

A Letter on the Capitulators

Dear Friend:

The latest press despatches tell of a journey of Preobrazhensky to Moscow for negotiations with the Central Committee. There is not the slightest doubt that these capitulators and compromisers of the third draft will be made fools of. Of what participation in the Party different from that of Zinoviev are they dreaming? Branded as a capitulator, Zinoviev sits in silence, afraid to move, not knowing what to expect. We, meanwhile, are actively, though slowly, preparing the future, forming the cadres of young Bolsheviks. What position between us and the Zinovievists do the new capitulators expect to occupy? It is doubtful if they themselves have any clear idea of that. They have the hope that Yaroslavsky will purge their brains, after which they will have to crawl out of the swamp onto a clean spot, by no means increasing their authority.

I. They assert that the disagreements have almost disappeared. How do they explain the rabid character of the repressions? Exile, and hard-labor prisons for Bolsheviks in the absence of very deep and irreconcilable disagreements, could only be the result of a completely unprincipled bureaucratic banditism. That is just the policy of the Stalinists, if you take the point of view of Radek and others. But in that case, how do they dare murmur of a union with these political bandits who, without grounds in principle, are imprisoning our comrades in hard-labor prisons condemning them to banishment, and sometimes to death?

WHAT CAPITULATION MEANS.

We never characterized the Stalinists so mercilessly and annihilatingly as Radek does, against his will, as a result of the mere fact that he has got lost in this forest of three trees, crawls out, falls again, scrambles away, tries to get up, and falls down again. We have thought, and we still think, that the Stalinists are not unthinking political bandits, for they have profound and principled reasons for their merciless persecution of us. It is a poor statesman who takes a political line in short fragments; not asking himself what elements are carrying out that line and for what reasons. Having got into an economic blind alley, the Stalinist cadres, gritting their teeth, are carrying out a left zig-zag, which by force of circumstances and of the struggle itself has carried them much farther to the left than they wished. Nine-tenths of those cadres are dreaming of getting back at the first opportunity upon a more "healthy", "normal", "national" line, and hate us mortally exactly because by our uncompromising attitude we prevent their doing it. A capitulation of the Opposition would mean: a) condemning ourselves to a Zinovievist vegetable existence — nature knows no more shameful thing, and b) an immediate swerving of the Stalinists to the right.

II. The question of the Comintern does not in the least interest the advocates of capitulation "in one country". The national-socialistic program of the Comintern worries them very little. They reconcile themselves with light hearts to the policy of adventurism which, in Berlin as in Canton, is designed to restore the revolutionary reputation of Centrism. Meanwhile the continued persecution of the Opposition is hopelessly decomposing the cadres of the Comintern. Everything is being trampled and defiled by the boot of bureaucratism. How shall we heal this affliction? It is quite simple: capitulate before that same boot!

III. A revolution is a mighty devourer of people. In the older generation there is an immense percentage of devastated souls among the ruling majority — and no small percentage among the Opposition. The reaction is in full course in the Party and the Comintern, reflecting the general swing of class forces on a world scale. In such circumstances withdrawals and capitulations inevitably stand on the order of the day. Bolshevism from 1907 to 1910, and again from 1914 to 1917, passed through a whole series of such departures, splittings off groupings and individual capitulations. Only by way of such self-cleansings and self-clari-fications could it have grown and strengthened for the October victory. We are not in the least frightened by the withdrawal of comrades, even those with the most "respected" names. By the example of their waverings we will teach steadfastness to the young.

THE USE OF THE BOURGEOIS PRESS.

