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# “At Last” the Centrists Unite! (“A Convention of Revolutionists”)

by Charles Dirba

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Unsigned in the original and attributed to the publication’s editor, Dirba.

## (“A Convention of Revolutionists”) (!)

“At last” a copy of the Convention number of the United Centrist Party of America has reached us. Aside from the Program and Constitution of the new party (“minority” [CPA] and CLP), which we shall review in the next issue, the other two articles require attention. In order to analyze the program and constitution of a party it is necessary to know *who drew it, how it was framed, and under what circumstances*. Therefore an analysis of the United Centrist Convention is both interesting and necessary as throwing *light* on the program and constitution of the new party.

There are two articles on the convention, dealing with it from two different angles. One, evidently written by Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg], the editor, bears the slogan “At Last”; the other bears the euphonious title of “A Convention of Revolutionists,” signed by Y.F. [I.E. Ferguson], the associate editor. Indeed it was unnecessary to sign his name, for it bears all the earmarks of the notorious author of **“Has it All Been Worthwhile?”**

### “At Last.”

Damon’s article, as the title implies, is a sickening-sweet, sentimental sigh of relief that “unity” has “at last” been achieved. He shuts his eyes to everything but the accomplished fact of the “merger” of the two groups. And well he may. For no Communist can read the story of that convention without realizing that the only “unity” achieved has been one of name only. The groupings within the convention remain the same — neither side having given up an iota, either in principles or “control,” of the new organization. A Central

Executive Committee composed of 10 members, 5 “minority” [CPA] and 5 CLP; and 10 alternates, 5 “minority” and 5 CLP — “minority” alternate to take the place of “minority” CEC vacancy and CLP alternate to take the place of CLP vacancy — gives a glowing illustration of the kind of “unity” achieved.

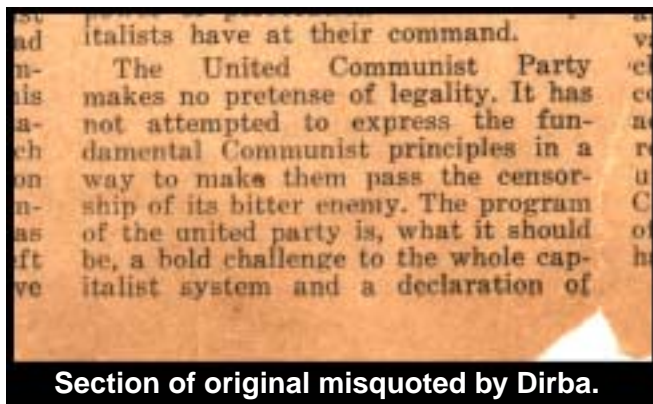
But Damon [Ruthenberg] gives a sigh and sighs “at last.” His mission in the Communist movement, he feels, has been accomplished. “Unity,” of a sort, has been achieved, praise the Lord and Damon! The torture of his seven months’ sojourn with the Communist Party, especially with the “super-bolsheviks” and “great theorists” of the CEC — his artificially prepared “split” — his stealing of party funds and property — his renunciation of Communist principles and tactics (as published in first two statements of the “minority” subsequent to the split) — everything “has been worthwhile” now that “unity” has been accomplished! Poor fellow! The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse.

The “minority” and CLP leaders are politicians of a very low order; with the cunning of their type — having noticed how Hillquit and Berger have stampeded the SP convention by mere device of unveiling a life-size portrait of Debs at the right time — they conceived of a similar scheme to whip up an artificial enthusiasm and stampede the delegates for “unity.” What Debs was to the SP convention, “unity” was to the United Centrist convention. But let Damon [Ruthenberg] describe this delicious scene himself: “When after meeting as separate groups for a day the delegates from the two organizations were united, there quickly appeared upon the breasts of most of the delegates the words “AT LAST” in great black letters. A circular bearing that caption had been distributed among the

delegates and the words had been torn from it to give expression to their sentiment."

Damon [Ruthenberg] then goes to prove how many meanings these words "AT LAST" have, until one begins to feel that this "new slogan" has as many meanings as "mass action" has to Damon [Ruthenberg] in the course of his meteoric career in the Communist movement.

"The United Communist Party makes no pretense of legality. It has attempted to express the fundamental Communist principles in a way to make them pass the censorship of its bitter enemy," says our heroic "liquidator."<sup>†</sup> Behind this apparently innocent remark — aside from the very obvious attempt to make a virtue of a necessity — lies the clue to the manner in which they framed their program. On one side a number of delegates, conscious of the Centrist tendencies of their leaders and highly distrustful to them — prod- ded by the merciless criticism of the "majority" — were



Section of original misquoted by Dirba.

determined to make the program Communist to the best of their ability; on the other side, the leaders, who receded inch by inch from their own well-known positions under the threats of bolts and splits — and who only accepted the situation because not to have accepted it would have meant political oblivion for them. Damon's [Ruthenberg's] guilty conscience speaks in that last-quoted paragraph.

