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**Open Letter to  
V.I. Ulianov (N. Lenin) in Moscow  
from the Communist Unity Committee  
in New York, circa Feb. 28, 1921**

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The end of February, 1921.

Dear Comrade Lenin:

The troubles and tribulations of the communist movement of America may look very small in the eyes of men dealing with the international aspects of the social revolution. But to us here, in America, these are extremely big things; and unless we manage to successfully overcome our present difficulties, we shall not have a Communist Party in America for a very long time to come.

For the situation in the communist movement of America is unique: it has no counterpart in any of the parties or groups at present affiliated with the Third International. We refer here to the nature of the divisions that keep our movement disunited. In England, for example, the fight is between Communists, on the one hand, and revolutionary syndicalism, or Communist Left-Wingism, as you prefer to put it, on the other hand. In Germany, previous to the Congress in Halle, it has been a fight, on the one hand, between Communism and Centrism and, on the other hand, between Communism and Syndicalism. But [here] in America, and as far as the struggle between our two Communist parties is concerned, none of these issues are really involved. There is no Centrist party in America, unless it be the Socialist Party. But this party is no issue at present between our two struggling Communist groups: both of them are equally hostile to the Socialist Party. And if there are any Left Centrists within the Communist movement, their number is almost equally distributed between both Communist parties.

As to revolutionary syndicalism, there is, to be sure, an organized syndicalist group in America functioning as the IWW. Both parties equally condemn the anti-political tendencies of this organization. Both parties are equally desirous of making the IWW accept the tactical methods and leadership of the Third International. What they do differ in, is in the method of approach towards the solution of this practical problem. While the CP prefers to keep aloof from actual contact with the rank and file of the IWW, limiting its activities to repeated condemnations of the syndicalist fallacies of the IWW leadership, the UCP has been rather more “diplomatic” in its criticisms of the IWW, making it a point of tactics to win over the syndicalist leadership of the IWW by persuasion rather than condemnation, also bothering itself very little with the rank and file of the IWW. We consider the tactics of both parties equally wrong, inasmuch as none of them conceives the problem of winning over the IWW toward Communism as one which involves the actual defeat of the syndicalist leadership of the IWW *within* their own organization upon issues arising from the immediate class struggle of the workers organized in the IWW. Conceived in this manner, the solution of the above problem would demand of the Communist parties of America the organization of their forces within the IWW; the active and persistent participation of these parties in the everyday affairs of the IWW; and an intelligent and consistent policy for immediate action of their own to oppose the syndicalist-opportunist policies of the present leadership of the IWW.

But, whatever the right tactics towards the IWW should be, this also is not an issue between our two Communist parties. As to syndicalist, or “Left Wing” tendencies *within* the Communist movement, both of the two parties are afflicted with the sickness, and it will do us no good to try to determine which of the two is more so.

The present divisions between our two parties do not at all run along the familiar lines of European Communism. At the bottom of our factional struggles lies a specific American problem — the so-called problem of federations.

Here we want to state as emphatically as we can, that this problem has never been conceived here, not even by the most ardent federationist, as one of *federalism versus centralism*. There is not, to our knowledge, a single Communist in America that would advocate a federative form of organization for our party. This cry of centralism against federalism has been raised by the leaders of the former CLP,

and later by the UCP, in order to blind the Third International as well as the membership of our movement to the real issue. This issue can be stated in the following manner:

1. Should the Communist activities in America be conducted in one language only (English), or in as many languages as there are nationalities among the proletariat of the United States?

2. If the languages of our propaganda are to be the languages spoken and understood by the various nationalities of the American proletariat, should this foreign language propaganda be conducted *directly* by the Central Committee of the Party, or should each foreign language group be given the right to itself provide for its own matters of propaganda and organization under the final supervision of the Central Committee of the Party?

These are really the questions at issue to both of which we respond: yes, the Communist propaganda must be conducted in the languages understood by the workers, and by the respective organized foreign language sections within the Communist party.

With this formulation and solution of the federation problem, both Central Committees of the two Communist parties of America violently take issue. To these Central Committees the problem is not only a *mere* question of propaganda and organization, but primarily a *question of control*.

The CEC of the CP proceeds on the assumption that the foreign language federations, as made up and functioning within their party, represent the best there is in the Communist movement of America. That the elements comprising the other party (UCP) are in a Communist sense non-reliable. Consequently, the Communist movement of America must be led and dominated by the federations, that is, by the CP of A.

The CEC of the UCP proceeds on another assumption, that the English-speaking and Americanized workers within their party, being closely and intimately connected with American realities, are the better fit for the leadership of the Communist movement of America. That, on the other hand, the "federationists," whatever their theoretical qualifications, are practically incapable to effectively approach the mass movement of the American working class. *That as long as federations are allowed to exist, these Americanized Communists have no chance of getting into their own.* Consequently, the federations must be destroyed and the control of the party given over to the Americanized Communists, that is, to the UCP of A.

