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# Minutes of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America

## [New York — May 21-23, 1920]

A document in the Comintern Archives, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 22-26.

Present: Myers [Walter Karath], Black [=???], Bernstein [Max Cohen], Alden [=???], Ries [John Ballam], Ryan [Pascal Cosgrove], Bunte [Charles Dirba], Andrew [Nicholas Hourwich], Sasha [Rose Pastor Stokes], Braun [Latvian Federationist=???], and Marsoff [=???] of the CEC. Henry [George Ashkenuzi] and Morgan [Latvian Federationist="D. Collins"=???] of District Organizers; and Baltic [Latvian Federationist=???], Morris [Russian Federationist=J. Wilenkin], and Burba [Lithuanian Federationist=???] of Federations.

Chairman: Bernstein [Cohen].

### Order of Business.

- 1.) Minutes of previous CEC meeting;
- 2.) Minutes of Executive Council meetings;
- 3.) Report of Secretary;
- 4.) Reports of District Organizers and Federations;
- 5.) Convention Matters:
  - a. Call,
  - b. Date and Place,
  - c. Preliminary Committees;
- 6.) ~~Relations with the Minority~~: Under Org. Matters <illeg.>:
  - a. Funds, Records, Paper, Exec. Sec. Signature,
  - b. Seceding Fed.,
  - c. Neutral Fed.;
- 7.) International Relations:
  - a. Pan-American Bureau,
  - b. <illeg.> N's Investigation;

8.) Organization Matters:

- a. District Organizer (Detroit),
- b. Finance,
- c. L.F. [Language Federations?] on Coming Elections,
- d. Press,
- e. Defense;

9.) New Business.

Minutes of previous meeting, 4/15/20 to 4/19/20, approved as read with the addition that Isaacs [I.E. Ferguson] was present as a paid Party worker and left with the minority.

Minutes of Executive Council meetings of April 21, 26, and 30, and May 8, 15, and 20, were approved as read.

**Motion:** To adopt the minutes as a whole. *Carried.*

**Motion:** That in the future minutes of the [Executive] Council after approval by the Council be sent to all District Organizers, Federation Secretaries, and Members of the CEC, marked "confidential for them."

**Amendment:** Only such matter to be sent out as approved by the Council for sending out.

**Amendment to the Amendment:** To strike out "marked confidential."

*Both amendments carried, and motion carried as amended.*

**Motion:** That every member can speak 2 times, 7 minutes and 3 minutes. *Carried.*

**Motion:** In case of appeal from the chair, each side can speak 3 minutes. *Carried.*

### Report of Secretary [Dirba].

The most important work confronting the organization since the last meeting of the CEC [April 15-19, 1920] was reestablishing connections with the members in those districts in which the organizers [DOs] went with the minority [Ruthenberg group], and to get the CEC position clearly before the membership everywhere. Of the success of this work particulars will be given by the District Organizers and Federation representatives present, when they give their reports. In general it is very gratifying to point out that the Ukrainian Federation as a whole did not go with the minority, as it appeared at first, but stands solidly with the CEC. The same is true to a large extent with District I [Boston] as a whole. Jewish [Yiddish language] Federation is splitting up, showing the fallacy of neutrality in the circumstances; and serious opposition is developing in the Polish and South Slavic [Croatian] Federations against their Central Committees for aligning with the minority. Wherever both sides are adequately represented the scales are turning out way, because the whole campaign of the minority is based upon slanders and misrepresentations.

The records of the Executive Council show that the talk of the minority about arranging *one* convention of the Communist Party was only talk, that they never intended to act in such a way as to make it possible, and that from the very beginning they turned to the CLP to arrange for a convention of the minority together with them and not with the Communist Party. One of the chief tasks of this meeting of the CEC will be the making of all necessary arrangements and decisions for the regular convention of the Communist Party.

In the difficult circumstances confronting the organization we have succeeded in getting out two editions of our paper, distributing the leaflet to railroad workers, distributing to certain extent the Open Letter to Debs, and preparing for distribution a leaflet on the present offensive against Russia.

