
To the American Council of the Communist International: An Open Letter

Published in *Communist Unity* [New York], v. 1, no. 6 (April 1, 1921), pp. 1-3.
Note that the pages of issues 6 and 7 are jumbled on the Comintern Archive microfilm.

Dear Comrades:

From the 15th issue of the official organ of the UCP we learn that on February 20, 1921, you have addressed a communication to the Central Committees of the two Communist parties, containing 7 proposals which, if accepted, would have, according to your opinion, brought to an end “the factional struggle and (to) the realization of a semblance of unity, so that in the eyes of the masses we shall present a united front.” From the same source we learn that on February 27, 1921, you addressed a second communication, this time to the *membership* of the two parties, declaring in effect that because the Central Committee of the CP had rejected your proposal you have been unable to break the deadlock, and accordingly you will report to the Executive Committee of the Communist International “that we cannot break the deadlock and we shall make definite concrete suggestions to the Communist International on how to break the deadlock and how to realize actual activity — unity of a character which shall give factional control to neither party, but which shall be the unity desired by the International itself.”

This second communication addressed to the membership of the two parties you conclude with the following appeal: “We therefore call upon you, comrades, to stay in the party where you are now, to have patience and not increase the bitterness which prevails among us, and give the Executive of the Communist International time to act, finally and authoritatively.”

There is very little to be said on the merits of your “Seven Proposals” to the two Central Committees. The most that you yourself expected from the realization of these proposals was only a *semblance*

of unity which, under the present circumstances, would have failed to accomplish even as little as the cessation of the factional struggle. For what does this struggle consist of? Is it still, as it was 3 or 4 months ago, an open fight between the two Central Committees? No, it is not. These two committees had ceased fighting each other publicly immediately upon the issuance by the Executive Committee of the Communist International of its last mandate for unity. You will be able to verify this statement by just looking over the files of the official organs of the two parties. *But the factional struggle of the two ruling groups for control and against unity continued just the same.* The ruling group of the CP has turned from public propaganda against the UCP to the secret work of building up a ruthless and powerful machine, terrorizing and unscrupulously suppressing every desire for unity among the rank and file of the CP. And as regards the ruling group of the UCP, they have never done much public propaganda against the CP, devoting their energies primarily to the destruction of the foreign language sections within their party, thereby strengthening and perpetuating their control over the rank and file of the UCP. In other words, the ruling cliques of the two parties have been fighting for control and against unity not through open debates in the party press, but through secret machinations securing and safeguarding their unlimited control over the rank and file of their respective organizations. This is the concrete form through which the factional struggle in the movement is making itself felt at the present moment. Consequently, no “semblance of unity,” no matter how strong, could be an end to such a factional struggle. It is in view of these considerations that we do not attach much importance to your “Seven Proposals” and to the attitudes assumed by the two Central Committees towards them.

The need of the hour in our movement is not a makeshift of unity, but the actual, real, and organic unification of the two parties. This the last mandate of the Communist International was unable to achieve because of the opposition of the two ruling cliques. Every sincere attempt to unite our movement must start with the recognition of this fact. But this, strangely enough, you refuse to do. In your communication to the members of the two parties, dated February 27, 1921, you state expressly that “It is not our task to pass judgment on the two parties in this matter.” That is, you refuse to discuss the question of unity on its merits; you also refuse to determine the reasons that brought to a deadlock the unity negotiations of the two

Central Committees; you finally refuse to tell us, the members of the two parties, how this deadlock could be broken and unity achieved. And at the same time, while refusing to pass judgment on the two Central Committees in the matter of Unity, you say that you are going to make “definite concrete suggestions on how to break the deadlock and how to realize actual unity” — to the Executive Committee of the Communist International. Does this mean that you are going to make definite suggestions on unity *without* passing judgment on the behavior and attitudes of the two ruling groups? Surely, you cannot mean that. If your suggestions on unity are at all to be definite and practical, such as will enable the Communist International to *act on* and not merely decree unity, they — your suggestions — must be based on facts — *on all the facts* pertaining to the recent negotiations for unity. But the mere giving of facts, as, for instance, the fact that the CEC of the CP had rejected your proposal for a “semblance of unity,” is already passing judgment. Consequently, if you adhered to your statement (about refusing to pass judgment) even in your suggestions on unity to the Communist International, these suggestions will be of no practical value, and no unity can be expected to issue from them. But if, on the other hand, you did base your suggestions on facts, then you have practically passed judgment on the two Central Committees, merely refusing to tell the *membership* of the two parties what this judgment of yours is. In other words, you are working on the assumption that the members of the two parties have and should have no say in the matter of unity, and that it is none of their business *how* and *when* the unification of the two parties will be achieved.

