Make the Party a "Party of Action."

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by C.E. Ruthenberg

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To the Members of the Communist Party:

A situation has developed in the party which has compelled the Executive Secretary, supported by District Organizers and Executive Secretaries of Federations and a minority of the Central Executive Committee, whose names appear below, to repudiate the authority of the majority members of the Central Executive Committee in order to prevent the disruption of the party.

This statement is submitted to present the facts to the membership and to enlist their cooperation in an effort to preserve the Communist Party of America against the destructive activity of the majority group of the Central Executive Committee.

The immediate circumstances out of which the situation developed will be made clear by the following statement submitted to the majority membership of the Executive Council by the Executive Secretary:

April 8, 1920.

STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO THE MAJORITY OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

Comrades:—

At the meeting of the Executive Council on Tuesday [April 6, 1920] I withdrew from further participation in the meeting when the Council made a decision which I considered an effort to bolster up the control of a certain group in the Council at the expense of creating a situation which might result in the disruption of the party.

Before stating the course of action which it is my intention to pursue, I wish to review the circumstances which lead up to this situation.

After the recent meeting of the Central Executive Committee, opposition to the decisions of the majority group of the committee developed in the Chicago District. This movement, as expressed by the Chicago District Committee, which claims that it is but carrying out the wishes of the membership of the district, was based on the following indictment of the majority group of the Central Executive Committee:

1. That this majority group "packed" the Chicago convention [Founding: Sept. 1-7, 1919] through securing the election of about twice the number of delegates representing its viewpoint than any membership basis gave authority for, and through its caucus controlled the convention and placed its members in control of the party.

2. That since the convention this majority group, in place of devoting its energies to building up the party, has been largely concerned with the work of maintaining its control and has decided every question that has come before the Central Executive Committee from the standpoint of its interests and the maintenance of its control of the party, rather than from the broader standpoint of building up a strong, unified Communist Party in this country.

3. That within a month after the convention certain individuals of this group, who largely controlled its actions, became more concerned for themselves junketing trips to Europe at party expense than with any interest of the party.

4. That Comrade Andrew [Nicholas Hourwich], after his designation as one of the delegates who were to go to Europe if a Congress of the Third International was held, began an intrigue to secure party funds to enable him to go to Europe, although no evidence was at hand that a congress was to be held. Immediately after the November meeting [of the CEC] he attempted to have himself placed on the party payroll on the ground that he must go into hiding to fulfill his mission. On three occasions, through personal demands and through emissaries, he attempted to secure funds from the Executive Secretary, which were definitely refused by both the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and the Executive Council, then located in Chicago. That in furtherance of these personal schemes, Comrade Andrew [Hourwich] came to Chicago twice, and each time the money for these trips was voted out of the party treasury — the money for the last trip for two members of the majority group being voted out of the treasury by the majority group of the Central Executive Committee after it had been refused by the Chicago Executive Council. These efforts of Andrew [Hourwich] culminated in his plan to leave the country as an International Delegate without authority of the party committee, in which plan, according to statements made

before the Central Executive Committee, certain members of the majority group abetted him.

To secure funds for this unauthorized trip the party organizations were resorted to and a member of the Central Executive Committee [John Ballam] is charged with having gone to Boston and represented to the District Committee that the Central Executive Committee had assessed the district $100 for Comrade Andrew's [Hourwich's] trip. Later Andrew [Hourwich] appeared and secured the money. Andrew [Hourwich] himself confessed before the CEC that he had secured money from party sources on the representation that a certain group considered the decisions of the governing body of the party wrong and therefore was raising funds for the trip as International Delegate contrary to the decisions of that body, which funds would be repaid by the party should this group be proven right by events.

In spite of the fact that Comrade Andrew's culpability was shown by his own statement, the majority group of which he has been a member has refused to even censure him, while on the other hand it has been quick to move against any member of the minority against whom the slightest pretext for action existed, notably in the Wicks case and the removal of Langley [Jay Lovestone] from the Executive Council.

5. At the January [1920] meeting of the Central Executive Committee this majority group was prevented from securing control of the Executive Council through an ultimatum from certain Federation representatives, who supported the former Chicago majority of the Council. This control was, however, established by the removal of Langley [Lovestone], which was part of the plan to further entrench the majority group. The contrast between the prompt action against Langley [Lovestone] because he had missed two meetings of the Executive Council and the action in the Andrew [Hourwich] case, who succeeded him as a member of the Council, is in itself the best kind of proof of the motives which govern the majority group.

6. That since it has been in office the majority of the CEC has been completely taken up with the forwarding of personal schemes and maintaining its control and have not taken any constructive action in the interest of building a stronger organization. At no time has the committee considered the question of propaganda policy and the relation of the party to the working class movement in this country. What constructive propaganda and organization work has been done in the party has been done by initiative of the Executive Council while in Chicago and not dominated by the present majority group, and by the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg].

