
A View of Our Party Condition: Extract from Report of the Representative of the Communist International to the Presidium of the CI [circa Sept. 10, 1922]

by Genrik Valetski

Published in *The Communist* [New York: unified CPA], v. 1, no. 10 (Aug.-Sept. 1922), pp. 10-14.

I take this occasion to give you a report on the period of the Convention [Bridgman, MI: Aug. 17-22, 1922] itself and on the present situation in the Party.

When I arrived here about the middle of July, the situation was as follows:

The Party was divided into two factions fighting each other at daggers' point. The meetings of the CEC were devoted entirely to inner matters. Questions dealing with the big struggles taking place in the country were never on the order of business. Even though the membership in the districts participated in these struggles, and at times with very good results, they did so generally beyond the range of the CEC, which was bothered with other cares and did not direct work.

The factional strife was conducted according to all classical and non-classical rules. It prevailed over everything else, and it was apparent to every impartial witness that the danger of a new split had become imminent. Both factions were either firmly organized or in the process of organization. It is immaterial to ask which one started organizing. The whole question was which faction would have the majority at the coming convention.

On the basis of a cable from Moscow, one faction proposed to postpone the Convention. The other faction immediately declared that the cable was a maneuver and even suggested that it was a fake. I absolutely rejected these implications or charges, but at the same time was just as decidedly against a postpone-

ment of the Convention, since I perceived quite clearly that this would merely aggravate the situation. Furthermore it was also clear to me that no ostensibly new instructions coming from abroad could prevent a split, but that such a split could be obviated only by a great effort *here at the spot*.

In a written declaration, I reminded the comrades of the prohibition of caucuses (see Theses of the 3rd Congress [of the Comintern]); I pointed out the danger of a split, and demanded that the CEC immediately elect a Commission to discuss all the controversial questions and endeavor to find a common ground on which to restore the Party unity. If there were any disputes that could not be bridged over, they would become manifest in the work which was to be free from all caucus passion. This proposal was adopted unanimously by the CEC and a Commission of 8 elected, comprising the representatives of all tendencies and the 3 comrades from abroad [Valetski, Boris Reinstein, John Pepper]. This Commission was called the "Disarmament Commission," officially the "Adjustment Commission.

2. The Disarmament Commission held a dozen meetings lasting several hours each. It made up a list of all questions in dispute, both large, small, and moderate questions, and discussed all of them most thoroughly. In the midst of the debates on each question, I endeavored to draft a resolution embodying the kernel of the question in concise form. The result was

that the Commission adopted 10 resolutions *unanimously*. Two or three points in a few resolutions, which could not be agreed on unanimously were dropped without the whole result suffering in the least. The resolutions carried pertained to the following matters: 1. Work in the unions. 2. "Liquidation." 3. Relations of the CP to the LPP [Legal Political Party]. 4. Composition of the coming CEC. 5. Prohibition of Caucuses. 6. Discussion in the Party. 7. Formation of a Party Council. 8. Centrists in the LPP. 9. Relation to the Opposition [Central Caucus faction]. 10. Program of the LPP.

An 11th resolution on the very important question of the Labor Party I withdrew myself, since I was convinced that the moment was not opportune for arriving at a decision on the question in the Party.

The Commission adopted the following method of carrying on its work: none of the Theses already published (there were three: (1) by Ford [Israel Amter] and Dubner [Abram Jakira]; (2) by Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg] and Marshall [Max Bedacht]; (3) the so-called "CEC Thesis" drafted by Ballister [Robert Minor] — see official organ) — none of them was taken as a basis. I did not assume the role of a pacifier or arbiter, but, on the contrary, openly combatted everything that, in my opinion, represented witch-hunting or a political judgment or standpoint in the Theses published. On the one hand, I particularly attacked the "optimistic" estimation of the possibilities of political development as expressed by Marshall [Bedacht] and Damon [Ruthenberg], which ignored the growing sharpness of the class struggle in the country and thereby gave rise to illusions that led to charges of "liquidation." ON the other hand, I pointed out the falsity of the "illegalistic" conception of the role of the Party in the Theses of Ford [Amter] and Dubner [Jakira], which was in opposition to facts as they are and also contradicted our [Comintern] Congress Theses on this subject. I must emphasize that the authors of these ideas were, all in all, convinced, and did not persist in these views.

