
The Party at the Crossroads

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The Present Situation.

Never before has the situation in America been so favorable for Communist propaganda and activity. Millions of workers are unemployed. Wages are being cut at an alarming rate. The open shop drive is becoming more intense. The capitalist class has taken the offensive along the whole front.

The Party must fulfill its historic role of serving as the guiding, unifying, and directing center of the class struggle. We must lend unity of plan and purpose to the American labor movement. Merely to lay plans and express hopes is to dabble in Platonic aspirations. We cannot stop here. Too long have we supposed and proposed. Propaganda alone is not sufficient for the realization of working class victory.

It is high time that we act. *The Party must develop such a machinery as will enable the entire membership to actively participate in all the struggles of the working masses.* We must further give these struggles a political character and direct them into revolutionary channels. We must give them a deep Communist hue.

Never before has there been such a crying need for Communist activity and leadership. But our underground organization is by itself not best or even suitably fitted for the task of winning over the masses to the side of Communism. *It must be remembered that we were driven underground by the American bourgeois-*

ie. Our class-conscious capitalists will not sacrifice this tremendous advantage won by them during their orgy of persecution. They realize full well the advantage they have gained. *They are well aware of the fact that their fate is sealed unless we become a hopeless, sterile sect.* And the capitalists know all too well that underground life pure and simple makes most positively for sectarianism and political impotency. Hence the bourgeoisie will do all in their power to thwart our working in the open, to sabotage our efforts to establish machinery for effective open work — that is unified and centralized open activity on a national scale. They will do all to promote suspicion, distrust, and dissension in our ranks in order to stifle us.



What Has to Be Done?

Our Central Executive Committee, conscious of its duties and the pressing needs of the Communist International and the Party, has laid the foundation for unifying and centralizing the open, legal activities of the Party. It is high time that our efforts to win the masses should cease being sporadic sallies. If we are to develop a mass Communist Party in the United States, our efforts at coming into open, direct contact with the working class in all its struggles must be highly organized and centralized on a national scale. This is indispensable to a proletarian revolution in America. In doing this we are simply accepting the tactics adopted by the 3rd Congress of the Comintern [June 22-July 12, 1921]. We are only taking steps to carry out the especially emphatic instructions of the 3rd

Congress to the Communist Party of America.

We quote from the Theses on Tactics as submitted to the 3rd Congress by Lenin, Radek, Bukharin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev:

In the United States of North America, where on account of historical circumstances, there was lacking a broad revolutionary movement even before the war, the Communists are still before the first and simplest task of creating a Communist nucleus and connecting it with the working masses. The present economic crisis, which has thrown 5 million people out of work, affords very favorable soil for this kind of work. Conscious of the imminent danger of a radicalized labor movement, American capital tries to crush and destroy the young Communist movement by means of barbarous persecution. The Communist Party was forced into an illegalized existence, under which it would, according to capitalist expectations, dwindle into a mere propagandist sect and lose its vitality in the absence of any contact with the masses. The Communist International draws the attention of the Communist Party of America (unified) to the fact that the illegal organization must not only serve as the ground for collecting and crystallizing of active Communist forces, but that it is the Party's duty to try all ways and means to get out of the illegalized condition into the open, among the wide masses. It is the duty of the Party to unite the masses politically for the struggle against American capitalism.

Comrades, conditions known to all of us and at present beyond our control make it impossible for us to go into an elaboration of the details involved in our plans. For this end, the Central Executive Committee is devising other means. Suffice it to say that our Central Executive Committee is not pledged to any iron-clad formula as to our machinery for countrywide open work. We frankly recognize that the form is a matter mainly dependent upon the prevailing Party and outside conditions. But taking all circumstances into consideration, the Central Executive Committee's plan is best suited for the present. *It is therefore the inviolable duty of every member of the Party to give the Central Executive Committee undivided support in its efforts to build a Party of life, of action, of revolutionary power.*

We have taken all steps possible to insure complete and unquestionable control of the entire open work of the Party. *Our open work is completely under the control of the Party.* Only the most reliable comrades, subject to strict Party discipline, are entrusted with such work. The Party is at the crossroads. We are first beginning to be aware of the difficulties and problems involved in our task. *But difficulties and dangers are no reason for avoiding the class struggle.* To turn your

back on the class war because of the difficulties and dangers that go along with it is rank opportunism. This is true whether the opposition comes from the "Left" paralyzed or from the Center and Right. To lead and unify the workers in their struggles the Party must set up proper machinery. This is exactly what the Central Executive Committee is doing. *Any member — or anybody else — who deliberately spreads misinformation, distorts, or misrepresents the Central Executive Committee's plans for unified, centralized, open work is guilty of gross insubordination and crass violation of Party discipline and loyalty.* Especially shameful is such insubordination and disruption at this moment in view of the national and international situation. Besides, the Party is still completing the task of organic amalgamation. Particularly at this time, then, should every member give his all to the Party.