### Lighting-Change Artist Damon [Ruthenberg].

That the program was framed by the leaders with the view to averting a split in their own ranks, and to

ward off criticism by the "majority" [CPA] — and not with a clear, sound knowledge of Communism, is forcefully illustrated in the following quotation from Damon's [Ruthenberg's] article — *which proves that their chief theoretician — Editor-in-Chief of their national organs — and presumably the leading light in the Convention, is not clear on Communism himself.*

"The program of the party declares that the final struggle *between the workers and the capitalists, between the exploited and the exploiter*, will take the form of civil war, and that it is the function of the United Communist Party systematically to familiarize the working class with the necessity of armed insurrection as the only means through which the capitalist government and the *capitalist system* can be overthrown." (Italics ours.)

In the first place compare the foregoing with Damon's [Ruthenberg's] own statement speaking for the "minority" just prior to the "unity convention":

"In carrying on the work of agitation and education on the question of *armed insurrection the social and industrial conditions must be considered. To talk to the workers about arming themselves and armed insurrection at a time when the masses are still without any revolutionary consciousness is to make a farce of and discredit Communism and shows a fundamental lack of understanding of Communist principles.*

"While the 'minority' will work for a clear expression on this point in the party program and in the literature explaining Communist principles, it will consider the circumstances in each given case and the general development of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses in deciding whether the propaganda for armed insurrection shall be spread around them."

How comes this sudden change in Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co.? Is it possible for them to have changed overnight on so fundamental a question? If so, whom are we to believe? Damon of the "minority" or Damon of the United Centrist Party?

This was one of the important issues between the "majority" and the "minority" in the recent controversy within the Communist Party, and one of the causes behind the "split." We were accused of doing "agent-provocateur" work, of being "closet philosophers," "Big Bluff of Bolshevism," etc., just because we stated our position uncompromisingly on the ques-

<sup>†</sup>- This is a blatant falsification of the cited passage, which reads "The United Communist Party makes no pretense of legality. It has *not* attempted to express the fundamental Communist principles in a way to make them pass the censorship of its bitter enemy." [emphasis mine. —T.D.] See illustration above, scanned from the original UCP document. This alteration in Dirba's account is possibly the result of a typesetting error rather than ill intent, but the result is a falsification nonetheless.

tion and nature of "force" in relation to the proletarian revolution and its propaganda to the masses systematically and persistently, as one of the cardinal points of the Communist program. Yet these same opponents of ours — Centrists in character and tendency — have now apparently completely reversed themselves on this question. What does it mean? It means that when Centrists begin to use revolutionary phrases they are most dangerous. As Lenin says: "These men are apt to recognize anything and sign anything only in order to remain at the head of the working class movement. Kautsky already says that he is not opposed to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. French Social-Patriots and "Centrists" also sign under the resolution for Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They do not deserve any confidence."

Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. will betray the rank and file of the UCP when the time comes just as they betrayed the rank and file of the Communist Party at the crucial moment of the organization. As a matter of fact, they have already betrayed that membership which followed them out of the Communist Party in the belief that these leaders would fight for the position enunciated in the statements issued by the "minority." Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co., it has been amply proved, have no position of their own — they are ready to accept any position that will place the power of the organization in their hands.

Wile on this question, we may mention that the fact that Damon [Ruthenberg], Isaacs [Lovestone] & Co. and the old Centrist leaders of the CLP are still in control of the new party is sufficient proof of the Centrist character of organization. A real Communist party would never again TRUST men of such well-known opportunist tendencies, much less entrust the organization into their hands. These leaders are of the type of the MacDonalds, Longuets, Kautskys, revolutionary in words and opportunist in deeds — leaders who possess the ideology of the Second International while mouthing the phrases of the Third International. Any party which consciously and deliberately elects them as leaders is a party which has not yet cut the umbilical cord which still holds them to the ideology of the Second International, their "revolutionary" program to the contrary notwithstanding.

Not how Damon [Ruthenberg] (in the last quotation from "AT LAST") already distorts the concept

of the final struggle: he says that the final struggle takes place "between the workers and the capitalists, between the exploited and exploiter." How about the *capitalist state*? Will it be a private war between the workers and the capitalists leaving the *capitalist state* somewhere on the side — "neutral"? Will the capitalists arm themselves and go out and fight the armed workers, or will they employ the armed forces of the *capitalist state* — the police, the army, the navy, the bureaucracy, the stool-pigeons, the thugs and gunmen and the whole hoard of mercenaries and supporters at their command?

The whole question of force in the revolution is related to and inseparable from the *state*. Damon [Ruthenberg] does not know or pretends not to know. And in view of his previous accusation of "agent-provocateur" at the CEC of the Communist Party on the question, we are inclined to believe he does know but is opposed to it.

In that same quotation is another glaring illustration of his lack of understanding of Communist principles; he speaks of the capitalist *system* also being overthrown by armed insurrection. The capitalist *system* is not overthrown by armed insurrection — only the capitalist *state* can be thus overthrown. The capitalist *system* is abolished in and through the process of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the suppression of the bourgeoisie as a class, the nationalizing of the banks and industries and building up of the workers' own economic administration of production. This process is long and arduous, including all that is known as the transitory period from capitalism to Communism.

