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# Letter to the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America in New York from the Central Executive Committee of the United Communist Party in New York, December 12, 1920.

A document in the DoJ/BoI Investigative Files, NARA M-1085, reel 940, document 295.

Dec. 12, 1920.

To the Central Executive Committee,  
Communist Party of America.

Comrades:

We have analyzed your statement of membership given to our Unity Committee and have made an investigation of your membership claims in each district. This shows that your report is utterly unreliable, contains many discrepancies and contradictions, and could not by any stretch of imagination be considered as any proof whatever of your actual functioning membership.

Your method of recording dues, which you have inherited from the old Socialist Party, is a very poor guide to actual membership, since it does not show the dues paid by individual members but merely the wholesale purchases of dues stamps made by branch organizers.† The mere fact that a branch organizer buys

a supply of dues stamps is no proof whatever that the individual members of the branch pay dues, least of all that they pay the amount given for any certain months. The branch may keep a supply of stamps on hand to last for all of next year as far as the records show, and the dues stamps may never reach the individual members at all.

In the United Communist Party no subdivision “buys” dues stamps. Not a cent can be recorded as dues until the individual member has actually paid the dues into the Party treasury.

Our investigation shows that your entire statement of membership bears on its very face the evidence of gross manipulations. We find that in many places your membership is not half of what you claim, and that in others you count as members of the CP many members of social and legal organizations. These are only nominally divided into groups and take no part in underground communist activity. Their only relation to the CP is that a portion of their receipts is automatically set aside for the purchase of dues stamps.

†- This entire issue represents the distilled essence of obfuscation — a means for the UCP to sabotage and sink any forthcoming joint unity convention based upon actual paid membership. The count of monthly dues stamps sold had always been, dating back to the earliest days of the Socialist Labor Party, the means by which radical membership organizations had determined their size. Certainly there are discrepancies in sales from month to month under this system, a function of large block purchases of stamps by intermediaries between individual members and the national office, be they federation offices, district organizers, state organizations, or what have you. However, over time these fluctuating sales average out to generate as accurate a measure of organizational size as can be generated. The terms of the forthcoming convention addressed this monthly fluctuation by taking into account dues stamp sales over a *four month period already completed*. The only issue should have been whether the CPA was providing true or falsified sales statistics — not the merits or relative lack thereof of the dues stamp system, which had been in existence in America for nearly half a century.

It should be noted that the UCP’s innovative — some might say “bizarre” — system of calculating membership based upon dollars paid by district organizers to the National Office without regard to physical stamps sold and cancelled, is a system clearly vulnerable to mischievous manipulation than the stamp system, whatever its weaknesses. Creative bookkeeping might have easily moved revenue from some other source to “dues revenue” with the stroke of a pen, thus magically “boosting” the membership count.

Again, your official statement claims 139 non-federation members. Your table of dues payments shows that 125 paid dues for July and August and only 117 for September and October, making an average of 121. In spite of this little discrepancy these figures bear the stamp of truthfulness, a quality that can certainly not be credited to your federation membership statement.

In spite of your modest claim of 6,013 members for your Lithuanian Federation, your report actually credits you with an average membership of 4,951 in this federation for July and August [1920].† A similar surprise is revealed by an analysis of your report of Russian, Ukrainian, and Lettish [Latvian] membership. A careful study of your statement shows an alleged membership of 10,137 for July and August at the 20¢ rate and an average of only 4,792 for September and October at the 40¢ rate, while the average for July and August becomes 9,301, the bulk of whose dues are booked as paid NOT IN THE MONTHS TO WHICH THEY ARE CREDITED BUT IN THE MONTH OF OCTOBER, AFTER THE NEWS OF THE ORDER FOR UNITY HAD ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY FROM MOSCOW.

