
Letter to Leo Laukki in Moscow from Alfred S. Edwards in Boston. Circa November 1921. †

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 39, l. 194.

Dear Comrade:—

Through the courtesy of com. S. I am sending you this letter from the Dollar Land. I will try to tell you as much as possible about the situation here, after you left this “sweet land of liberty,” I mean the situation in our Party and the whole movement, if we have any movement to speak of here.

The Unity Convention was a 50-50 proposition, 30 delegates from each side. Five from each side were elected to the CEC. When all was over com. Scott [Karlis Jansons, the UCP representative on the “American Agency”] (representing the EC of the CI) advised us in a really menshevik style: “Comrades, let us sing ‘The International,’ but keep your voices down, so that our singing is not heard.” This advice is the slogan of our official Party policy now. Our communism has become of the respectable, rose-water kind.

In the CEC one of the former CP-ites (a dentist by profession, who has never seen the inside of a factory) [J. Wilenkin] has gone from violent leftism to extreme opportunism. Another, who does not know how to be in the minority [the Lithuanian Federationist “Riley”/“Ray”], has joined him and as the result the whole CEC is in the hands of opportunists of the worst kind. I’ll give you as an example just some of the more important differences of opinion on party problems.

(1) Agitation in the Army and Navy — NOTHING done by the Party and the CEC simply ignores this question. It is not the work for “respectable” communists, you know. On the questions of Soldiers’ Bo-

nuses, neglect of crippled and sick “heroes,” Armistice Day, Memorial Day, rape of Mexico, Haiti, etc. by the US, “Sovietism” in the Navy (discovered by the present Secretary of the Navy), dangers of new wars in the Pacific, “our” interests in the Mesopotamian oil wells, building of the “strongest Navy in the world” after the “war to end wars” and “the last war” — on all these questions, the CEC has nothing to say. Our Party has not a single group organized in the military forces of the country, and does not intend to.

(2) UNEMPLOYMENT — members of the CEC are paid by the Party, so the question of unemployment does not exist for them. No propaganda done and no attempts made to organize the unemployed ex-soldiers on auction (on the Boston Common), as they used to do with the black slaves long ago.

(3) PARTICIPATION in and LEADING the MASS STRUGGLES of the WORKERS — nothing done and no intention to do anything. Problem of “Open Shop,” West Virginia, and Ohio coal miners’ strikes (ending in civil war), anti-strike laws and imprisonment of Howat in Kansas, etc., does not interest the CEC.

I’ll give you a characteristic example: At the Lettish [Latvian] Federation Conference I asked the reporter of the CEC what had been done in West Virginia Civil War for our propaganda and agitation. “Nothing has been done; what did you expect us to do, to send a reporter there?” answered the representative of the CEC, who at the same time is our “National Industrial Organizer”! When other organizers

†- Original addressed simply “Dear Comrade” with the name “Laukki” handwritten at top of document, presumably a reference to long-time Finnish Federationist Leo Laukki. Alfred S. Edwards, a Latvian Federationist from the suburbs of Boston, was a founder of the Socialist Publication Society in December of 1916 — precursor of the organized “Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party.” The letter discusses CEC politics taking place in the second half of July 1921 and speaks of the reorganization of the American Labor Alliance as a soon-to-be-accomplished fact, while not speaking of an actual split of the Central Caucus faction (to which Edwards owed his allegiance) — indicating a date of origin of approximately November 1921.

protested against such inactivity, the CEC at last issued a leaflet, SIX WEEKS AFTER the END of the STRIKE.

In the above case the CEC could get plenty of good agitators, party members, from the Pennsylvania coal fields, with union cards. They asked one of the minority members of the CEC to go to WV, but when he asked for \$250.00 for fare, printing, etc., they told him to travel under freight cars, as there is no money for this purpose in the treasury. At the same time the CEC spent 10 times as much travelling around to explain to members of the Party why the Party must be legalized and the illegal Party liquidated.

(4) ORGANIZATION of PARTY NUCLEI in SHOPS, UNIONS, etc., was begun and then halted till the Party is legalized.

The CEC does not seem to understand the work of party nuclei in shops or unions. Where we ought to be in the front in minor fights in the shops — against brutal overseers and foremen, sanitary conditions, denounce the “suckers,” for shorter hours and better wages, etc., etc., where we ought to issue leaflets urging the workers to fight — the CEC forbids lower party units to issue leaflets even as the District Committees have no right to issue leaflets, unless authorized by the CEC.

I remember how clearly this work was done in Russia, although I had my knowledge about it mostly from *Pravda*, *Proletarskaia Pravda*, *Nasha Pravda*, etc. that I received and read here in America. There are others, though, who have been in this work in Russia. THIS IS THE BEST WAY TO OBTAIN THE CONFIDENCE of the masses in our Party, but the CEC does not know it and does not understand it. They aim to get the leadership over the masses by reading the program of their new legal party.

