
Letter to “Comrade Stepan” in Moscow from Charles Dirba in New York, April 12, 1921.

Document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 46, ll. 4-7.

April 12, 1921.

Dear Comrade Stepan [=???]:—

It is very difficult to put down on paper all the points and facts concerning unity and our relations with the American Agency (the same — Pan-American Council of the Red Labor Union International) that might be essential in carrying out your mission of appealing and protesting to the CI in regard to the recent developments on the unity question. It would not be an easy task to put down all the important general points, but it is still more difficult, well nigh impossible, to know just what question will be raised in detail, and what details, therefore, would be necessary for you to know.

However, I'll try my best; I'll give you all the details that come to my mind now, as I look over the official protest appeal (copy herewith) drawn up by our committee yesterday, the conditions of the AmAg. [American Agency], and the latest developments which led up to it. Don't look for order or plan, therefore, in my statements. Neither expect me to go too far back in all these questions. Comrade Stone [Louis Shapiro?] left here in the beginning of March [1921], and, having been on the CEC for nearly a year up till then, he has all the materials, and knows all the facts and details up to that time. You should get in touch with him and Comrade Andrew [Nicholas Hourwich] immediately on your arrival on the other side, and present the case together with him, so that he should be at hand to render information on any question of detail that might arise.

Point #1 of the Official Appeal.

There is no question that Scott [Karlis “Charley” Janson] absolutely overstepped his authority in presenting to use in the form of an ultimatum, without the decision of a formal meeting of the AmAg. [American Agency], a plan for unity and declarations on certain points of controversy, which the AmAg. had drawn up on March 5 [1921] as a suggestion and recommendation to the CI. It is quite different to make suggestions and recommendations to a higher body, which possesses greater knowledge and authority in every respect, and would be supposed to consider, change, and amend the plan before final action; I say, it is quite different from making up in final form an ultimatum themselves. In the latter case they would be compelled to keep all the time within the limits of their specific powers, and there would not be any opportunity to make changes and corrections. It is true, the AmAg. [American Agency] received full powers to unite both parties, and the EC of the CI did not make any special decisions as to how they should do it. But this does not mean that in exercising these powers they are authorized to go against the general policies and principles of the CI in similar circumstances, and it does not mean that they are authorized to go any further than the purpose for which they were given full powers. We consider that they have gone against the general policies of the CI in ordering the unity convention on the basis of equal representation instead of proportional representation. As an exception, they would have to justify it by extraordinary circumstances. The only extraordinary circumstance in our case, on this point, is the arrogant refusal of the UCP to abide by this condition. But, why not use the “full powers” to force the UCP to accept it? The AmAg. [American Agency] would have to answer this question in order to justify their position.

Having decided upon equal representation, the AmAg. [American Agency] was forced to look around for some arrangement by which a deadlock at the convention itself could be broken. Hence their next point that the chairman of the convention shall be appointed by the CI. If equal representation is accepted, then this point also must be accepted.

And we had to accept them, though under protest and giving notice of appeal to the CI, because we could clearly see that the AmAg. [American Agency], being absolutely partial to the UCP, would not hesitate to proclaim us outside of the CI, if we refused. Of course, we could have still appealed against their ultimatum and against their action in declaring us outside of the CI, but in the meantime there would have been disorganization in our ranks, while the UCP would be strengthened by the AmAg. [American Agency] and gaining new membership, so that we would have lost in fact even though our appeal to the CI on the point of our rights might have received favorable decision.

Since then we have received a cablegram informing us that the CI insists upon immediate unity either through proportionate or equal representation; and since the AmAg. [American Agency], having full powers to bring about unity, has come out for equal representation, we cannot but accept it. The only thing that remains to be done on this point is to show to the CI that this deviation from the principle of proportional representation is entirely due to the stubborn violation of the decisions of the CI by the UCP, and that our stand on the question has been correct; and from the standpoint of principle, we still appeal to the CI to order at the very last moment that the representation at the unity convention should be in proportion to present actual membership as shown and conclusively proved by the convention assessments to the Unity Convention. This would exclude any possibility for the UCP to claim that our figures are not correct or identical with their own.

