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# Circular Letter to the Finnish Branches and Members of the Workers Party of America from Fahle Burman in Chicago, Dec. 4, 1924.

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 329, ll. 7-19.  
Followed in the archives by a full Russian translation, d. 329, ll. 20-29.

Chicago, Illinois,  
December 4th, 1924.

To the Finnish Branches and Members  
of the Workers Party.

Dear Comrades,

The annual congress of the Workers Party will be held in the very near future. The day has not yet been fixed but this will probably be done very soon.† The most important question before the congress will be that concerning the future tactics of the Party. The majority [Foster group] and the minority [Ruthenberg group] of the Executive Committee of the Party have elaborated theses or declarations on this question, which were published in full in the *Daily Worker*. The main paragraphs of these will be published in all newspapers. It is the duty of every Party member to become familiar with these theses, to study them and to form his own opinion on them for the forthcoming town and district conferences, and for the National Congress at which decisions will be made concerning future party tactics. Before explaining the attitude of the majority and of the minority of the Executive Committee of the Party towards this question, I want to impress all the branches with the necessity of taking part in this discussion of Party questions and to see to it that the opinion of the Finnish comrades should influence the decision to the extent which we should claim on the strength of our Party membership. The Finnish comrades form 40% of the general

number of Party members, at least more than one-third, and it is not right that they should be merely executors of Party duties, leaving it to the minority to decide the most important questions concerning the existence of the Party.

Consequently, wherever a Branch is in contact with the City Central Committee (and Branches must be in contact with Central Committees wherever they exist) it must elect to the Central Committee the full number of delegates to which it is entitled by its membership, and must see to it that these delegates attend the sessions of the Central Committee regularly. Representation in the Central Committee is usually 1 delegate for 25 members or part of that number. To City Conferences which elect delegates of District Conferences as many delegates should be elected as the number of members permits. Branches not in contact with Town Central Committees should elect delegates to the District Conference where instructions are given and delegates to the National Congress are elected. Every Branch should elect to the District Conference the full number of delegates from its own members, or should give a mandate to some comrade belonging to a Branch in the vicinity of the place where the District Conference is to be held. To the National Congress, too, delegates should be elected from amongst the Finnish comrades in proportion to the number of members. By participating in these conferences and congresses, Finnish comrades will have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the questions discussed at these meetings and will thereby be able to understand Party matters better and to form an opin-

†- Originally anticipated to take place around New Year's Day, the 4th National Convention of the Workers Party of America was not held until August 21-30, 1925.

ion on them. A knowledge of the English language is not absolutely necessary as among the delegates there are bound to be comrades capable of explaining the questions under discussion and of acting as chairman. The main thing is that delegates be imbued with communist ideas and be willing to do their share in the building up of the Communist Party of the USA, and that they should approach the question from the point of view of the masses, which is the best way of keeping the Party on the right path. Thus, comrades, set to work and do your best to solve these questions. This must be done if our Party is to grow and develop.

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And now I will state the case. Comrades who have followed the activity of the Party since its inception know that there were from the beginning two distinct tendencies within the Party which could not agree on the question of Party tactics. When the Communist movement in the USA was an underground movement, one of the groups took up the position that in our country the Communist Party must remain an underground party, and that it would be detrimental to it to endeavor to give it some kind of legal form. Others considered an underground party inexpedient, and demanded categorically that some legal form of existence be found for the Party. The latter tendency we Finns supported wholeheartedly. Under Comintern pressure this tendency won the day, and the Workers Party came into being as the representative of the Communist movement in the USA. These differences have not yet been fully liquidated, and it is owing to this that there are even today dissensions which divide Party members and the Executive Committee into two opposite camps, although now these differences have assumed a different form from before. I do not think it necessary to deal with the causes of former dissensions, but will touch upon the forms which these differences take today.

