
It Will Be Made Worthwhile.

by “Y.F.” [Isaac E. Ferguson]

Published in *The Communist* [UCP: New York], v. 1, no. 2 (July 3, 1920). pg. 3.

At the end of March [1920], the writer refused any longer to sustain the appearance of unanimity on the Central [Executive] Committee of the Communist Party by remaining on that committee. The small minority of the committee had ceased to have any real function. Previously this minority, supported by Federation Secretaries, had acted as a check on the Andrew [Nicholas Hourwich] faction by virtue of membership on the Executive Council. In March, however, the Executive Council also was transformed so that it came under the same caucus control. Discussion on the CEC became a mere camouflage for predetermined plans for factional control, with 5 or 6 votes almost invariably cast as a unit. The minority had no open forums through which to rally the membership against the majority. There was no resort other than to the “unconstitutional” methods by which the majority of the membership finally disavowed the caucus-controlled CEC.

Immediately after his repudiation of the CEC, the writer undertook to analyze the history of the Left Wing movement as it related to the present Communist situation in the United States. The object was to focus attention on the critical condition of the party in such a way that the members would realize that only by the most decisive action could the party be saved from the impotency of a CEC dominated by Andrew [Hourwich] & Co. At the time when the introduction to the intended series of articles was written, no plan had been formulated and no prospect of action was in sight to save the party from what appeared as fatal stagnation.

By the time this introduction, under the title “Has It Been Worth While?” was put into hands of the party editor, the minutes of the March meetings

of the CEC had come into the hands of the district committees. Within a few days the revolution in the party against the CEC was in full swing. By April 20th [1920], a decisive split had become unavoidable. Instead of going on with an abstract review of the past party history, the writer was called upon to turn his energies into the constructive channels of preparation for the convention called by the Executive Secretary [C.E. Ruthenberg] and the committee of District Organizers and Federation Secretaries. This work was done in association with the Chicago District Committee, later with the joint CP and CLP committee which prepared the preliminary program and constitution for the Unity Conference [Bridgman: May 26-31, 1920].

What was the challenge of the introductory article (which never appeared in print except in the Federation edition of *The Communist*, since it was so quickly made obsolete by the unexpected vigorous show of life within the party)? What was the central theme of this article? That the Left Wing movement, and thereby the Communist Party, had been artificially diverted into the political plaything of a few Russian-speaking leaders who had stultified the growth of the Left Wing and had paralyzed the Communist Party by taking out of it all realism of an actual functioning organization in the United States. It was argued that they had made a play of “principle” as a thing in itself; and to this they had added a cheap play upon nationalistic vanity to discredit all but themselves as suitable persons to be at the helm of the American Communist movement. This tricky combination of appeals to fidelity and principle and to nationalistic prejudice was branded as “fake Bolshevism.”

The conclusion indicated was that there could

be no success in developing a Communist party under such influences. Principle had ceased to be a principle; there was no discussion of social or tactical problems, only a pretense of sanctity in phrases as phrases. By more or less open suggestion the idea had been put across that only those who spoke the Russian language could also be expected to speak the language of Bolshevism, and that this idea had been at the bottom of much of the bitter controversy within our ranks — controversy not at all related to any major question of Communist principles or tactics.

What was needed was an ending of nationalistic factionalism by the federation members themselves. That was the only thing which could save the party. It was up to these members to refuse to allow a few politicians to fan up nationalistic prejudice as a means of keeping up a Communist Party of their own ordering. The natural development of the Left Wing had been diverted into channels remote from anything going on in the class struggle in the United States; it was imperative to get a reassertion of Communism imbued with the real life of the class struggle, a Communism which seriously talked about and proposed to do something about the actual developments in the United States.

The program of the United Communist Party and the work of its convention and of its CEC are all the answer that is needed to the ridiculous sophistries of Andrew [Hourwich] and his associates, whose main insistence is on their legal status as the rightful authority over the CP.

By one unscrupulous change of the tense of a verb — from “had” to “has” — it was made to appear that the writer was saying farewell to the Communist movement. No doubt this was the wish of the critic, Andrew [Hourwich], since he had been unremittingly exposed by the writer in his true role at all times during the past year. What was actually written was that the writer had found himself faced with such a bad dilemma last August [1919] that he found it hard to go into the Communist convention, realizing that it

would be easily manipulated by the Andrews [Hourwich] caucus, and that it would result in a party from which all who challenged this artificially-acquired control would be rigidly excluded, without the least consideration of the needs and objects of a true Communist movement.

What was said in “Has It Been Worthwhile?” had already been said during the unity debate in the Communist convention last September [Sept. 1-7, 1919], though not with the bitterness of another half year’s realization of the harm done to the movement in this country. But there has always been the faith that sooner or later the rank and file of the party would find some effective way of asserting itself against the nationalistic manipulation for control. It was in the faith that something would be done by the members, not to entertain Andrew [Hourwich] & Co., that this article was written. The hypocrisy of the sort of criticism leveled at this article, with the cheap insinuation as to leaving the party at a time when the writer was giving his wholehearted energy to the work of the party, hardly requires comment.

The appeal for action intended to be made to the members of the Communist Party was inspiringly answered — though the appeal was never published! Dozens of the most active comrades have expressed a new zeal in the work of the United Communist Party, which they never felt in either of the separate parties. It is not only a matter of the new program, constitution, etc., but the feeling that this party has been made by will of the members, that its convention expressed the thoughts and decisions of the rank and file, and that the Communist movement has gone by the state when it can be made the plaything of caucus-politicians. There is the feeling now that no matter what attacks are made against the party, no matter how many are jailed or deported, the work will go on. It will go on and it will grow, until it becomes the overwhelming assertion of the mass will and power of the revolutionary workers of America.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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