(5) FIGHTING the CENTRISTS. “There’s no such animal” for the majority of the CEC. They are cleaning the Party now, but not for the purpose of expelling the centrists. Revolutionary workers are expelled, while bourgeois-liberals are admitted as members of the Party.

Just an example: The Jewish Socialist Federation and other centrists left the Socialist Party lately, stating that they want to affiliate with the Third International, but that they DO NOT ADOPT THE 21 POINTS, but they intend to fight for changes

WITHIN the Third International. The CEC decided to admit them as members of the Party (so that they could fight WITHIN, of course). Raphael [Alexander Bittelman], who was expelled from both CP and UCP before, has been admitted again.

(6) LEGAL POLITICAL PARTY — On this question I will have to go more in details, to avoid people misunderstanding.

Firstly, there is no antiparliamentarism in the Party, unless you apply this word in the wrong meaning against those Russian Comrades that refuse to become American citizens (they don’t like the idea of swearing to renounce forever their loyalty to Soviet Russia, and I don’t blame them for it. I myself would feel like a political prostitute or a menshevik if I would do it.

We know that for the purpose of participation in a campaign, nominating our candidates, etc., a LEGAL ORGANIZATION IS NECESSARY. There are no objections against it.

Where we differ is on the question — what kind of a legal organization? The majority of the CEC want to ABOLISH the UNDERGROUND PARTY. All underground party groups must become legal and join the Legal Political Party. They should pay dues (25¢) in the legal party. All CENTRISTS THAT WANT TO JOIN HAVE A RIGHT TO DO SO. Any organization where our comrades are in [the] minority, but where they can pack a meeting, must decide to join this legal party.

WE claim that the legal organization must be but an auxiliary of the underground party and under the full control of the latter. Besides that, we don’t have to ape the Socialist Party form of organization. We are not afraid of legal work, of using even the smallest opportunity for legal work, not afraid even to make mistakes, AS LONG AS THIS WORK IS UNDER FULL CONTROL OF the UNDERGROUND PARTY, and as long as we have a STRONG, CENTRALIZED, and DISCIPLINED UNDERGROUND PARTY.

History repeats itself. We here now face practically the same struggle as the Party in Russia after 1906 — struggle against the “*likvidatorstvo*” [liquidator group]. The darkest hours of reaction, persecutions of communists, the influence of bourgeois intellectuals on the labor movement — like causes produce like

results. We are in a worse fix [than] the party in Russia at that time, because there was no “rich uncle in Moscow” up to 1918, to corrupt the liberals so they would join the Party. Such temptations do exist now. I personally think that our uncle by his generosity has unwillingly done much for the corruption of the movement here.

Leftism and opportunism have joined hands here. Their slogan is CONTACT WITH THE MASSES (so is ours). The result of their policy will be just the opposite — a small sect (like the SLP) with a legal program. The five previous clauses of my letter is the best proof of it. Out CEC-ites don’t understand how to gain the confidence of the workers by participating in their everyday struggles, they think all that is necessary is to read some clauses of their legal program and to hold some campaign speeches.

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Some steps in the right direction were taken by the CEC, when they decided to organize the “A” [American Labor Alliance for Trade with Soviet Russia] and “Friends of Soviet Russia.” The latter has succeeded in assembling many labor organizations together and some good communist work is being done. The former was organized, but has been inactive all this time. Nevertheless, it is an excellent form of organization for doing our legal work. The trouble is that no work is being done by it now, before it is reorganized in the Legal Political Party, besides the leaders don’t know HOW to do to the work.

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As a result of the above disagreements complete disorganization exists in the Party. All members protesting against or not in agreement with the opportunistic policy of the CEC are expelled from the Party or removed from Federation Executive Committees (Bureaus) and obedient machine men put in their

places by the CEC. The majority of members, on the other hand, have lost all confidence in the CEC and in some places there is open revolt against it.

The Party is bankrupt besides FINANCIALLY. About 50 paid officials (Federation officials not included) use up all funds and some more. Party papers are discontinued, leaflets are not printed for months, pamphlets none at all. Members refuse voluntary donations, claiming (and with good reasons) that it will be spent on more salaried officials that do no work whatsoever.

We are demanding an emergency party convention now. Also that none be expelled for opposing the tactics of the CEC, where the CEC violates the decisions of the Joint Unity Convention [of May 1921]. We expect more expulsions, because the CEC will try to remain in the saddle by all means.

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Just happened to read an article by Lenin on “*chistka*” [cleansing] in the RKP [Russian Communist Party], that 99% of the mensheviks that joined the Party after 1918 must be thrown out. We here [have] 50% of our CEC [composed of] mensheviks that in 1919 still worked for the 2 1/2 and even the Second International. And “once a menshevik, always a menshevik” seems to be god’s truth.

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I am the man, sent to you shortly before you left by com. Rihi..... (from the CEC of the former CP). Inform com. Baldwin [Oscar Tyverovsky] about it. Hope you can use the information for enlightening the comrades on the present situation in America.

With fraternal greetings,

Edwards (Sullivan)

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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