
Letter to Leonid Belsky in Chicago from C.E. Ruthenberg in New York, May 7, 1920.

A document in the Hoover Institution Archives, Jay Lovestone Papers, box 195, folder 11.

New York, May 7, 1920.

Dear Fisher [Belsky]:—

In a letter received from Comrade Ferguson two days ago there appeared this expression:

“But, I say it reluctantly but with absolute conviction, there must be unity between us and the CLP, no matter how petty they are about it.”

And in one of your letters you expressed the thought that unless such unity was effected we would have another revolt. The CLP had refused the 32 and 18 division of delegates before our split. When the proposal that they should enter into the same arrangement with our group was made to them they naturally argued: We refused to enter a convention on that basis with your party while it was united. Now we are asked to accept the same proposition from a faction. We don't know how many members support you. There may be a thousand and there may be 5 or 7 thousand. We don't know and you won't know until the situation is cleared up. You can hardly expect us to accept such a proposition.

Personally I believed their argument sound. We don't know. You may say that we will have 90 percent of the membership in our convention, but I say — you will pardon my being frank — that such a statement is rot. We'll be lucky if we have 50 percent represented. You haven't been up against this proposition as I have. We have a hard

case to put across, particularly in those Federations that are strongly Federationists, like the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians. We will have Chicago, most of Cleveland, some of Detroit and Pittsburgh, about half of Philadelphia, and less than half of New York and Boston. At the present moment we may have 60% of the membership supporting our convention — not necessarily our group. What the situation will be in another two weeks is hard to say. Here in New York we have lost ground in the last week.

Under the circumstances and in view of the urgent statements from both you and Comrade Ferguson, with which I agreed, I came to an agreement with the CLP for the Unity conference after conference with the comrades here. This Unity Conference does not bind us to anything except to try to achieve unity through the action of the delegates at the convention. No principles are compromised, no definite agreement as to representation is made. Our delegates may still insist on the 32 and 18 division if they think that just, or, if agreement is had on principles in advance they may be lenient on the question of representation. Certainly there could not be a stronger proposition for us in view of the existing situation. We do not change the proposition made by the CEC when it was still the CEC of the whole party. We leave the matter of changes to the convention. This is the strongest position we could take and is the best hope for unity, which you and Ferguson and I say we must achieve.

This is all settled, then comes your letter stating that your District Committee rejects any other proposition for unity with the CLP except the original proposition of the CEC! With you and Ferguson present!

What am I to make of this? First you both urge unity at all costs and then evidently acquiesce in the committee action?

The Unity Conference proposition has gone too far to be rejected now. All the arrangements have been agreed to and I have sent a statement to all District Organization and the Federations. We are committed to nothing except to make an honest effort to agree upon principles and then unite the two parties, or rather our faction and their party.

If the Chicago District Committee refuses to agree to this proposition now, there is only one course for me to pursue and that is to send my resignation as Executive Secretary of the CEC and go home and wait until there is someone with authority to receive the party funds and property from me, and this I will do.

There is no use our worrying about the “majority” group. They have determined to fight the thing to a finish without compromise. They will stand on their proposal that we must withdraw our convention call before they will even talk to us. I have removed them from consideration in

handling the present party situation. The important thing for us is that we have a convention and elect an Executive Committee that will have authority, as one of our weaknesses at the present moment is that I stand alone as one man defying the “legal” committee of the party. If when we are organized we include the CLP in those our committee will represent, we will be in the same relation to the “majority” group that the Communist Party was toward the CLP during the recent months. We will have the advantage and can crush them. If we stand alone, as a third Communist Party then there is not much hope for us.

I feel sure if this matter is properly presented to your committee it will agree to the Unity Conference, and there is nothing else to do if we are to continue any sort of fighting front.

Fraternally yours,

[C.E. Ruthenberg]
Executive Secretary.

P.S. I will send a statement regarding negotiations with the “majority” group for the next issue. This will reach you Monday or Tuesday [May 10 or 11]. I understand the paper will go to press next Friday or Saturday [May 14 or 15].

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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