
A View on the Former Opposition and Our Present Unity: Second Extract from Report of the Representative of the Communist International to the Presidium of the CI. [circa Sept. 30, 1922]

by Genrik Valetski ["Wilke"]

Published in *The Communist* [New York: unified CPA], v. 1, no. 11 [Oct. 1922], pp. 6-8.

As a continuation of my previous report, I shall depict to you in the following the progress and the results of the work of liquidating the Opposition.

I.

A few days after my arrival [mid-July 1922] I had two talks with an ad hoc selected committee of the CEC of the Opposition, consisting of 4 persons. At first the members of the committee were irreconcilable, repeated the "conditions" laid down by their organization in May [1922] after the return of Moore [John Ballam]), the most important of which was the expulsion of the "liquidators," and attacked the Party most violently. They also boasted of having developed extensive legal work in the meantime ("entirely in the spirit of the tactics and directions of the Comintern"). They also showed me a collection of the issues of their legal weekly [*The Workers Challenge*] and two special bulletins, one of which was devoted to the coal strike, the other to the railroad strike. I rejected the "conditions" as not even to be discussed. I took pains to demonstrate to them the hopelessness of their existence as a separate organization, emphasized the fact that every attempt to postpone the matter (by appealing to the 4th Congress [of the Comintern], etc.) would merely impair their situation. I especially parried their attacks on the Party by a minute examination of the contents of these attacks. The fact that they produced

their open legal activity as their highest trump card proved, I told them, that the pretended cleft between the two sides did not exist; that the existing differences had been constructed by factional passion (and factional gossip). Thus they combatted the formation of a legal political party, but several months after the split formed a legal political organization and tried to explain away the contradiction by hairsplitting arguments on the difference between the idea of a "party" and an "organization." (Their legal organization had about 1,200 members as against 2,500 in the illegal organization). At our second session, upon my request, they laid before me a questionnaire containing the points of greatest importance to them and which I answered in writing in that session, in order to lead authentic signs of our discussions. (See report of opposition convention). As I later learned, my replies were sent out to the Districts as material. For several weeks I interrupted these negotiations with the opposition, owing to my being occupied with other work. It later turned out that the first meetings with the representatives of the Opposition had been the beginning of lively discussions in their ranks which were to have a decisive influence on the results of their convention. (More in detail below).

II.

Shortly after my arrival, conferences of the two

largest federations of the Opposition took place: the Polish (about 450 members) and the Ukrainian (800 members). I attended the Polish conference. It voted unanimously to affirm the necessity of reuniting, and asked the CEC to hold a Party convention within 6 weeks, in order to effect this; otherwise, they would return to the Party on their own account. As I could not attend the Ukrainian conference, for various technical reasons, I sent them a detailed letter. They passed a similar motion. It may be remarked that the representative of the CEC at the Polish conference *fought against* unity, whereas at the Ukrainian conference, which took place after my first talks with the CEC, the representative of the CEC *advocated* return to the Party.

III.

On the eve of the convention, which took place at the end of September, the situation in the Opposition was as follows. There were two opposing tendencies. One contained the convinced believers in unity, the other fought unity with all bitterness. The extremists accused the advocates of unity of betraying the Opposition and of having become tools of the representative of the CI. An issue of the organ of the Opposition which appeared before the convention reflected the situation: it contained 2 articles written by members of the CEC advocating unity and 2 articles against unity.

The convention met. There were present 24 district delegates with vote, in addition to CEC members, federation secretaries, and editors with voice but no vote. From the very beginning, the convention divided into two caucuses: the opponents of unity (they called themselves the opponents of “unconditional surrender”) had a majority of 12 votes to 9. The large majority of those without votes were for unity. The majority was composed of two groups: factional extremists of different languages and several Americans (from Boston) with syndicalist tendencies under the leadership of 2 Letts [Latvians].

