
Theses on Relations of the CP to an LPP:

by the Central Executive Committee of the CP of A,
Section of the Communist International †

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I. — Necessity of a CP.

All experience in the modern class struggle proves that the working class can emerge victorious only after developing an organ of leadership in the form of a highly disciplined Communist Party, thoroughly conscious of revolutionary principles and tactics. The first task of Communists is, therefore, to develop such a party.

II. — Action of Masses.

While the CP is the organ of leadership and bears the heaviest brunt of the fight, the revolution is an action of broad masses of the exploited sections of the population, extending far beyond the limit of the numerical strength to which a highly conscious, disciplined party can be developed. The final struggle for power by the working class is not the result of a revolutionization of the minds of the masses through merely theoretical propaganda, agitation, and education. It develops out of the irreconcilable conflict of the interests of the classes. This conflict is first shown in the minor struggles of the workers for their existence. The minor struggles clarify the fundamental conflict of class interests, thus bringing class consciousness and leading toward the major struggle for power. Education and propaganda, though necessary to build the revo-

lutionary party, would if taken alone build a sterile sect, utterly impotent to deal with mass action. The major task of the revolutionary party in regard to the broad masses of workers is, therefore, not abstract propaganda and abstract theoretical education, but participation in all the struggles of the workers as the most active force.

III. — Contact with the Masses.

The leadership of the masses of the exploited can be attained only by directly engaging in all their struggles, together with the masses of the workers. In a country where political conditions permit the possibility of mass political organizations of the working class, the revolutionary party cannot secure leadership without securing a powerful, and finally dominant position among such mass political organizations of the workers. This essentially implies public contact with the masses. In America, it has become the most urgent immediate task of the Communists to secure a public, open, so-called “legal” existence as an organization.

IV. — A Legal Party.

A truly revolutionary (i.e. Communist) party can never be “legal” in the sense of having its purpose har-

†- According to a report to Moscow by Comintern representative Genrik Valetski, these “CEC Theses” on the relationship between the underground Communist Party of America and the legal political party established at the end of December 1921, the Workers Party of America, were drafted by Robert Minor (“Ballister”). As was the case with the two other competing sets of theses on the same topic — one by Israel Amter and Abram Jakira of the “Anti-Liquidation” faction (so-called “Geese”), another by C.E. Ruthenberg and Max Bedacht of the pro-open party “Independent” faction (so-called “Liquidationists”) — this document was not ultimately used as the basis for discussion on the topic at the August 1922 Bridgman Convention of the CPA. [*The Communist*, v. 1, no. 10 (Aug.-Sept., 1922), pp. 10-14].

monize with the purpose of the laws made by the capitalist state, or its acts to conform with the intent of capitalist law. Hence, to call a Communist Party "legal" means that its existence is tolerated by the capitalist state because of circumstances which embarrass the capitalist state's efforts to suppress it. The revolutionary party can avoid suppression into a completely secret existence only by one or both of two means:

a) By taking advantage of the pretense of "democratic forms" which the capitalist state is obliged to main. By this means the Communists can maintain themselves in the open with a restricted program while establishing themselves with mass support.

b) (Later stage.) By commanding such mass support among wide masses of workers that enable them to proclaim publicly their final object in the revolutionary struggle and maneuver openly to attain this object regardless of the desire of the capitalist state to suppress it.

It is necessary at the present time (and circumstances make it the most urgent immediate need) to resort to the first of the before-mentioned methods of open contact with the working masses — which means to maintain an open political party with a modified name and a restricted program. The second of these two conditions must be reached by the Communist Party of America. We seek to have an open Communist Party as soon as this can possibly be attained.

As to whether a "legal" Communist Party is possible, the test is whether the full Communist program (including the principle of mass action and the violent overthrow of the capitalist state), together with affiliation with the Communist International, can publicly be maintained without the Party being suppressed.

