

Conference of the Opposition Communists

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interest was manifested in the report on this question and an earnest discussion followed it. Here a great progress was reflected. The tendencies toward organization fetishism in regard to the Stalinist apparatus, the "legalistic" attitude toward the rules of the usurping bureaucrats, which affected our ranks in the beginning, had been completely overcome. Not a single voice was raised in favor of holding back our necessary organization development on this score. On the other hand, there were signs of a reaction to the other extreme. The unbounded provocations of the subsidized corruptionists had led some comrades, who incorrectly identified them with the Party, to think a complete break with the latter.

The discussion clarified this question and resulted in the unanimous decision to organize our forces for independent activity while maintaining our position as a faction of the Party and strengthening our bonds with its proletarian elements. This latter is necessary in order to assist their inevitable development toward the path of the Opposition which is the only possible outcome of the present factional impasse in the Party. The Oppositionists must have confidence in such a development and work for it. That means to keep contact with the party ranks. We were the first to grasp the significance of the world issues shaking the Comintern and to raise the banner of the International Opposition, but we will not be the last. The struggle for the consolidation of a new grouping in the party on our Platform must go hand in hand with the development of our organization and the recruitment of new revolutionary workers outside the Party ranks. The Conference decided unanimously for this policy.

A large percentage of the delegates were representatives of the Communist Youth. This was a proper reflection of the composition of the ranks of the Opposition movement, as a whole. The Youth are the most free from bureaucratic cynicism and corruption and the most responsive to revolutionary ideas. A large number of the foremost young Communists of the United States and Canada have already rallied to our banner—far more proportionally than the adult party members—and this process is only beginning. The letter from comrade Trotsky which placed the greatest emphasis on the struggle for the proletarian youth met with the warmest approval of the Conference.

Disputed Questions

Conflicting opinions were revealed in the discussions mainly on the Labor Party and on the Slogan of the Right of Self Determination for the Negroes. The delegates who opposed the formulation of the Platform on the Labor Party showed a number of differences and shadings ranging from a virtual "opposition in principle" to the position that it would be correct for us to participate in a mass labor party if it should be formed, but wrong to work for its formation. The gross errors of the Party and the Comintern on this question, which have never been properly corrected or explained, have undoubtedly produced a vast confusion and skepticism about the labor party throughout the ranks of the American Communists. There is less of it in the Opposition than in the Party as a whole. Such as exists among us was brought out more clearly and fully only because the discussion was open and free at our Conference and there was no reason for anyone to conceal his opinions or doubts.

It was the opinion of the majority that, although it certainly is not a pressing question of the moment, the labor party question has a great importance for the future when the radicalization of the workers will begin to seek political expression. Therefore it is imperative to have a clear and definite stand on it. A misjudgment of the probable line of development of the American workers or a sectarian doctrine which would prevent us from approaching and influencing new upward movements might have the most serious consequences later on. The formulation of the Platform on the

Perspective of a Labor Party was adopted by a majority after a thorough discussion.

Following a discussion of the disputed section of the Platform on the Slogan of the Right of Self Determination for the Negroes it was decided to defer final action until more exhaustive material on the subject can be assembled and made available for discussion in the groups. In view of the profound importance of this question and the manifest insufficiency of informative material and discussion pertaining to it, this decision to defer final action was undoubtedly correct.

General Summary

The National Conference, held under such adverse conditions and with such gratifying results, made a profound impression upon all who took part in it. Quiet and matter-of-fact, in glaring contrast to the bombast and ballyhoo of so many "Conferences" which have made a noise and left no trace, our gathering generated an enthusiasm which was real and genuine. The pledging of quotas for the support of The Militant from the various delegations, which preceded the singing of the International at the close of the last session, was a sign of that kind of enthusiasm which expresses itself in deeds. Such enthusiasm and conviction are our capital for the future.

The Conference was a picture of the best representatives of American Communism. Side by side with the young fighters, many of them at the beginning of their revolutionary activity and attending a National gathering for the first time, were not a few veterans of the movement whose faces have been familiar at all important meetings of the party since its foundation. We saw there the forces of the Communist vanguard again assembling and taking shape on a National scale, and it was a heartening sight. The Opposition and its Platform are on the march in America. That which was merely an idea advocated by a few individuals in the Central Committee a brief seven months ago has become a National movement taking on organization form and functions. It has its own momentum. It will go forward in spite of all.