Now, an objective analysis of the contentions of the Central Committees of the two parties will show that they both are empty and meaningless. The way to show it is to analyze the active make-up of the two parties.

### **The CP of A.**

It is made up of an overwhelming proportion of foreign language Communists, organized in national federations, plus a small group of English-speaking Communists. The Central Committee of the CP is being elected and is responsible to a general party convention, made up of delegates from general party units, irrespective of their language group affiliations. The personnel of the CEC of the CP is made up of a majority of foreign language Communists and a minority of English-speaking Communists. Practically, the party is in the hands of the leaders of the two or three strongest federations in the CP.

### **The UCP of A.**

It is made up of an overwhelming proportion of foreign language Communists, organized in elementary language-units of 10, without autonomous National Committees, plus a small group of English-speaking Communists. (The UCP claims a larger English-speaking group.) The CEC of the UCP is being elected in the same manner as the CP. The personnel of the CEC of the UCP is made up of a *majority of foreign language Communists*, and a minority of English-speaking Communists. *Practically, the party is not in the hands of the CEC, but of the various District Committees, which are being dominated by the strongest foreign language group, or groups, in each respective district.*

This is the true situation. And in view of it, can this factional struggle between our two Central Committees be considered a fight between foreign language Communists and English-speaking Communists? Of course not. Both parties are being ruled by foreign language Communists, with this difference: that in the CP they rule through National Federations, and in the UCP, through general Party District Committees. And such being the case, how can anyone take seriously the contentions of the two Central Committees that their fight for control is based upon objective necessities and the interests of the Communist movement of America as such? The Communist Unity Committee of America views this fight as nothing else but a

*personal affair* between the Central Committees of the two parties. And just because this is so, the situation from a Unity point of view seemed to us, up till the beginning of this year, so hopeless.

But the failure of the two Central Committees to carry out the last mandate for Unity issued by the Third International — which was the *third* mandate for the last 14 months — has definitely prompted us to launch upon our present campaign for Unity. We could see that the only alternative to some such action would be the complete disintegration of our movement. Disgust with the sabotage against Unity of our official leadership and, as a consequence, an apathetic attitude toward the future of our movement has become pronounced features of the mental state of our membership. It was necessary to promptly check its further development. The formation of our Committee and its subsequent activities, which can be seen from the 4 issues of our paper [*Communist Unity*] attached to this letter, have already succeeded in creating a more hopeful state of mind among the rank and file of our movement.

The Communist Unity Committee, as you are probably aware, is made up of active comrades in both parties. Their present strength as a unity committee lies in the fact that they enjoy established reputations within their respective parties as old minorities that have been fighting consistently over a long period of time for a sensible solution of the federation problem as a basis for organic unity between the two parties. These two minorities have never agreed wholly with the official policies of their respective parties. But each minority disagreeing as strongly with the official policies of the other party, could see no good purpose served by leaving its own party and entering the ranks of the other. So up till the beginning of this year each minority in its own way has been practicing the maxim of *choosing and sticking to the lesser evil*. But for these minorities to continue practicing the above maxim would have meant, in view of the prevailing situation as described above, leaving the movement to be ruined by the personal whims of the present leadership. This they could not do. They saw a better and more promising exit from the deadlock, this is, uniting the forces of the minorities of the two parties for the purpose of *combating both evils*. This they did in the formation of the Communist Unity Committee of America.

For the present, it is our policy to have the membership remain where they are. We mean to discourage any and every step on the part of the rank and file that may lead to *actual disobedience* to their re-

spective Central Committees. We have already been instrumental in checking such a movement of revolt in the CP that had grown out from the party's official attitude toward the Bureau of the Red Trade Union International. We are, as a matter of policy, keeping the identity of our people secret, so as not to provoke expulsions by the Central Committees. But we are determined to bring our unity platform, as expressed in the memorandum dispatched by us to the Executive Committee of the Third International, to the membership of the two parties, and get their official endorsement to its substance. This done, the chasm between the two parties will have been bridged and a solid foundation for Unity created.

The complete consummation of this first act of our committee towards Unity is to be expected in the very near future. It will be attested to by official resolutions endorsing our unity platform passed by most of the organization — units, city, sub-district, and District Committees — of the two parties. And then, if the two Central Committees should still persist in obstructing the unity efforts of the rank and file, and if the Executive Committee of the Third International should not succeed in breaking this obstruction, the situation may become such as to compel open revolt, and the actual merging of the organization of the two parties over the heads of their present Central Committees.

It is for this emergency, and with the approach of such a situation in view, that we are writing this letter to you, and asking your advice.

*The CUC of A.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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