Thus armed, we arrived at the Convention with 10 resolutions unanimously adopted by the "Disarmament" Commission, and pertaining to all the important controversial questions. Thus armed, the Party stood face to face with the disarmed caucuses. As a matter of course, we obtained the main ideas for this

work from the general arsenal of the CI, from its special decisions on the Tactics in America, from the experiences of other sections of the CI, and from an analysis of the general situation in America. The "Disarmament" Commission instructed me to make the report in its name at the Convention and to recommend to the Convention that it adopt the resolutions passes as the basis for its own decisions.

3. The Convention assembled. At first the main question was: who had the majority? Two caucuses were formed: an "anti-liquidation," and an "independent" caucus. Caucus meetings, as a matter of course, were inevitable. I attended both. As to their character, I shall give further details. In the election of the temporary chairman, it was apparent that the former caucus had a majority of 22 against 18. Later these figures varied, once being 23 to 21, but always a few votes more on one side. Thereupon followed a long, bitter debate on the formation of a Presidium (which was something new for America), since the majority caucus insisted on having a decisive majority in the Presidium, whereupon the minority rejected even the idea of a Presidium. At last a Presidium with an equal number (6) from either side was formed, with myself as the 13th member. Several days lost through this sort of debates and needless caucus meetings, which, as a rule, paid no heed to reality — not only no attention to the big reality, but not even to the trifling immediate reality of the Convention itself.

The following are the only matters that the Convention settled before it prematurely closed [due to the August 22, 1922 raid]: (1) An address by me on the World situation and the Comintern; (2) a report by me in the name of the "Disarmament" Commission; (3) a report from the director of the Industrial Department [William Z. Foster], together with a debate on the report; (4) report of the Executive Secretary ["Acting Secretary" Max Bedacht?] followed by two short minority reports. The Convention voted on a few resolutions of the Trade Union Committee only, which were adopted unanimously in the committee and unanimously by the Convention. It also unanimously approved the results of the work of the Disarmament Commission.

When it was discovered that it would be necessary to end the Convention, a new CEC was elected.

The majority demanded a decided majority in this body — two-thirds of the body, 6 of the majority [“anti-liquidators”], to 3 of the minority [“independents”]. The minority considered the question whether, under such circumstance, it would not be best to refrain from accepting any place in the CEC. I advocated a majority of 3 for the majority caucus, and the compulsory participation of the minority. I had two motives for making this recommendation: (1) with a majority of 1 or 2 votes in the CEC, a struggle would arise in the leading body to obtain the majority, speculation as to accidental majorities [at individual meetings due to absence] would be continued, which would demoralize the work; (2) The majority should have the full possibility to show the Party how the work can be better done. I demanded, however, that the caucuses accept their mutual candidates without debate. As a consequence there were elected: 2 candidates proposed by both caucuses, 6 of the majority, and 3 of the minority, as well as alternates. Since that time a 12th has been added, the representative of the YCL. This election, together with the election of the Party Council, was the last act of the Convention.

4. Characterization of the Caucuses. Both of them are wrong in conducting the caucus fight in such a manner that the interests of the Party were lost before the interests of the factions. This they did despite the fact that the real differences between them were relatively small, as proven by the results of the work of the “Disarmament” Commission. Furthermore, as was expressed on many sides, if there had not been a well-timed intervention from outside — I refer to your representative — a split might have occurred. And this would have been the craziest of all splits that have taken place in America.

Both factions were also wrong in essence. The former majority of the CEC [“Independents”] declared that the enemy was at the Left, and its name was Leftism. They were wrong in their diagnosis, and they were again wrong in the choice of the method of combatting it. It is clear that the application of the “new” tactics in America, the tactics based on the 3rd Congress [June 22-July 12, 1921] and adopted by the Executive in its concrete decisions on the tactics to be applied [i.e. in favor of an open, mass party] — it was clear that these tactics would meet with great objec-