The characterless bureaucrats who cannot understand how anyone can or should swim against the stream talked a great deal about the early collapse of the Opposition movement and, no doubt, really expected a flood of "capitulations" after the first few engagements. The delegations were the answer to them. They showed our ranks unshaken and more closely united than ever. Our forces have grown, slowly, but steadily, since the beginning of the fight.

A significant aspect of the Conference was the appearance of a true collective leadership, capable of harmonious collaboration and division of labor and bound together by a common standpoint on all important questions. The close unity of the leadership with the Opposition movement as a whole was illustrated by the conscious and deliberate support given to all its proposals by the Conference delegates and by the unanimous election of the National Committee. A nucleus of leadership evolving by these processes in the heat of struggle will have an organic character. It will have a real authority and will be able to exert a unifying influence on the movement. It needs no appointment by cablegram and cannot be removed that way.

The political and organization tasks of the Opposition are determined basically by the situation of the Russian revolution and the Comintern. Representing the stream of genuine proletarian internationalism, the Communist Opposition equally rejects the bureaucratic caricature of internationalism by the subsidized Stalin consulates, and the reaction to social-democratic national-narrowness of the Right Wing Brandler groups. The course of the Russian revolution, which has now reached a turning point, is fateful for the international class struggle. The final victory of socialism in the Soviet Union, in the economic as well as military sense, can only be assured by the international revolution. In the interval only the platform of the Russian Opposition can strengthen the socialist as against the capitalist

and restoration elements in the Union.

The regime in the Russian Party decides the regime in the International and the present crisis in the Comintern is due to the fact that opportunism and bureaucratism have entered into the leadership of the C.P.S.U., and resulted in the general demoralization of the sections and the expulsion of the Left Wing. The Opposition refuses to identify the International with the Stalin hierarchy. It is the Opposition which in reality represents the historic line of the Third International, for the leadership of which it will struggle both inside and outside the party. The victorious outcome of this struggle depends not only on the sharpening class struggle in the U.S.S.R., in the capitalist world and the Orient, but on the active and organized intervention of the Left Communist Opposition.

The Conference turned a corner in the struggle of the American regiment of World-Bolshevism and opened up a new stage of its development. It faced its problems, its difficulties and its prospects realistically and showed a collective will to battle onward to victory. This victory will come all the sooner if the members of the Communist Opposition promptly carry out the decisions of the National Conference to organize their forces more cohesively, develop a firmer and more conscious discipline and work with increased energy to enlist new recruits under our banner, which is the banner of International Communism.

Help the Imprisoned Bolshevik-Leninists!

We must start a systematic and unremitting campaign of struggle to improve the conditions of the exiled and arrested Bolshevik-Leninists. The number of the latter now exceeds 2,000. They are confined in prison under foul conditions: no light (the blinds on the windows are almost tight shut), damp rooms in which they crowd the prisoners to the extreme limit, bad food, extraordinary brutal treatment. It is still worse in the Tobolsk hard labor prison (Political-Solitary). It is the same as it was in the time of Dostoevsky's "House of the Dead". In this prison there are only Bolshevik-Leninists. They have released the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. They have introduced military sentries. The cells are locked. No interviews are allowed. The Mensheviks had a common dining table, a common kitchen, free interviews, etc. Our comrades are deprived of all this. Unquestionably the powers have adopted a policy of physical extermination of the Bolshevik-Leninists. Relations have grown very tense. Any moment you can expect not only physical conflicts, hunger strikes (which have no end) but . . . yes, the firing squads. Fifteen men from the prison personnel of the Tobolsk Political Solitary refused to apply repressive measures to Bolsheviks; they were replaced by guards specially sent from Moscow. The need among the families of the arrested is enormous, simply monstrous. The families of the prisoners and exiled remaining at liberty are literally starving. We haven't our own International Labor Defense. We must collect money abroad. We must fight for the right to have our legal International Workers' Defense. We must pillory the contemporary agents of the Soviet power, the Party leaders, who are responsible for these crimes. Correspondence from Tomsk, Sterdlovsk tells of whole crowds driven into the hard labor prison, Naryn, where they are sending Oppositionists, taking them from the various places of exile. Among the exiled and imprisoned there are heroes of the October Revolution and Civil War decorated with the Order of the Red Banner (Dreitzer, Gaievsky, Kavtaradze, Enukidze and many others). Among those imprisoned in a hard labor prison is Budu Mdivani, the old Bolshevik who served time under the czar, was president of the Soviet of People's Commissars of Georgia under Lenin and head of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Paris, fifty-three years old.

T. T.

Moscow, March 20, 1929.