V. — LPP [Legal Political Party].

A legal political party with the before-mentioned restrictions cannot replace the Communist Party. It must serve as an instrument, in the complete control of the Communist Party, for getting public contact with the masses. It must mobilize the element of workers most sympathetic to the Communist cause with a program going as far toward the Communist program as possible while maintaining a legal existence. It must, with a course of action in daily participation in the

workers' struggle, apply Communist tactics and principles and thus win the trust of the masses and prepare them for the leadership of the Communist Party. It must organize the sympathetic workers into a framework that will later become the framework of an open Communist Party, taking care systematically to educate the workers in the "legal" party in principles, tactics, and discipline, so as to fit them — to become members of the Communist Party. Thus the building of a legal political party with a modified name and program will prepare the field for an open Communist Party strong enough to stand in the open and capable of leading in the revolutionary struggle.

VI. — Future Suppression.

The overthrow of the capitalist system can only come through the violent overthrow of the capitalist state. To accept this view is to accept the certainty that the capitalist state will find itself in violent conflict with the masses led by the Communist Party, and that the state will attempt to destroy the Communist Party. While the capitalist state retains the governmental machinery, and as the struggle grows sharper in approaching the final struggle, the capitalist state will inevitably strike again and again at the revolutionary party in the effort to destroy it. After the Communist Party shall have established itself in the open, it must be prepared for, and must expect to be driven out of a "legal" existence from time to time. The Communist Party must at all times be so organized that such attacks cannot destroy it. It must perform its functions of leadership in the class struggle no matter what tactics the ruling class adopts — open as far as possible, secretly as far as it must.

VII. — Underground.

The underground machinery of the Communist Party is not merely a temporary device to be liquidated as soon as the Communist Party with its full program can be announced in the open. The underground machinery is for permanent use. It is not a machinery to be used only on emergency occasions. It is for constant use. It must continue to operate not only while a legal party operates with restricted program, but also at all times, before and after the Com-

munist Party with a full Communist program shall exist in the open. There is never a time, previous to the final overthrow of the Capitalist state, when a truly revolutionary party does not have to perform a considerable amount of work free from police knowledge and interference. The Communist Party will never cease to maintain an underground machinery until after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of the Workers Soviet Republic.

VIII. — Control.

Throughout the Communist movement of the world, the system of "Presidiums" prevails, by which matters of necessarily secret nature are kept in the hands of the most reliable and most trusted members of the Party. This is a necessary feature of a revolutionary organization. As the Communist Party of America grows to dimensions containing many thousands of members, it will be necessary to maintain this principle. At times when the Communist Party as such maintains itself in the open, the membership which constitutes at present the CP within the No. 2 [Workers Party of America] will, with some variations, constitute the older and best known, and most disciplined membership, to be trusted with the more confidential matters and the illegal work of the party generally. This does not mean that the whole Party membership will not be required to do work that conflicts with the capitalist law, but that the work of the most secret and important nature must be kept in the most trusted hands.

During the time when the Communist Party operates, not under its own name and program in the open, but through a "legal" political party with restricted program and different name, the same principle is applied by having full control of such legal party in the hands of the CP. This is accomplished by

having a majority of CP members, and by means of regular and compulsory caucuses of all the CP members within any legal unit, bound by the unit rule, a principle which will prevail in some effective form when the CP is itself in the open. As the membership develops loyalty to the Party and respect for its discipline it will be possible to lessen the purely mechanical control and avoid the small friction that is inevitable for the present. There is an unsatisfactory feature in the present condition. Committee members, persons in responsible positions, and all especially active members of such legal party should be, practically without exception, members of the CP. The Party must make systematic efforts to bring this about. Definite efforts must be made to bring every member of such legal party who shows himself to be equipped with communist understanding and capable of leadership into the CP. Every such active member must be tested as to his readiness to accept the CP program and discipline, and the decisions of the CI, and upon passing the customary tests, must be brought into membership of the CP.

IX. — Executive Committees.

The Party must endeavor to reach at the earliest reasonable time the condition where all members of the responsible committees of an LPP, such as CEC, DEC [District Executive Committee], Sub-DEC, etc., shall be member of the No. 1 [underground CPA]. The personnel of committees of an LPP should consist in its majority of the personnel of the corresponding committees of No. 1. The remainder of the personnel of LPP committees should generally be No. 1 members whenever possible. The organizers and officials of the No. 1 and the LPP committees shall generally not be the same.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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