IV. What a pitiful and cowardly falsity is the "Yes-yes" of these new capitulators to Yaroslavsky and company, in regard to the impermissibility of employing the bourgeois press. Was it necessary to

stoop to such triviality? Through T. A. S. S. (the official press agency of the Soviet Union. — Ed.) the Stalinists are propagating in the bourgeois press of the whole world a monstrous lie and slander against us, gradually preparing a justification for measures of blood repression. And we must not dare tell the truth about ourselves in that same press!!! The Stalinists dicker with the bourgeois police and with the reactionary diplomats to prevent our admission into one country. They compel the Norwegian Communists together with the reaction to destroy the right of asylum. They compel the official Communist press to accompany this reactionary police work with wild persecution and slander, which creeps into the pages of the whole bourgeois press. And we must modestly and sweetly keep silent, obedient to a resolution of the year 1905 which was adapted to the conditions of a revolutionary Party, and not to the reactionary work of a Thermidorian bureaucracy attacking us in sacred union with the

capitalist police of all Europe!

One thing is clear: we have the perspective before us of long stubborn struggle and work of education. We must renew our ranks. Let those withdraw who are not strong enough for this work. Some of them, having wandered and wavered, will come back to us. And we by then will be stronger. We must prepare to replace them in the spirit of adamant Bolshevik irreconcilability. Along with the work among the masses on the basis of our platform, we must deepen our work of educating the youth, not sparing our strength even to win one person. We need a deepened propaganda on a world scale. Every serious Bolshevik ought to have around him several young people, leading them from day to day into the sphere of the fundamental questions of Marxism and the international revolution.

Constantinople, May 23, 1929.

L. D. TROTSKY.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: A letter just received from comrade Trotsky on "Radek and the Opposition", dealing also with the reply of comrade Trotsky written in exile at Alma-Ata to the thesis of Radek.

THE PROGRESSIVES MEET

This "Conference for Progressive Labor Action" was more a symptom of the processes at work than an event of importance in itself. It will not shake the throne of a single king of trade union reaction or even upset the swivel chair of any of its lower mercenaries. Nevertheless it has an importance for those who examine the happenings of today in the light of the dynamic forces making for future changes — that is to say, for the Marxists. Not even a confab of progressive windjammers happens without cause. The development of the new progressive movement is following the line of the analysis and forecast of our Platform just as precisely as it is confuting the Party Convention theses of both groups of the squabbling bureaucrats which were concerned only with the attempt to adapt themselves to the latest zig-zag of Stalin Centrism in the Comintern rather than with an analysis of the actualities of the American movement and inferences proceeding from such an analysis.

The holding of the progressive conference and the attempt to give the movement a national form and an organizing center are evidence that the half-conscious revolt in the labor ranks against the paralyzing rule of the black reactionaries is growing. The conference was above all an expression of this movement from below. This is the outstanding fact, and those who do not understand it, who try to dispose of the whole affair with sophomoric denunciation and childish misrepresentation — the Daily Worker's contribution — will never be able to understand anything. First of all it is necessary to see and understand the movement from below and then seek the tactic whereby its development along the line of effective struggle and revolutionary understanding may be facilitated.

SOCIALISTS AT THE CONFERENCE

The Socialists appeared at the conference as the directing element — discreetly behind the scenes for the most part, it is true, but more or less in charge of things and working like a well organized steering committee whenever the proceedings lagged or the pre-arranged program encountered obstacles. This also is an important fact. The emergence of those heroes with paper swords in their hands on the field against Green, Woll and Company, after years of skulking subservience in their train, represents a change in the appearance of things. They are being blown to the front by the wind of a new movement in the workers' ranks. The stupid tactics of the Communist Party only clear the way for them and thereby help to prevent the new movement from developing its real implications of struggle. The "new line" of the socialists serves to strengthen their position just as the "new line" of the Communists serves to weaken and isolate them. These simple and obvious facts stand out above a bale of theses.

The "Conference for Progressive Labor Action" is not ahead of the workers' movement it seeks to represent but behind it. The movement has impulses toward militancy. These leaders in the main dampen this spirit and hold back the struggles. The atmosphere of their conferences was thick with caution, timidity and fear. The solemn warning of Norman Thomas that the demand for a labor party is "too radical for the labor men" although he himself of course is heartily in favor of it, — a sentiment echoed by his socialist confreres — is an indication of the rabbit-like boldness of these latter-day warriors against reaction.

ROLE OF PROGRESSIVE LEADERS.