When about three years ago a movement sprang up in the USA among the masses in favor of independent political parliamentary activity different from the activity of the old capitalist parties — the Republican and the Democratic Parties — the Executive Committee of the Party decided to join this movement for the purpose of imbuing it, if possible, with a class char-

acter. The Executive Committee of the Communist International gave its consent to it. When this decision was subsequently placed before the Executive committee of our organization for the purpose of adopting practical measures in connection with it, we did not at first take much interest in it. It is true that we confirmed the question in principle, but we commented on the erroneousness of the tactics which were to guide us in the control of said movement, as the tactics were mainly based on the endeavor to get mechanical control of the young movement which became subsequently known as the Farmer-Labor Party. The result was that the organization of the movement was done from the top to the bottom, which means that in the majority of cases common cause was made with the more or less liberal influential leading elements, and decisions were arrived at concerning the establishment of some form of Farmer-Labor Party, while we were of the opinion that members of trade unions and other workers' organizations have to be educated in the class spirit and must be encouraged to act independently of other classes, which is tantamount to building up the Party from the bottom.

On the strength of these tactics we went to Chicago to the congress of the Farmer-Labor Party [May 3-5, 1923], the Executive Committee of our Party having decided to lay at this congress the foundation of the Farmer-Labor Party, provided organizations were represented at the congress with a total membership of 500,000. Representatives to this congress were also elected mechanically from elements in sympathy with us, and when a split took place there, which although not very serious had an influence on the masses from which the Farmer-Labor Party was to be formed, the result was a purely mechanical foundation of the Party which was subsequently called the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The foundation of this Party was the inevitable result of the tactics which guided the then-majority [Pepper-Ruthenberg group] and which also guide the present minority of the Executive Committee. When the Party was founded only part, altogether 175,000 members, joined it, and most of them nominally. Only organizations under direct Communist control paid the stipulated membership contributions and thus the upkeep of the Party was placed on the shoulders of the Workers Party. Comrades Foster, Cannon, and others, who form now the majority of the

Executive Committee of the Workers Party, recognized that it was senseless to continue the artificial organization of this Party, as this would only result in a second Workers Party under another name, and probably larger as to the nominal number of members.

The former majority of the Executive Committee also propounded the theory that it would be possible to form in this Federated Farmer-Labor Party of the USA a Communist mass party, while the Workers Party would remain a party of communist theorists, which would be the guide of the mass Communist Party — in other words, similar relations to those [principles] on which the advocates of a Communist underground group insisted with respect to the Workers Party. This absurdity was the product of Comrade Pepper's vivid imagination and enlisted the support of our "patented" communists. Another logical consequence of this theory was the "union with the Third Party," which was endorsed by the present majority more out of solidarity than out of conviction of its correctness.† At the session of the Executive Committee of the Workers Party held in November 1923, a compromise agreement was arrived at between the members of the Executive Committee, which was not adhered to by Pepper and his followers, as Pepper had only consented to it in order to retain his influence and to secure the election at the congress of a large number of his followers on the Executive, thereby securing a majority in it, and also in order to continue his former policy with relation to the Farmer-Labor Party.

Before the congress we discovered this intention at the last minute and saw to it that the whole matter was explained to the delegates at the congress [3rd Convention: Dec. 30, 1923-Jan. 2, 1924]. An overwhelming majority of the delegates adopted the attitude of Comrade Foster and the present majority of the Executive committee and elected to the Executive of the Party a majority of representatives of this attitude. Nevertheless the minority had too many representatives in the Executive Committee, and immediately after the congress it initiated a systematic "sabotage" directed against the majority, making thereby all our activity extremely difficult and burdensome and

