
Report on the 4th Comintern Congress to the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party of America [circa December 1922]. †

by Max Bedacht

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 201, ll. 277-282.

CEC

Dear Comrades:—

The report about the 4th World Congress of the Communist International will contain the following points which demand action on the part of your committee:

1. Every section of the Communist International is in duty bound to appoint or elect two regular reporters for the *International Press Correspondence*.‡ One of them to report not less than twice per month on the political situation; and the other on the economic situation, about strikes, about the labor unions and their activities. Besides these regular reports your committee is responsible for the delivery to the *International Press Correspondence* of special articles on such issues and events in the American class struggle that are of importance to the revolutionary world movement.

2. The Communist International insists upon closer cooperation of parties of neighboring countries, especially when some of the problems and issues of those parties are similar or interlinked. To secure such cooperation the congress decided:

“It is desirable, for the purpose of mutual information and for the coordination of the work, that the more important sections of neighboring countries shall mutually exchange representatives. The reports of these representatives shall be simultaneously furnished to the Executive. It is further desirable that the appointment of such representatives should take place with the consent of the Executive.”

In this connection I might state that the representative of the Central and South American sections of the Comintern complained bitterly about the utter lack of cooperation and, as he said, the seeming unwillingness of the American section to cooperate. He claimed that all their demands for cooperation sent to the American section by the Mexican section were never answered.

3. In the matter of a program for the Communist International a number of drafts were submitted. No final decision was made. The sections are instructed to have a committee work on the program for the 5th Congress. Their drafts and proposals are to be published before that congress and the matter finally disposed at the congress itself. The program shall have two parts: one general, theoretical, applying to the Communist International in general; and one specific part for each section. In this connection the congress decided that the program should contain immediate or partial demands.

†- The 4th Congress of the Comintern was convened in Petrograd on November 5, 1922, and conducted sessions until December 5. This report by Workers Party of America delegate Max Bedacht seems to have been written for the benefit of the Central Executive Committee in the immediate aftermath. A brief cover letter (also reproduced here) preceded the actual report.

‡- *International Press Correspondence* (“Inprecorr”) was the weekly organ of the Communist International, published in Germany in several languages, including English.

I submit these points separate from the regular report so the CEC will not overlook to act upon them.

Fraternally submitted,

Max Bedacht.

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To the Executive Committee of the Workers Party.

Dear Comrades:—

As one of your delegates to the 4th World Congress of the Communist International I herewith submit the following confidential report which, I trust, will not be published. I have discussed the matter of this report with Comrade Trachtenberg, another of your delegates, and I can safely state that he would concur in the report if present.

The credentials of your three delegates arrived in Moscow by cable, were submitted at once to the credentials committee, and accepted. Your delegates were seated as fraternal delegates, as coming from a sympathizing party, with a voice but no vote.

During the first part of the work of the congress there was a decided lack of cooperation among your delegates. Although this shortcoming was really never completely repaired, still, there was a decided improvement toward the end, especially as a commission elected by the congress to consider the American problems decided unanimously that the delegates from the United States were in duty bound to admit all delegates from America to the deliberations of the delegates caucus.

The congress formally opened on November 5th at 9 o'clock in the evening in the Narodnyi Dom ("People's House") in Petrograd. Its real work, however, only began on November 9th in the Kremlin in Moscow, and continued till its closing session on December 5th, in the Andrea Hall in the new palace in the Kremlin.

The congress, in the main, had the character of a review of past activities of the Communist International and its sections. The work of the past years, its success, the experiences derived from it, was to be the acid test for the resolutions of the 2nd and the 3rd

