
The UCP and the CP United:

An Account of the Joint Unity Convention.

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The long struggle, the interparty fight between the UCP and the CP, the conflict between two opposing points of view on tactics, forms of organization, and formulae of Communist principles converged and clashed and were thrashed out at the joint unity convention. Thirty UCP delegates met an equal number of CP delegates. Although they had come to a convention to merge into and form one united party, the two delegations from the beginning held aloof from each other. The party lines held; each delegation met in separate caucus. There was no fraternization except for good-natured banterings between individuals of both factions. With all there was no bitterness and little open hostility. Every delegate was impressed with the seriousness of the task which lay before him. Each delegation realized from the outset that somehow unity must be achieved and that at this convention there must be formed a single Communist Party of America. The Third International had spoken and its mandate could no longer be postponed.

The complete story of the Convention could only be written by one who had participated in both caucuses, for the real problems and the real debates on all important questions were first thrashed out in the caucus meetings. The speeches on the floor of the joint sessions were but the expression of the majority opinion of each caucus.

The first joint session was held in the open air, the delegates seated in a semi-circle, the UCP delegates on the right and the CP delegates on the left, in a natural amphitheatre with a boulder for the chairman's desk. The session was opened with short introductory remarks by the representative of the Pan-American Agency, introducing the impartial chairman who had been decided upon in advance by the Unity Committee.

The report of the credentials committee showed 30 delegates from each side, and 6 fraternal delegates, who were seated without contests. The difficulties which this convention was to face all through its sessions were indicated at the outset by the attempt to elect a rules committee of five members in accordance with the agenda which had been previously agreed upon by the Unity Committee. A proposition, made by a delegate from the CP side, to elect this committee by secret ballot resulted in a deadlock. A compromise was reached by an agreement to elect two members of this committee from each side with the chairman as the fifth member. The rule which provided for the deciding of all questions by secret ballot upon the demand of a majority, the request for secret ballot to be taken by ballot, as proposed by the CP members of the committee and the chairman, resulted in the next deadlock.

Agreement was reached by the UCP proposal to elect all standing committees by secret ballot. Three were nominated from each side and on all committees the 6 nominees received 30 votes each and were declared elected. The standing committees were: Program, Constitution, Press, Industrial, Education, Legal Organization, Resolution, and Liquidation.

Then followed nearly two days of caucusing, during which the committees prepared their reports. The UCP caucus was debating the report of its CEC preparatory to presenting it to the joint convention session. The question of mass action, participation in parliamentary elections, factory committees, the relation between the language federations and the party, which were included in the "ultimatum" of the Pan-American Agency of the CI, which the CEC of the UCP had adopted, were being thrashed out in the UCP caucus. The fact that this "ultimatum" was not accepted

as such by the EC of the CI made it necessary for the UCP delegation to seriously debate these questions at length.

The CP rejected the interpretation placed upon these questions by the Agency.

Each district convention of the CP had thrashed out questions of program and the delegates of the CP were in fundamental agreement.

The CP program was accepted as a basis for the program committee's report almost without change.

The next session of the Joint Unity Convention was held outdoors and opened with the reading of the reports of the UCP's and the CP's CECs. Comrade Elk [Ludwig Katterfeld] reported for the UCP and Comrade Dobin [Charles Dirba] for the CP. The two reports showed better than volumes of argument the important differences between the two parties.

The UCP report recounts the facts of the unity of the CLP with the "Minority" [Ruthenberg] faction of the CP in May 1920, claiming that according to the reports of the delegates there that there were 11,000 members in the UCP, that the great majority of these left the party after this "unity" convention because they did not agree with the UCP Program and Constitution adopted there. Then follows a tabulation of UCP membership at the time of their convention held last December, 1920.

It reports a membership of 5,700, organized in 667 underground groups — 3 being from Canada.† For May 15, 1921, the reported membership of the UCP is 5,927, divided among 771 groups. The membership dues figures given in the report covers the period from Jan. 1st to April 1st, 1921 (three months) and are as follows: Dues Stamps, \$8023.65; Initiation Stamps, \$1005.00; showing an average of 3,566 UCP members paying dues during the months of January, February, and March [1921].

The UCP report on Organization shows 14 Districts with 12 paid District Organizers and 3 paid Sub-District Organizers.§

The UCP reported to have 35 publications under their control with a total monthly circulation of 1,642,000, and to have distributed since January 1st, 1921, 2 million leaflets and 105,000 pamphlets in 7 languages besides English.

The UCP report covers 32 closely typewritten pages containing a mass of detail covering every phase of UCP activities in the minutest possible manner but not discussing the attitude of its CEC towards the questions which have divided the two parties for the past two years.

The report of the CEC of the CP opens with an itemized cash statement, signed by the auditing committee, a complete statement of assets and liabilities of the CP, a condensed cash statement for July 1, 1920 to May 13, 1921, covering all Language Federations and subsidiary units. In the report on organization all membership figures are based upon dues received and show an average for January, February, March, and April of 6,328 dues paying members of the CP. The dues payments for February, March, and April were \$9,718.40 (@ 60¢), and the initiation fees (@\$1.00) \$702.