Similar mistakes, discrepancies, and omissions abound in the program of the UCP, in which Damon [Ruthenberg] undoubtedly had a great hand in formulating. In general, it is an unbalanced, uncorrelated structure exposing in itself a lack of clarity and understanding of Communist principles. The United Centrists still do not fully understand Communist principles and tactics. They still play with revolutionary phrases — as Damon [Ruthenberg] does in his article — still give "lip-service" to the revolution in *words* but in practice recede from it...

### "Now So Blind..."

There is little more of interest in Damon's [Ruthenberg's] article except a few braggart phrases

which mean nothing at all and have been placed there obviously for effect. For instance: "While there still remains outside of the united party a faction made up of part of the language groups, the logic of the situation will compel them to join the united party or bring about the disintegration of their organizations."

As if the Communist Party of America no longer exists just because Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. ignominiously split away! Damon [Ruthenberg] has always proved himself a good **businessman** — he computes Communist in terms of dollars and cents or membership — depending upon the occasion. When he was about to split away from the CP, he bragged about the wonderful organizing capacity and what a good Communist Fisher [I.E. Ferguson] was, because he collected more than \$5,000 for the National Office. After the split, when he had stolen the party funds in his possession, the \$5,000 collected by Fisher suddenly turned out to be nothing more than loans which had to be repaid to the Chicago District Committee. Similarly when he threatened to split in the CEC he stated with magnificent gestures that it was morally certain that the overwhelming majority of the party membership would stand with him as against the CEC (he had no way of proving it at the time, but we have since proved to him where the membership stood, to his very evident discomfiture). But now that he has united with the CLP and bargained for 32 delegates against the 25 of the CLP he must need to keep up the bluff that he carried the major part of the membership of the CP with him into the United Centrists. That it is a lie doesn't matter to Damon [Ruthenberg] so long as he thinks it will help him crush the Communist Party — The "Big Bluff of Bolshevism" — which he so thoroughly hates and detests because it is usually right and has proved him wrong on all questions.

#### "The Convention of Revolutionists."

We now come to the more interesting of the two articles. Damon [Ruthenberg] writes of the Centrist convention like he who has "at last" found the land of the heart's desire — the Centrist swamp. Y.F. [I.E. Ferguson] makes no such pretenses. He has no illusions about the stillborn monstrosity he helped to create, but, like one who is compelled to acknowledge its authorship much against his will. Not being a Commu-

nist, he dislikes it for the reason that it even pretends to be a Communist organization. His heart still yearns for the "Left Wing conquest of the Communist Party" — for a retransformation of the Communist Party into the Left Wing of a year ago — with its delightfully hazy, utterly non-Communist conceptions and atmosphere.

But, poor chap, he is in the grip of forces and currents too powerful to cope with and must needs [*sic.*] go along. But he serves notice in his article — in the lines as well as between the lines — that Y.F. [Ferguson] of "**Has It Been Worthwhile?**" fame is still the same old Y.F. In its frank attack upon the UCP one is almost tempted to believe that an enemy of the UCP had written it instead of one of its sacred founders. The old proverb, "preserve me from my friends, I will take care of my enemies" is aptly illustrated in the case of Y.F. [Ferguson].

Indeed, Y.F. [Ferguson] is an incorrigible Left Winger! Note the title of his article — "**The Convention of Revolutionists.**" What kind of revolutionists? There are bourgeois revolutionists, anarchists who call themselves revolutionists, yellow Socialists who style themselves revolutionists, and Centrists who *think* they are revolutionists. Y.F. [Ferguson] in using this indefinite, entirely non-Communist term "revolutionists," permits the reader his own choice. And the reader, if he is a Communist, after going through his article, concludes that it was a convention of "revolutionists" — it was a convention of *Centrist* "revolutionists."

#### Y.F. [Ferguson] Gives Some Inside Stuff.

His introduction, giving a survey of the Communist movement in this country during the last year is a gem in itself. One wonders is he in earnest — is he sarcastic — or is he just "playful," a condition from which he states the "unity convention" suffered during its seven days when it was not engaged in "uniting" through the process of "splitting" every day and every session?

Then a grandiloquent gesture — "Sometime recently, somewhere between the Atlantic and Pacific, between the Gulf and the Great Lakes, two groups of elected delegates assembled as the Unity Conference..." He then proceeds to dip into the convention. It's a cold plunge and the reader shivers as he flops into the

frigid atmosphere of the "unity convention." Let us follow him.†

"In spite of the fact that these delegates came together on a call for a 'Unity Conference,' in spite of the realization of the *fearful blow* it would be to the Communist movement in this country *if unity were not at once achieved*, it was not until noon of the seventh day that this issue was decided conclusively."