As to membership figures: our does show as follows:— Dec. [1920], 7339; Jan. [1921], 6673; Feb. [1921], 6497; and March [1921], 6360; average for the 4 months — 6717; average for the last 3 months — 6510. These figures do not include many exemptions, which are very heavy at this time of unemployment. The March figure, for example, includes only 308 exemptions, not quite 5%, which is absolutely too low. We have no stamps for exemptions, and they are recorded only by reports, many subdivisions of the Party failing to make any reports on this point; as, for example, we have no reports of exemptions from any non-federation branches, and none even for the whole Lettish [Latvian] Federation. The *reported* membership of the

UCP as given to the AmAg. around the beginning of March [1921], we understand, was about 6100; the *reported* membership of the CP is over 7000 right now.

The above disposes also of point #2 of the official appeal.

Point #3 of the Official Appeal.

In view of the cablegram just received by us it appears that the CI will concur in the action of the AmAg. for a unity convention on the basis of equal representation, and, if the EC of the CI will send a representative over to act as a chairman of the Unity Convention, of course, there will be no question of his authority.

But the powers of the AmAg. [American Agency] are certainly limited to bringing about unity. Their declarations about the controversial points may be properly made as suggestions and recommendations to the Unity Convention, but under no circumstances can, or should, or do they have here to power to prescript these views of theirs as ultimative conditions obligatory to the Unity Convention, or to be accepted by our CEC as a condition for unity. When a Unity Convention is assured, and a plan has been devised and accepted to preclude deadlocks at the convention, then the AmAg. [American Agency] has carried out its mandate to bring about unity, and their powers cease. All the other conditions and declarations are not necessary and are not essential for the purpose of bringing about unity, and in making them the AmAg. [American Agency] has clearly overstepped its authority. We feel sure that the EC of the CI will repudiate them in this respect, and that is one of the purposes of our appeal. You must press for immediate action on this point, so that [they] could send us a cablegram before the Unity Convention comes together. If they are not repudiated by the CI, even though we have not acceded to them, they will be put before the Convention in the name of the CI, and will be so considered by the majority of the delegates, unless we have received message to the contrary by that time.

In points #4 and #5 of the Official Appeal, I think, you do not need any further particulars; they can be very well defended in general principles and on the basis of recorded facts.

The Situation of the Present Moment.

We have demanded a formal meeting of the AmAg. [American Agency] in order to present to it our protest against the unauthorized acts of Scott [Janson], and to argue in defense of our refusal to act on all the conditions and declarations of the AmAg. pertaining to the questions of program and constitution, which are only within the authority of the Unity Convention itself; to argue in defense of our refusal to bind the Convention.

Upon an official request from Scott [Janson] as to what our decision was, he was informed of it by a special committee of ours. He did not have anything to say against our committee, and he appeared satisfied with our decision; so far so that he wanted to connect up immediately with our representative to the Joint Convention Committee, so that this committee could go ahead right away with the preliminary arrangements for the Unity Convention.

He expects Yavki [Sen Katayama] here this week. They will be able to hold a formal meeting of the Agency upon his arrival. If they will accept our decision as satisfactory, then a Unity Convention is assured. We have figured out that 3 weeks is the minimum time required for carrying out elections to the Convention, and, if the UCP can do the same, then we can look forward to a Unity Convention around May 5 [1921].

If the formal meeting of the Agency should insist upon our acceptance of their ultimatum all through, then a special meeting of our CEC will be held to decide upon what to do. It is possible that we may be compelled to accept the whole ultimatum in words, having all the time in mind our present appeal, and expecting that the decision of the CI will repudiate the action of the AmAg. [American Agency] before any convention is held.

