

The Cult of the 'Third Period'

CONCLUDED FROM LAST ISSUE

So much for the first part of the manoeuvre to avoid responsibility. But the rank and file was beginning to get restive. The hammer-blows of the Opposition platform were beginning to sink in especially as the passage of events continued swiftly to vindicate its every important argument and criticism. Repression, deportation, expulsion, slander, and victimization were proving insufficient for the bureaucracy to maintain their grip on office. The grain crisis in Russia, the Chiang Kai Shek coup in China, the corpse of the Anglo-Russian committee, the consequent weakening of the international position of the Soviet Union (Arcos and Peking raids) the exposures of degeneration and corruption in the party and state machines, were too flagrant to dispose of with mere abuse of the Opposition. The growing unrest had to be canalized. The old gag of "bolshhevization" had lost its force. So resort was had first to "self criticism", which meant anything but criticism of the leadership; and secondly, a "new line" for a "new period".

At the Fifteenth Russian Party Congress (1927) and at the subsequent Ninth Plenum of the E. C. C. I. the outlines and the strategy of the "Third Period" began to emerge. The sophistic Bucharin suddenly discovered that the social-democratic leaders were merging with the state-apparatus and were traitors to the working class and that henceforth only a "united front" from below" was permissible. Hitherto communists had been under the impression that the social democratic leaders were traitors in 1914, 1927, 1919, 1923 and a number of intervening years and that they had been pretty well merged with the state apparatus all this time. Is Arthur Henderson more "merged" with the State and a bigger traitor today than when Lenin urged that the Communists support him as a rope does a man hanged, or when Henderson was in the first Labor Government? But the capitulations to Purcell, Hicks, and Cook, during the "second period" had to be explained away. Furthermore said Bucharin, the independent role of the communist parties must now be strengthened and the British and French Communist Parties, but yesterday enthusiasts for the Chiang Kai Sheks and the Cooks, were presented with the slogan of "Class Against Class" for use in forthcoming struggles. Apparently Bucharin-Stalin would have us believe the communist parties knew and practised nothing of their independent role during the active leadership of Lenin before the "class against class" slogan was launched.

The "Third Period" with which the "Right Danger" was tied up, blossomed out into full glory at the Sixth Congress. Bucharin and Stalin, Serra and Ercoli, Ewert and Thaelmann, Lovestone and Foster equally gave it their blessing. It was a meaningless and platitudinous substitute for the concrete Marxist analysis of the given class relations and world situation upon which communist strategy must base itself. The "Third Period" is defined as one of capitalist stabilization but of growing contradictions which leads to the danger of fresh wars for the shrinking world market, sharpens the danger of an attack on the Soviet Union, and brings with it a leftward movement of the working class and an intensification of the general crisis of capitalism. This definition adds exactly nothing to the fundamental and elementary communist conception of the epoch of imperialism as one of wars and revolutions and capitalist decline which was as true at the Third Congress in 1922 as at the Sixth in 1928. But because it is so general and vague, the definition of the "Third Period" unanimously endorsed by the Right and Center at the Congress, has also served as the argument of each of these factions against the other since the struggle in the Right-Center bloc began to assume sharper forms.

THE COMINTERN RIGHTS

The Right Wing in the Soviet Union bases itself socially on the state bureaucracy, and the upper crust of the labor aristocracy, and the new possessing classes. It worked out its real perspectives on the international situation and the stabilization in common with the centrist Stalin party apparatus, in the theory of socialism in one country, which is the revision of the international socialist character of the Russian revolution. It implies the stabilization of capitalism for decades, the attempted retreat to the theoretical positions of the party in 1905 (bourgeois revolution) The rights in the Comintern must formulate their outlook less bluntly than the social democracy which expresses its outright belief in the consolidation of capitalism as a progressive historical factor. The tradition of Marx and Lenin is still strong in the Communist masses, and this compels the Rights to proceed in round about ways. Their perspective includes the peaceful cohabitation of socialist and capitalist system, the formation of Workers and Peasants Parties, the kulak's growth into socialism, the orientation on Amsterdam, collaboration with the national colonial bourgeoisie. Brandler and Thalheimer have expressed agreement with the program of the Bucharin-Rykov Right in Russia, and so does the Right elsewhere.