World Congresses of the Comintern. Were these decisions correct? Was the analysis of the world situation as given at the 3rd and the 4th Congresses correct, and was the tactic decided upon on the basis of this analysis a good one? The congress came unanimously to the conclusion that the Comintern had judged correctly at its previous congresses. Capitalism is moving down grade in spite of all breathing spells it may succeed in gaining. The problem for the sections of the Comintern was: To the Masses. In the realization of this slogan "To the Masses," we encounter many difficulties. The 3rd Congress proclaimed as one of the most dangerous obstacles left blindness and phrasemongery. The 4th Congress came to the conclusion that the greatest obstacle, the most dangerous enemy is at present on the right. But while the danger from the left as criticized in the 3rd Congress is a danger from within us, a danger looming up in form of inexcusable mistakes made by ourselves, by our sections, because of a leftist, a wrong orientation, the right danger is more a danger from without. It is the apathy of the masses, their lack of revolutionary spirit and lack of self-confidence.. With the masses dominated by a psychology of passivity there is a great danger of the sections [also adapting] themselves to this psychology and thus, instead of becoming the leaders of the masses in action, being drawn down by the masses into the quagmire of inactivity. This danger from the right must be overcome. The policy of the united front is the instrument with which to overcome it. Basic all action upon the immediate needs of the workers, their immediate problems, the greatest possible masses of workers must be united in action (not in theory). And, contrary to the policy of the reformists, the Communist does not desire to exhaust the energy and activity of the masses in these struggles for immediate demands, but, on the contrary, tries to develop energy, self-confidence, and revolutionary spirit.

It was unanimously decided that the policy of the United Front must be continued; that this policy is not only a temporary measure of momentary expediency, but that it is the only method by which the inactive masses can be set into motion, and by which all differences of conceptions among the masses can be overcome. The reports at the congress showed that wherever the tactic of the United Front was applied intelligently, the communist parties strengthened their

position with the masses and succeeded in overcoming the prevailing inertia of inactivity. The slogan of a “Workers’ Government” was discussed very intensively and it was decided that its intelligent use at present is of the utmost importance for the revolutionary movement of the divers countries.

A report of the President of the Comintern, Comrade Zinoviev, was the first matter taken up and disposed. Dealing with the United States the report touched on the problem of connection of legal and illegal work, and legal and illegal organization. The report declared that the question will be given careful consideration at the congress. In accord with this declaration, an American Commission was elected by the congress, consisting of the following comrades: Radek, Bukharin, Kuusinen, and Losovsky (the latter later replaced by Melnichansky) from Russia; Valetskii and Donski from Poland; Katayama, Japan; Kurela, Finland; Raavenstein, Holland; Eberlein, Germany; Lackie, England; Kobler, Czechoslovakia; Gamelon, France; Assaria, Italy; McLean, Ireland; and McDonald, Canada.

In connection with the discussion of the report of the Executive Committee, a delegate from America, Sullivan†, accused *The Worker*, the official organ of our party, of being counterrevolutionary and opposed to Soviet Russia. Comrade Trachtenberg and myself demanded that he substantiate his statement with proofs; and as a result of our demand the above named Commission found itself forced to have printed in number 20 of the official bulletin of the congress the following statement:

“Comrade Sullivan in his speech at the plenum on November 12 (see *Bulletin* no. 7, English edition, page 3) made a strongly-worded attack against the organ of the Workers Party, *The Worker*, quoting a passage of an article in that paper, and took upon himself to present the article in question to the American Commission. After reading the article, the commission declares that the passage in question, taken in conjunction with the context, has quite an opposite meaning to that attached to it by Comrade Sullivan.

The Commissions furthermore most emphatically condemns the manner in which an organ which has rendered the greatest services in the spreading of communist ideas in America has been treated by Comrade Sullivan. (signed) The American Commission.”

The report of the Executive Committee found little criticism and was finally adopted unanimously.

The climax of the congress was the report on five years revolution in Russia. The psychological climax was Comrade Lenin’s speech, the political climax the speech of Comrade Trotsky. I would only do an injustice to either of the speeches would I attempt to give excerpts of them. The comrades are referred to the official minutes, which are already available, at least in German.

Comrade Radek reported on the capitalist offensive. The discussion on this point brought out an excellent characterization of Fascism as an attempt of dying capitalism to recruit the petty bourgeoisie in its defense. It was shown how this movement is bound to be short-lived as a political force on account of the inner contradictions especially apparent in the classical example of Fascism, in Italy. However, we cannot leave the destruction of Fascism to its own inner contradictions, but must organize the defensive of the working masses in such a manner that this defensive can be turned into an offensive any minute opportunity offers itself.