Be sure to make all possible haste in getting to your destination [Moscow], in bringing the case before the EC of the CI, and in informing us immediately of their decision. I'll give you mail and cable addresses.

The Partiality of the American Agency.

Officially the American Agency is made up of 2 CP men and 1 UCP, but in fact, while Yavki [Katayama] and Louis [Fraina] are not very much in favor of the UCP, neither are they very friendly to the CP, Scott [Janson] being a strong partisan of the UCP, the Agency, as a whole, in all their acts, turns out to be on the side of the UCP and against the CP.

Scott [Janson] told us that the comrades of the EC of the CI are very much incensed over our opposition to Yavki's [Katayama's] cooperation with Scott [Janson] on the question of unity. The facts in regard to this question are these: When Scott [Janson] arrived here in the first part of January [1921], and made his report to us about the unity mandate and the creation by the CI of the American Agency, we asked him if he was going to enforce the unity conditions upon the UCP. His answers were evasive, and right then and there he tried to shift the responsibility on the unity question from his own shoulders to the American Agency. On a question whether the American Agency has any mandate as to unity, he answered "Yes," but Yavki [Katayama] answered "No." Later on, in answer to our communication with him as a delegate who had given pledge to the CI to come back and enforce the unity conditions of the CI, he, personally signing the letter, still wrote in the name of himself *and Yavki [Katayama]*, even without Yavki's [Katayama's] personal consent. That is where we made the point that Yavki [Katayama] has nothing to do with the unity question; that is where we opposed Scott's [Janson's] trying to evade sole responsibility for not enforcing the unity conditions of the CI upon the UCP.

How Yavki [Katayama] came to be influenced by Scott [Janson] against the CP is another story. The above point is one of the means he used for this purpose. To Yavki [Katayama] and to the CI itself, he represented our opposition to his switching responsibility for failure to achieve unity from his shoulders also upon the shoulders of Comrade Yavki [Katayama], as our opposition to Comrade Yavki [Katayama].

When the CEC [had its] disagreement with Allen [Max Cohen], and had to expel him for gross breach of Party discipline, Scott [Jan-

son] represented the case in the light that our act was an act of enmity to the American Agency, that we were fighting the Agency through our actions against Allen [Cohen]. In fact, however, it was Scott [Janson] himself who seized the Allen [Cohen] case to set Yavki [Katayama] and the whole American Agency against the CP.

In this connection came our fight for representation on the American Bureau of the RLUI [RILU]. Allen [Cohen] was put on it by the Provisional Council at Moscow as the direct representative of the CP. When we had to expel Allen [Cohen] from the Party, we naturally demanded the right to put someone else in his place on the American Bureau. This was refused, and in connection with this some more hard feelings were engendered by Scott [Janson] in the heart of Comrade Yavki [Katayama] toward the CP.

Not only had we differences with the Pan-American Council (the same — American Agency) on the question of our representation to the American Bureau, but time and again we had to oppose them in their policies, we had to watch that in their zeal to “make good,” to show big results of their work, to get through a number of delegates from America to the Congress of the RLUI (the more, the better), they should not sidestep the principles of the CI or work injury to the movement (such, as for example, bring about splits in the unions in order to get through a delegate to the Congress). In this connection I want to report an incident that will throw light on the attitude toward and knowledge of the principles of the RLUI on the part of the American Bureau and its Secretary, Comrade Benjamin [Benjamin Lifshitz].

When the Bureau decided upon a letter to certain regional trade union organizations urging affiliation with the RLUI, they omitted to state that for this purpose a recognition of the idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and of the Soviet Power was essential. Our representative urged that the conditions of affiliation should be quoted in the letter. His proposition was not accepted, and the letter was sent without it. The Secretary of the American Bureau [Lifshitz], however, in the minutes of that meeting recording the demand of our representative, and desiring to make it appear absurd, on his own [hand wrote?] that he had proposed to insert in the letter the following “conditions of affiliation” — “The violent overthrow of the state and

capitalism by adopting the dictatorship of proletarian organization as a temporary and transitional measure for the attainment of Communism.” (Quote from Lozovsky’s pamphlet, page 31). When afterwards we pointed out to him that this formulation was rejected, and was not a part of the conditions for affiliation, he professed that “he had been mistaken.” Imagine the Secretary of the American Bureau making a mistake of this kind!

