

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONVENTION

(Translated from the Jewish issue of the "Communist," official organ of the U. C. P.)

The following article, reprinted from the official Jewish organ of the United Centrist Party in answer to Y. F.'s article "A Convention of Revolutionists," is highly important as shedding more light on the vicious Centrist character and tendencies of the leaders of the U. C. P., and the lack of Communist understanding among the great majority of the delegates at the so-called "unity convention."

It is no surprise to find that Damon, Caxton, Fisher & Co., of the former "minority" of the Communist Party, and the leaders of the C. L. P., Brown, Klein, Dubner & Co., framed a program and constitution which completely evaded the fundamental question—how are the workers to assume power and establish the proletarian dictatorship? The Communist Party had already branded and exposed those leaders as Centrist whose chief object was to split the Communist Party and effect a mechanical amalgamation between the splitting-off faction, the C. L. P., and the "left elements" of the S. P., and force this heterogeneous mixture back to the Left Wingism of 1919.

The reader need merely refer to the statements issued by Damon, Caxton, Fisher & Co. in the recent split to verify the truth of this.

Nor is it surprising to learn that "naturally" the authors of this program, Comrades Damon, Caxton and Fisher, were also its chief defenders. This was very evident from the tone of the articles which Damon and Caxton, editor and associate editor respectively of the official national organ of the U. C. P., published in the convention number of their paper.

The following article also explains why these two political adventurers attempted to evade any discussion of fundamental principles and tactics in their paper since the convention. The first issue contained an article "Away with Controversy." The second issue contained an editorial "Shall we argue with Liars?"

Both articles were cowardly attempts to run away from any discussion which would compel them to express their real position on fundamental questions. The first article seemed more like the lamentations of one haunted by unpleasant memories, trying to drive them out of his mind. The second attempted to evade discussion by taking a dishonest advantage of a typographical error which in no way affected the tenor of the argument made by the present writer in criticizing the "unity convention" as reported by Damon and Caxton. Had Damon printed what immediately followed the quotation in question, instead of the typographical error itself, he would have immediately exposed his false accusation.

We cite these two instances as further proof of the studied attitude of evasion which the chief theoreticians of the U. C. P. have adopted as their policy, in order to continue humbugging their own membership. It is also interesting to note that Fisher, the former notorious Chicago organizer and lieutenant of Damon in the recent split, also helped to frame and support this Menshevik program. This was the one man whom Damon used to point to with pride as the "greatest Bolshevik of them all." As for the Chicago delegates (most of them former members of the Chicago District Committee who staged the abortive "revolt" in the Communist Party), only two out of the seven could be counted among the left delegates, the other five were on the "right" or vacillating. A more sweeping vindication of the position of the Communist Party before, during and after the split, could not come from the testimony of one who sided against us in the split.

Moreover, the following article, aside from the valuable "close-up" it gives of the Centrist leaders in action and scrambling for jobs, is mainly interesting for the reason that it proves the impossibility of effecting real organic unity between the Communist Party and the U. C. P. in this country so long as the latter organization is dominated and controlled by vicious and unprincipled centrists of the stripe of Damon, Caxton, Fisher, Meyer & Co. —Editor's note.

There appeared in the English issue of the "Communist" an article by Y. F., in which the writer gives his impressions of the convention. These impressions are one-sided, exhibiting everything from one angle only, and therefore we found it necessary to throw light on these occurrences, to present all the facts in their true color, even if it is to some extent far from pleasant, because we believe that "the bitter truth is far better than the sweet untruth." This is not being done to hamper the work. On the contrary, it is done with the purpose of correcting our errors and to avoid such mistakes as have been committed in the past.

It seems that God is with the Communists, as the weather was splendid during all the sessions of the convention. From time to time the sky grew cloudy, but it never rained. The place of the convention was very suitable for such an undertaking, and everything was arranged beforehand in the best manner. Delegates were present, representing every part of the United States in spite of all obstacles and the persecution of government agents. We succeeded in holding a convention of a United Communist Party with all the features of a convention, even with caucus, but without "political machines..." Nevertheless there operated at times the shadow of "machines," but they could not function (evidently) out of order... The assertion of Y. F., that among

the names of the delegates are not found any known in 1919, is somewhat exaggerated. Many of the delegates were well known to the membership of our party as valuable workers in the movement.

