

The Crisis in the Communist Party

By James P. Cannon

The crisis in the American Communist movement is a part of the crisis in the International which has been maturing over a period of years. The Communist movement throughout the world is paying, in disintegration and defeat, for the false leadership of Stalin Centrism and the mechanical extermination of the Leninist wing.

The American Party was slow to manifest open reactions to the International crisis, and particularly slow to develop a conscious participation in the world struggle over the basic questions which lie at the bottom of the crisis, but it is catching up now with devastating speed. And what we see now is only a beginning. Greater storms are ahead. The life of the movement is at stake. Only those who rouse themselves to think and act can play the part of Communist soldiers now and in the days ahead. Theological worshippers of formulae handled down from above, automatic hand raisers, are worse than useless. The cult of "corpse obedience" serves only the bureaucratic destroyers and holds back the awakening of the movement and its regeneration.

It is necessary first of all to tear aside the curtain of falsehood, deception and trickery behind which the pitiful subsidized agents of American Stalinism try to conceal the real state of affairs from the party. The spurious "enlightenment campaign" is such a curtain. It talks of discussion of the issues—and prohibits it by organization measures and threats. It crusades against factionalism—under the direction of the most unprincipled and corrupted faction mongers. It cries about the unity of the party—and plunges the party headlong into a new split, the second in less than a year. The "enlightenment campaign" is a bare-faced fraud, an insult to the party and a target for the ridicule of its enemies.

Contempt for the Communist rank and file is a characteristic of Stalinism which rules by apparatus compulsion and corrupts by subsidy. Take the case of Lovestone. For years the Stalin E. C. C. I. supported him in his criminal factionalism; time and time again it interfered to strengthen his control of the party. Foster was his comrade-in-arms in the expulsion of the Opposition Communists. Stachel, Bedacht & Co. were his partners in every perfidious faction manoeuvre, assuring the Party that he represented the line of the Communist International. With the help of the E. C. C. I. and with the help of Stachel, Bedacht and Weinstone he gained the support of 90 per cent of the delegates at the Party Convention a few months ago. Now, out of a clear sky, without Lovestone having changed his character or his actions in the slightest detail, he is expelled from the Party as an opportunist and renegade. And Stachel, Bedacht and Weinstone conduct a campaign to "enlighten" the party about the matter; explaining, however, that they, like Saul of Tarsus, suddenly saw the light and can now be trusted safely.

THE STALINISTS AND THE RIGHT WING

Why should anyone be surprised if the enemies of Communism laugh and if the party members and sympathetic workers fall away in bewilderment and disgust? When we spoke at the December Plenum of the Central Executive Committee about the growth of the right wing in the Russian Party and the crisis in the Right-Center Bloc, we were accused of scandal mongering and "speculation". Pepper, who made the report against us, denied the existence of any differences between Stalin and Bucharin, and Foster nodded approval of the statement. Now the Party, which was left in ignorance of all the developments, is blandly informed that Lovestone is aligned with the Russian and International right wing and therefore must be expelled.

The Party member who takes official pronouncements on faith does not understand this rigamarole—and for a good reason. The Right-Center Bloc (Stalin-Rykov-Bucharin) which has ruled the International through the six-year war against "Trotskyism" has conspired all the time to prevent the Communist workers from knowing the truth about the conflict within it. Up to the present moment the identity of the leaders of the right wing (Rykov-Bucharin-Tomsky) has not been disclosed in the official Party press, although everyone knows it except the "loyal" Party member who is supposed to know everything. The question of the right wing in the Russian Party is indeed a burning question of the International movement; the fate of the Russian Revolution, of the Comintern and, consequently, of our Party is bound up with it. But the "enlightenment campaign" only obscures and muddles the great issue, keeps the membership from understanding it and thus strengthens the right wing and Lovestone, its outstanding American representative.

The new manoeuvre of Stalin Centrism which brands Lovestone as an opportunist and expels him from the Party—seven months after he expelled us—cannot change the position of the Communist Opposition on any of the principle questions, above all on the question of the right wing. It was the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Russian Party—the "Trotskyists"—who analyzed its social basis and exposed its Thermidorian character. The Opposition alone wages a real struggle against it in defense of the Proletarian Dictatorship. The present sham battle of the Centrists against the right wing is carried out only under the whip of the Opposition.

