
Letter from Grigorii Zinoviev on behalf of the ECCI to the Central Executive Committee of the CPA and National Executive Committee of the CLPA, January 12, 1920.

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 17, ll. 1-3.
Russian language original (with handwritten amendments) in same *delo*, ll. 4-9.

TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEES OF THE
AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE
AMERICAN COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY.

Dear Comrades,

From the reports of the comrades who arrived from America and who represent both tendencies of American Communism, the Executive Committee of the Communist International had the opportunity of acquainting itself with the differences between the American comrades; differences which have led to an open split and to the formation of two communist parties. The question was submitted to the consideration of an extended session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International at which, besides the members of the EC there were also present representatives of both American parties as well as representatives from France, Switzerland, Hungary, Finland, and Yugoslavia. Arising out of this meeting the Executive Committee came to the following conclusion:

The split has rendered a heavy blow to the communist movement in America. It leads to the dispersion of revolutionary force, to a harmful parallelism, and absurd partition of practical work, and senseless discussions and an unjustifiable loss of energy in interfractional quarrels. A concentration of American bourgeois forces has increased to an unprecedented extent, while the class struggle is becoming more acute every day and demands unprecedented sacrifices from the American proletariat. The world revolution is inexorably growing; great possibilities and brilliant perspectives are opening up before the American prole-

tariat. This is not the time for division of communist forces.

In addition to this we must assert that the split has not been caused by any profound differences of opinion as regards program. At bottom there are but certain disagreements on the question of tactics, principally questions of organization.

Under such circumstances this split has not the slightest justification and should be liquidated at all costs. In so far as both parties stand on the platform of the Communist International — and of this we have not the slightest doubt — a united party is not only possible but is absolutely necessary, and the EC cat-



egorically insists on this being immediately brought about.

The necessity for the immediate unification is imperatively dictated by the further fact that the two parties represent, as it were, varying sides of the communist movement in America. The American Communist Party is principally a foreign party embracing so-called "national" federations. The American Communist Labor Party chiefly represents American or English-speaking elements. If the first is more developed theoretically and is more closely connected with the traditions of the revolutionary struggle of the Russian working class, it is on the other hand more isolated from the mass movement and mass organizations of the American workers who are gradually entering the broad path of the struggle between the classes. The second party, which has not passed through a similar revolutionary school, has received less training in the subtle ties of Marxist theory and is in need of a certain intellectual guidance, nevertheless has the advantage in that it may more easily influence American labor — which is to play the most important part in the coming decisive battles of the class war. Thus both parties naturally supplement each other, and only by their unification is it possible to create in America an efficient Communist Party which must take the lead in the mass movement; and in the oncoming communist revolution.

With the aim on bringing about this unification, the Executive Committee of the Communist International proposes to both parties to immediately convene a joint Conference whose decisions shall be binding for both sections. We suggest that an organizing bureau composed of an equal number of representatives of both parties should be set up for the purpose of preparing and convening the conference and also for the coordination of the work of both parties. The platform of the Communist International and the resolutions of the Executive Committee regards it necessary to point out the following to the American comrades:

1. The Communist Party should strive to unite in its ranks all those elements which recognize the necessity for seizing power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. It should be understood that this recognition should not be only verbal or theoretical, but the recognition must be proved by the obliga-

tion being imposed upon every member of the party and every proletarian conscious of his class interests of taking part in the determined struggle to overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie and to establish the power of the working class. In the face of this great problem all disagreements on other questions, as the employment of parliamentary action and other legal measures, on the application of one or another means of struggle or on the various forms of organization, disappear. Disagreements of this character are inevitable in all countries where it is necessary to form a communist party of various elements — left socialists leaving the old parties, non-party people who have come over to the point of view of the inevitability of the class struggle, anarchists and syndicalists who recognize the necessity of seizing power and establishing the proletarian dictatorship — but to split over these differences, which in a period of revolution have only a secondary importance, is absolutely inadmissible. The only thing that the party must demand in the event of differences between organizations and individual comrades, is unconditional discipline, the absolute submission of the minority to the majority. Before the acceptance of any resolution it is essential that there should be possibilities of full and frank discussion of the question and freedom of criticism within the ranks of the party. But after an authoritative resolution of the party has been carried, all members are obliged to carry it out without reserve, including those who do not agree with it. On the one hand there must be the widest tolerance for differing opinions during the period of discussion. On the other hand the strictest discipline must be observed in carrying out the decisions of the party. These are the fundamental conditions without which the creation of a strong proletarian revolutionary party is impossible.