even creating impossible conditions. This went on during the whole year [1924] with varying intensity. The apple of discord was again the Farmer-Labor Party and our attitude towards it. In March 1924 it was decided to place this question before the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and for this purpose Comrades Foster [majority], Pepper [minority], and Olgin [Anti-Third Party] went to Moscow. As we know, the Executive Committee of the Comintern vetoed all collaboration with the "Third Party," namely the movement of LaFollette, and at the same time condemned Pepper's theory of the transformation of the Farmer-Labor Party into a Communist mass party. This decision was received in May before the [FFLP] congress in St. Paul [2nd Convention: June 17-19, 1924]. The decision of the Comintern stated very definitely that in the event of LaFollette becoming an independent candidate and succeeding (as this was expected) to merge the Farmer-Labor movement into his movement, we would have no other choice but to bring forward at the forthcoming elections our own Communist candidates from the Workers Party and to conduct the election campaign on behalf of the Communist Party. The Executive Committee of our Party decided to go to the congress in St. Paul in order to ascertain what were the hopes and prospects of the proposed Farmer-Labor Party, as at that time it was not yet definitely known if LaFollette would agree to be the candidate of the Third Party. The St. Paul Congress was a purely Communist congress where we were in the majority and could therefore do as we liked. But even at this congress representation was purely mechanical, as many delegates did certainly no represent the masses but in the majority of cases organizations of the Farmer-Labor Party created by us and which only existed on paper and would have had the masses behind them if LaFollette had not stood as a candidate. The majority of the Committee were all but convinced that in the event of LaFollette declaring his candidature at the time of the [CPPA] Cleveland Congress on July 4th, there would be nothing left for us but to abandon the Farmer-Labor Party altogether and to appoint candidates from the Workers Party. Soon after the Cleveland Congress [July 4-5,

†- Burman seems rather confused here, characterizing the Lore group's position as being one of being *for* union with the LaFollette Third Party that seemed to be emerging. In actuality, this group sharply criticized the WPA's Farmer-Labor Party policy from the Left, being strongly *against* any sort of collaboration with the "Third Bourgeois Party."

1924], the LaFollette movement absorbed the entire Farmer-Labor Party movement, with the exception of those who were under our control, and were sufficiently in sympathy with us to vote as readily for definitely Communist lists of candidates as for the lists of the Farmer-Labor Party. This being so, the Executive Committee decided on the 8th of July [1924] to bring forward its own candidates for the Workers Party [Foster and Gitlow].

The results of the election has shown that the decision of the Comintern vetoing collaboration with the "Third Party" was correct, and that the decision of the Executive Committee of our Party to bring forward its own candidates was equally correct. This enabled us for the first time to appear at the elections as Communists with our own Communist candidates. It is also obvious that the LaFollette movement absorbed entirely the Farmer-Labor movement, which in spirit did not differ from the former, with the exception of the section which was sufficiently politically developed to give their vote even for Communists if convinced that the latter were right.

After the elections the question of elaboration of a plan of future tactics was raised again in the Executive Committee. The majority unhesitatingly adopted the position which they were wont to occupy — that the American working class was as yet so unprepared for political struggle that it would be impossible to organized now, in addition to the LaFollette movement, a national party which would on the one hand differ from the said movement, and on the other hand from the Workers Party. This being so, agitation in favor of it would be at present mere waste of energy and means. Instead of it we ought to work energetically to increase the membership of the Workers Party, and do our utmost to develop the class-consciousness of our members, to improve and develop the newspapers and literature of said party, to carry on agitation for the United Front, and to combine all this work with the everyday demands of the workers. To put it in a nutshell, the attitude of the majority of our Executive Committee was as follows: In view of the fact that there is no prospect of any opportunity to organize in the near future the Farmer-Labor movement, we relinquish for the present agitation on behalf of it, but should an opportunity arise in the future to educated with its assistance the communist forces and the

Workers Party, this agitation can be again resumed. But to carry it on now would be inexpedient. Instead all the energy is to be directed toward the consolidation of the Workers Party, out of which the Communist mass party is to be formed. We are convinced that the Workers Party can rally to itself all the class-conscious workers of the USA, and that there is no need whatever for a "substitute" such as a Farmer-Labor Party bearing the communist label.

