
Minutes of the Central Executive Committee of the old Communist Party of America, September 7, 1919.

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI f. 515, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 1-3.

Sunday, Sept. 7, 1919.

Comrade Ferguson elected chairman.
C.E. Ruthenberg [Secretary].
Present: All members but Comrade Petras.†

Motion: That we proceed to elect the Executive Council.

Carried.

Comrades Wicks, Schwartz, Karosas, Ferguson, and Dirba elected.

Motion: That we elect an Associate Editor of *The Communist* and *Communist International*.

Carried.

Comrade I.E. Ferguson elected.‡

Comrade [Joseph] Stilson was given the floor and stated that the Lithuanian Federation Convention was to be held in Brooklyn, NY on Sept. 27 and suggested that the party send delegates to officially represent it. Comrades Lovestone and Bittelman elected.

Motion: That we elect two delegates to attend the convention of the Jewish Federation at Philadelphia, Oct. 9th, 10th, 11th.

Carried.

Comrades Hourwich and Ferguson elected.

Motion: That the Central Executive Committee take charge of the defense of all the comrades arrested and that we establish a Legal Bureau to defend party members against prosecution.

Carried.

Motion: That the party undertake the defense of Comrade [Dennis] Batt.§

Carried.

Motion: That Comrade Ferguson be appointed counsel for the party.

Carried.

Motion: That the Executive Council shall constitute the Legal Bureau.

Carried.

Motion: That the standard wage of \$45.00 per week for persons with families and \$35.00 per week for employees without families be established for the positions of Executive Secretary, Editors, Organizers, and Translator-Secretaries.Δ

Carried.

Motion: That the members of the committee who live in New York constitute a sub-committee of the Central Executive Committee.

†- The 15 member CEC of the old CPA elected at the group's Founding Convention [Chicago. Sept. 1-7, 1919, included: John J. Ballam (Boston); Alexander Bittelman (New York); Maximilian Cohen (New York); Charles Dirba (Minneapolis); Daniel Elbaum (Detroit); I.E. Ferguson (Chicago); Louis Fraina (New York); Nicholas Hourwich (New York); K.B. Karosas (Philadelphia); Jay Lovestone (New York); Paul Petras (Chicago); C.E. Ruthenberg (Cleveland); Oscar Tyverovsky (New York); John Schwartz (Boston); and Harry Wicks (Portland, OR).

‡- Editor of Party Publications, elected by the Founding Convention, was Louis C. Fraina.

§- Dennis Batt, formerly editor of the official organ of the Left Wing National Council in Chicago, *The Communist*, was arrested on the floor of the Founding Convention of the CPA. He later joined the Proletarian Party.

Δ- Note the retention of Translator-Secretaries as liaisons between the individual Federations and the central party apparatus.

Lost.

Motion: That the members of the Central Executive Committee and Translator-Secretaries be used as organizers whenever possible.

Carried.

Motion: That Bertram Wolfe be appointed organizer for the state of New York.

Amendment: That we request the New York members to make a recommendation for organizer for New York.

Amendment to Amendment: That the New York members of the committee constitute a sub-committee to organize a District or State Organization.

Amendment to Amendment carried.

Motion: That Comrade Cohen act as secretary of the New York Committee.

Carried.

Motion: That the Executive Council be authorized to divide the country into districts for the purpose of organizing District and State Organizations.

Carried.

Motion: That we endeavor to have the members of the party develop a Cooperative Printing Plant.

Referred to Executive Council.

Motion: That we appoint as a Press Bureau the editors of the national, state, and Federation party papers, and that the national editor [Fraina] act as secretary of the Bureau.

Carried.

Motion: That we print a pamphlet containing the correspondence in regard to unity with the bolting delegates [the CLP] and that it contain the program and constitution of the party and be mailed to all locals with a charter application.

Carried.

Motion: That Comrades Ferguson and Fraina be appointed editors of the Manifesto and that it, together with the program, be printed in pamphlet form.

Carried.†

Motion: That we instruct the Executive Council to take steps to publish the stenographic report of the Convention Proceedings.

Carried.‡

Motion: That the Executive Council act as the Special Committee called for by the Convention actions.

Carried.

Motion: That the Central Executive Committee meet again on the first Saturday in November [Nov. 1, 1919].

Carried.

Motion: That the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] endeavor to arrange meetings for the members of the committee while en route to the meetings of the committee.

Carried.

Motion: That the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg], in cooperation with the Executive Council, be authorized to secure new headquarters.

Carried.

Motion: That Emergency Meetings of the Central Executive Committee may be called by majority vote of the committee or by the Executive Council.

Carried.

Motion: That the work of the Central Executive Committee be carried on through executive motions, which shall be held upon for 15 days, and which may be accompanied by 300 words of comment. Members of the Executive Council may have adverse comment to same extent sent out with the motion.

†- The first pamphlet of the CPA, entitled *Manifesto and Program. Constitution. Report to the Communist International*, was published in Chicago right around the 1st of October 1919. It did not include the unity communications with the Communist Labor Party.

‡- Unfortunately for historians of American Communism, no stenographic report was published. The fact that the direction for this publication was given after the conclusion of the convention implies that a stenographic record was taken down, however. While no such document has come to light, scholars should be on the alert should they ever sight such a thing lurking in a dank archive.

Carried.†

Motion: That the funds of the party be deposited in a bank in the name of the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] and that all bills be paid by check signed by the Executive Secretary and countersigned by one of the members of the Executive Council.

Carried.

Comrade Ferguson designated to countersign checks with Comrade Schwartz as alternate.‡

Motion: That the party take over the *Communist* and *Revolutionary Age* with all their assets and liabilities.

Carried.§

Motion: That Comrade Batt continue as Secretary for one week.

Carried.

Comrade Elbaum made a statement in regard to the printing plant of the Polish Federation, requesting that when speed was not necessary printing be given to the plant. This was referred to the Executive Secretary [Ruthenberg] with a favorable recommendation.

C.E. Ruthenberg,
Executive Secretary.

†- This is the same method of day-to-day operation practiced by the Socialist Party of America and by the Communist Labor Party emerging from it — business was to be conducted by mail with the Executive Secretary sending out periodic ballots and receiving and tabulating votes on the various executive motions of the CEC. The use of this method of decision-making (in lieu of physical meetings of a committee living in close physical proximity to one another) implies a free and unfettered use of the mails, a luxury which the Communist Party of America had only momentarily.

‡- This decision would have serious consequences in April 1920, when Ruthenberg and Ferguson would bolt the party to form their own independent organization — carting thousands of dollars of party funds with them. The Ruthenberg faction would soon merge with the Communist Labor Party to establish the United Communist Party of America.

§- The small-format newsprint publication *The Communist* [Chicago] and the tabloid *The Revolutionary Age* [New York] were immediately merged into a new small-format publication called *The Communist*, also published in Chicago. Numbering of the combined publication was started anew at “Vol. 1, No. 1.” First issue of the new publication was dated Sept. 27, 1919.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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