Our financial difficulties were very threatening in the beginning, since all the funds were seized by Damon [C.E. Ruthenberg], but the 4 Federations who stood by the CEC [Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian,

and Ukrainian] came forward with financial support, and we succeeded in getting back the \$1000.00 bond money, so that we are able to function pretty well. The cash statement for the month (April 20 to May 20 [1920]) shows Received \$4542.80, Paid \$3292.80, Balance \$1250.00.

Other business, besides the Convention matters, to be acted upon by this meeting of the CEC are shown in the Order of Business submitted herewith.

**Motion:** To accept the report of the Secretary including cash statement. *Carried.*

**Motion:** That in monthly cash statements the receipts be classified by districts and by Federations. *Carried.*

**Motion:** That all Party funds above \$500 shall be deposited on a joint account of the Secretary and a trustee.

**Amendment:** "Above \$1000" instead of \$500. *Carried.*

*Motion carried as amended.* Comrade Field [Secretary of Russian Federation=??] was elected as the trustee.

### Report of District Organizers and Federations.

**District I [Boston]**— Few Letts [Latvians] for the minority — only about 24 took part in electing for minority (but elected 7 electors); Russians seem OK, in Lawrence unanimously with the CEC; Polish comrades stand with the CEC; Damon [Ruthenberg] sent letter to Comrade Smith [Marion Sproule] to call district convention for electing delegates to the minority convention, but Comrade Smith [Sproule] refused to do so; the whole District Committee, with the exception of Jewish [Yiddish] representative, stands by the CEC and recognizes the organizer of the CEC; was instructed to bring up the question of Com. Smith's [Sproule's] charges against Ries [Ballam]; Lowell and Lawrence English groups will participate only in the convention called by the CEC; Haverhill — the same; CLP organizers knew about the split in the CP before it happened; Comrade Smith [Sproule] is acting now as the representative of the English comrades in the District Committee; Minority *Communist* distributed

through CLP channels.

**Motion:** To accept the report (referring the charges against Ries [Ballam] to new business). *Carried.*

**District II [New York]**— Membership in district about 3,000, hardest hit by the raids, internal confusion through “non-partisan” “Deportees Defense Committee” (CP and CLP), but now a CP Local Defense Committee is organized; all committees, District and Sub-District, stand solidly by the CEC. Of NY English groups about 60% for CEC, the rest wavering; East Side and Brooklyn Jewish groups with the CEC; Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Lettish [Latvian] solidly with the CEC. Several German groups in Queens stick with the CEC, defection in NY about one-tenth. Expect split in Polish and South Slavic [Croatian] groups. In Jersey Sub-District Polish branches are with the CEC, the whole sub-district solidly CEC. Connecticut and upper NY the same. Assistant District Organizer put into the field to relieve Comrade Bernstein [Cohen] for editorial work. Connecticut Sub-District Organizer paid man, others working without pay. Minority has at least one paid man in the field, but without success.

**Motion:** To accept the report. *Carried.*

**District IVa&b [Cleveland]**— Pittsburgh 26 branch organizers solidly with the CEC except South Slavic [Croatian], who are splitting. Cleveland — Damon’s [Ruthenberg’s] stronghold, hardest to get connections. Letts [Latvians] turning back to CEC; 30 Lithuanian groups withdrew their delegates to Damon’s [Ruthenberg’s] convention; Ukrainians wanted to stay neutral, but will probably come with CEC; Russians withdrew delegates; Germans not all lost. Cleveland 80% with CEC. Cleveland and Detroit minority conventions to be held together.

**Motion:** To accept the report. *Carried.*

**District IVc [Detroit]**— Myers [Walter Karath] reporting. District Committee with CEC. Jewish comrades also; paid on account \$120. Fisher [Leonid Belsky] got 12 Estonians, 20 Germans, 15 Armenians, and Lithuanian representative D. [=???], but Lithuanian membership will not go with him. Polish, Ukrainian, and South Slavic [Croatian] not represented. Organizers needed very much.

*Report accepted.* The question of organizer to be taken up under Organization Matters.