A complete report of Convention Assessment figures was made by districts showing \$2,909 paid, 304 exemptions, and 56 to be collected shows that the CP membership participating in the elections to be 6,178, exclusive of 333 members in Canada (now organized in the CP of C) and 81 on the Pacific Coast. From January 1st [1921], 1,300 CP members left for Russia and 870 members joined the party.Δ

The CP was divided into 6 districts with 6 paid District Organizers and 4 paid Sub-District Organizers.

†- The UCP's own internal dues statistics indicate an actually paid membership of 4,395 for the 4th Quarter of 1920. [RTsKhIDNI f. 515, op. 1, d. 28, l. 25-26; DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 940, case 202600-1775, docs. 323 & 474.]

‡- The Primary Party Unit of the UCP was the "group," consisting of between 5 (if possible) and 10 members.

§- UCP Districts 4 [Pittsburgh] and 9 [Denver] were basically nonfunctional for most of the year of the organization's existence. It seems unlikely that they were dusted off and restarted in the run-up to the unity convention. The writer of this article (seemingly hailing from the old CPA) also here wrongly states the declared payroll of the UCP. In actuality, the report delivered to the convention by Katterfeld states: "D1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14 have DOs working for half pay. D2, 5, and 7 also have paid SDO each, and D14 is dividing his wages with a SDO." [See: RTsKhIDNI f. 515, op. 1, d. 50, ll. 29-58; available on www.marxisthistory.org as a 1921 downloadable file entitled "Report of CEC to UCP Convention and to Joint Convention of CPA..." pg. 2.]

Δ- The assertion that 1,300 CPA members left for Russia should be taken with a grain of salt; it was the organization's enormously unlikely contention that the main cause of its membership attrition was emigration rather than burnout.

The CP report on “Propaganda and Agitation” showed 19 papers under the control of its CEC published in 7 languages besides English and having a monthly circulation of 999,000 copies per month.

Since the last CP convention (Feb. 1921) the CP distributed 2,183,000 leaflets in English; and published 11 books in 104,000 copies; and 9 pamphlets in 61,000 copies.

The CP report after giving a detailed account of the important decisions of their CEC proceeds to the discussion of questions of principles and policy, mass action, and armed insurrection; CP Nuclei, Shop Delegate System, and Factory Committees; Relations with the Pan-American Council of the RILU; the question of participation in the Elections; the question of Language Federations, and the Unity question were reported at length stating the CP position on all these questions together with definite recommendations to the Unity Convention.

During the entire afternoon and extra night session these two reports were discussed and debated; the issues raised by the reports forming the basis of the arguments. It was during the debate upon the two CEC reports that the delegates from both the UCP and the CP discovered that the long controversies and disagreements between both parties on the questions of program and principles had had the result of clarifying these issues. With few exceptions the delegates of both sides found themselves in agreement on all fundamental questions, especially the interpretation of mass action and armed insurrection and the role of the party in the proletarian revolution. This debate paved the way for the consideration of the Program Committee’s report and showed clearly that the real problem for affecting the unity of both parties would be tested in the consideration of the Constitution Committee’s report.

The Program of the unified party which appears on another page in this issue, is almost wholly the old program of the CP, which was used as the basis for

drawing up the new program. The important additions were made in the section dealing with “Labor Unions and Labor Organizations” especially in those parts which treat of the “left wing” movement within the old unions, and the attitude toward the IWW. These sections, together with the adoption of the report of the Industrial Committee’s report, having been adopted with little opposition and without a dissenting vote, show that the delegates were determined to make the united part a party of action, with a program adapted to the immediate struggle of the workers. Both parties had in the course of the past 12 months grown up and with the exception of a few delegates were almost entirely recovered from the infantile sickness of “leftism.”

The section of the program dealing with parliamentarism, definitely pledges the party to participate in the municipal, state, and national elections and is more than a mere formal declaration, since it makes it obligatory upon the CEC to organize the necessary machinery for such participation. Thus whatever there may be of anti-parliamentarism and syndicalist tendencies within the united party finds no expression in its official declarations.

The Negro Question, which some delegates wanted to have included in the program, is to be treated in the Party’s Manifesto, which for lack of time for preparation was referred to the CEC to issue.

The unanimous adoption of the program... proves beyond doubt that so far as our declaration of principles is concerned the two factions are now in fundamental agreement upon all the important questions of principle which formerly divided them. The questions of tactics will from now on be the major questions to be decided.