As to Louis [Fraina], his relations to the Party have been rather strained ever since he without any authority had vouched for Dr. Nosovitsky and brought him into the Amsterdam Conference in the beginning of 1920 [Feb. 10-11, 1920]. He was officially censured for this act by the CEC. Besides there was quite a little friction between him and the CEC on account of his failure to return to this country promptly. The CEC passed two times a decision calling upon Louis [Fraina] to return immediately, none of which was carried out. Then again, on the basis of the reports from the 2nd Congress of the CI [July 19-Aug. 7, 1920] our Editor wrote in *The Communist* that Louis [Fraina] had misrepresented the Party on the question of Trade Unionism. A recent article by Louis [Fraina] explains that this was mainly due to incorrect reports. However, it did not help much to improve his relations to the Party, since he had come out already as one of the instigators of the plan for a “National Council” of a “Communist Party of America (Unified)” — 3 and 3 with the UCP — and had expressed himself as not opposed to a unity convention on the basis of equal representation.

Miscellaneous.

I am sending Andrew [Hourwich] a letter through another comrade, but, if it has not reached Andrew [Hourwich] by the time you arrive there, you can transmit to him the following decision of the CEC:

“To present an ultimatum to Andrew [Hourwich], if he is not going to acquaint us immediately with all decisions of the EC of the CI pertaining to the Communist movement in America, and present our case before the EC of the CI, we shall be compelled to recall his

credentials, in view of the fact we have not received any reports for the last 5 months.”

Personally, you can tell Andrew [Hourwich] that we are all firmly convinced that if he had returned to America immediately after the first definite unity conditions were decided upon by the CI, unity would have been achieved on that basis, and we would not have arrived at the sorry pass in which we are now, practically losing out to the UCP on all points. We are quite unanimous in the opinion that his failure to return at that time was absolutely treasonable to the CP.

Another thing, which the CEC decided to communicate to Russia through our representative there (Andrew [Hourwich]), that a comrade by the name of Frank Svidersky, District VI [Chicago], Polish Federation, went away a couple months ago to Russia, taking with him out of spite, the membership certificate of another comrade. See if he cannot be located and properly disciplined for such an act.

Make it clear to the comrades there that we have been absolutely misrepresented on the question of the BRT [Brooklyn Rapid Transit] leaflet. We did not call the strikers to arms; the call was to *all* workers, and, in circumstances, it could not be interpreted as calling all the workers to arms at that moment, but it plainly meant a mere propagation of the idea of armed insurrection. On this point there is really a difference of opinion between the CP and the UCP, while we consider it “preparation” for armed insurrection, a “propagation” of it, to bring the idea before the workers at every opportunity, especially during strikes and unemployment, when the workers are open to revolutionary ideas in general, the UCP wants to “familiarize” the workers with this idea only in theoretical discussions and in connection with the presentation of the “ultimate” goals and the “ultimate,” the remote struggle.

On the question of participation in elections, I want to point out that the clause in our present program dealing with this question was specifically reformulated in order to express that we [want?] to participate in elections whenever possibly by putting up candidates as individuals, for example, even though we could not take part in the election officially as the Communist Party, being under ban by the government.

I think this is all that I can say to you. Note that this letter is written in a personal way, and it would be wrong to take the part about the partiality of the American Agency, for example, as an *official* statement. All facts, however, are given you without qualification. You can state them officially whenever necessary, without any doubt as to their absolute correctness.

Give my regards to Comrade Stone [Shapiro] and Comrade Andrew [Hourwich].

Fraternally yours,

C. Dobin [Charles Dirba].

Edited by Tim Davenport

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