**District V [Chicago]**— Membership led into the split blindly, did not know anything. Letts [Latvians] solidly with the CEC. Russians will stand with CEC on principles, discontinued paying Fisher [Belsky]. Chicago Sub-District Committee voted 5 for Federation Conference resolution, 8 for neutrality, 5 not voting. Lithuanians and Ukrainians OK. Jewish [Yiddish] best branch with CEC. Polish Federation CC decided against taking part in the minority convention (4 to 3). Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine solidly with the CEC. Kansas City not with minority. Minneapolis Letts [Latvians] stand by the CEC. Funds beginning to come in. Fisher [Belsky] had spread false information that CEC had decided to disband Federations. Defense Committee with about \$1300 funds in charge of Isaacs [Ferguson]. Minority’s paper issued in Chicago. Report accepted.

**Russian Federation**— All district conventions, except Boston, stand with the CEC; Boston neutral — in principles with the CEC but against some individuals. Chicago convention not held yet, is in process of turning back to the CEC. Milwaukee, Kansas City, Kenosha, and St. Louis with the CEC. Federation CC issued ultimatum to all branches to take definite stand with the CEC or be expelled; initiated Federation Conference with resultant resolution. Kenosha denies rumors that St. [=???] got money

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### CEC Meeting, May 23, 1920.

Present: Marsoff [=???], Braun [=???], Myers [Walter Karath], Bernstein [Max Cohen], Andrew [Nicholas Hourwich], Ryan [Cosgrove], Sasha [Rose Pastor Stokes], Ries [John Ballam], Bunte [Charles Dirba], Black [=???], and Henry [Oscar Tyverovsky].

Chairman — Bernstein [Cohen].

**Motion:** To adopt the Convention Call as a whole.

**Amendment:** In paragraph 5 strike out words: “and before minority convention.”

**Amendment to the Amendment:** Strike out these words and change “by the time of our elections” to “before the date set for the beginning of our group elections.”

*Amendment to the Amendment carried.* Roll call

as follows:

**Yes** — Braun [=???], Ries [Ballam], Ryan [Cosgrove], Bunte [Dirba], Black [=???], and Andrew [Hourwich].

**No** — Myers [Karath], Marsoff [=???], Sasha [Stokes], and Bernstein [Cohen].

**Amendment:** In paragraph 7, insert “branches having 100 or more members may send representatives to the district conventions directly.”

*Lost by 9 to 1*, Bunte [Dirba] voting for, all others against.

**Amendment to the Amendment:** This insertion to read “branches having 250 or more members may send delegates to the National Convention directly.” other

*Lost.* Braun [=???] voting for, Bunte [Dirba] not voting, all others against.

**Motion:** To adopt [Convention Call] as a whole as amended. *Carried.*

**Report of committee on an agenda for the National Convention.** — Minor changes were made in the agenda as reported by the committee, and in the final form it was adopted, as follows:

***Agenda for the Second Communist Party Convention.***

**I. Reports.**

- a) CEC and National Secretary.
- b) International Relations Committee.
- c) Editorial Committee.
- d) Defense Committee.

**II. Current Fundamental problems.**

- a) Present world situation.
- b) Present situation in the United States.
- c) Communist International and Party International Relations.
- d) Our attitude toward Parliamentarism.
- e) Mass Action.
- f) Industrial Unionism and Syndicalism.
- g) Our attitude towards economic, educational, and other legal workers' organizations.
- h) Workers' Councils before, during, and after the Revolution.

**III. Revision of Manifesto and Program.**

**IV. Organizational Problems.**

- a) Communist Party Centralization and Discipline.
- b) Underground Organization and its forms.
- c) Communist Party units and CP Shop Committees.
- d) Functions of Language Federations in the Communist Movement of America.
- e) Propaganda, Agitation, and other forms of Communist Education.
  - 1) General Propaganda and Education.
  - 2) Classes for Propagandists, and Communist Study Classes.
- f) Party Press and Literature.
  - 1) Policy.
  - 2) Literary.
  - 3) Technical.
- g) Communist Unity vs. “Socialist Centrist Unity.”

