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# Decision by the Communist International.

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The Communist International was appealed to to settle the controversy between the Central Executive Committee (majority) of the CP of A and the faction headed by the three former members (minority) of the CEC.

The Communist International acted upon (1) a report of the CEC (majority) of the CP of A, and (2) a formal written appeal signed by Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam] for the minority.

After hearing the case for both sides, the Communist International on December 8th [1921] signed a formal written decision, which has been received by the CEC of the CP of A from the hand of a special messenger [Robert Minor].

The Decision states that *the Executive Committee of the Communist International has resolved to support the position of the majority of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America in favor of the immediate construction of a legal political party on a national scale, which will act as an instrument of the illegal Communist Party for participation in legal activities, such as electoral campaigns, etc.*

The Comintern Executive orders, for good reasons, that the document shall not be printed. However, it is available for unlimited inspection and study by the leaders of the minority faction and by any committees of the minority rank and file that may be appointed for the purpose, so long as no copy of it is taken out of the possession of the CEC. The so-called “emergency convention” called by the minority leaders [New York: Jan. 7-12, 1922] heard the document read by the messenger from the Comintern [Minor]. The CEC also arranged to give Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam] an opportunity to

study the document with full liberty to make notes. Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam] have used that opportunity for nothing further than to spread the most outrageous falsehoods. In the face of a 10-page, official and final answer to the minority’s appeal, in which the EC of the CI declares its decision *to uphold the majority of the CEC of the CPA in favor of immediate formation of a legal political party*, these men have the dishonesty to issue a forged edition of the official organ of the party, containing evasive language intended to make the party members think that the Comintern upholds their position. In the meantime, when asked by the Comintern’s messenger [Minor] what they intended to do about it, Henry [Ashkenuzi] and Moore [Ballam] replied: That they intend to disregard the decision on the ground that it is addressed only to that Communist Party of America that is recognized by the Comintern, whereas *they* have another Communist Party that is not recognized by the Comintern.

It is imperative for all the Party membership — and all who have lost their standing as Party members through actions resulting from the controversy — to know and understand the decision of the Comintern. This article is written to give as much as possible of the substance of the document without violating the order not to publish.

## Strategy.

The document issued by the Communist International to the American party is destined to be a part of the history of the Communist movement of this country and of the world. Its first chapter is an effort

to wean the American Communists away from the primitive conception of revolutionary actions engaged in by Communists alone. To a Communist movement too youthful to have found the broad, directing viewpoint from which can be found the guideposts for its various steps, the International explains that isolated actions participated in solely by Communists will not suffice; that it is necessary to bring about common mass action of workers who are not as yet Communists. It points out that the workers will develop consciousness as a rule only through the struggle itself and through experience in “*General Class Struggle Organizations*.” We are told that we must unite the workers in such *General Class Struggle Organizations* and must join the various ones of these organizations into close relationships — that this, and not merely to attain Communist purity and perfection of program, is the task now facing the Communist Party of America.

The first portion of the message is a plea for us to cease striking around with our eyes closed, fighting as a little sect against the entire outer world. In short, it tells us that we will begin to be effective in the political struggle only when we adopt strategic aims, based upon a thorough examination of the facts.

### **Legal Party Must Be Formed.**

The Comintern ruled categorically that an instrument in the form of a *Legal Political Party* must be built. It instructs us that the means of public contact with the masses must be principally, a legal press, including (etc.), and organized groups of sympathizers in the Trade Unions, and an *Overground Political Party*.

The minority’s stand, rather vaguely to the effect that legal activities at the present time should be carried on only through legal “organizations” not in the form of a political party, was overruled. The Comintern decision is: *That the Legal Organization must take the permanent form of a Party Organization, and that some other loose Organization Form would be very much more difficult to control and guide.*

The Comintern Executive states that it is aware that the minority does not deny the advisability of taking advantage of legal opportunities, but that the minority opposes the rapid and energetic procedure of the majority in founding a legal revolutionary party, and that this distinction is without good ground.

Dobin [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam] are violating the principles of Communist honor by taking advantage of the fact that the Comintern’s document cannot be printed verbatim, to make their followers think that the Communist International accepts their stand for a legal “organization” not in the form of a political party. In their forged edition of *The Communist* they write that the Comintern “commands the CEC of the CP of A to call the convention of the illegal party before establishing the legal *Organization*.” In *every instance* where they mention the Comintern’s ruling as to whether there shall be a legal Party or only some other form of organization, these clever charlatans substitute the word “organization” where the Comintern decision reads: **“Party.”**

The Comintern received and considered (in the written appeal of the minority) a proposition that at some future time a “legal political organization may be initiated by forming *Skeleton Branches* composed of CP members, such branches to be formed *with only a part* of the membership of the corresponding underground CP branch,” etc. The Comintern decided on this point that: *The entire Communist Party membership must join the legal political party and become its most active element,*

and that

*The ruling of the CI must be accepted as obligating every member of the CPA, minority or majority, to work diligently in the immediate construction of a legal political party.*