The newly appointed leadership of the Party, in order to create confusion, spreads rumors of a combination between the Opposition Communists and the Lovestone faction. Weinstone "predicts" such an eventuality in his article in the Daily Worker. These people who themselves change with every wind and every cablegram from Moscow do not understand a struggle on principle lines. The Weinstones and Fos-

terstone in every infamous practice against loyal Communists, who were his accomplices in gangsterism, in burglary and slander, make this accusation with ill grace.

THE OPPOSITION AND THE RIGHT WING

There can be no combination of the Communist Opposition with the Lovestone faction. A serious discussion in which the political issues are elucidated will make this absolutely clear. When we speak of the Lovestone faction in this sense it goes without saying that we refer to the leaders only and not to the honest Communist workers who have been deceived by them with the help of the E. C. C. I. Many of these are already finding their way to our platform and will be among its staunchest defenders.

The right wing of the Russian Party, with which Lovestone is unquestionably connected, is the representative of the class forces in the Soviet Union which are driving the restoration of capitalism. This fact, now openly proclaimed by the Stalinists, was also the case when it was in one bloc with Stalin to exterminate the Leninist wing of the Party, and its bloodthirsty campaign against the "Trotskyists" was the clearest expression of its Thermidorian character. The dissolution of the Communist International would be an inevitable corollary of its victory. For those who want to fight for the preservation of our communist movement, any kind of support for the right faction—to say nothing of a bloc with its American agents—cannot be spoken of lightly; it cannot be spoken of at all. An absolutely irreconcilable war against the right wing is the first and foremost duty of the American Opposition Communists.

The idea that the right wing Thermidorian elements in the Russian Party can really espouse "party democracy"—an idea suggested in an editorial in the New York Volkszeitung—is the greatest and most dangerous illusion. The right wing, by its very nature, by the class forces of capitalist restoration it represents, had to demand the fiercest and most criminal repression of the Bolshevik-Leninists and to drive the Stalin Centrists who were allied with them onto this path. The condition for the existence and growth of the right wing is the annihilation of the Leninists who are fighting for the October revolution and the regeneration of the Comintern on the line of Lenin. "Democracy" for the right wing is only an expedient in the faction struggle with the Centrist Apparatus, not a principle of party organization which they would or could apply.

This is true also in America. The Lovestone who demands party democracy expelled the Opposition Communists from the Party for their views alone. They went further—the Lovestones and Fosters together—and expelled Communist proletarians for merely protesting against the expulsion of the others. Party democracy is an absolute prerequisite for the Party. It will be the mightiest weapon in the hands of the proletarian elements for the salvation and regeneration of the movement and for its normal development on the revolutionary path. But Lovestone is not and cannot be the champion of this slogan.

FAILURE OF NEW LEADERSHIP

The re-unification of the Party and the elimination of factionalism are categorical tasks for the accomplishment of which the conscious revolutionaries must band together and fight. The "Open Address" and the measures which followed it have not and cannot solve this problem. Crisis, splits, paralysis and disintegration are the results so far. And the coming period will only intensify the crisis, widen the splits and increase the demoralization until the course is changed. To bring this change about a discussion and an education of the Party, a correct line of tactics in the class struggle and a bona-fide leadership, freely chosen by the Party and standing on its own feet, are necessary. They are lacking now.

The present make-shift leadership, a conglomeration of yes-men and parasitical place-hunters who confess their sins for self-advancement, patched together from the tag ends of the old factions and appointed by cablegram from above, cannot overcome the crisis and unite the Party. The stop-gap leadership of today only makes matters worse. It has all the faults of the Lovestone regime without any of its strength or independence. It confuses the Party by giving the outward appearance of a change from petty bourgeois politicianism and factional corruption which does not exist in reality.

Lovestone is out but Stachel remains. And Stachel is in charge of the campaign against factionalism. Is this not a spectacle for gods and men? Stachel, the organizer and right-hand man of Lovestone in every evil enterprise of disruption, the most dubious character that ever floated to the top in the foul waters of party factionalism, an individual with no tradition, experience, ability or integrity, the faction-monger who lived by factionalism—Stachel has made the sign of the cross and become the apostle of unity.

Wolfe is removed from the Political Committee and Wicks, equally characterless and with far less ability, takes his place. Gitlow is slated to go but Bedacht, who by his own confession was steeped in moral and political corruption, is promoted. Add a few Amters and Tallentives—the numer makes no difference because they weigh nothing—and Foster. This is the "new leadership".