**V. Revision of Constitution.**

**VI. Resolutions.**

**VII. Elections of Party Officials.**

**Motion:** To adopt the Agenda as a whole and to have it sent out together with the Call for Convention. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To print the Agenda in The Communist. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To change the order of business, to take up International Relations first and then Organizational Matters. *Carried.*

**Report of the International Relations Committee.** — Informed the Amsterdam Bureau [of the Comintern] of the split by two letters and an outline of a detailed statement to the effect that the split was along principles, began at the Left Wing [June 21-24, 1919] and Party First Convention [Sept. 1-7, 1919], between real Communists and Centrists, unity between whom could not be maintained by compromising principles — as approved in their (Amsterdam Bureau) advice to British Communists.

Sent wire to have L.F. [Louis Fraina] come back as soon as possible; inquired about Dr. N. [Nosovitsky].

Sent various statements and circulars.

As to Pan-American Bureau — Damon [Ruthenberg] and Raphael [Bittelman] dropping out, there is only one member (Andrew [Hourwich]) left, and of the alternates — Bernstein [Cohen] and Myers [Karath].

**Motion:** To accept the report. *Carried.*

**Motion:** Alternates Bernstein [Cohen] and Myers [Karath] to take their places on the Provisional Pan-American Bureau. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To instruct the Provisional Pan-American Bureau to take immediate steps to get in touch with other Communist Parties on the American Continent, especially the Communist Party of Mexico, to establish a Provisional Pan-American Bureau on a broader basis, and to call a Pan-American Conference as soon as possible. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To elect new alternates. *Carried.*

Field [=???], Morgan [=???], and Baltic [=???] elected in the order named.

L.F.'s [Louis Fraina's] theses on "The Coming Elections," proposed for discussion and action by the Communist Party, read.

**Motion:** Whereas, recommendation in the letter of L.F. [Louis Fraina] of March 10, 1920, to nominate and campaign for a presidential candidate is contradictory to Communist principles as enunciated and incorporated in the Communist Party program and tactics adopted at the First Convention of the Party; and, Whereas, besides being against a change in the program along the line suggested by Comrade L.F. [Louis Fraina], the CEC of the CP has no authority to make such a change; Therefore, be it resolved to refer L.F.'s [Louis Fraina's] letter to the coming Party Convention for consideration under the proper order of business. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To elect a committee of 3 to draw up an answer to L.F.'s [Louis Fraina's] theses to be presented to the next meeting of the Executive Council and later

to the Convention. *Carried.*

Andrew [Hourwich], Bunte [Dirba], and Bernstein [Cohen] elected.

**Motion:** To send another communication to L.F. [Louis Fraina] asking him to return in view of the coming convention as soon as possible. *Carried.*

**Report of Secretary [Dirba] on the investigation against Dr. N. [Nosovitsky].**

**Motion:** To elect a committee of 3 to investigate the case and to report back to the next CEC meeting. *Carried.*

Baltic [=???], Braun [=???], and Sasha [Stokes] elected.

**Motion:** To write the Amsterdam Bureau repudiating as entirely unauthorized the participation of Dr. N. [Nosovitsky] in the Feb. 3-8 [1920] Conference of the Bureau in the name of the Communist Party of America. *Carried unanimously.*

**Motion:** To request the Bureau to publish our protest in the next issue of their Bulletin. *Carried.*

**Motion:** That a copy of our letter to the Bureau be sent to L.F. [Louis Fraina] with additional letter protesting against, and severely censuring him for bringing Dr. N. [Nosovitsky] to the Bureau Conference and vouching for him while he knew that grave accusations and suspicions existed in the Party against Dr. N. [Nosovitsky]. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To print in The Communist our letter to the Amsterdam Bureau on this question. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To take up the charges against Ries [Ballam]. *Carried.*

Comrade Ries [Ballam] made a statement denying that he ever had asked any money from Comrade Smith [Marion Sproule] as District Organizer and under the pretext that the District had been assessed by the CEC.