What? In spite of the placards "AT LAST" on the breasts of the delegates? Funny kind of "unity convention" this. What was the reason? Listen to Y.F. [Ferguson]:

"Neither side was fully conscious of the undercurrent of sentiment on the other side. Factional controversies (he probably means the issue of principles — but Y.F. [Ferguson] never talks of principles in controversies, controversies are always factional; this is a typical bourgeois intellectual viewpoint. *Ed.* [Dirba]) of nearly a year's standing surcharged the atmosphere with suspicion — suspicion not only across the lines but within each camp. (No wonder, with such recognized and well-known Centrist leaders as Damon [Ruthenberg], Isaacs [Lovestone] & Co. in their midst. *Ed.* [Dirba]). None of the delegates were willing to surrender their reservations (he means their suspicions of the leaders. *Ed.* [Dirba]) until after a long series of debates, some of little intrinsic importance, many on basic questions of Communist understanding — *questions which had never before been really faced in the United States.*" (Italics ours. *Ed.* [Dirba])

Really, that last remark is a crusher. They have evidently discovered or invented a new, American brand of Communism — "copyrighted, patent applied for, infringements will be punished to the full extent of the law."

### Caucuses.

All the sessions of the delegates, both as separate bodies and as a "unity convention," developed into caucus action, despite the early decision of the "unity convention" to abolish caucuses and in spite of the "minority's" abhorrence of "caucuses" and "packed conventions," about which they raised such a loud wail

against the "majority" in the Communist Party. How Damon [Ruthenberg], Isaacs [Lovestone], Fisher [Ferguson], and Kasbeck [Schwartz] used to thunder against the "caucuses!" It was "treason" for the "majority" to "caucus" in a Communist Party — Kasbeck [Schwartz] even went so far as to call it "counterrevolutionary." How about "caucuses," members of the United Centrists of America?

### First Session.

As soon as the first session opened, a bolt of 9 or 10 delegates from the "minority" seemed imminent because the leaders wanted to proceed to the election of committees and these "irreconcilables" wanted to take up the program first. These 9 or 10 were evidently the "left elements" of the "minority" who had learned from the criticism of the "majority" and were suspicious of the leaders of both sides. They wanted to see how the convention would act on the question of "mass action," etc., before they gave their consent to remain with the convention. They were defeated on the motion, but in order to avert a split, [the] motion was reconsidered and the program was next taken up. By the way this business of reintroducing defeated motions was the constant "order of business" at the "unity convention" from the first day to the last in order to keep the various antagonistic factions from splitting away.

In the following paragraph Y.F. [Ferguson] is at his best. His humor is infectious and his sarcasm keen as a blade — we wonder if the members of the United Centrist Party also see the joke.

"The opening debates were sparring matches, with a strong undercurrent of nervousness. Three score persons, *engaged in a criminal conspiracy*, spent two hours to decide whether capitalism breaks down in that it fails to "produce" the needs of life, or whether the collapse is due to the failure to "provide." *After considerable uncertainty* (italics ours. *Ed.* [Dirba]) the argument prevailed that capitalism, in spite of all its equipment, stultifies production; the wheels of industry turn only at the call of profit, regardless of all capabilities for production; crisis or no crisis, capitalism has never functioned to 'provide' the needs of the masses.

"In the playfulness of the debate was expressed relaxation and the forestalling of another premature clash. This was the safe way of 'getting acquainted' — the

†- Humorous between-the-lines commentary about the chilly temperature of Lake Michigan in May, written by a fellow from Minneapolis who knows these things. The UCP "Unity Convention" was held amidst the wooded dunes on the sandy shores of the lake at the Wolfskeel Resort, just outside of Bridgman, MI.

suppressed form of the struggle for unity."

After you have stopped laughing at this sally, you realize what Y.F. [Ferguson] meant when he said that this convention discussed "questions which had never before been really faced in the United States." Indeed, we make bold to say that this question was never before discussed in any convention in the Communist movement, not even by the Communist International!

There is just one little discordant note there, however. Y.F. [Ferguson] you must remember is a lawyer, with a bourgeois intellectual mind, so he naturally cannot free himself from bourgeois phraseology. His reference to a so-called Communist convention as a "criminal conspiracy" is not merely sarcasm, Y.F. [Ferguson] still secretly holds to his old belief in "legality" — his formal acceptance of the UCP, apparently "illegal" proposition to the contrary notwithstanding. To him any organization functioning underground is a "criminal conspiracy."†

So ended the first day's session with "unity" six days off.‡ Now let us read about the second day. It was as peaceful as a "unity convention" of Kilkenny cats.