The minority demanded immediate resumption of the agitation for the Farmer-Labor movement with the object of making this agitation the chief plan in the platform of the Party. The excuse for this is that candidates for the Communist Party need, before they can be admitted into the Workers Party, preliminary "licking into shape" in some intermediate training ground such as the "communistic" Farmer-Labor Party, and also that the only possible means for the establishment of the United Front is the Farmer-Labor Party. In fact this Farmer-Labor Party is omnipotent like some patent medicine. But the leaders were mainly actuated by the desire to maneuver and to have an opportunity to sit at the conference table with great people dealing with political problems and telling the world: look what a great influence our Party has on the decisions of the political questions of the country. As the Workers Party is not yet very large, and does not, as they think offer favorable opportunities for such maneuvering, they look for round about ways to lead them as rapidly as possible to Communism. There would be nothing reprehensible in all this if it were not a senseless absurdity which demands such an enormous expenditure of the energy and financial resources of the Party as not to leave either opportunity or time for systematic constructive party work.

I said that it was a senseless absurdity, but why so? Firstly, because our Party has not enough members to bear the expense of such large scale maneuvers as the agitational and organizational work a mass Farmer-Labor Party demands, especially when this movement does not meet with greater response among the mass than it actually does. Every comrade who comes into contact with the masses knows how few people there are outside the LaFollette movement who could be asked without any preliminaries to enter the Workers Party, or who would be amenable to agitation in favor of the establishment of a mass Farmer-

Labor Party. The author of these lines was one of the few delegates at the congress in St. Paul who was elected by bona fide organizations, trade unions favoring consciously, and not instinctively, the establishment of a truly independent political labor movement. With a very few exceptions they did not realize that there is a certain difference between the proposed Farmer-Labor mass party without a communist imprint and the LaFollette movement, not to mention the Farmer-Labor Party with the communist imprint.

When the Cleveland Congress was over and when LaFollette had swallowed the followers of the Farmer-Labor Party present at the congress, I perceived that he had also swallowed up all the followers in the trade union organizations which had sent me as their delegate to the St. Paul Congress, except the Communists, of course. When I attempted to explain that there was still a certain difference, I was told unanimously that LaFollette is the representative of the Farmer-Labor Party movement which will remove all the blemishes against which they protested. And the funny thing happened that at the meeting of my union I, as a Communist, was obliged to join the voting of the ultra-conservative elements in order to prevent money being assigned for LaFollette's election campaign. This, of course, made still more acute relations with elements which might have been induced to take an interest in agitation for the organization of a mass Farmer-Labor Party. As everyone knows, similar relations exist almost without exception in every workers' organization and among farmers. The psychology of the workers is this time such that they cannot be moved by agitation for the Farmer-Labor Party.

The only way to counteract the "LaFollette" intoxication is to set against it a definite communist agitation, explaining to the masses that only a Communist Party, the Workers Party, can be that foundation of a working class party and that it behooves all class-conscious elements among the workers to rally to it. Secondly, there are so few capable class-conscious and active Communists in our Party that we will not be able to safeguard ourselves against the peril threatening our Party and its members if the proposed non-communist and non-conscious party were to be established, for it might happen that our Party will merge into it, instead of the Farmer-Labor Party merging into the Communist Party. It is as well to mention that up

to now at least Party money amounting up to \$50,000, plus the energy and the best organizational forces have been spent for agitation in favor of the Farmer-Labor Party. Even if 5,000 new members were made, this would have been achieved if all this expenditure had taken place for purely communist agitation for increase of membership and for the building up of the Party. This has been detrimental to necessary measures for the building up and organization of the Workers Party, and although it was to a certain extent useful as agitation among the masses, we must nevertheless put an end once and for all at the forthcoming congress to unnecessary and ineffective measures, and must above all take in hand the consolidation of the Workers Party and its institutions.