The debate on “International Relations” was introduced by a long address by the representative of the CI [“Wilke”] and lasted 3 days. Twenty-eight speakers took part in the debate. Your representative stressed the following points: The possible differences do not

justify the continuance of the split; the question of responsibility is a secondary matter; the blunders made by the CEC of the Party in December, last year [1921], did not justify the frivolous split and the breaking of all discipline even to the Comintern; in the most important questions in dispute (the formation of an LPP) the Opposition was absolutely wrong; the demand that a group of comrades (the “liquidators”) who had proven to be good Communists, valuable and indispensable elements for the Party, be expelled, the demand for a new split, had to be rejected; in the present situation, not only would expulsions be a crime, but the Party must make efforts to attract all elements gravitating towards it, even those not yet fully Communist, and get them into its ranks. On the other hand, the Opposition had proven by its activity that it did not intend to develop into a consistently left-radical group, that it accepted in principle the tactics laid down by the CI. Its opposition was based more on faction radicalism than on political radicalism. The unimportance in real differences between the Party and the Opposition made unity possible; while the general situation in America, the big perspectives opened to the Communist movement by the struggles of last summer, the gigantic tasks before the Party, make immediate unity necessary. In conclusion the representative of the CI warned against an insincere unity, unity with reservations, a stone in the hand, unity which might lead to new factional fights and new splits. *Such* unity, however, would not take place: we would disclose the concealed stone; we intend to effect guarantees not only for the equal rights of those returning to the Party but also for real, enduring unity of the Party.

In the debate the advocates of unity emphasized chiefly the necessity of international discipline, the hopelessness of the struggle against the CI. They also attacked the exaggerations and falsehoods which their opponents had made use of in their fight against the Party. The opponents of unity collected a large mass of so-called “material,” but could not build up any kind of serious program for the continuance of the Opposition as an independent party. They sometimes gave one the impression of having already given up the fight, and were only pursuing the naive tactic of procuring better “conditions” by adopting a relentless attitude.

IV.

The end of the debate was quite dramatic. The minority made a motion to accept unity on the basis of the decisions made by the CI on the American question. Thereupon a speaker of the majority made an amendment containing 7 conditions, the first of which demanded the exclusion of 4 “liquidators” mentioned by name (which list, it stated, could be extended), the second the replacement of 5 members of the CEC of the Party by 5 members of the Opposition. The representative of the CI [“Wilke”] immediately made a written declaration to the effect that he would regard the passing of the amendment by the convention as a rejection of the decisions of the CI and would discontinue all negotiations with the convention. After making this declaration, he was forced to leave the room, owing to other work. A vote was taken in his absence. The minority demanded that the majority withdraw its amendment; the majority made a condition that the minority withdraw its motion, which the latter refused. When the vote was taken, the amendment passed by 12 votes to 8. Thereupon the minority declared that it no longer considered itself a part of the convention and would leave. The next day the minority sent a time ultimatum to the majority: either the majority must reverse its decision, or the minority would enter into negotiations with the representative of the CI on its own account. The majority surrendered. The minority returned, and after a discussion lasting several hours, a motion was passed embodying the ideas that had been advanced by the minority. A committee of 5 members was elected to confer with the representative of the CI on the conditions of unity.

V.

The procedure from then on was as follows: The CEC of the Party had agreed that the conditions of unity should not be decided by negotiations between the two sides, but should be formulated by the representative of the CI after hearing both sides, and should be couched on the basis and in the spirit of the old decisions of the CI. After talking for several hours with the committee of the Opposition convention, during which the irreconcilables spoke quite differently from 2 days before, the representative of the CI formulated

the terms of unity in writing. (See terms). They consist of 3 paragraphs. Paragraph 2 demanded the unconditional entrance of all members of the Party into the LPP and active work there, and the amalgamation of the legal organization of the Opposition with it. Paragraph 1 took up the method of fusing the illegal Party organizations from top to bottom on the basis of equal rights of all Party members. Paragraph 3 considered the guarantees for the future unity of the Party. In an annex, which is not to be published, was demanded the collective obligation of the Opposition convention never and in no form to raise in the united Party the demands made in the majority amendment at the Opposition convention.