The order of the Comintern must not be misunderstood as minimizing the role of the Communist Party itself. On the contrary, it assures us that *the fundamental task is now* (as we know it always has been) *the organization and training of the Communist Party as leader of the revolutionary movement. It further states that it must always be remembered that the real revolutionary party — the American section of the Communist International — is the Communist Party of America, and that such a legal party would be but an instrument which it would use to better carry on its work among the masses. Only through membership in the American Section — the Communist Party of America — can American workers become members of the Communist International.*

But we are told plainly that *Communists must*

*participate as Revolutionists in all general election campaigns, municipal, state, and Congressional, as well as Presidential. Not in the same manner as the Social Traitors and Centrists. Not in order to avoid violent revolution and substitute parliamentary activity for revolution, but, on the other hand, in order to use even the election campaigns to revolutionize the workers and lead them forward, to sharpen their class consciousness and to bring them together and unite them under Communist leadership.*

We are reminded that the purpose of the Communists is not to reform the capitalist state. Nevertheless, the document tells us that the program of a legal party will have to be somewhat restricted, but at all times going as far toward the Communist program as is possible while continuing a legal existence. Very clearly the document explains how a legal party program can and must have the desired result, *objectively*. While refraining from dictating the specific partial demands that should be made, the CI give examples by way of illustration of what *kind* of demands should be made. These cannot be given in this article; they will be read to the membership whenever requested. It is notable that these illustrations of demands are all such as to remain within the law, while framed so as to have the desired objective effect of developing the masses toward the desired result. It is made clear the demands upon the state for immediate concessions to workers must be made, not after the fashion of the Social Democratic parties, which try to make those demands within the limits in which the state can grant them while retaining its strength intact. Communist demands for immediate concessions to the workers are formed, not to be “reasonable” from the point of view of Capitalism, but to be reasonable from the point of view of the struggling workers, regardless of the state’s power to grant them without weakening itself.

### **As to an Underground Convention.**

In the hearing of the case, the Comintern had before it the written appeal of the minority, which stated:

“We have urged the CEC majority to call a convention of the party in order that the question now agitating the membership may be solved through intelligent discussion and action. This the CEC refuses to do, claiming that it is

acting under the direct mandate of the EC of the CI, with the result that affairs in our party are becoming more and more critical. We submit to the judgment of the EC of the CI the fact that these conditions within the party are unfavorable to the immediate launching of a legal political party, and that hasty and ill-considered action will disrupt the CPA and cause more harm than good to the movement in America.”

In fact, the Comintern had before it *five speeches and two reports (including the written formal appeal of the minority)*, all of which dealt with the central theme that the CEC majority *was already proceeding* in making a legal political party without calling an emergency convention of the CP to give it authority to do so; and the hearing before the Comintern had the *sole purpose* of deciding: “Is the majority of the CEC right in so proceeding?”

The answer is as plain as language can make it that: *The EC of the CI has resolved to support the position of the majority*

and that

*The fact that the Party Executive is proceeding rapidly and energetically with the formation of the legal party organization is not a fault.*

Throughout the document the Comintern emphatically and categorically upholds the CEC (majority) in *every* respect, and shows that it sent the document for the *sole purpose* of sustaining the majority and compelling the minority to cease sabotaging the vitally necessary step demanded by the Comintern. Ballister [Minor] and Carr [Ludwig Katterfeld] made the mistake of telling the Executive head of the Comintern that Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam], being honest Communists, would cease their destructive work as soon as they received the Communist International’s command to do so.

While making every effort to keep their following from assembling to hear the actual document of the Comintern read, Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam] publish the statement that the Comintern “commands the CEC of the CP of A to call the convention of the illegal party *before establishing* the legal organization.”

This is one of that peculiarly contemptible sort of lies which seeks to make an effect by confusing two similar, but entirely separate points. The sick Left minority tries to make it appear that the process approved by the Comintern was to be as follows:

*First step: Call underground convention.*

*Second* step: Then — if authorized by the underground convention — begin the formation of some sort of a legal “organization,” not necessarily in the form of a political party.

The process really approved by the Comintern in the document was:

*First* step: CEC completes the construction of a legal party up to the point of being ready for public launching.

*Second* step: *After completing* the construction of a legal party, call an underground convention of CP to make all preparation in the underground convention *for the public convention at which the legal revolutionary party is to be launched.*

What *did* the CI say about an underground convention? It said that it was very necessary to make all preparation in our underground Party convention *for the public convention in which the legal revolutionary Party is to be launched.* That is, *preparation for the public convention* is the purpose given by the Comintern in the only instance where it mentioned the subject of holding an underground convention before a legal convention.

Did the Comintern expect the CEC to establish a legal political party structure *before* the underground convention? Most emphatically, it did. The Comintern states bluntly that the minority opposes *the rapid and energetic procedure of the majority in founding a legal Revolutionary Party*, and that this is without good ground. The decision states categorically that *the fact that the CEC of the CP of A is proceeding rapidly and energetically with the formation of a legal Party is not a fault.* That is, the CEC “*is*” proceeding and founding a legal party *at that time*, which is certainly to say before any underground convention.

In short, the whole issue before the Comintern was: The CEC is now constructing a legal political party; is it right or wrong?

