

An Apologetic Progressivism

A Weekly by Nov. 7

The road to progress in the labor movement lies in the combination of all the opposition forces against the ruling oligarchs and their policies. Only such a combination, which includes the communists and takes the class struggle for its guiding line, can wage a struggle on the broad front that is necessary and do it with sufficient energy and resolution to stir the masses into motion and lead them forward. The first conditions for the formation of such a movement are already beginning to manifest themselves but they have not yet found the proper form.

The new progressive movement is a sign of the working class impulse in this direction which is being held back from its proper development by the leaders who, thanks to the sectarian line of the Communists, have gained a temporary monopoly of the movement. The greater the urgency of forming a militant opposition and the surer the indications of rank and file readiness for it, the more clearly the unfitness of the leadership of Muste and Company is shown.

The labor movement is also an arena of the class struggle in which the ruling officials represent the capitalists. There can be no dynamic force organized against them which does not proceed from this standpoint, but this is just the issue that the progressive leaders try to evade. Pretending to shape a movement in between the two main counter-currents—the right and the left—they inevitably yield to the former and serve them. Thereby they stultify the rebellious aspirations of the workers and arrest their progress on the path of struggle for a class movement. "Neutrality" between the right and left is as impossible as neutrality in the class struggle. The conflict between these forces is in fact a part of the class struggle and no one can stand half-way between them. The "progressives" are bound to be the allies of one or the other. Failing to steer toward an alliance with the left, they are thrown into the arms of the right. The blows which they make believe to deal "impartially" against the reactionaries—who represent the capitalist interest—and the Communists—who represent the proletarian interest—become harder against the latter and feebler against the former.

Recent actions and utterances of Muste and other prominent representatives of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action bear this out already. Muste's article in the "New Leader" for August 17th illustrates the point. There he summons the workers to the standard of the C. P. L. A. in the name of Gompers. Apologizing to the Socialist black hundreds of the United Hebrew Trades for the appearance of the progressive movement, and pleading for "toleration" he asks: "Did he (Gompers) ever question the right of an opposition to exist in the A. F. of L.?"

Such an argument is false and misleading. In the first place Gompers was the symbol of capitalist influence in the labor movement for forty years and remains so today. His spirit belongs exclusively to the exploiters of labor and their agents who are the rightful heirs of Gompers. The attempt to invoke it in the name of a progressive movement can only make the reactionaries laugh and fool the workers. In the second place it is equally wrong to represent Gompers as a democrat who tolerated opposition movements. The present expulsion of the A. F. of L. against the left wing was initiated by him. The expulsion of William F. Dunne from the Portland Convention of the A. F. of L. was a way of "questioning the right of an opposition to exist". Can such an item be overlooked, or is it Muste's idea that "democracy" should not be extended to the Communists? Such apologies to reaction cannot be slogans for a progressive movement of the workers.

The bosses of the United Hebrew Trades have repudiated the C. P. L. A. out of gratitude to Green and Wolf for their help in wrecking the left wing unions. A more brazen crime against the workers was never perpetrated than this united front of the bosses, the police, the heads of the A. F. of L. and the Socialist leaders of the needle trades against the workers. The denunciation of such a betrayal is the first duty of a progressive leader. For what else can there be a progressive movement except to call treason by its right name and fight it in the open? But Muste passes it over and even condones it as a matter of course, maintaining only that Green and Wolf deserve no special "thanks" for doing their "duty" to the needle trades fakery in distress:

"Let credit by all means be given where credit is due. But why so much ado about help given

by the Executive Council to some of its affiliated bodies? What else is the Executive Council for?"

A movement animated by this pusillanimous spirit will never seriously disturb the agents of capitalism who sit in the seats of power in the trade unions. Their thrones will be shaken only by an army of militants raising the standard of the class struggle and fighting in its spirit. The new progressive movement in its present stage of development does not present such a picture because the discontented workers in the ranks have not yet clarified their aims and thrown up a leadership to express them. This is yet to come. To make the issues clear, to broaden and deepen the movement and inspire it with class struggle militancy is the primary task of the communists. This task will not be accomplished by turning away from the promising beginnings represented by the progressive movement and abandoning it to unworthy leadership. Such a policy only strengthens reaction and its auxiliary forces.

The Communists must establish contact with the workers in the ranks and combine with them for a common struggle. Without the Communist leaven the new progressive movement will have no backbone, it will retreat on all basic questions before the onslaught of the entrenched reactionaries and become a shield for them. The movement which Muste and similars seek to stultify is a genuine movement from below. It has strength, it is growing and will continue to grow as the growing horror of capitalist rationalization drives discontent deeper into the ranks of the masses of the workers. Without asking anybody's permission the Communists must become a part of it, influence it from within, push it to the left and help to shape it into an effective fighting force. Ruthless criticism of the Muste leadership is an indispensable part of this work for the future of the movement.

Party Splitters and Gastonia

As we go to press, comrade Martin Payer of St. Louis informs us that the delegates from the St. Louis Communist League were refused admission to the Gastonia Conference organized there by the party, on the ground that they were "not an organization"! The delegates from the Workers' Alliance then walked out. There were left in this broad united front eight Party members and one delegate from the A. C. W. No attempt was made to organize the sentiment of St. Louis' labor movement for Gastonia. The conference was run by D. E. Earley, travelling job-artist of the Party.

A mass meeting of the Leninbund (Left Communists) in Berlin, after hearing a report on Gastonia, adopted a resolution of support for the defense, and called for a broad agitation against the proposed lynching of the strikers. An attempt by Stalinist Party thugs to disperse the meeting was repulsed by the workers in attendance.

