
Circular Letter on Unity Negotiations to All Groups of the Communist Labor Party from the CLP National Office in New York April 23, 1920

Mimeographed document. Copies in Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 24, l. 14 & 38.

April 23, 1920.

Dear Comrades:—

Until such time as we can give a more detailed report, we desire to inform the groups and members of the CLP of the progress that has been made toward unity between our party and the CP. It will be remembered that the CLP demanded unity upon an equal basis at the time both parties were organized, last September. Subsequent to the conventions, the CLP engaged in active propaganda to bring about Communist unity. All attempts at unity were spurned by the CP. Our party was labeled by the CP as a Menshevik party, we were all Centrists. About the first of this year a letter reached the National Office of our party, signed by the Secretary of the CP German Federation [Fritz Friedman], asking us for an unofficial unity conference [in Cleveland]. The CLP National Executive Committee decided to enter only official conferences for unity. Officials of the CP [Ruthenberg & Ferguson] were interviewed and from them we learned that the CP was considering the question of unity officially.

Shortly thereafter, the first official unity conference was held between sub-committees of the CLP and CP [NY: Jan. 24, 1920]. Letters were mailed back and forth debating the conditions upon which unity could be arrived at. At first the CP demanded that the call for the joint conven-

tion of both parties be issued with the CP manifesto and constitution as a basis. The CLP held that the CP constitution and organizational form was impossible, that we were absolutely opposed to language federation autonomy and proved that the CP itself was not adhering to its own constitution. The CLP on the other hand demanded that the CP agree that unity was being effected between two parties alike in principle, this to compel the CP to admit that a split in Communist ranks is now and always was criminal and the fault of the CP. Negotiations continued until at last the CP agreed to allow the question of the form of language federations to go before the proposed joint convention without prejudice. In submitting a draft for a joint call for the convention the CP also made admission, by the very working of the draft, that there was no difference in principle between the two parties. The discussions now proceeded upon the question of representation for each party at the convention. Negotiations had reached this stage when it was reported to the CLP that the CP had split over the question of party control.

As will be remembered, the CP has always been in the control of a language federation bloc, which in turn was in control of half a dozen careerists, who held it more important to cut our careers for themselves than to build a strong Communist movement. Now that the national convention was coming on, and as the power of these

careerists was threatened by a combination of the opposition to them in the CP and the CLP, something had to be done to save the control of the united party for them. So they began discharging district officials not in harmony with their control policy. The minority upon the CP Central Executive Committee [Ruthenberg group] objected to such discharges, but as the careerist majority on this committee insisted, the minority split away. From what we can gain at this time, both factions in this split are about evenly divided in regard to membership backing, both claim to be the CP, and both will hold conventions.

The CLP predicted the split in CP ranks 6 months ago. Where the question of control is paramount in the minds and actions of a party officialdom, there a split is bound to occur. At this writing, communications seeking unity with the CLP are on hand from both factions of the CP.

(National Office — CLP)

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.