The new leadership has no real authority. Its temporary existence signifies the abolition of a genuine leading body and the establishment of a receivership over the Party by the Stalin E. C. C. I. This so-called leadership enjoys no confidence in the Party ranks and the "loyal" Party members who want salvation by faith alone are falling back on the

ity this is literally the case. The C. E. C. is only the rubber stamp for the Representative of the E. C. C. I. who in turn relies on cabled instructions at every change in the situation. The C. E. C. does not even venture to write its own statements; this is obvious from their language. Such expressions as "defeat" all efforts of drawing the Party away from the political path of the 6th Congress" and "sending the direction to the devil" show that the C. E. C. does not even do a decent job of translating the statements it signs.

STRENGTHENING THE RIGHT WING

Their method of "fighting" the right wing only strengthens it as an ideology in the Party. There is no education of the party on the political issues. The victories over the right are mechanical and temporary. The Lovestone right wing was nurtured too long to be suddenly uprooted by decree.

The political line of the leadership is heading toward catastrophic defeats for the Party which will weaken its position in the class struggle and sharpen the crisis in the party. The false tactics of counterfeit leftism in the preparations for the T. U. E. L. Conference, in the Gastonia defense, in the Needle Trades and in other questions will bring swift and devastating reactions.

The leadership which promises to unite the Party will itself fall apart into factions, in fact it is already doing so. The groupings which are taking place around Foster on the one side and Bedacht on the other are common knowledge in the circles of informed functionaries. These are not purely arbitrary and personal groupings, as may appear. They have a political base in the impulse of Foster, whose real trend is toward labor progressivism, to find a way out of the blind alley of fake leftism on the trade union field and the wish of Bedacht to "make good" for his confessed sins of opportunism. This base will widen as the harmful results of the present tactics accumulate. Under the impact of the class struggle, and of the blows of the right wing on the one side and the Communist Opposition on the other, the present Central Executive Committee lacking independence of thought and action and any real principle foundation, is doomed to defeat and collapse.

Stalinism is breaking up the ranks of International Communism, and the American section is now beginning to feel the full force of the International crisis. This is the meaning of the crisis in the Party. The Communist forces must reform themselves and build anew. Help will not come from above; the source of the disruption lies there. The struggle against disintegration must be organized from below. The revolutionary workers must awaken. They must give up blind obedience and begin to think and to act independently. The struggle must cease to be an affair of the bureaucratic upper crust and become the concern of the Communist workers in the mass. The development of the initiative of the Party ranks and their conscious intervention in the struggle is the hope for the future of the movement. This means, as a beginning, a fight for definite aims along the following lines:

THE WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

1. In place of the fraudulent "enlightenment campaign", a real discussion of the three political tendencies which are now taking definite shape in the American Party. Such a discussion calls for the publication of all important documents and a free opportunity to explain and clarify the conflicting views. Only in this way can the Party be educated politically and enabled to act consciously, solving its problems without inner convulsions. We stand for such a discussion because we know that in it the Leninist line will prevail and the right wing, which thrives on bureaucratic measures, will be politically annihilated.

2. Genuine party democracy in place of the regime of administrative terror and suppression. A situation must be created where nothing is taken for granted and where incompetent bureaucrats can no longer hide behind official authority. The members must assert and take the right to speak out what they think without fearing organization measures and threats. The reinstatement of the expelled Oppositionists with full rights to defend their views is the first prerequisite. Without this party democracy is a sham.

3. A genuine proletarianization of the leadership in which bona-fide workers, leaders in class struggle activities who have independent opinions and the ability to defend them, play an active part in all the leading bodies. This must replace the present system of electing harmless proletarian elements for show purposes only.

4. A reorganization and reduction of the Party apparatus which, including the functionaries and employees of auxiliaries, now exceeds ten per cent of the Party membership. These paid officials, remote from the actualities of the class struggle, are a crust over the party, stifling its normal life and monopolizing party discussion and direction. The drastic reduction of this staff and the election of fresh worker elements will strengthen and invigorate party life.

5. Subsidies of all kinds must be absolutely abolished and the Party adjusted to operate by its own means derived from membership dues and contributions. Opposition to subsidy is no principle. Mutual assistance of revolutionary parties has played a positive role in the past and no doubt will do so in the future. But in the present situation subsidy has become an instrument for corruption, for bureaucratization and crushing out independent life. Opposition to subsidy under these conditions is a fight for the integrity of the Party.

6. The Party must have a real Convention, preceded by an honest discussion and the honest selection of