In reality two conventions met on the first day: a convention of the Communist Party, in which participated 32 delegates, and a convention of the C. L. P., represented by 25 delegates, and one fraternal delegate, all 58 delegates. If to this sum be added the representative of the Third International,—the total reaches 59. The two conventions opened in different places, not far apart. Occasionally a delegate of the C. L. P. would pay us a visit to see whether we were ready for the fusion.

It was already noticeable during the first session that the convention of the Communist Party was not a unified body, but was composed of different elements, who differed not only in tactics, but also in fundamental questions of principle. It was easy to foresee that it will be difficult to present "a solid front" against the C. L. P. This became the more evident, when the program and constitution submitted by the "Unity Committee" were read. This program was prepared by a committee, composed of three members of the C. P. (Damon, Caxton and Fisher) and three of the C. L. P. (Brown, Klein and Dubner). It was read before both conventions as a basis of unity and it called forth great dissatisfaction among several Eastern delegates and a few Western, because of its (the program's) weakness and of its failure to express a definite revolutionary attitude, especially in regard to mass action.

The parts of the program dealing with mass action did not mention a word about armed insurrection as the only method for the conquest of political power by the working class. It dealt only with the general strike, which is transformed into a general political strike. But it did not state the manner, in which political power can be seized.

It is remarkable, that those, who always criticized the old program of the Communist Party, which said so much about mass action without defining it, have copied the very same program, in particular the part about mass action, and thought that they would easily get away with it. Naturally the authors of this program, comrades Damon, Caxton and Fisher, were also its chief defenders. Ford, a New York comrade reads another program, which is more revolutionary and contains a clear definition of mass action. But the trouble was that in other respects it was far from satisfactory. Taken as a whole, it was not a document, but only a weak attempt on the part of a young author, who knew what he wanted, but could not enunciate it on paper in a systematic way. On the other hand the program of the "United Committee" was well written, but lacked "one insignificant detail"—the revolutionary thought. Heated debates began. A few Eastern delegates are speaking in favor of the "New York Program"—that is the program brought in by the New York delegate. They are demanding that this program should be taken as a basis. They are speaking with heat and vigor. Besides the author of the program (N. Y.) also a delegate from Philadelphia, a delegate from Baltimore and another one from New York are defending this program. Comrade Newman takes the floor and criticizes that part of the program ("Unity Committee"), where it speaks about mass action, touches the New York program and speaks about the good and bad sides. He points out that the New York program touches very important questions, which must have a place in our program, as for example, the agrarian question, the "American Legion" as a counter-revolutionary power, the role that the church plays in the struggle against Communism, etc. He proposes that the program of the "United Committee" shall be taken as a basis on the condition that the part of the program dealing with mass action shall be changed in the spirit of the New York program and all other above mentioned points shall be included in this program. At last the authors submit and promise to revise the program. It was late in the evening, when this session ended. Some delegates were still discussing the question of mass action with a few delegates of the C. L. P. convention, who came to our convention to tell us that their convention accepted the program of the "Unity Committee" as a basis. The accumulated energy of the delegates sought an outlet.

The first session of the United Communist Party began with disputes about elections for the various committees. The left element of the convention demanded, that the program should be taken up first, and the elections afterwards. Their motives were as follows:

"That we came to a Communist convention in order to formulate a real Communist program and therefore it is the most important point, which ought to be immediately attended to, as the union through committees is only of secondary importance; that a complete union can not take place unless we stand on the same ground in regard to principles; that we cannot find a common ground before formulating a program, that the delegates of the C. L. P. are entirely unknown to us and in order to vote intelligently we must discuss the program first if only to get acquainted with the view points of the delegates." These were in general the arguments of the left delegates, who, however, were numerically weak. It is not superfluous to mention that there were in all only five delegates who,

discussing the various problems on the floor of the convention, have influenced it towards the left. Among them were two delegates from New York, one from Philadelphia, one from Baltimore and one from Chicago. These five delegates obtained the co-operation of five others, who although participating but little in the debates, have nevertheless helped to move the convention to the left. This is mentioned here in order to throw some light on the subsequent events.