Now, we consider it our duty to the Communist movement of America to protest as emphatically as we can against such a manner of treating and disposing of party problems. And we base our protest not on abstract principles of democracy, but on the concrete facts of the present situation in our movement. What are these facts?

First, that the ruling groups of the two parties are definitely opposed to unity.

Second, that these groups will not and cannot break the existing deadlock in the unity negotiations.

Third, that the interference of the Executive Committee of the Communist International can at the most succeed in compelling only a “semblance of unity” but not unity itself, and

Fourth, that the only force in our movement desirous of unity and capable to work for its achievement is the *membership* of the two parties.

Our first two statements need no proof or elaboration. Their truth must be evident to everyone who knows the situation and is willing to look facts squarely into the face. Our third statement must be supplemented with a few more observations. The Executive Committee of the Communist International, by virtue of the fact that its seat is in Russia and not in the United States, can work towards the unification of our movement *only* by adopting one of the following means:

1. Authorize or demand of the two Central Committees the calling of a joint unity convention, specifying the basis of representation to this convention, as well as its date.

2. Authorize one of the two Central Committees to call a unity convention, also specifying date and basis of representation.

3. Give such authorization to the American Council [Agency].

Point one has been tried and failed, because the Central Committee of the UCP rejected the proportional basis of representation recommended by the Communist International. Now the Communist International can either confirm its previous decision, that is, support in the matter of representation the Central Committee of the CP; or change its previous decision and support the basis of representation finally advanced by the UCP. And to make sure that this new decision on unity will be carried out, the Communist International will have to place in charge of calling and organizing the unity convention either the American Council [Agency] or that of the two Executive Committees, which will unreservedly accept the new mandate. That is, the Communist International will have to adopt either Point 2 or 3.

Whichever of the last two methods the Communist International eventually adopts, there will be a unity convention called into session. The only question, the one that really matters, is this: Will such a unity convention really achieve unity? Our answer is — no! And here are the reasons: Should such a convention be called on a proportional basis of representation, *it will split on the report of the Credentials Committee*; for there is no force on earth that will make the two ruling groups agree on their membership books and figures. Should, however, the unity convention be called on the basis of 50-50, there will be two organized caucuses of equal numerical strength, *which will*

never really unite. They will elect a joint Central Committee on the basis of 50-50, which will be something like the National Council of Point 1 of your “7 Proposals,” that is, *a semblance* of unity, while in practice there will continue functioning two organized caucuses with their respective Central Committees fighting each other, as at present, for control and position. All these observations simply go to prove the truth of our above statement, that the interference of the Executive Committee of the Communist International can at the most succeed only in effecting “a semblance of unity,” but not actual unity.

We are, therefore, face to face with a practical proposition. Unless the membership of the two parties can be made to understand that they — and they alone — are capable of achieving unity, and unless they can be made to act upon this understanding, there will be no unity for a very long time to come. There are two technical questions involved in such a proposition. First, how can the propaganda for unity be brought to the rank and file of the two parties, while the official party press is in the hands of the two ruling cliques? Second, how can the rank and file be made to act in favor of Unity without endangering the integrity of the existing party organizations? These two technical problems, arising from the rank and file movement for unity, have been successfully solved by the Communist Unity Committee of America. Our propaganda and literature is reaching an increasingly large number of comrades. Our unity platform (see memorandum of CUC to the Communist International), by solving and thereby removing the federation problem as an active issue in the factional struggle, is gaining recognition and support from members of active and influential comrades in both parties. Thus is being created, without in the least affecting the integrity of the existing party organizations, a solid foundation for unity, upon which the Communist International will eventually be able to act definitely and decisively.

In conclusion we want to state that your appeal to the members of the two parties “to stay in the party where you are” is in complete accord with our own position. You will find an appeal to the very same effect, under the title, “Stay Where You Are,” published in the second issue of our paper as far back as February 1, 1921. That appeal, as you are probably aware, was prompted by an attempt of the ruling clique of the UCP to disrupt the CP. We refer here to the proclamation calling upon the membership of the CP to break their party and join the United Communist Party, issued in January [1921] by the CEC of the UCP and published in their official organ. Further-

more the ruling clique of the UCP has gone so far as instructing its district agents to do all in their power “to smash the CP.” The Communist Unity Committee of America (CUC of A) has persistently and successfully fought these disruptive tactics of the two ruling cliques. So on this score, we are in perfect agreement with you. However, we must express our regret at your failure to take the membership more into your confidence, thereby encouraging and assisting the rank and file movement for unity initiated and led by the Communist Unity Committee of America.

In the hope that you will not fail to see the strong points made in this open letter, we remain,

Yours for Communist Unity,

The CUC of A.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · April 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.