2. The complete break with the old socialist parties, the SP and the SLP, is naturally a condition for the creation of a communist party in America. But this by no means signifies that the communist party cannot accept individual comrades and whole organizations officially regarded as part of old parties who have decisively come over to the point of view of consistent class war and proletarian dictatorship. The communist party must be a mass organization and not a close narrow circle. "Isolation from non-communist elements" should be understood in the sense of sepa-

ration from the hardened social-treacherous [*sotsial-predatel'skikh*] elements in the old parties, particularly from those leaders who have compromised themselves; but it must not be taken to mean self-isolation from and repelling those workers who were formerly members of the old parties but who have now broken with them. The doors of the communist party must be open wide for proletarians, even if they have not mastered all subtleties of Marxist theory, but are sincerely loyal to the cause of proletarian revolution and are actually conducting a struggle against the domination of the bourgeoisie. The communist party will be for them the best school of communism.

3. The party must take part in the everyday incidents of the class war. Up till now the American left wing socialists devoted most of their attention to agitation and propaganda, and in this direction did important work. But, confined in a more or less close circle of comrades all thinking alike, they, to a large extent, stood aside from the everyday class struggle of the proletarian masses which is flowing in broad streams throughout the country; at any rate they did not play the leading part in the greater conflict between capital and labor. It is particularly necessary to remember that the stage of verbal propaganda and agitation has been left behind, the time for decisive battles has arrived. Uniting in its ranks all the class conscious and most active elements of the working class, and developing the widest propaganda of communist ideas, the communist party must at the same time strive to become the leader in the proletarian class struggle in all its various aspects, from separate economic strikes, demonstrations, mass meetings and election campaigns, to general political strikes and armed insurrection of the proletariat. The most important task confronting the American communists at the present moment is to draw the wide proletarian masses into the path of the revolutionary class struggle.

4. Cooperating in hastening the process of dissolution of the AF of L and other craft unions associated with it, the party must strive to establish the closest connection with those working class economic organizations in which industrial unionist tendencies are being manifested (IWW, "One Big Union," WIIU), as well as with separate unions breaking away from the AF of L. The party must work in closest contact with these organizations, striving at the same time to

unite them and to create a powerful centralized strictly economic organization of the proletariat imbued with class consciousness. Supporting the industrial unions in their everyday struggle for direct economic demands, the party must strive to deepen and widen the struggle and convert it into a struggle for the final revolutionary aims of the proletariat, for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the abolition of the capitalist system.

5. The party must support the formation of factory workers' committees in the factories alongside with the communist party groups, with might serve on the one hand as the base for the everyday economic struggle, and on the other hand as a school for the training of the advanced guard of labor in the management of industry in the event of the dictatorship of the proletariat being achieved. It is of course understood that these factory committees should work in closest contact with the industrial union organizations.

6. The party must not represent a conglomeration of independent or semi-autonomous "national federations." The national federations played an important historical part in the American Socialist movement, for many years conducting a systematic opposition in the old party, and being largely instrumental in creating the Socialist Propaganda League and the Left Wing. But in the future, with the rapid intensification and widening of the class struggle, and the great complexity of problems confronting the proletariat of America, the foreign-born communists will only be able to carry out their task by entering into the closest possible relations with their brothers in the American labor movement. Being in general better trained theoretically, and being more closely bound to Russian revolutionary traditions, the members of the federations may in the future have a guiding influence in the American Communist movement; but this influence must be exercised not by means of separate national federations, but from within a united strongly centralized Communist Party. The sudden and complete break-up of the historic form of organization of the federations is certainly undesirable, as this might lead to the disintegration of the foreign-born movement, which has been the chief promulgator of communist ideas in America. Moreover, the national federations, strictly as organizations of propaganda among their own countrymen, are still and will for a long time be necessary in America. But at the same time the for-

eign-born workers must recognize the principle that in the sphere of political and economic activity these federations must be wholly subject to the leadership of the organs of the party as a whole, and that the chief function of the national federations is to prepare the foreign-born workers to take their places in the English-speaking Communist movement.

7. During a period of social revolution, the employment of referendums should be reduced to a minimum. In any case questions requiring speedy decision under no circumstances can be submitted to a referendum. In the intervals between conferences the Central Committee of the party must wield complete authority [*vseiu polnotoiu vlasti*].

8. One of the most important practical tasks which imperatively confronts the Communist Party of America at the present moment is the establishment of a large daily political newspaper, which should be not only an organ of theoretical propaganda and training, but should be a leading organ in the political struggle giving information on all public events from the communist point of view and [put] forward the regular battle cries reflecting the everyday proletarian class struggle.

9. The Executive Committee urges the American comrades immediately to establish an underground organization, even if it is possible for the party to function legally. This underground organization shall be for the purpose of carrying on direct revolutionary propaganda among the masses, and, in case of violent suppression of the legal Party organization, of carrying on the work. It should be composed of trusted comrades, and kept entirely separate from the legal Party organization. The few people who know about it the better. For the formation and control of this underground organization, a small sub-committee of the National Executive Committee can be appointed. An underground printing plant and distribution machinery should be established.

Moscow, January 12, 1920.

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the Communist International,

Zinoviev.

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