7. That in dealing with the problems of reorganization after the January [1920] raids and the liquidation of the legal organization, this majority group has decided all questions on the basis of its continued control rather than the standpoint of the best interests of the party.

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Personally, I am to a large extent in agreement with this indictment of the majority of the committee, but on the other hand I believe that any movement of revolt against the majority group shortly before a convention at which all elements within the party would have the opportunity to present their case and at which the party will be definitely reorganized, cannot be justified, and would only result in the disruption of the party at a time when all our energies should be devoted to rebuilding our organization.

I went to Chicago with the purpose of presenting this viewpoint and convince the committee that the only course to pursue, no matter how bitter the opposition to the majority group of the CEC — and the opposition is bitter — was to go to the convention and fight for its viewpoint. I went to Chicago to use all my influence to prevent a break in the unity of the party and succeeded.

I reported this settlement to the Executive Council last Tuesday [April 6, 1920], but in place of accepting it and thus expressing its cooperation in our endeavoring to prevent a split in our organization, 4 members of the Council, representing the majority group of the Central Executive Committee, took action to maintain their factional control of the party — action which is bound to bring about a split — by voting to send a representative of this majority of four to Chicago with authority TO REMOVE THE DISTRICT ORGANIZER [Leonid Belsky]. This action was preceded by a proposal to remove the entire District Committee and to reorganize the District, which was only abandoned when it was shown by the minority that it would be impossible to carry out such a proposal because the membership of the Chicago District would not permit it. The 4 members of this majority (Andrew [Hourwich], Bernstein [Maximilian Cohen], Raphael [Alexander Bittelman], and Sascha [Rose Pastor Stokes]) also voted down my motion to refer the whole matter to the full CEC (motion supported by Damon [Ruthenberg], Bunte [Charles Dirba], and Braun [???]).

The sending of a representative of the majority group to Chicago with authority to remove the District Organizer can have only one purpose, and that is to use the temporary authority of the present majority group to perpetuate its control by arbitrarily ousting those who oppose it. The removal of the Chicago District Organizer [Belsky] on this issue would be resisted by the District Committee and the membership of the Chicago District and would bring about a break in the party unity which I succeeded in preventing.

There is no other ground than an effort to perpetuate factional control to warrant the removal of the Chicago District Organizer [Belsky]. He is the most capable man in such a position in the party at the present time. The Chicago District reorganization [to the underground system] has progressed farther than any other district. The Chicago District has turned over to the National Organization for the party work more funds during the last three months than all the other districts combined. Yet this majority of 4 members of the Executive Council, in its desperate attempt to maintain its control of the organization, is ready to summarily dismiss this District Organizer because he represents a different party viewpoint than they do, at a time when the party has been unable to secure competent men to fill similar positions elsewhere.

The proposed action of the majority members of the Executive Council (a bare majority of one, for the motion was adopted by a vote of 4 to 3) is exactly parallel with the action of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party last year, when it expelled all those members of the party who opposed it, in order to make certain its control of the convention in August, with the exception that in the Socialist Party there was the justification of a great difference of principle, while the action of the majority of the Executive Council is based solely upon motives of personal politics and control, even though it attempts to camouflage its motives by talk about "discipline" — discipline which it only invokes against those who oppose it.

In my activity in the party I have constantly stood against disruption and fought to maintain the unity of our organization. I do not believe there is any issue in the party at this moment which cannot be decided by the coming convention and leave the party united.

But I am faced with the necessity of choosing a course of action in a situation in which a temporary majority, a few weeks before a convention, threatens to bring disruption and disunity into the party in an effort to further not the interests of the party, but its own group control. I have determined that it is my duty to the membership of the party to fight such disruptionist activity when it comes from a majority of the Executive Council, just as I fought it when it came from the Chicago District Committee.

I therefore make the following statement to the majority of the Executive Council:

Should it persist in the course of action determined upon at the last meeting and this result in the removal of the Chicago District Organizer [Belsky] and refusal of the Chicago District to further recognize the authority of the Executive Council and the Central Executive Committee until the convention, it will be impossible for me to continue to work with the present majority of the Executive Council. I will continue to conduct the work of the office of Executive Secretary and Acting Party Editor and will carry on this work of the party through the District Organizations, including the Chicago District Organization as now constituted, holding all funds and report of my work for submission to and disposal of by the convention.

David Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg],
Executive Secretary.

The submission of this statement compelled the Executive Council majority to change its position and to call a meeting of the Central Executive Committee, the District Organizers, and the Executive Secretaries of the Federations. At this meeting an effort was made by the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and those supporting his position to effect an agreement to maintain the situation as it stood before the Council action, until a convention could be held. The agreement this group proposed is contained in the following statement which they submitted to the majority of the CEC:

STATEMENT BY THE MINORITY GROUP.

The undersigned earnestly desire to prevent the development of a situation in the party which will result in disorganization and chaos at a time when all the energy of the movement should be directed toward building up a stronger organization and propaganda among the masses of the workers.