tive difficulties in America. And also with opposition within the Party. The Party, *this* party, should have been won over and educated for these new tasks. True, it could not be arranged in such a way that, chronologically, first the party membership should be educated by means of internal propaganda, and that only later on the external work (foundation of LPP, activity in the trade unions, etc.) should be accomplished; both things must be done at the same time and must be interrelated with each other. Now, the old party executive was relying too much on disciplinary methods; it baptized every opposition with the name of “Leftism”; it acted that way not only toward those whom it excluded in December of last year [the Central Caucus faction] and who together with other elements formed the opposition that split away, but also towards those who remained in the party and who were able to obtain a majority in the Convention [the “Anti-Liquidators,” so-called “Geese”]. Its diagnosis was wrong; although in the opposition that arose against the general application of the “new” tactics, although in the interval was to be overcome — many leftist elements, many leftist prejudices and ideas were to be noticed, nevertheless we did not have to deal here with a consistent system of “Leftism,” such as the KAP [Communist Workers Party]; it was the “Italian” rather than the “Dutch” school. The means employed toward the great mass of the party members should have consisted in persuasion and education rather than mere discipline with its penal code. On the other hand, a more cautious attitude should have been taken with reference to the Centrists and half-Centrists (standing outside of our party) lest the impressions be created that we had combined with them against our own comrades. Some of our comrades of the former majority, in opposing the illegalistic prejudices, point out very correctly that the class and group relations within the hostile bourgeoisie must be analyzed from the Marxian point of view, and that they must be exploited in our tactics; that possibilities of development must be considered under which, owing to the growing intensity of the class struggle itself, there may arise conditions and opportunities for revolutionary activity and also for the existence of an open CP — conditions different from the present ones. But instead of concretely elaborating this analysis in every respect, they have satisfied themselves with optimistically sounding

utterances which were far from being correct, in which they predicted the impending development towards an open CP. All this contributed to the spread of a legend among the broad masses of the party membership that the party was headed by men who would like to get rid of the illegal party as soon as possible, who place legality above everything else, and who for this purpose have combined with the Centrists against the Communists. This is a false legend, a groundless accusation, and those who were spreading it have done the greatest possible harm to the party.

The former majority ["Independents"] has rendered a great service: among enormous difficulties, against deeply rooted traditions and opposition, it has done pioneer work in endeavoring to induce the party to take up the great, open activity; it has helped a number of talented agitators and organizers in this work, but on the other hand, especially as far as the mass of the party members is concerned, it has committed grave blunders and has brought about an internal party crisis which could have caused the death of the party.

The opposite current gathered around the slogan: The Enemy is at the Right — It is "Liquidatorism." A wrong diagnosis. The Party, as it existed a year ago, had new, enormous tasks before itself. It was necessary to put the small illegal party into relations with the masses and their everyday struggles; it was necessary to exploit all the possibilities of open propaganda, agitation, and also organization, and for this purpose new means, especially the foundation of a LPP were necessary. It was necessary to direct the interest of the entire CP, of every single one of its members, to the great life problems of the American proletariat, and to establish a durable connection with them. In order to succeed in this, it was necessary to break with the old traditions of communist sect life in America, and to declare a pitiless war against our own prejudices, habits, and inertia. It was not sufficient simply to "agree" with the instructions coming from Communist International, i.e. with the "new" tactics. No, the enemy was not "at the Right" — he was everywhere, in all of us; an enormous effort of all our intellectual forces was necessary in order to prove equal to great new tasks. True, the work was not without dangers; true, blunders could, nay, were sure to be committed; the stormy urge "to the open" could lead to many exaggerations. But the mistakes can be righted, the exaggerations can

be corrected, as long as the work is done with a common spirit. But instead of this, real or even apparent mistakes of the former majority of the EC have been declared as high treason against Communism and the Party, and the legend concerning the "Liquidatorism" that wants to kill the Party has been put into circulation. The *entire life of the Party* has been centered on this struggle against this imaginary enemy. By the way, the leaders of this current have not acted with consistency: If they really had been convinced that there are men in the Party (and among its leaders, at that), men who were Liquidators, who wanted to liquidate the CP in favor of some more or less radical party that was to be legal at any price, they should (in order to be consistent) have demanded the immediate expulsion of these men from the Party and from the CI. They did not do that; on the contrary, they always insisted upon the necessity of a unity of the party as it was, and thus they themselves proved that the slogan of the struggle against the Liquidators was in this form nothing else but a factional slogan, not a party slogan.

In the Convention we had these two currents as constituted factions. At bottom — if they are considered in the light of the final results of the Convention and in the light of the resolutions of the "Disarmament Commission" which were unanimously accepted by the Convention — they were temperamental formations rather than factions. There is no text, no coherent formulation which could present authentically the point of view of each of these groups. The faction of the "Independents" would refuse to sign and to defend the theses of Marshall [Bedacht] and Damon [Ruthenberg], it would be prepared merely to defend the former majority of the CEC against the accusations of the opponents. The faction of the Anti-Liquidators had never the opportunity to defend publicly either the theses of Ford [Amter] and Dubner [Jakira], nor the theses of District No. 5 [Chicago], nor the "combination" of both of them which were prepared outside of the official sessions of the Convention. This would be rather hard for that faction, because to do so would be in contradiction with its agreement to the resolutions of the "Disarmament" Commission and with the private utterances of many of their conspicuous adherents. Therefore it is impossible to speak here of the ideological victory of one crystallized conception over another one.