### The Making of the Program.

"Restrained resentment and suspicion broke loose into a furious storm during the next session. At the first statement in the program (a typically Centrist one no doubt from the pens of Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. *Ed.* [Dirba]) concerning the overthrow of the capitalist *system* (note the same mistake that Damon made in his article about the overthrow of the capital-

ist *system*. Isn't it more than a coincidence? *Ed.* [Dirba]) it was insisted that the word 'forcible' be added. Likewise, at the first mention of 'conquest of political power' it was demanded that there be added 'by the use of armed force.' *One amendment was piled upon another — a veritable 'force' panic.* (Italics ours. *Ed.* [Dirba])

"In vain was it argued that this part of the program contained only preliminary definitions, statements of the goal to be achieved; that the Program, under appropriate sub-divisions, gave full attention to the methods of action; that the *item of armed force* does not stand by itself but is the 'inevitable culminating aspect' of 'mass action'; that this tactic must be presented in its developmental character — armed uprising as the *unavoidable* sequence of the advancing class conflict. (Italics ours. *Ed.* [Dirba])

"The CLP delegates, for the most part, were ready for a test of strength against the CP 'irreconcilables.' They were conscious that this minority would have to accept defeat, since the point to be voted was only on what page something should be stated in the program. Others sensed too much danger of misunderstanding behind such a vote, too much anger where agreement could easily be reached. Caxton (in which we recognize our old friend Y.F. [Ferguson])§ moved to recommit this part of the Program, then to adjourn. There were some protests, but the motion prevailed. Meanwhile the tension relaxed by the brilliant satirical speech of Sherwood [=???], whose Yankee wit was the perfect antidote for passionate argument (reminds us of Oscar Ameringer at the SP convention who in every tense situation was used by the

†- One wonders if Attorney Ferguson provided heckler Dirba with a complimentary box of toothpicks after the August 1922 Bridgman, Michigan Convention — uniting the "United Centrist Party" with Dirba's Central Caucus Faction-CPA — was raided by law enforcement authorities and the participants charged with violation of the state's "Criminal Syndicalism" statute.

‡- There is some discrepancy on the number of days of this convention. Ferguson is very definite statement that the 1920 Bridgman proceeding lasted 7 days (See: "The Convention of Revolutionists," *The Communist* [UCP] v. 1, no. 1), but a subsequent report to the Comintern of the convention describing it as having run "May 26-31," with the joint sessions beginning on May 27. (See: Comintern Archive f. 515, op. 1, d. 25, l. 3) Both of these accounts can not be correct; if Ferguson is mistaken, then the conclusion of the convention would actually have been "five days off" from the close of the convention.

§- Dirba is playing the "pseudonym guessing game" here, but he is incorrect. In "The Convention of Revolutionists" a Joint Program Committee is mentioned listing the three CPA members being "Damon, Caxton, and Fisher." Since "Fisher" was Ferguson, "Caxton" could not have been. "Caxton" was almost certainly a new pseudonym for Jay Lovestone. Ferguson probably also used a new pseudonym at the 1920 Unity Convention as well, as there is no mention of "Fisher" in either Ruthenberg's or Ferguson's account of the proceedings, including the list of elected officials. Leading cadres in the Communist movement generally used more than one pseudonym over the course of the underground period, a very effective means of keeping the Department of Justice of the day — and historians more than 80 years down the road — guessing at who was who.

leaders to put the delegates in good humor again, making them forget what was "itching" them. *Ed.*) on an artificially stimulated issue."

How is that for a peaceful "unity session!" Do you get the significance of the whole proceeding in this session? Y.F. [Ferguson] characterizes those who justly distrusted him and his Centrist colleagues as "irreconcilables." Notice Y.F.'s [Ferguson's] contemptuous reference to the "item of armed force" — such a paltry detail. Note how he speaks of "armed uprising as the *unavoidable* sequence of the advancing class conflict." Here is a Centrist conception which looks upon the "armed conflict" as something to be avoided, if possible, but if not, then to get rid of it as of some terrible nightmare. They dread and fear it, coming at last to the revolution, tardily and unwillingly, uncertain in their movements, with the pacifist moral aspect in their attitude toward it and desiring to get rid of it as soon as possible. To the Centrists "armed insurrection" is a "necessary evil" — not something the Communist Party must prepare itself and class-conscious workers for *as the highest stage of the class struggle*.

But our opportunists of the type of Damon [Ruthenberg], Y.F. [Ferguson] & Co. pay lip-service to the proletarian revolution, mouth the phrases of "mass action" (which they termed "mass actions" before. Isn't it natural for advocates of "mass actions" to unite with the advocates of "action of the masses"? *Ed.* [Dirba]) and "armed uprising," but in their hearts they are opposed to it — their Centrist activity is for the purpose of delaying this highest stage of the class struggle — and either openly or surreptitiously will retard the working class preparation for this culmination.

As for the "unity session" which was thrown into a "veritable force panic," one thing stands out clear. Many of the delegates, sincerely desiring to meet the issue squarely, having learned from the "majority" criticism of the "minority" position, were determined that their discredited leaders would not fool them on this issue. Therefore the "force panic." It is a natural outcome where the opportunist leaders are determined to put one over on a convention where some of the delegates at least know their game. Of course, the net result as far as the program is concerned is as Y.F. [Ferguson] states. He knows why he criticizes them: he is

opposed to the whole thing — and by ridicule he sweeps the whole program inferentially into the refuse.

