
About the Annual Meeting of *Työmies*

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Although complete unanimity was reached in the convention of the Finnish Federation after the most thorough discussion on the relations of the Finnish Communists to the questions raised by the party crisis, the party nevertheless was not lulled to sleep by an illusion that there would no longer exist any remnants of confusion. On the contrary, considering all the various experiences which the Communist International has had in the reorganization in several parts of the world, confusion was to be expected in one form or another.

On the side of the party it was considered that surges of opposition would arise, among other things, in the annual meetings of the newspaper societies. The experiences confirm this assumption. Many signs pointed to it beforehand.

Out of Isolation.

The Finnish Federation had lived in a very loose relation to the party. The party did not know what was happening in the Finnish Federation and the latter led its own exclusive life. The inner life of the party was for the Finns more a matter of guess than of knowledge. And then when, before the last party convention [4th: Chicago, Aug. 21-30, 1925], from the circles around *Työmies* there arose criticism of the party leadership and party affairs, it developed into an opposition, although perhaps that was not the aim at the beginning. The comrades who took up this criticism, undoubtedly with a sincere purpose, once they had started criticizing, could no longer control the right wing elements they had carried with them. These right wingers came to the top with the wave of criticism and set their own mark upon it.

The Askeli Affair.

The party convention was compelled to use disciplinary measures. Henry Askeli was removed from the *Työmies* editorial staff. He became a martyr for the more backward elements. The big questions of the party crisis were put into the background and those elements saw only the person of Henry Askeli. In spite of all the assurances he gave the party, Henry Askeli could not master the temptation, but for a long time exploited the sympathy of the right wingers by keeping silent and so encouraging the organization of the opposition. The same purpose was served by the appeal of the editors of *Työmies* for Askeli although it was explained that technical questions, not questions of principle, were the basis of it.

About the removal of Henry Askeli and the technical side of it the Central Executive Committee gave a clear written statement. But the comrades who appealed still saw a possibility for a different explanation than *Työmies'* board gave, although the Central Executive Committee supported the views of the board on the question. This question formed a technical basis for the continuation of the opposition. The leaders of the opposition asserted that they are loyal to the party leadership. But the course of events showed that all elements pessimistic about the reorganization rallied around them. So this opposition became objectively an opposition to the party leadership, whether the leading comrades wanted this or not. The mistake of the comrades who intended to stick to the party line was that although they realized the standpoint of the party and the board was correct, [they] did not dare to recognize it in public.

Fight for Right Policies.

The sub-district convention in Superior [Wisconsin] before the Finnish convention met in this atmosphere. Reorganization and Bolshevization were officially and unanimously approved, but on technical questions many comrades indirectly and circuitously came to an anti-party position. The opposition worked under the cover of attacks on comrades who had worked consistently for the party line.

The Finnish convention defined our relation to the Communist International, the party leadership, reorganization, and Bolshevization. It repudiated sharply all tendencies objectively leading to side paths. In spite of this, there was in the annual meeting of *Työmies* a

well-organized opposition which tried to settle the disputed questions *by the power of* their share-holding. As before, this opposition asserted loyalty to the party, but in technical questions it had different proposals that might have led to precarious paths. The most convincing proof of that was their attitude toward Askelin's removal, the report of the board concerning the relations between the editorial staff and the board, and the public statement on this question. The opposition, although weak, voted against the stand of the board, when the opposition, with determined unanimity, tried to place the board in the hands of opposition members.

On two points in the annual report of the board, concerning the political lines, there was a thorough discussion for a day and a half. As those points are not yet made public and as the membership and the readers have a right to know what the discussion was about, I quote them here:

“The discussion which has been on the order of the day for the past two years had touched us only superficially before the last half year — when the situation developed to a decisive point and the Finnish Federation as well as the papers were compelled to take a definite stand on the questions concerning it.

“The board of *Työmies*, as well as the editors, had regarded the disputes as partly artificial and partly as a fight between personalities about the leading places, from which the party and our cause can derive only damage. From the same point of view the membership of the Finnish Federation seemed to regard the question and as a result we had among other things the famous statements of the Superior branch, which were without doubt framed with good intention, in the interests of the party, and which seemed to us very water-tight indeed; but that they were not so perfect as they had seemed to us, was shown to us by the sharp analysis of Comrade Green [ECCI Rep Sergei Gusev] and other comrades.

“It was not difficult for the *Työmies* board, at least its majority, to abandon those views expressed in the statements mentioned above when the inaccuracy was properly explained. But that was not the case with the editorial staff. The editors had been closer to those statements and the thorough explanation of them hurt them more.

“H. Askelin continued, as one of the editors and one of the framers of the statement, to defend them and tried to show Finnish affairs in a better light than they had been shown during the

dispute, but in his eagerness he did not see that he had come to defend 'Federation patriotism.'

"The result was that the party leadership exerted all pressure in order to discipline Askeli, who was asked in the party convention to repudiate his incorrect views if he wished to be an editor of a paper controlled by the party. Askeli did not do this, because he supposed that the masses were behind him.

"So the party convention unanimously decided upon the removal of Askeli from the editorial staff of *Työmies*. The question came up in the board Sept. 1 [1925], when Comrade [Matti] Tenhunen made a report on the convention. The board decided unanimously that the question of Askeli's removal would be taken up when there was official information about the decision of the convention.

"This decision has caused repeated attempts by the editorial staff to explain it in such a way that the board has requested the editorial staff not to make a report on the convention, the decisions and future forms of party work before they get official directions from [the CEC in] Chicago.