They believe that they represent the majority of the membership of the party and that it can be proven beyond doubt that their position in regard to organization tactics is supported by the membership, and that those who support the opposite viewpoint, although they may not be in the majority in the CEC, do not represent the membership of the party. If the wishes of the membership should prevail, their plan of organization would be immediately adopted.

They cannot, therefore, accept the decision of a

committee which by every standard of judgment and experience has been repudiated by the membership, but in order to preserve party unity propose an agreement on the following statement and conduct of the organization in accordance with same, until a convention can be held and the future of the party authoritatively decided:

That until the convention the existing facts in the party at the time before the meeting of the Council at which the controversy developed shall remain the status quo and neither the Executive Council nor the CEC shall take any action to change the situation so far as the matters of controversy are concerned.

The status quo to mean:

That there shall be no change in District Organizers except to fill vacancies until the convention.

That the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] shall continue as acting editor.

On the last point we are willing to agree that two pages of each issue of the paper shall be set aside for each group for the publication of controversial articles. These two pages to be under the complete control of the respective groups.

In regard to the matter of expressing the party policies in harmony with the party program, we agree that when the acting editor [Ruthenberg] and associate editor disagree, the article shall be referred to the Council for final disposition.

We further agree that the majority may send a representative to present its viewpoint to various party units.

David Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg],
Executive Sec.

Ed. Fisher [Leonid Belsky],
District No. 5 [Chicago].

W.A. Davey [???],
District 4-C [Detroit].

[Joseph Kowalski],
Polish Federation Representative.

J.E. Wood [???],
District 4-A [Cleveland].

[William Reynolds],
Estonian Federation Representative.

A. Smith [Antoinette Konikow],
District No. 1 [Boston].

[George Selakovich?],
South Slavic Federation Representative.

[Fritz Friedmann],
German Federation Representative.

[P. Ladan?],
Ukrainian Federation Representative.

J. Kasbeck [Alex Georgian],
Member of CEC.

The majority of the CEC, however, refused to agree not to remove any District Organizer until the convention and insisted on appointing another editor with equal power with the party editor.

The majority refused to discuss the call for the Convention.

"Talk Conspirators."

While the insistence of the majority of the CEC, as above set forth, on its right to use its power for factional purposes, is the immediate cause of the repudiation of its authority, the fundamental cause is deeper.

Since the beginning of the party there have been two viewpoints represented in the Central Executive Committee. The majority members of the committee considered themselves "great theorists." They constantly talked about the word "principle," but never about how to relate Communist principles to the working class movement of this country and to make these principles a living reality in *action.* Although the Manifesto of the party declared proudly that "the Communist Party is a party of action," the kind of action this majority believed in was hours and days of sitting about a table wrangling about who should go to Europe and be the hero to announce the organization of the American Branch of the Communist International.

This majority talked about theory, but never discussed and applied their theories; they continually used the word "principle," but the principles they adhered to they kept sacredly hidden from the light of day. They believed themselves super-Bolshevists and were quick to fling the epithet "Menshevik" at those who opposed them, but the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism they never discussed. They have been aptly designated "talk conspirators," who expect to establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat by hiding themselves away in some dark room and talking about theory and loudly shouting the word "principle."

In order to maintain themselves in the position of "leaders," this group pursued the policy of exclusiveness in their attitude toward party membership. They wished to keep the party a small sect of which they could pose as the high priests.

The Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and the minority group, on the other hand, stood for a policy which would make the Communist Party in reality the "party of action" which its Manifesto so proudly proclaims it. They endeavored to relate the party to the life struggle of the workers. They sought to inject

the party viewpoint in every struggle of the masses. They believed that a Communist Party should be not a party of closet philosophers, but a party which participates in the everyday struggle of the workers and by such participation injects its principles into these struggles and gives them a wider meaning, thus developing the Communist movement. It was the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and those who stood with him who initiated such efforts to make the party an organization functioning in the class struggle as the Gary leaflet at the time of the Steel Strike, the leaflet on the miners' strike, and even the recent leaflet on the Railwaymen's strike.

To break up our party into two organizations at a time when all our efforts have been hampered by the existence of two parties calling themselves Communist would be doing the greatest injury to the Communist movement in this country. While the majority group believes in splits and have made them part of their theory of action, the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and those supporting his position desire to preserve the unity of the Communist Party of America through action of the membership of the party. They will take no steps to split the membership.

The Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] will continue to conduct the work of the organization through the District Organizers. In those Districts in which organizers will not work with the Secretary, a new Organizer will be appointed.

We urge every member to participate in the District Conventions in regard to which information will be conveyed to the membership by the District Organizers, and through these District Conventions to send delegates to the National Convention. Thus they can themselves take control of the party, preserve its unity, and elect such officials as will carry out their desires.

Let us build the party of action, the fighting organization which a Communist Party can be through the effort of the virile membership of our organization, which has already proven by its sacrifice in time of stress its willingness to give everything for Communist principles.

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