These conditions were accepted by the convention of the Opposition by all against 4 votes.

VI.

The CEC of the Party accepted them unanimously. A committee of 5 members (3 old, and 2 new) were elected to carry out the work of unity. (See Manifesto and circulars of this committee).

VII.

Characterization of the Former Opposition and Present Unity.

The former Opposition consisted as a whole of good Communist elements. The possible germs of left-radical conceptions or tendencies have not crystallized into a systematic left-radicalism. In fact they were perhaps no stronger than manifest in some circles that remained in the Party. This must be emphasized, since the keen struggle against the Party, the separate existence, the expulsion from the Comintern, etc., would have tended to make a group charged with left-radicalism a real left-radical group. It is in fact quite remarkable that this split-off group charged with left-radicalism made every effort to prove that it not only accepted the policy of work among the masses, of participation in the daily struggle of the workers, of exploiting the possibilities of open “legal” activities, but really applied it (it is true, after a delay of a few months). In fact, this group boasted of its open activities. Left-radical or sectarian tendencies, prejudices, and traditions are a universal disease of our American Commu-

nist movement. They cannot be removed by a surgical operation, but can be overcome only by extensive, persistent educational work. The past year, with its splits, internal factional controversies, attempts at open work on a broad basis, the influence of the CI, and finally the unification of the Party in an atmosphere of a rising labor movement, have contributed not a little to this educational work. It was not the shortest or least painful method — but it was a method.

The Party has been decidedly strengthened by the return of the Opposition, the prodigal son. It will contribute valuable elements for all fields of Party work, for trade union work, for press, open political work, for major and minor organizational work. At one stroke, it represents a large numerical growth; as regards quality, the elements returning to the Party are, taken all in all, equal to those in the Party.

The great specific defects marking the members of the former Opposition were their light valuation of Party discipline, their frivolity in causing Party splits, and their inability to perceive the importance of Communist Party unity. These are serious and extremely dangerous defects. But these defects are the product of the whole previous history of the Communist movement of America. The Party, as a party, not as a loose conglomeration of language federations, has developed no real political activity in America. It has not been connected by means of thousands of threads with the outer reality, with the working masses, with their organizations and struggles. Its whole life has been an “inner” life — debates, discussions, groupings, formation of caucuses, reorganizations — the conception of the Party as a fighting party has not been a live one. What was the difference, some said, it *this* party, a party of this kind was split and broken up!

Party discipline, Party unity, Party confidence, responsibility, Party patriotism, up to a short time ago were empty words in America. No moral sermons could change it. Now there is real substance, living

content, to the idea of the Party. Only in this way can the defects be remedied.

It has been stated by sceptics both in the Party and in the former Opposition that the present unity runs the risk of being as fragile as the unity of 1921 — the same people, the same factions are concerned; that organic amalgamation has not taken place, but only artificial unity under the pressure of the CI. Without giving myself any illusions as to the idyllic life that the reconciled brothers will live together, without closing my eyes to the many dangers threatening not only Party unity but the very existence of the party, I have a different opinion on this matter than the sceptics have.

A number of organizational guarantees of unity have been created which are not to be underrated. Between 1921 and 1922 there has passed a year of experiences for all participants; it is not necessary to forget anything but only to learn a little in order to become wiser from these experiences. The most significant, however, is that unity has taken place at a time when, if all signs do not mislead, a change has taken place in the history of the American labor movement. The most important point is that our party is beginning, not only in theory but also in practice, to place the center of gravity of its work in outer activities. The most important thing is that the order of business of its sessions is not occupied with “inner,” more or less fictitious questions, but with real problems of the struggles of the American working class and our work within these struggles. The most important is that our Party is about to become a real party.

It is possible that the path of this development will not be a straight one; it is probable that it will be a stumbling one. The effects of the past will burden it for a long time. We shall experience some more splits, some Don Quixote revolts. Party splits, frivolous caucus fights paralyzing all Party life for months and years, in my opinion, are things of the past.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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