We of course appreciate the fact that by the simple expedient of crediting October receipts as dues paid for July and August at the old 20 cent rate you achieve just double the membership as you would by putting it down for October at the 40 cent rate now in force. But do you really expect us to accept such figures just because they appear on the official books of your party?

The statement furnished by the UCP presents no such riddles. During the months of July, August,

September, and October [1920] the UCP received for dues \$12,004.70, while the CP statement for the same period shows \$6,350.30 entered as dues receipts.‡ The progress of the UCP is reflected in a steady increase of dues received from month to month. The evidence of manipulation by the CP is plainly visible in the miraculous increase of alleged dues receipts, coupled with an APPARENT DECREASE IN MEMBERSHIP. These facts are plainly brought out by the following comparison of the two statements month by month.

	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>
<i>UCP dues received</i>	\$2130.40	2468.75	3153.15	4245.40
<i>CPA dues received</i>	\$ 609.60	773.40	1570.40	3396.90
<i>These CP dues are so credited that the average membership becomes for July and August</i>	10,137		3,867	5,743

It may be argued that the amazing increase of the October dues receipts is due to the increased dues rate. But your report shows that \$1874.50 for the October receipts are booked at the rate of 20 cents, that is, for July and August. This is 33% higher than the receipts of the months of July and August combined. Is it an injustice to suppose that the news from Moscow about unity has had its effect on the October report?

The statements from our district and group organizers who are in closest touch with your membership are unanimous to the effect that you have only a fraction of the membership that you claim in the respective localities. We already have on hand sufficient

†- How one defines a member is a matter of some debate — there are always a certain percentage of active participants in a membership organization who are in temporary dues arrears, for example. Still others might be “dead” names — former participants who had moved or quit, decidedly less worthy of being included in any count. All this is academic, the citation of either of these membership numbers for the Lithuanian Federation is pure obfuscation: at issue was the *average actually paid membership* for July-October 1920. Neither the higher nor the lower of the numbers cited here by Wagenknecht are even remotely close to the figure for “dues actually paid” by Lithuanian Federationist in July and August 1920, as ultimately reported by CPA Executive Secretary Charles Dirba to the May 1921 Unity Convention — these being 2,380 and 744, respectively. For the July-Oct. 1920 period as a whole, the Lithuanian Federation averaged 3,017 and the entire CPA averaged 7,509 [see: RTsKhIDNI f. 515, op. 1, d. 50, l. 79, available as a downloadable document “Membership Series by Federation for the (old) Communist Party of America, July 1920 to Jan. 1921” from [www.marxisthistory.org](http://www.marxisthistory.org)]. When it is remembered that the CPA in reality only claimed an actually paid membership of 7,552 for the period in question as the basis for delegate apportionment, the game being played by Wagenknecht and the UCP become clear.

‡- This is pure gibberish once again. As was very well known to the UCP, under the CPA’s dues system language federations collected organizational dues from the membership of the underground groups and transmitted *a portion* to the National Office, retaining the balance for their own operations.

evidence to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that your membership claims are not in accordance with the facts, and that the bona fide underground membership of the United Communist Party far outnumbered that of the CP.†

We accepted the mandate of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to enter into a unity convention with representation proportioned upon “an honest count of bona fide underground membership,” and stand ready now to act upon that mandate.‡ But your statement provides absolutely no basis for ascertaining the actual membership of the CP organized and functioning in underground groups. Therefore we have unanimously decided that it can not be accepted.

Central Executive Committee,  
United Communist Party.

[Alfred Wagenknecht],  
Executive Secretary.

†- A farcically incorrect assertion, as copious archival evidence proves conclusively. For the July-Oct. 1920 period in question the UCP had a true “actually paid membership” on the short side of 4,500; the old CPA right around 7,500.

‡- A gross misrepresentation of reality. The UCP had no intention whatsoever of fulfilling this mandate given the less than 40% share of delegates to which it would have been entitled by its actually paid membership for the period in question, as the red herring issues raised in this document demonstrate.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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