Askeli Assails Party.

"Then on Sept. 6, Askeli published his unparalleled chronicle of the convention which did not leave any doubt about Comrade Askeli to any member of the board for whom the authority of the party had any significance.

"The meeting of the board was then held, Sept. 10, when it had the official information by C.E. Ruthenberg about the Comintern decision that Askeli must be removed from the editorial staff, and the board decided to remove him by 7 votes against 1. Besides this, it was decided to publish a statement in *Työmies* in order to inform the supporters of the paper and the members of the party that the board was unconditionally for the Central Executive Committee.

"This stand of the board did not satisfy the editorial staff, which resented it and at a joint meeting of the board and the editorial staff, Sept. 17, it demanded that the board repeal the decision to remove Askeli and in this way begin a campaign against the unanimous decision of the party convention. The overwhelming majority of the board, however, regarded the authority of the party as higher than the occasional comradely feelings of the editors, and the decision was held valid.

"This meeting of the shareholders will now decide the relation of the firm towards the party, and the board has not the slightest doubt about the meeting taking a stand in favor of the

way mapped out by the party and the Communist International, and when it takes this road it should also demand that every editor in the service of the firm should officially, in an article signed with his own name, make clear his stand on the party. Up to this time such a statement has not been made by the editors in spite of requests, and the result may be some confusion among the masses, which confusion must be liquidated as soon as possible.”

The discussion on this question took one and a half days, as I said above. The opposition constantly brought up petty technical questions and questions of detail, which were in part contradictory to the documentary evidence. The opposition carefully avoided stating their political line and tried to get rid of the question with assurances of loyalty. Those comrades who were unconditionally in favor of the party presented documentary evidence and thorough statements of principle, explaining consistently the political lines which were the basis of the party discussion and the objective results of the opposition under such auspices. Thus the discussion became a fruitful explanation of the questions of principle and the results of it will be felt wherever the delegates are able to go deep into party questions.

A Sweeping Victory.

When at last the discussion was ripe for the question, a vote by a show of hands was taken and the report of the board was approved by 33 votes against 12. Then at the request of the representatives of the branches the vote on shares was taken. The result was 2,406 for and 801 against the report of the board. But when the representative from Minneapolis presented to the secretary a written statement that he approved the stand of the board in principle, but voted against it only on the technical point that Comrade Askeli should have received 30 days' notice before removal, the result of the vote became: for the report, 2,744, and 457 against. Of 17 who voted against, 11 were in one way or another connected with *Työmies* and only 6 were not. Also the broad mass of the shareholders have almost unanimously taken their stand for the party leadership and for the board of the paper.

This fact is of great importance because this shareholders' meeting was more widely participated in than ever before and because representatives were sent from a greater area than any time in the last 7 years. This shows that the interest in inner-party questions has grown

greatly and that the crisis as regards the Finns is clearing up. The Finnish membership has taken a stand decisively for the party line, not permitting any personal questions to confuse the issue.

The editors who were the center of the opposition declared at the end of the meeting that they would yield without protest to the decision of the overwhelming majority. Here is the starting point for the liquidation of our differences.

Even the best party functionary, acting with the best intentions, can make a mistake. This cannot be avoided with the best of wills. Mistakes can sometimes become fatal, depending on the concrete circumstances. The question is: how does one try to correct his mistakes — by covering them up and hiding them or by admitting them and showing in his acts that he has abandoned the wrong position?

In the former case new mistakes will be made and there will be a decline of morale, and finally a position on the other side will be reached. In the latter case, the mistake will be a lesson, enriching the experiences of the revolutionary movement.

Concerning the opposition in question, the fact is that they have retire from one position to another; from the almost unanimous opposition in the district convention to the defeat in the party convention. After that, from the near-balance of the forces in the district convention to the rejection of their position in the Finnish Convention. In the *Työmies'* meeting the opposition still came out as an organized minority with petty technical points but always as an opposition.

But now, to speak seriously, we must hope that the comrades will completely abandon this position and close the lines, leaving no possibility for the right wingers and confused elements to use their names as a symbol.

When we learn to become Communists, we must once and for all learn one lesson: when a party discussion is closed, the group which has lost submits unconditionally to the decision the Communist International has helped the party to reach. What is the ground for the differences within a Communist party? Not questions of personalities, although those who think superficially and do not go deeply into causes are often inclined to look at these questions as personal matters. The basis is the judgment of how different groups view the situation and the proper strategy and tactics. And since it is clear that the group which has judged the situation most nearly correct will in concrete work show it is right and win, if not otherwise, with the help of

the Communist International. It is necessary that the group which has been incorrect in its analysis of the situation work loyally for the party after the discussion. No tendencies which depart from the line laid down by the Communist International can be maintained without leading these comrades outside the party, that in spite of all mistakes in the past, is the only party in this country which bears the standard of the revolutionary proletariat united in the Communist International.

If one group in a certain situation has been more nearly correct in its analysis of a situation than another this does not mean that this group or the comrades in this group have a monopoly of being correct in every future situation. Far from it. In the Communist parties, as history has shown, there appear always new groupings in connection with new world situations. But these groupings have nothing to do with the old ones because these latter are liquidated with the decision. New grouping can occur only in connection with a new situation and the group which then is more close to concrete life is admitted as the leading group and will be empowered to carry out its plans.

At the *Työmies* annual meeting the points under discussion were formally petty and technical. But behind them the recent party crisis. Nobody can deny it. It is for this reason that I have regarded it as necessary to explain these things in order to help to liquidate the remnants of the crisis from among us.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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