Comrade Bukharin reported on the question of a program for the Communist International. It is intended to adopt a program for the Communist International which can be at the same time the program of all sections of the Comintern, providing the sections add to it a second part relating to the revolutionary problems of their own countries. A number of drafts had been prepared by some individual comrades, and some party executives. Comrade Bukharin also had prepared a draft. In his speech Comrade Bukharin pointed out that now, *ex post facto*, it is possible to trace the theoretical foundation for the betrayal of

†- “Sullivan” was the pseudonym of Alfred S. Edwards, a Bostonian who was the Assistant Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League from its founding in November of 1916 and later a founding member of the Communist Party of America. Edwards was a delegate to the 2nd Convention of the CPA in 1920 and member of the CEC of the old CPA in 1920-21, before serving briefly as District Organizer of the Boston District of the unified CPA in the second half of 1921. He was an active participant in the Central Caucus faction opposition from late 1921 to 1922. The fact that Edwards was a delegate to the 4th Congress of the CI indicates that he must have briefly come back to the CPA in 1922. Edwards was a left oppositionist outside the ranks of the Communist Party for much of the decade of the 1920s, heading a radical sect which is believed to have been called the United Toilers Party, the same name that was used by the legal political party of the Central Caucus faction in 1922.

Socialism by the parties of the Second International back far beyond 1914. He showed that the scope of the application of Marxism had by confined by the respective theoreticians within the geographical limits of their own country. Although the comparative elevation of the standard of life of the European workers during the period of the upward development of capitalism was only possible at the expense of the economically backward races and the colonial people, still these theoreticians attacked or abandoned Marx's theory of misery. In the question of the state the Kautskyian school had maintained even before the war that the state is something in the hands of one class to be taken over by the other. We did not see it then. But it is clear now that these people could not permit this organism to be endangered by what they call a foreign foe if they wanted to preserve it for themselves. So their betrayal was really no betrayal, but the logical result of their conceptions. Bukharin recited a great number of theoretical monstrosities of Marxism as advocated by the Marxians previous to the war. Our program must be free from such germs of future conflicts.

There was a question of immediate or partial demands in the program. Some maintained that the inclusion of immediate and partial demands would give too much prominence to such demands and would elevate them to the character of revolutionary problems. This would be disastrous and lead to reformist conceptions. The congress decided that although an uncompromising stand must be taken against reformism, still immediate and partial demands must find a place in our program.

It was decided that the final settlement of the program question be postponed till the 5th Congress. The sections of the CI are requested to have committees appointed to study the program question and to submit their proposals to the EC of the CI previous to the 5th Congress.

No change was made in the relation of Comintern to Profintern. Comrade Lozovsky in speaking about the Profintern work complained that some sections had not yet grasped the importance of the industrial work. Especially did he complain about the lack of cooperation between the party and the left wing movement in the trade unions. The parties must learn to regard their work in the trade unions as their most

important function in the execution of their task to get to the masses, to get the workers into action, and to gain leadership in the activities of the workers.

In deliberations about Workers' Relief it was pointed out that the famine relief should no longer be emphasized so much. There is not very much propaganda for the idea of a proletarian dictatorship if the only proletarian dictatorship in existence, Soviet Russia, is constantly associated with misery and famine. Of course we must not be afraid to tell the workers that the struggle for a proletarian dictatorship in their respective countries may mean misery and famine. But to make it appear the two, dictatorship and famine, [are] synonyms would be folly. More stress should be laid on the economic relief of Soviet Russia.

The report on the agricultural problem as was as about the Youth Movement presented no new conception to the established relations and theses.

The report on the Negro Question contains a recommendation for a World Negro Congress or Conference. The Comintern relies in the consideration of this question almost entirely on the American section because in the United States the negro problem is greatest. The resolution adopted, in my opinion, gives no analysis, contains only general phrases and ends with the proposal of a World Negro Congress. I am of the opinion that our party should instruct the industrial department to work out a policy toward the masses of negro workers. A special committee of the CEC should then take up the general policy of the party in [the] negro question and should make a report to the Comintern on the basis of these findings.

Reports on the Woman Question, on Education, on Cooperatives, and on the Versailles Treaty were given and resolutions adopted regarding these questions. The congress decided that communists everywhere must become active members of consumers cooperation.