Another Rumor Nailed

The Stalinist press in Canada is deliberately spreading the lie that one M. Bergstein, Canadian vice-president of the cap and millinery workers' union, and an agent of Zaritsky's right wing crew, is a "Trotskyist" and a member of the Communist League of America (Opposition). This lie is cut out of the whole cloth by Messrs. Buck, MacDonald and Smith. Bergstein was a member of the Canadian Communist Party for years. He was and is a consistent Right winger and an anti-Communist, and when charges were presented against him in the Canadian Political Committee for his collaboration with Zaritsky, Buck and MacDonald covered him up. Now Bergstein is out of the Party and the Stalinists are trying to conceal their own protection of him in the past by telling the lie that he is with the Opposition. Bergstein has never had any connection with the Opposition, neither before nor after our expulsion.

Piatnitsky's Figures

From the report of O. Piatnitsky, organizational head of the Comintern to the 10th Plenum of the E. C. C. I., we take the following excerpts which speak so eloquently for the decline of the sections of the C. I. during the period of the Stalin-Bucharin leadership of the International:

"In America in 1927, there were 166 shop nuclei and 452 street nuclei, in 1928, there were 111 shop nuclei and 468 street nuclei. Here the number of shop nuclei is also declining and the number of street nuclei increasing. In Czecho-Slovakia, there were 1301 shop nuclei in 1926, 1030 in 1927... In the Communist Party of Germany there is a high percentage of industrial workers, and the percentage of Communists working in factories and shops is certainly not less than 60 percent. How is the mass of the membership represented in the shop nuclei?... In 1927, 15 percent of the Party members belonged to shop nuclei, and in 1928, 12 percent... 47 percent of the Party membership belonged to street nuclei in 1927, and 42 percent in 1928. In the local organizations where there were no nuclei, there were 31 percent of the Party membership in 1927 and 43 percent in 1928. Thus, the number of Party members belonging to street nuclei fell from 47 percent in 1927 to 42 percent in 1928, that is, a decline of 5 percent, since a part of the Party membership moved over from the street and shop nuclei

The National Committee of the Communist League of America (Opposition), in conformity with the decision of our national conference in Chicago three months ago, has definitely decided upon a campaign for the launching of the Militant as the WEEKLY MILITANT on the 12th Anniversary of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, on November 7th, 1929.

For the militant workers throughout the world, the Russian Revolution has been the main source of inspiration for the struggle against world imperialism and for the liberation of the proletariat. Constantly on the side of the Russian Revolution for the twelve years since its inception, we remain the most resolute defenders of its achievements and triumphs today as the Opposition to those in the Communist movement who undermine its foundations. It was the Russian Revolution that gave birth to the Communist International. It was the Communist International, under the genius of its immortal leaders, Lenin and Trotsky, that welded together the forces of the revolutionary militants throughout the world that had been shattered and dispersed by the treachery of the social democracy. It was the Communist International that brought a new breath of life, a new spirit of struggle and militancy into the ranks of the labor movement. It established in the first five years of its existence those basic conceptions upon which a mighty mobilization of revolutionary fighters was organized.

Under the mis-direction of the distorters of the teachings of Marx and Lenin, the Communist International has departed from the path along which its founders led it to ever-increasing strength and prestige. Under the domination of Stalin, Bucharin and their disciples throughout the International, the Communist movement has been brought to a condition today in which it lies wracked by numerous splits, by theoretical confusion, by the pernicious germ of opportunism, by loss of strength and authority in the working class. The movement needs a fresh wind, it calls for clear voices that can sound again the clarion call of those principles of Leninism upon which the International was built, that can cleanse the movement of Stalinism. It needs a re-statement of fundamentals, clarity in theory and action. It needs a resumption of the struggle for the victory of Bolshevism.

In less than a year of its existence, the Militant has carried on this struggle. The huge requirements of the present moment demand its publication as a WEEKLY MILITANT. And no more appropriate and symbolic time can be found than the 12th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The publication of the Militant as a WEEKLY will enable us to deal more promptly and in greater detail with the general struggle of the American and world working class, to consider its problems, to fight by its side in every daily battle against the class enemy.

Our aim of a weekly can be realized if all the branches of the League cooperate. Already the Minneapolis and Chicago branches have taken the initiative and are working to raise their quotas to insure the Weekly. Every other branch, every member, every one of our sympathizers must now concentrate upon this task. It is a big task, but we are confident of our ability to accomplish it. The struggle for Bolshevism requires hard work and big sacrifices from every militant. The forces that are swimming against the stream are being united in Russia and the rest of the world. Their American regiment will do its part in the fight.

The WEEKLY MILITANT can be begun and maintained if every supporter of the Opposition comes loyally to its support. A MILITANT SUSTAINING FUND must be got under way for the next period. The SUSTAINING FUND can be best built by every comrade making a Pledge for money to be sent in regularly for the WEEKLY MILITANT, or by sending in a donation.

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into Party organizations where there are no nuclei at all... We have very little data on the C. P. of France, but the little that we have on the basis of official Party reports, indicate that the C. P. F. had about 56,000 Party members in February 1928, of whom 17,448 were in shop nuclei, which makes 31.15 percent of the Party membership... In April 1929, the report of the Central Committee to the 6th Congress of the C. P. F. already gives the Party membership as 45,000 of whom only 24 percent still belong to shop nuclei. That is the picture of the work of the Communist Parties in the shops."

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