But comrades will perhaps say: Why did not the majority, which had power in its hands, put an end to such topsy-turviness and set everything in order. To this our answer must be that we received this tactical chaos and disorder as a heritage from the Executive Committee which is now the minority of the Executive. Many followers of this minority occupied Party posts, and continued agitation among the members of the Party after the last congress [3rd Convention: Dec. 30-Jan. 2, 1924]. In addition to this agitation they spread the rumor that the majority intends to turn them out because of their convictions and other similar nonsense. It is true that a thorough cleaning up among them would do no harm, not because they differ with us on the question of tactics, but because they represent a section of workers who are most decidedly not fit for anything but "machinations." In the interests of party unity and the liquidation of fractional discord, the majority of the Executive Committee endeavored to maintain a conciliatory attitude as long as possible, avoided expulsions, and tried, as far as possible, to expose the futility of such a policy. Direct expulsions have not taken place, but a few of the collaborators were transferred to other posts because they were considered to be better fit for them. But all this is nevertheless so closely connected with a fractional discord that it can only be remedied by a definite condemnation at the forthcoming congress of the position taken up by Comrades Pepper and Lovestone as well as by Comrade Ruthenberg, who is so to speak their third wheel, and tried to play a double-faced role, and as Party Secretary discreetly "sabotaged" the deci-

sions of the majority by delaying their execution. Engdahl, Bedacht, and Gitlow, as well as the others outside the Executive, are more or less pawns on the chessboard.

The majority of the Executive Committee consisted of Comrades Foster, Cannon, Dunne, Bittelman, Abern, and the author of these lines. Comrade Lore is of a somewhat different opinion, but almost invariably voted with the majority. I am not interested in defending the attitude of the majority, or the activity of last year, let the latter speak for itself. I will merely say that in my sincere opinion the majority consists of comrades imbued with the strong desire to convert the Workers Party into the Communist Party of the USA. If at the forthcoming congress the delegates will elect an Executive from amongst these comrades, we can expect great success for the Party in the coming year, accompanied by economic and organizational consolidation. But first of all the cause of fractional discord must be ascertained and must be explained in a manner to make it clear to everyone that the Workers Party is the foundation on which the Communist mass party will be built up, and that the Farmer-Labor Party and other mixed organizations of that type can only be advocated and established if there are premises for their establishment in our country to give better assistance to the communist movement through them than directly through the Workers Party.

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Comrades, this is rather a long letter but to be able to say even approximately all that should be said, much more space would be required. But I hope that in the main point it will give you a clear idea concerning the situation within the Party and the causes which impede its development. Organize special discussion meetings at which this letter can be read in connec-

tion with the report on the question. Express your opinion and elect your delegates who will be your mouthpiece at the meetings organized for the solution of these questions. If possible, all the members of the Party should attend the general meetings in the larger towns, and every Party member should make the necessary arrangements to be present. Elect also a proportionate number of delegates from the Finnish comrades to the Party congress, and see to it that in the case of delegates of other nationalities being elected that the latter represent the same views as you. Let the members decide the question of the future tactics of the Party from the viewpoint of its mass interests.

The main question which you will have to solve is: Are you of the same opinion as the minority, that the Workers Party and the Communist movement stands in need in our country of a Farmer-Labor Party "under communist control and running under a communist label," or are you prepared to support the attitude of the majority, which says that there is no need to have side by side with the Workers Party a Farmer-Labor Party of that description. But if there should be among the masses of our country a tendency on a considerable scale inclined to sever connection with the petty bourgeois ideology of the LaFollette movement and to separate from it, we can again join this movement for the purpose of forming its Left wing. In our opinion the majority of the Workers Party is the only foundation of a Communist Party, and when the time has come it will be the nucleus around which the Communist mass party will be built up.

With Communist greetings,

Fahle Burman,  
Member of the Executive Committee  
and Secretary of the Finnish Section  
of the Workers Party.

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