Comrade Andrew [Hourwich] stated that he got the money from Comrade Smith [Sproule] without any

further representations, and that he gave receipt for it to the New England Defense Council.

Comrade Ryan [Cosgrove] stated that Comrade Smith [Sproule] had been acting as the District Organizer very soon after February 1st [1920], not receiving any salary from the Defense Conference, and that Comrade Smith [Sproule] has reported that the money was loaned from three comrades in Lawrence with the understanding that it would be returned by the Party.

Then Comrade Andrew [Hourwich] stated that the money was not taken by official action or on any such representation, that it has been all used up on preliminary preparations, of which he has given account to the Executive Council, and that, if the return of the money is demanded, all efforts will be made to return it as soon as possible.

**Motion:** Having heard Comrade Ries' [Ballam's] statement denying the charges that he had asked for the money as an assessment against District I [Boston], and in view of the fact that Comrade Smith [Sproule] asked for and accepted a receipt from Andrew [Hourwich] in the name of the New England Defence Conference, we consider the charges against Comrade Ries [Ballam] unfounded, and accordingly exonerate him.

**Motion:** To elect a committee of 3 to investigate the charges and to report to the Executive Council.

The Secretary [Dirba] stated that all documents connected with the charges are held by former Executive Secretary Damon [Ruthenberg], and that the investigation started by the CEC previously was interrupted by the split, and that it was in the interests of everybody concerned to reopen it again and finish along the line it was started.

*The motion was carried,* and Ryan [Cosgrove], Morgan [=???], and Bunte [Dirba] elected.

Secretary [Dirba] reported that Detroit was still without a regular District Organizer.

**Motion:** To appoint a District Organizer for Detroit. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To strike out of the order of business the heading "Relations with the Minority" and put the questions under it under "Organization Matters." *Carried.*

Andrew [Hourwich] took the place of Bernstein [Cohen] as chairman.

**Motion:** To take up the question of seceding and neutral Federations. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To appoint a provisional Central Executive Committee to organize the majority groups of the Jewish Federation, and to issue the statement to membership and other important communications in Jewish [Yiddish].

**Amendment:** To strike out "Central Executive."

*Carried.*

Sasha [Stokes] took the place of Andrew [Hourwich] as chairman.

*Motion carried as amended.*

**Motion:** To instruct that provisional committee to call as soon as possible, and if they find it practical, a convention of all those branches, groups, or members of the former Jewish Federation who still reaffirm their affiliation with the Party as represented by its CEC. *Carried.*

**Motion:** The provisional committee words under the supervision and control of the CEC of the Party. *Carried.*

The following comrades were elected to the committee: L. [=???], W. [=???], K. [=???], M. [=???], and Z. [=???].

**Motion:** Members of this provisional committee cannot be members of any official body of the former Jewish Federation at the same time; and if they are now, they should immediately upon acceptance of this election withdraw. *Carried.*

**Motion:** That we take immediate steps to have all Party circulars pertaining to the split translated and issued in the languages of all seceding Federations. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To appoint Polish, South Slavic [Croatian], and German organizers. *Carried.*

**Motion:** To refer the appointments to the Execu-

tive Council. *Carried.*

***Motion:*** That we instruct Executive Council to issue and publish a resolution branding former Executive Secretary Damon [Ruthenberg] for all his treacherous acts against the Party — for his seizure of Party funds and records, for continuing to sign as Executive Secretary without any authorization, for issuing his paper under Party name and seal, etc. *Carried.*

***Motion:*** That the next meeting of the Central Executive Committee be held beginning 0/0/20.† *Carried.*

***Motion:*** To reconsider motion on the beginning of group elections. *Carried.*

***Motion:*** Group elections to begin 0/N/20. *Carried.*

***Motion:*** To adjourn. *Carried.*

*D. Bunte [Charles Dirba],*  
Act. Sec.

†— The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee mentioned in the archives took place on June 12, 1920. This may have been a one day extraordinary session, however; no minutes are extant. The next regular monthly meeting of the CEC appears to have begun on June 19, 1920.

***Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.***  
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