The Role of the Party.

The role of the Communist Party is to unify the proletarian struggles so as to turn them into broader and deeper channels — into a revolutionary struggle for power, into a struggle for the complete destruction of the bourgeois state and overthrow of the capitalist system. To realize this task, the Party must actively participate in every phase of the class struggle on the basis of a clearly defined plan. But we cannot secure such active, well-planned participation in the struggles of the workers unless we have connections and contact with the broad laboring masses. Our present outlawed, underground organization, imposed upon us by the American capitalist class, is not fitted to realize this end by itself. We must, therefore, develop an auxiliary organization that will be so organically constructed as to secure for the Communist Party a controlling influence on the working masses. Hence we must develop an organization functioning on a national scale and unifying and centralizing all our open work — that is, all our work of immediate and direct participation in the life of the labor movement of the country.

Some Problems.

It may be said by some that such an organization will slip out of the control of the Party. Some

maintain that the development of an organization that actually leads the workers in their struggles will do away with the Party. Others may be afraid of compromising our principles. Still others, insisting on their being in favor of open, legal work, may oppose the idea of setting up on unified, centralized, national organization. They would have us set up many special organizations for particular purposes.

1. Party Control of Open Work.

Let us consider these problems. First, anent the fears of losing control. Well, the problem of control is one which we will always face. The Central Executive Committee has taken every step possible to effect 100 percent control of the legal work. As time goes on, still better methods of control may be devised. Then again, our entire membership must swing into the open work so as to perpetuate our control. It must be remembered that a well-trained and highly disciplined body of Communists can guide and control a far larger number of workers. The problem of control is in reality a problem of getting across certain policies and tactics in practice. The success we will have in meeting this problem depends on the extent to which every Party member will devote his energy and time to carrying out Party instructions and order. Those especially solicitous of having the Party control its legal expression should devote their time to Party building only. To promote dissension and mistrust on a specious plea of "control" is conduct unbecoming a Communist and worthy only of the worst enemies of the Party.

2. No Liquidation.

Now as to the fear of doing away with or liquidating the Party. The underground form of organization is not a form inherently characteristic of or indispensable to all Communist parties. The mass Communist parties of the world are today functioning mainly above ground. Our underground organization arises from the unfavorable conditions under which we find ourselves now. The bulk of our work can and must be done openly. The 3rd Congress of the Communist International emphasized most strongly the urgent necessity of our finding ways and means to so

function.

Because of capitalist oppression, our underground organization must and will be maintained for at least two very important reasons. *First of all, as a protective, emergency safety valve.* Our open organization may at any time be faced with an onslaught by the government forces and agencies. We must have, at all times, an organization that will hold together our membership and be ready to function. This is a task of the underground Party. *Secondly, the present political conditions in America do not permit a legal guidance, a direction and unification of the class struggle by an open Communist Party.* Such guidance, direction, and unification are a prerequisite to a successful struggle for proletarian political power. Therefore, we must now have an underground Party devoting itself to devising ways and means of giving the workers' struggles a political character, a unified plan, and Communist purpose.

...The existence of a strong, open, fighting auxiliary organization of the Communist Party will not undermine or do away with the underground Party. Such a subsidiary organization will positively add strength and life to our Party. The more work our comrades do, the more will our underground Party devote itself to serious consideration of the actual problems of the proletarian battles and victory; the less time and energy will we expend in sterile, factional strife. And this is the greatest source of vitality and power of our Communist Party. Besides, as our members come into contact with the broad laboring masses and distinguish themselves in the class struggle, the more opportunity will we have of winning over into our closed ranks, into membership, the best blood, the most conscious and the most courageous of the proletariat. This will breathe a new spirit of life into our underground Party. This will strengthen us immeasurably. This will make us the vanguard of the proletarian movement in fact and in deed as well as in name. And the only way to realize this most desirable conditions is to devise such ways and means as will enable our membership to win the recognition and trust of the working class. Hence, the unification and centralization of our open work is the best means possible to end our isolation, rid us of our present political impotency, and make out of our Party a Party worthy of membership in the Communist International.