The Comintern replied categorically that the CEC is right in doing so.

While the document was being written, telegrams from the American CEC made plain that the CEC intended to enter a legal convention without holding a preliminary underground convention of the CP. The telegrams contained fairly complete information of plans, the different elements, the proposition, etc. Most of the members of the Presidium [of ECCI]

read these telegrams in the presence of Ballister [Minor] and Carr [Katterfeld], and all expressed their satisfaction and very great pleasure. Carr [Katterfeld] and Ballister [Minor] called attention to one feature, however, in which the plan did not conform to the original plan reported by them; that is, that the CEC now intended to enter a legal convention without holding a preliminary underground convention of the CP. Ballister [Minor] and Carr [Katterfeld] declared that they considered this a very bad mistake and asked that the CI send a telegram telling the CEC that it must manage that the arrangements be delayed for a few weeks so that a preliminary CP convention could be held immediately before a legal convention. The members of the Presidium agreed that entering a legal convention without holding a preliminary CP convention would be “indiscreet” (“*unvorsichtig*” was the German word used), but they hesitated to authorize such a telegram, saying they thought that the time was too short to change the plan. Upon Carr’s [Katterfeld’s] and Ballister’s [Minor’s] insistence they finally consented to the sending of the telegram, while reiterating that they doubted the possibility of changing the arrangements on so short time.

The telegram was sent, containing full approval of the plan, but ordering a few weeks postponement to allow for the preliminary convention.

The CEC had received several previous telegrams from the CI demanding that it proceed immediately to construction of a legal party apparatus, and declaring that no delay would be permitted; and this late telegram was the first intimation the CEC received that any delay would be permitted by the CI (the document itself was not received until very much later).

Since the above, the CEC of the CP of A has received another telegram from the EC of the CI stating that the CI exonerates the CEC for failure to comply with the command as to a preliminary underground convention, on the ground that the command was given on too short notice.

### **The Question of Liquidation.**

While the written instructions for the CPA were being prepared, there arrived in Moscow a curious appeal. From members of the CPA in one of the Western districts, not having access to official Comintern

channels, this document was sent to Petrograd by unofficial means, and was forwarded to Ballister [Minor] in Moscow. It was an appeal for the liquidation of the underground Communist Party. Ballister [Minor] and Carr [Katterfeld] immediately turned this document over to the Commission that was preparing the instructions for the CPA, with the request, in the name of the CEC of the CPA, that a vigorous condemnation of the liquidation tendency be included in the instructions.

Such an appeal is nothing new to the veteran revolutionists of Moscow. It is but a repetition of past developments in the history of the old Russian Bolshevik Party. Therefore the answer of the Comintern has some of the quality of reminiscence. It is to this effect: That he who wants to liquidate the illegal activities is no Communist at all, and that in carrying out the instructions for legal work, the Party must guard itself against the tendency to neglect or repudiate the illegal work, the tendency to become legal in fact as well as in outward appearance. This tendency will be found especially among the "intellectual" Party members who have little experience in the brutal physical phases of the class struggle, to which the rank and file workers are always exposed but from which the intellectuals engaged in legal political work are sometimes shielded. Upon finding themselves in the easier life of legal activities, many will forget that no matter what maneuvers may be made upon the public stage, the final class struggle must be, until its end, a brutal fight of physical force. A certain element in the Party membership will inevitably forget this fundamental principle (which no humble worker in the class struggle is allowed to forget) and will come forward with naive proposals for the liquidation of the illegal machinery of the Party. Such a tendency is very dangerous to a proletarian revolutionary party. The actual liquidation of the underground Party would mean the liquidation of the revolutionary movement. Party members who persist in such a view must be ruthlessly expelled from the illegal Party.

The underground organization of the Communist Party must not sink into disuse, but on the contrary must constantly extend its illegal machinery further and further. The document declares that the underground machinery of the CP is not merely for emergencies, but for constant and permanent use, and that every member, no matter what his duties in the legal Party, must also perform his duties in the underground organization.

This article cannot be a substitute of the original document issued by the Comintern. Certain delicate matters of very great importance, such as control, press, etc., are necessarily omitted here.

The Party Executive is determined to get the message in full to all of the Party membership, including ex-members who lost their standing through acts resulting from this dispute.

Dow [Dirba], Henry [Ashkenuzi], and Moore [Ballam], and their lieutenants, are *making every effort to prevent the rank and file under their influence from hearing the Communist International's message read*. Their plan is to evade the Comintern's decision, destroy the young Party, and then go to the Fourth Congress of the CI on an appeal from the decision of the EC of the CI, with evidence of a disrupted CP of A to prove that formation of a legal party was premature.

Full opportunity to every Communist, whether in good Party standing or not, to hear the message, can be obtained by applying to the CEC through Party channels.

The duty of all is plain. The ruling of the Communist International must be accepted as obligating every Communist, minority or majority. The message closes with the hope that in our coming Party convention all of us will give evidence, in our resolutions and our actions, of firm organic unity, and that our Party will prove its ability to measure up to the great responsibilities that stand before it.

***Central Executive Committee of the CP of A.***

(Written by James Ballister [Robert Minor])

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

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