After a prolonged discussion the resolution to proceed with the elections was adopted. The ten delegates refused to vote and began to retire in order to hold a caucus. That had an effect on the convention. Comrade Klein (C. L. P.) moved that the elections be suspended and that a discussion of the program be taken up. The motion passed. And so the "left" delegates celebrated their first victory. The program was read and discussed, every word being carefully weighed. In this manner two hours were consumed in debating about one word, whether capitalism collapses, because it cannot "produce" the necessities of life or because it cannot provide the necessary means of existence. It seemed as if party distinction disappeared. All trying to exhibit their accomplishments in political economy.

A storm began. The part of the program about "the seizure of state power" was read. This part that should indicate the means and ways through which the proletariat can seize political power, does not even mention a word. It avoids even mentioning the word mass action. It is in general very weak and colorless, endeavoring to dismiss it all with a few phrases about the class struggle.

The first to speak is Comrade Newman. He points out all defects and that the program is even inferior to the previous program of the C. P. "The other," says he, "at least speaks about mass action, even though it failed to define what mass action is. And we try not even to mention the word. You give us a whole chapter about the conquest of political power and you don't tell us how, through what ways and means it can be accomplished. You avoid the words 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' 'mass action,' and 'armed insurrection.' You must either throw the whole thing out or else talk in clear language."

The convention is thrown into an uproar. Tens of hands are stretched towards the chairman,—all want to speak. Various opinions are expressed. The debate is prolonged until 1 A. M. Against this part of the program speak also the comrades Dellon, Zlank, Ford and Parker of the Communist Party and Comrade Brown of the C. L. P. The comrades Dellon and Zlank speak heatedly. It is evident that for them everything depends on the outcome of the discussion, that it is a case of "to be or not to be," to be a Communist Party or a party of phrases. They demand that this paragraph must speak of dictatorship and an armed insurrection. For this paragraph in its original form speak many delegates.

The most noteworthy speech is made by a comrade of the C. L. P., who says that "the left" delegates don't know what they want. They demand that the words 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'armed insurrection' shall be openly repeated several times. I am against it. For me the word 'dictatorship' is repulsive. It is only because it is a necessary evil that we include it in our program. Therefore let it remain under the paragraph about dictatorship. But why repeatedly mention it?"

It is noteworthy that the so-called "left" delegation of the Chicago district was not what it pretended to be. Of the seven delegates only two were left. The rest were either of the right, or they vacillated so much that it was a strain on one's eyes merely to watch them. The session is adjourned, leaving dissatisfaction in the hearts of the left delegates. They immediately summoned a caucus of left delegates, to which only those are invited, who are reliable and balanced in question of principle.

They debate the question: what is to be done? They decide not to compromise. Several delegates express the opinion that the "morning is wiser than the evening" and that tomorrow all will be well. The leaders of the Communist Party are smarting under the pain of defeat. They thought that all are already united into one party and they could, therefore, afford to slightly disregard vital principles and here they meet with such opposition. They come to us in order to make a compromise. The "left" delegates are disappointed, especially so about the Chicago organizer, Comrade Fisher, who has suddenly as if by some miracle found himself among the "vacillating."

The morning proved to be wiser than the preceding evening and that was because our "leaders," the authors of the program, became wiser over night. The left delegates passed everything they wanted. The committee brings the paragraph in a revised form. It is designated now "the nature of the state," and the paragraph about mass action speaks explicitly about armed insurrection as the only means for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a great victory for the ten left delegates, who have led the convention towards the right road. It is to them that the Communist movement of America is indebted for the clearly expressed revolutionary program.

An interesting debate occurred about the question of participating in political elections. (Continued on page 8)