3. *As to Compromise.*

A word or two about compromising principles. Our program is not a Holy Bible handed down to us by the Gods. It is not a sacred papal bull that we must hurl at the American working class. Our program is a guide to our action, a source of light for our policies and tactics. Consequently, our program will cease being a conglomeration of attitudes, pious wishes, and formulas only when we turn it into life, when we test it, when we apply it. But to test and apply our principles means to fight side by side with the workers in all their struggles. It means to lead the workers in the onslaught against their oppressors. And to fight alongside of and lead the workers in battle necessitates machinery adapted to such an end. The hidden, underground machinery cannot serve this purpose. Hence, the imperative need for an open, centralized organization under which complete Party control.

This is no compromise. To refuse to take such steps is to be guilty of worse than compromise. To run away from the struggles and trials of the workers is the surest way of turning our program into fossilized dogmas, into lifeless formulas — in short of entirely destroying our principles.

At present we can openly apply and work out all of our principles except that of armed insurrection and the seizure of power. The Party must lose no opportunity for winning over the masses to our position on this problem. For this task, the underground organization is especially fitted. In other work, the Communist Party should fully and most openly utilize all legal opportunities. The underground Party should limit itself to that work which can and must be done underground only. This should be the guiding policy for our press, education, defence, agitation, and labor union work. Such a policy is not one of compromise. It is the policy urged and demanded by the Third International. Were it otherwise, all our defense, legal publications, mass meetings, nuclei, and election campaign activities would be compromising acts. We know better than that. On the contrary, such work is only the most positive proof of our strength, of our life, of our carrying out the program of the Communist Party and the Communist International. This and this only is what is meant by Communists combining legal and illegal work. Of course, all these activities are always

under the complete control of the Party.

4. *A Working Body.*

Finally, as to those who protest their desire for open legal work but say that they are only opposed to the existence of one unified, centralized organization functioning on a national scale. Such opposition is groundless. The case of the opponents of centralized open work won't hold water. If the Party really means and plans to do effective work, to realize our task of becoming the unifying and guiding center of the class struggle, it must adopt the most efficient machinery for this end. We must organize ourselves not on a foundation of sand, not on a shifting slippery basis, but on a solid, permanent, and concrete foundation. The class struggle does not lend itself to mechanical, artificial divisions in distinct airtight compartments. All the phases, all the manifestations of the class struggle are closely interlinked, are closely interwoven. The workers face the same fundamental problems in every phase of the struggle against their exploiters and oppressors. *We, therefore, cannot set up special, isolated, disjointed organizations for every need and purpose that may arise from the class struggle.* Again, the membership which is to function in any one of these countless "organizations" is the same that is to function in all of them. Why, then, refuse to set up an organization which will unite all of our members into one working body? Why deliberately scatter our forces and dissipate our energies? The very struggles and hardships of the class war necessitate a unified, centralized organization. Furthermore, it is much easier for the Party to control its open legal work if this work is unified and centralized on a national scale. The Party can exercise much more effective control of its legal expression when this expression is centralized and in the hands of responsible comrades than when our forces are scattered, disunited, and not coordinated. Hence, the necessity to have on unified, centralized organization, more easily under the complete control of the Party, in order to effectively participate in the struggles of the working class.

Conclusion.

The class struggle and the very life of the Communist Party demand a unification and centralization

of all our open work on a national scale. The Communist International is most insistent on our accepting such a policy.

It is high time that our program cease being a dead letter. It is high time that we put into motion the wheels of life, of action, of revolutionary struggle. Let every member pledge himself to the building of a virile, mass Communist Party! Away with sectarianism! We must give our undivided energy to the Party work in all its divisions. The need for Communist activity and leadership is greater than ever before. The working class of America must be won over to Communism! This can be done only through tireless, wholehearted efforts to realize the Party's plans. This must be done! There is no time for delay! All discord, dissension, and disruption must be banished!

Comrades! All as one! To work! To your task! Put your shoulders to the wheel! On with the Communist struggle!

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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