After two more days of caucus meetings, the convention met to hear the report of the Committee on Constitution. The clauses upon which the committee had split 3 to 3 deadlocked the convention by a vote of 30 UCP delegates to 30 CP delegates.† The

†- Central here would have been the question of the Language Federations. The old CPA was essentially a federation of 6 Language Federations — some of which were more wealthy and vital than the central party organization itself. These semi-autonomous organizations hired their own personnel, published extensively in their own language, and were the mechanism for collecting the party dues, a portion of receipts then being remitted to the National Office. The UCP distrusted the institution of language federations and attempted to minimize the role of such groups. It handled the collection of dues through the regular District Organizer structure and had no substantial organizational mechanism to link together various local groups speaking one common tongue. It was these two very different philosophies — combined with social and economic pressure to preserve each status quo — that presented the main obstacle to unity between the CLP/UCP and the old CPA/Central Caucus throughout the entire 1919-1922 period.

clauses agreed upon by the committee were adopted with little debate. At 11 o'clock at night the Committee on Constitution had finished its report. No constitution had been adopted. The convention was hopelessly deadlocked. Neither side left their seats. No motions were made; no one took the floor. The chairman announced that he would entertain a motion to adjourn. This was answered by the humming of "The Internationale." The chairman waited and then declared the session adjourned and left the chair. But both delegations remained in session. The situation was tense. After a while the chairman announced the reopening of the session and introduced the representative of the Pan-American Agency, who proposed the settlement of the deadlock on the constitution by the negotiation between the separate caucuses. A delegate from the UCP side moved that a recess be taken which was unanimously voted. Both caucuses then met and negotiations were carried on between them during the night. It was finally agreed to elect a committee of 10, 5 from each caucus, who were to bring in recommendations on each clause of the constitution upon which the constitution could not agree. This committee met during the following day. Each caucus confirmed the compromises reached upon each clause and the convention in joint session rapidly adopted them with very little discussion. The principle points at issue and the decisions regarding them have been already described in detail in No. 1 of the *Official Bulletin*.

With the adoption of the Constitution the party lines melted away. Comrades who after having been separated for years embraced each other; hands clasped hands; the delegates sang "The Internationale" with as much energy as could be mustered after the trying 48 hour continuous sessions. Unity had almost been achieved.

Almost — because while the convention had decided upon a CEC to be composed of 9 members, another deadlock occurred over the election of the 9th CEC member. Two names were proposed as the "impartial" 9th man. These were voted for by secret bal-

lot, with the result that both received 30 votes. Neither side was prepared to trust to the complete impartiality of the other. After further caucus meetings it was agreed to reconsider the clause in the Constitution providing for 9 members on the CEC. A CEC of 10 members was accepted. Both "impartial" candidates were then unanimously elected.† It was agreed to elect the delegates to the Third Congress of the Comintern at the convention and the Joint Unity of the UCP and CP wound up its work and adjourned.

The delegates, exhausted from the strenuous activity of two weeks, but happy at having successfully accomplished their difficult task, formed little groups regardless of former party lines and left for their homes.

Of the many conventions held by the Communists in this country, the Joint Unity Convention just ended will prove to be the most momentous and the most far-reaching in its effect upon the communist movement in the US.

With the unity of the former UCP and CP accomplished, the Communist Party in America enters upon a new period. Many comrades may deplore the long factional fight in this country, and the resultant splits within the movement, as a dead loss and waste of energy, but the clarification of Communist principles and tactics which resulted from these splits are a distinct advantage which more than compensates for the apparent loss of revolutionary energy.

The experience gained will be felt when the Communist Party enters the period of revolutionary activity, such as now prevails in Germany. But these factional controversies, when carried beyond the point necessary for the establishing of communist understanding, tend to become barren and may easily result in sectarianism.

For after all, the test of our principles lies in action; in the application of the tactics and principles of communism to the needs of the exploited masses in the class struggle. From now on the Communist Party of America must bend all its energies to bring its pro-

†- The CEC elected at the May 1921 Joint Unity Convention included: George Ashkenuzi, John Ballam, Charles Dirba, Joseph Stilson, and J. Wilenkin (formerly of the old CPA); James P. Cannon, Abram Jakira, Ludwig Katterfeld, Joseph Zack Kornfeder, and Jay Lovestone (formerly of the UCP). It is not known who the respective candidates for the "impartial" 9th man would have been, but most likely candidates would have been Stilson or Wilenkin for the old CPA, and Jakira and Katterfeld for the UCP. It should be noted that Alfred Wagenknecht was not elected to this body, ending his continuous tenure since 1919. C.E. Ruthenberg was unable to serve due to his imprisonment in New York for violation of that state's "Criminal Anarchism" Law.

gram into life; to achieve and maintain that contact with the masses without which there can be no powerful and effective communist movement in this country.

The Joint Unity Convention has produced a program of action sufficient for the requirements of the class war in the America. Every member of the Communist Party (formed at this Unity Convention) has behind him the necessary training to make of the CP the revolutionary vanguard of the working class.

All the problems arising out of the unity of these two former factions are by no means settled. There yet remains to be consummated the physical union of the separate units of both the former parties. To this task every comrade must bend his or her energies. The bitterness engendered by two years of factional strife cannot be expected to disappear over night, but these will wear off as our comrades fight shoulder to shoulder within the unions and elsewhere in carrying out the party's program.

Let every comrade resolve to support the new CEC in its difficult task of bringing into life the new program and constitution of the CP of A.

LONG LIVE THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF AMERICA.

LONG LIVE THE COMMUNIST INTER-
NATIONAL.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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