They aim to strike a balance between the awakening workers and the A. F. L. officialdom which will reconcile their co-existence and leave a dignified place for themselves as "leaders" of a sort. It is their policy to be radical enough in talk to catch the sentiment of the discontented worker, and to be conservative and cowardly enough in action to dodge any real clash with the reactionaries. The removal of Calhoun, himself a pink-hued liberal confusionist, from the teaching staff of Brookwood College, on the heels of the conference, was meant to mollify Woll and Green and convince them that the Muste progressives do not really mean to fight them.

In all this the progressives run true to form. Such contradiction between words and deeds, such confusion and cowardice, are the very essence of "progressivism" in its leading staff. All this should be known in advance and taken for granted by Communists. It is only those who have placed too much confidence in it who will suffer from disappoint-

But what about the movement they express which is indubitably a growing one? — this is the question. How can it be broadened and developed, how can it be steered away from reformist stultification into the path of class struggle and the influence of the revolutionaries expanded? In our opinion it would be a grave error for the revolutionaries to stand aloof from it. As the movement takes shape locally and in separate unions the Communists should penetrate it and force it to the left. The fact that the progressive leaders do not want this "help" and that the socialist party elements especially will try by all means to prevent it, is no serious argument against such a tactic. This attitude of the progressive leaders only facilitates the exposure of their fraudulent claims before the workers and helps to prepare the ground for the consolidation of a more aggressive leadership and the strengthening of the position of the revolutionary elements.

FALSE TACTICS OF THE PARTY.

Their game is only aided by the tactic of barking at the movement from the sidelines of isolation. Such a course which the Party is now following is not only wrong and futile from a tactical standpoint. It is a direct repudiation of the tactics elaborated by the Second, Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International and applied in practice throughout the years of its growth and progress.

Unfortunately the Official Communist Party is on this false path today. Our Party, like the other sections of the C. I., is being forced into all kinds of ultra-left idiocies to "make good" for the crimes of Stalin opportunism in the Anglo-Russian Committee and the menshevik policy in the Chinese revolution. The present policy of "having nothing to do with the progressives" is just as wrong as the game of subordinating everything to them and supporting them without criticism which was played until a short time ago. The rabid and senseless leftism of today resulted from the opportunism of yesterday and will be followed tomorrow by another swing to the right. This is Stalinist Politics.

The catastrophic results of the current infantism are already foreshadowed in the growing isolation of the Party and the weakening of its position. The entire movement of radical labor will suffer for this policy, perhaps for years to come. The policy of the Party is directly against the interests of the unfolding workers' movement. The trend of events will make this all too clear as it is already clear to those who apply the criteria of Leninist tactics.

PLAIN TALK NEEDED.

Silence in the face of these enormous errors, or lackey-like acquiescence in them has nothing in common with revolutionary duty. Such an attitude befits only religious cretins who register approval of all decrees from "above" automatically and in advance, or soul-less place-hunters on the make. Fewer decrees, fewer hypocritical endorsements and confessions, less automatic hand raising; more honest thought and plain outspoken talk — this is what the Communist movement and the whole radical workers' movement of America needs.

It is now time to check the new line of phrasemongering leftism against experience and draw the balance against it. The revolutionary proletarian wing of the Party must foresee the cumulative harm which a persistence in this course will bring and begin now a stubborn and determined fight to change it. An honest, conscientious fight for Leninist policy on a single important question, such as the trade union question, will inevitably lead its protagonists into the general communist struggle against the whole regime of bureaucratic centrism. The broader the scope of this fight and the swifter its tempo the sooner will the errors be corrected and the Communist ranks be united on the line of Leninism.

NOTE

The publication of the report sent in by Comrade Konikov of the shoe strike situation in Boston has been unavoidably delayed on account of the conference material. Comrade Celia Cooperstein is active on the Executive Strike Committee. Comrade I. Cooperstein and Comrade Kleinfeld of Chelsea have been active as pickets. The Stalinists have followed their usual tactics of first trying to get me control of the movement and when they fail to disrupt it, follow in next issue.

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