On the question of the reorganization of the Executive Committee some important changes were made. The Executive Committee of the Comintern is no longer composed of the delegates selected by the respective parties for that post, but are from now on selected by the congress. This should put an end to federalism. The members of the Executive Committee, 25 in all, are no longer representatives of their respective parties and responsible to them, but elected by one congress to carry out its decisions, and respon-

sible to the next congress. Another innovation is the desire of the Comintern for neighboring parties to exchange representatives on the Executive Committees. It was also decided that the Executive Committee of every section is in duty bound to send regular political reports of all its doings, all important decisions, to the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

A number of commissions have been elected by the congress to take up the problems of some of the sections of the Comintern. About the American committee I will report separately. The most important commissions were the Italian and the French. In the settlement of the French question the congress set a precedent. It reorganized the Executive Committee of the French Party and instructed all factions to submit to this reorganized committee. Thus the CI established its right to oust elected officials of any of its sections and to replace them with its own appointees.

The Italian Commission decided that the CPI must unite with the Socialist Party (Maximalist) of Italy and thus must admit Serrati to the party, against which the CEC of the party was strenuously opposed.

Two members of your Executive Committee were elected by the Congress as members of the Executive Committee, Comrade L.E. Katterfeld as member, and Comrade C.E. Ruthenberg as alternate.

There were 393 delegates admitted to the congress — 340 with decisive vote, 48 with deliberative rights, and 5 as guests. The report of the credentials committee was interesting for your delegates especially as it accompanied a report of the numerical strength of each section. There it became apparent that the CPs of some Baltic states were much smaller than their respective language federations of our party. Thus the Lettish [Latvian] Party shows a membership of only 500, and the Lithuanian Party one of 1500.

The American Commission.

As mentioned above the congress elected a commission to consider the problems of the movement in America. The commission considered the following questions: Sullivan's [Edward's] statement in the plenary session of the congress about *The Worker*; the question of an open party in the US; the question of

affiliation of the WP to the Comintern.

On the question of Sullivan's statement the commission adopted a statement as given above. During the sessions of the commission a cable arrived reporting a split in the Jewfed [Jewish Federation]. An answer was agreed upon. The commission also agreed that a general change of policy as regards to the American Party should be decided upon. To give the WP a chance to inaugurate such change a cable was decided upon to ask the WP to postpone its convention until the delegates return.† The commission also agreed that the WP be accepted as a sympathizing organization to the Comintern. The commission, however, refrained from finally formulating the intended change of policy and reported to the congress a recommendation to refer the whole matter to the Enlarged Executive Committee. The decision of the commission to accept the WP as a sympathizing party gave a right to the WP for a representative on the Enlarged Executive with a voice but no vote. Comrade Trachtenberg was our representative.

After the close of the congress the Enlarged Executive went into session. This body instructed the Presidium to dispose of the matter. The Presidium in turn instructed Comrade Zinoviev to draw up a letter to the American Party embodying the change of policy. In the next session of the Presidium, in which among all the American delegates then present in Moscow there were also present Comrade Trachtenberg and myself as delegates of the WP. This Presidium meeting decided:

1. The legal and illegal party organizations must be combined into one.
2. The illegal party shall continue within the legal party merely as an apparatus for necessary illegal work and for the protection of the party against possible serious attacks.
3. Until the organizational readjustments can be completed and for the carrying out of such adjustments the Executive Committees of both parties are to combine into one committee which controls legal and illegal activities.
4. The WP will be the American section of the CI.
5. For legalistic purposes, however, such affli-

†- The Second Convention of the Workers Party of America was held on schedule in New York City, December 24-26, 1922.

ation will be acknowledged by the Comintern only as one of a sympathetic party. But the delegates of the WP will enjoy all the rights and privileges of delegates of other sections of the CI.

6. All members of the WP are considered members of the American section of the CI and are subject to the discipline of the CI.

7. The work in the left wing of the trades unions is at present the work of permanent importance for the American party.

8. The American section must develop the sentiment for the Labor Party because the formation of such a party would mark the birth of the American workers as a class.

This decision means first, that the CI is of the opinion that under existing conditions an open party can and should exist in the United States; and second, that the WP is recognized as that open party.

The CI expects us to exploit the tremendous possibilities for our movement in this country and pledged your delegates to assist in this task to the best of their ability.

Fraternally submitted,

Max Bedacht.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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