The writing of "force" into every part of the program does not make it a Communist program — this is something our United Centrists will have to learn. Another lesson they will have to learn is that even a good program in itself does not make the organization really Communist in character — although the clearness and soundness of the Program does give a clue to the clarity and consciousness of the party which frames it. Even a Communist Program with a bunch of opportunist leaders such as Damon [Ruthenberg], Y.F. [Ferguson] & Co. to lead the organization, expound the principles and tactics, publish its propaganda to the masses, would stamp that organization as Centrist — having been thoroughly exposed as opportunists and Centrists in the split.

But as a matter of fact, the program of the United Centrist Party is a poor, mechanically stultified document — "made to suit every antagonistic faction in the convention" — in some parts a poor paraphrasing of fundamentals put together helter-skelter without any idea of correlation of ideas or sequence — in some places vague — in some places taken directly from the CP — and the last two columns a reprint from the manifesto of the Third International, where their own efforts evidently had proved fruitless. It might do as a primer for beginners in Communist study classes, after the proper revisions had been made and it had been touched up in general. But as a Program it is a good dissertation!

### Parliamentarism.

On the question of parliamentarism another discussion ensued which showed how far apart the assembled "unity" delegates were on all fundamental questions. They only seemed to agree on the question "unity," all other questions were a "free for all match" — each side giving a little in order to effect "unity." A sound, uncompromising Communist program was furthest from their minds.

The anti-parliamentarians criticized the "nominations for legislative office only" — and the "parliamentarians" themselves differed as to whether to nominate for executive and legislative offices or for legislative offices along. All three groups differed sharply with

each other. A year ago this discussion might have been in place. But since the theses on parliamentarism which were issued by the Third International have received such wide publicity in Communist circles everywhere it is characteristic of this "unity" convention that even now they are not clear on the subject.

### Industrial Unionism.

The third day came the longest and most stubborn debate of the whole convention on the question of Industrial Unionism and the IWW. On this question there were also three groups — one group who stood for outright endorsement of the IWW (in spite of the recent convention decisions of the IWW), another group who were ready to give it a limited endorsement, and a third group who believed neither in a direct endorsement of the IWW nor in an outright condemnation of the AF of L.

Finally, the (former) Chicago District Committee's resolution on this question was adopted which gave an outright endorsement of the IWW. But again, in order to maintain harmony and "unity," the convention reconsidered the matter and amended it to please all three factions. The result is that their position on the IWW is neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring. It has one merit, however, which the "unity convention" is satisfied with — and that is, it prevented another "split" at the convention.

### Party Name Almost Leads to a Split.

Then came the question of a party name — and again frail, overtaxed "unity" was nearly smashed to pieces. After thirty votes had been cast for "Communist Party" on a roll call vote (our former "minority" tried their best to bring confusion into the Communist Party by adopting our name) — which meant that the name was adopted — the CLP raised a loud holler, and what Y.F. [Ferguson] calls "the moral power of effective minority criticism" and what we call the deadly fear of a deadlock and a split, won the day. The question, like all the others, was reconsidered and a new motion reintroduced to placate all elements. "United" was added and the dove of peace again hovered benignly over the "unity convention."

Thus far, on the question of reconsidering passed

motions the "batting average" of the "unity convention" was 1.000.

As a balm to the wounded feelings and the suspicions of the CLP, they were permitted to retain their emblem.

### Constitution-Making.

Then came the discussion of the constitution. Two questions occupied them — one centralization, the other, federations. The question of underground organization was not apparently discussed for nowhere is there a mention of it in the Constitution. On the question of centralization two main groups stood out. One group apparently headed by Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. (who now talks of giving the CEC full power to elect and control the party officials — some hypocrisy!) and the other group composed of the CLP, whose conception of Communist organization had not advanced from the bourgeois democratic ideology of the SP. Note the arguments: "Lack of confidence in officials was the central theme of the contrary argument. (If they mean their own opportunistic leaders we don't blame them — but then why didn't they remain in the SP, since there is little to choose between the opportunist leaders of the Right and the Center — in fact, it is easier to fight the Right leaders because they are out in the open, but the Centrist leaders who lean toward the Left, as Lenin said, are the most dangerous. *Ed. [Dirba]*). The party affairs, it was urged, must be brought nearer to the control of the rank and file. *The Central Committee had been the breeding place of factional controversies.* It was not asking too much to give the district committees a veto in the choice of organizers upon whom their work depended." (Italics ours. *Ed. [Dirba]*).

Nothing can show the Centrist character of the "unity convention" better than the italicized quoted statement, about "the central committees being the breeding places of factional controversies." As a matter of fact, the whole paragraph is the CLP echo of Left Wingers who "left" the SP, not because of a fundamental difference in principles and tactics, but because they were opposed to the SP machine, to the steamroller methods of the Right Wing, to the crooks and scoundrels among the officialdom.