What, then, was victorious at this Convention? What is the real result of the Convention? I will endeavor to answer this question in the next paragraph.

5. Three things have won a victory at the Convention: First, the will that the Party should continue its existence as an illegal communist party; Second, the will that the unity of the party should be restored and strengthened; Third, the conception that the *raison d'être* of this united illegal party should be the open activity for the winning of the sympathies of the broad proletarian masses.

The party is to continue as an illegal communist party. This resolution, which was accepted unanimously without any mental reservation and which at the same time corresponded to the passionate wish of the majority faction ["Anti-Liquidationists"], is to dispel all fears and suspicions which in the course of the last months have done so much harm to the Party. All members of the Party may be absolutely without fear in this respect; nobody wants or is able to dissolve or substitute the present Party, Section of the CI, for another party. The ghost of "Liquidatorism" has disappeared before the energetic language of the Convention. At the same time the illegality of the Party — which is necessary at present — the underground character of the entire party organism, has been deprived of its mysterious and romantic halo; it has been declared as something that is conditioned by circumstances, but by no means something inherent, permanent, absolute. Should the circumstances change — which in the near future is not to be expected in America — after a sober estimation of the situation and class conditions in America, then only a fully empowered Convention of the CP may decide that the Party is to be constituted as a legal and open organization.

The open activity of this underground party — this was the unanimous decision of the Convention, again without any mental reservation — shall not only be continued, *but it shall be continued in much higher degree than hitherto*. This refers to the press; this refers to a strenuous activity in the trade unions; this refers to a participation in all daily struggles of the American proletariat; this refers to the building up of the LPP, which from a topic of discussion in the limited party circles should develop a powerful center of at-

traction for the advance guard of the American proletariat, through the multiplied energy of all comrades. The illegal, underground party must penetrate so deeply into the entire life and into all struggles of the American proletariat that neither persecution nor raids should be able to eradicate or to destroy it.

And the party unity should be kept up. Not only is there in the party not a single group, not a single man whom it should exclude, nay, whose work it should do without, but also it should even pave the way for the return of those who have left it some time ago. This factional strife within the Party must cease, the old factions must be dissolved, the formation of new factions must be punished as an offense against discipline. If the Convention emphasized this as its will, and this is what the Convention did, then it considered this not only as necessary, but also as *possible*. Which proves again that the alleged chasm between the old factions was neither as deep nor as wide as it appeared to many in the heat of the factional strife.

I don't know whether all the former members and leaders of the old — now nonexistent — factions will unreservedly accept this conception that I have formed as to the results of the Convention. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it is the correct conception which exactly corresponds to all the facts. At the eve of the Convention we had no Party, we had two hostile factions flying at each other's throat; after the Convention, we have a Party. It is not the result of a one-sided victory of one faction over another one — it is sufficient to think of the voting strength of both factions in the Convention and of the fact that the credo of each of them was anything but completely clear. The party ideology which stands above the factional ideologies (just as the Party itself stands above all possible factions) is the outcome of the experience of the entire CI and of the entire practice of American Communism. It is this party ideology which I endeavored to express in the above formulated sentences.

6. The subsequent activity of the newly elected CEC completely confirms this conception. A few days after the untimely breaking up of our Convention there occurred in the American labor movement events of the greatest importance. Attorney General Daugherty has caused an injunction to be issued against the striking railway men which has created a tremendous ex-

citement in the entire working class of America. All of a sudden the slogan of the General Strike appeared in hundreds of labor centers of the US. Gompers and his clique, fearing to lose touch with the masses, were forced to use a language which has not been heard from their mouths for decades. Our Party, in its manifesto published on Labor Day [1922] and in its instructions to the party organizations, has proved that it has fully grasped the spirit of the time and the extraordinary character of the moment, and that it is willing to give the entire activity of the party a direction such as to enable it to become a Communist mass party in the best meaning of the word, such as to enable it to become a revolutionary factor.

There are in America several thousand tried, conscious, courageous Communists who have devoted their lives to the cause of Communism and the CP. We have here a Party which through its own will has in a manly way overcome a grave internal crisis and which is provided with a good strategy and tactics that are based on all the experiences of the International. We have in America a situation which, next to the situation in Germany, is perhaps the most favorable for Communist successes, decidedly more favorable than ever in the history of this country. We are entitled to hope and to require from our American Party the best and the greatest results in the near future.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.