But perhaps lest you think that the other side



really believed in revolutionary centralization, we hasten to dispel such an idea. Their policy is half and half. On paper the CEC is the highest body between conventions, collects all the dues, publishes all the papers, etc., etc. but actually each district holds its own conventions to legislate for itself and elect its District Committee. The CEC organization machine extends only as far as the District Organizers, then it stops and meets the machine built up in the various sections, sub-districts, and districts. In other words, there are two machines in the party: A CEC machine and a "democratic" machine: slow, cumbersome, and unwieldy. The friction between these two machines must lead to paralysis of work, disagreements, appeals, counter-appeals, etc. In case of serious friction in the organization, each District Committee can do as it pleases even to the extent of bolting the organization. Having abolished language federations, the CEC has no effective counter-check against the possible machinations of any organized group within the party.

But even this half-and-half measure of centralization was won only after the most stubborn fight. At first the proposition was defeated. Of course, it was reconsidered and reintroduced. It took three roll calls for it finally to pass.

### Language Federations Disposed Of.

We now come to the question of language federations. Y.F.'s [Ferguson's] report is interesting in this connection so we quote: "On the federation question the Joint Committee had come to no agreement. *In curious contrast to the history of last Summer, it was the CLP committee members who were loath to take a rigorous stand against federations.* At the convention the CLP delegates took no group stand on this question. Two plans were presented, one for the CP delegates by Damon [Ruthenberg] (remember Damon's [Ruthenberg's] insistence that he was not opposed to federations — that he did not want to abolish them but only to change their method of paying dues?), the other by Dubner [Abraham Jakira] and Raphailoff [=??] for the federation members of the CLP. The debate was largely between the federation delegates on both sides. The principal controversy was as to the existence of national executive committees for the language groups, this proposal being decisively voted

down."

Anyone who reads the United Centrist constitution about language federations will quickly realize that the object behind the abolition of the federations was not to make for greater centralization, as they claim, but for the *purpose of effectively closing the channel of organized expression and control of the vast majority of the "foreign comrades" who cannot speak or understand English, over the actions of the opportunist leaders of the United Centrist Party of America.* This undoubtedly is the purpose. But the opportunist leaders composed of Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. have evidently ridden to a fall. Note that the CLP, which had experience with the federation question for nearly a year, had changed its policy, or, rather was willing to change its policy. They know by bitter experience that the "foreign comrades" who cannot speak or understand English must have a centralized body of their own, which can function for them, else they drift away, lose interest in the party, or veer away from Communism gradually and are swallowed up by other movements.

It will not be very long before Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. find this out for themselves and then..., we can safely predict (knowing the character of these men), their CEC will *change the convention decision or make it a dead letter* and permit language federations to exist in their party.

Just as their program is "a scrap of paper," so is their constitution "a scrap of paper." Nor are they afraid of conventions. They can defy conventions and when it gets too hot split away before the next convention, organize their own convention, and thus rehabilitate themselves as "leaders" (save the mark!). They have done it before and they can do it again.

### The Election Farce.

Now we come to the *piece-de-resistance* of the "unity convention" — the elections. We shall quote: "Late in the afternoon of the fourth day of the joint sessions (joint sessions? And we thought all the time it was a "unity convention" — isn't it mean of Y.F. [Ferguson] to so cruelly shatter our illusions — and perhaps the illusions of the UCP? *Ed. [Dirba]*) it was decided to proceed with elections of party officials. There had been many hours of caucusing on each side as to elections. *Regardless of the sentiment of the convention*

expressed by a majority vote against further caucuses (what is a majority vote in a convention to Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. and the CLP Menshevik leaders! Ed. [Dirba]) *neither side was willing to risk a surrender of its group strength*. (Strange situation for people who have been shouting "unity" for over a year and are about (?) to accomplish it "at last." Ed. [Dirba]).

Note how even both groups in the "unity convention" distrusted each other after the adoption of an apparently satisfactory program to all concerned. No better proof of the insincerity and hypocrisy that animated the whole convention and its proceedings can be given than the suspicion, distrust, jockeying, bargaining, trading, dickering that went on during the election of officials.

The mast of "unity" was thrown off "at last." Both groups stood, ready to battle for the control of the new organization. "Control" or "split" became the new slogan of both sides. But we are anticipating. Let Y.F. [Ferguson] tell you all about it. He was there and witnessed it! "Then came ten nominations for the nine places on the CEC: Damon [Ruthenberg], Scott [=???], Reinhart [=???], Delion [Louis Hendin], Zemlin [S.M. Krunislav], (CP); Meyer [Alfred Wagenknecht], Klein [Ludwig Katterfeld?], Flynn [Edward Lindgren], Brown [Max Bedacht], Dawson [James P. Cannon] (CLP). These were the caucus nominations. Obviously the CLP caucus had determined to avail itself of the dissensions in the CP ranks and to attempt to elect a majority of the committee. (Won't somebody be shouting "packed" convention soon? Ed. [Dirba]).

"At the night session was announced the result of the balloting; Damon [Ruthenberg], Scott [=???], Klein [Katterfeld?], Flynn [Lindgren], 29. Brown [Bedacht], 33; Dawson [Cannon], 32; Meyer [Wagenknecht] 30; Reinhart [=???], 26; Delion [Hendin], Zemlin [Krunislav], tied at 24. (Damon [Ruthenberg] & Co. evidently got a bad licking and they knew it, too. Watch them swing into action when the question of "control" is involved. There he fights like a tiger.

But on principles, that's another story. Ed. [Dirba]).

"Damon [Ruthenberg], Scott [=???], and Reinhart [=???] quickly offered resignations. A bitter discussion was precipitated. **Both sides had played for "control" and the result had been a boomerang**; for how it was urged, could the CP delegates report back to their members that they had been outwitted in strategy in a way to give the minority control of the united party? Even though the fault was that of the CP delegates themselves, how could that remedy the outside situation? (Here Y.F. [Ferguson] unwittingly gives a sidelight on the situation which would make pleasant reading about a Democratic or Republican Convention but coming from a so-called Communist Convention represents the very lowest order of political consciousness. Do you see what worried the "minority" CP delegates — not the formulation of a Communist Program and Constitution — the laying of the basis for their activities for the coming year — or even the superficial achievement of "unity" which they did manage to accomplish for the time — *but what their members will think if the CLP gets control of the party!* Ed. [Dirba]).

After some bitter retorts from the CLP a recess was held for half an hour.

"Then began the tug of war which went into the middle of the night, only to be resumed the next morning — the two groups, apparently completely welded, now standing sharply apart *as CP and CLP. The convention vanished; in its place were two caucuses*, with committees for interchange of offers and counterproposals.

"The strained item in the CP camp had been an attack upon Caxton [Lovestone], based on the "majority" CP criticism.† (So, our work was bearing fruit "at last." Ed. [Dirba]). In the CP caucus, after long discussion, he had been nominated for the CEC 18 to 9. (Was Reinhart [=???], who used to denounce Y.F. [Ferguson] when he appeared at meetings one of the 9?)‡ Later Caxton [Lovestone] withdrew his name.

†- Reference is apparently to criticism of Lovestone's testimony in the trial of Harry Winitsky in February 1920. While Lovestone's testimony was authorized by the CEC and the subpoenaed Lovestone gave the prosecution nothing of real use, as Lovestone's biographer notes, "gossip persisted that he had rattled on Winitsky to save his skin." [Ted Morgan: *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster*. (NY: Random House, 1999), pg. 23].

‡- Dirba still mistakenly thinks "Caxton" was Ferguson, which he could not have been. We also know from this passage that "Reinhart" was not the new pseudonym of Ferguson, meaning that if he was elected to the CEC at all, he was "Scott." Pseudonym identification is a cross between cryptography and crossword puzzling... There are some mistakes made, use a pencil.

Now it was insisted that his name be reintroduced, making Zemlin [Krunislav] first alternate. The CLP offered to substitute Caxton [Lovestone] for Brown [Bedacht] as International Secretary." (The International Secretaryship, the highest office in the party, is something to be traded and bargained for not on the basis of the man most fit for it but on a purely bourgeois basis of political trading. *Ed.* [Dirba]).

The last meeting found the situation deadlocked. To open the convention again meant to give the CP the advantage of the renewed caucus pressure in favor of solidarity for CP control, all questions of personal-ity aside. The issue of control having been precipitated by the turn of the election, the CP delegates were in no mood to give up their demand for a majority of the CEC.

"The CP delegates made only one demand, to reopen the convention. It was for the other side to make the next move...

"...How is one to visualize one group of delegates in a heated argument, while the other group is engaged in the singing of revolutionary songs, mostly in Russian — how is one to imagine all this without something in the way of spacial dimensions? The singing group marches halfway toward the arguing group — a challenge to unity, the song of the International — and reluctantly marches back to its own meeting place.

"There is a committee conference. Before the report comes back the lines are formed for a new march, this time to go all the way. Agreement is reported: a CEC of ten members: the five CLP to stand elected, five CP members now to be chosen. The march proceeds; it is the only report to the anxious CLP delegates — the two groups merge into one another, all singing the Internationale. There is the grasping of hands, the embrace of comradeship; nothing is said — there is too much feeling for speech... Unity is achieved..."

"At last," as Damon [Ruthenberg] would say the torture and suspense is over, "unity is achieved!" — The Centrists have united into the United Centrist Party of America!

Need anything more be added to the foregoing? Surely, every reader has formed a vivid picture in his mind of the "unity convention" which gave birth to the UCP! Born in compromise and betrayal, fathered by Centrists of the type of Damon [Ruthenberg], Y.F. [Ferguson] & Co., and mothered by the CLP — with one who claims to be a representative from the III International in the role of godfather (the latter is himself responsible for a great deal of the disorganization that has been going on recently in the Communist Party, through his unwarranted meddling.† This new United Centrist Party is doomed to an ignoble career in the Communist movement in this country.

†- Reference is to Samuel Agursky (1884-1947), representative of the Communist International to the 1920 Bridgman Unity Convention. Agursky does not seem to have played a particularly important role in the gathering, not being mentioned in either the Ruthenberg or the Ferguson account of the event.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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