The ultra-left zig-zag is represented by the Russian party bureaucracy which is centrist, that is, it swings between social democracy and communism, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The strength of Stalin is in the party apparatus, which however, is more subject to the pressure of the party masses, with their revolutionary traditions of October. Jointly responsible for the opportunist theories and course of the past six years with the Rights, the fear of the influence of the Opposition among the industrial workers and the awakening of their revolutionary class con-

sciousness, has led the Center to advertise a "swing to the left" a move which is either shadow-boxing or a swing to the left of the Marxist line. The centrist staffs of the parties of the Comintern, subsidized appointees of Stalin, imitate their master closely or follow out instructions implicitly. The centrists seek to extricate themselves from the fruits of their past collaboration with the Rights unsuccessfully because they cannot follow a true Marxist policy without recognizing the monstrous errors committed in the fight against the Leninist Opposition. Hence the obverse side of Stalin's cooperation with Chiang Kai Shek is the Canton Putsch.

ULTRA-LEFT ADVENTURISM OF CENTRISTS

The centrists interpret their "Third Period" as an almost immediate revolutionary and war situation. The May Day events in Germany were hailed in extravagant terms as a proof of the rising tide of the revolutionary movement. The terms of the call of the Western European Bureau of the Comintern leave little doubt that the First of August was conceived as some sort of dress rehearsal for the insurrection. The Soviet Union is pictured as in danger of imminent attack. Fascism and social democracy are identified without regard for their specific political functions. The social democratic worker is characterized as the most reactionary element of the working class, and the unorganized worker as the most revolutionary. The leftward movement of the working class is monstrously exaggerated. The slogans of "united front from below" and "class against class" are used to liquidate the policy of the united front in general and in the trade union work in particular. All warnings are disregarded. No heed is paid to the results of the Saxony elections which registered losses for the communist party despite the May day events, to the apathy of the German workers in face of the proscription of the Red Front organization, to the fiasco of the "new line" in England where the party secured some paltry 50,000 votes, to communist impotence in the Ruhr struggle. The results of this ultra-left adventurism are seen clearly in the United States in the isolation of the party in the fight for Gastonia, in the debacle of the left wing furriers' strike which it was responsible for, in its failure to exercise any influence on the cloak makers stoppage, in the loss of its base in the needle trades in general, in the playing with the idea of a new socialist trades and labor alliance of dual unions, in its inability to manoeuvre in connection with the new progressive movement in the trade unions.

For the real Left in the Comintern, the Communist Opposition, the basic estimate of the epoch given by Lenin remains valid to day as it was several years ago when it began to fight the theory of national socialism. No real Marxist policy can be pursued until the program of the International is cleared of revisionist undergrowth. We recognize more than ever the force of Lenin's dictum that without revolutionary

theory there can be no revolutionary practise. The decline of the capitalist system, however, does not proceed in an unbroken curve. The defeats of the proletariat in 1923 helped the capitalists stabilize the system, and gave the social democracy a new lease of life though on a different basis than before 1914. We cannot disregard the fact that the defeats in China, Great Britain have not strengthened but weakened the proletariat. The contradictions of capitalism are again in the process of maturing and not explosion.

CLASS AGAINST CLASS

The leftward movement of the workers must not be exaggerated. There is such a movement but it still flows in reformist and parliamentary channels. In Europe it is a movement from the bourgeois parties to the social democracy and on a much smaller scale to the communist parties. In the United States it takes the comparatively primitive form of sporadic struggles in the worst paid industries, in a certain revival of progressivism in the trade unions, in scattered signs of labor party sentiment. Our policies must be adapted accordingly. The united front must be our guide to the winning of the masses, and unity must be our slogan in the trade unions even while we proceed legitimately to the organization of the unorganized. The slogan of "class against class" as issued by the Comintern looks terribly radical but is in reality a reversion to the Lassallean theory of the single reactionary mass outside the industrial workers. A class movement is not created by the use of so general a slogan but on the basis of the concrete needs and demands of the workers in their developing struggles linked up with the final goals. Not "class against class" but peace, land and bread was the slogan launched by the bolsheviks even in the directly revolutionary crisis of 1917. The period requires concrete programs of action, flowing not only from the revolutionary estimate of the international situation but expressing the specific characteristic and demands of the situation in each country. The senseless confusion of social democracy and fascism must be abandoned. The former play their main role as agents of the bourgeoisie in the peaceful parliamentary period and the fascists are their arm in the period of direct civil war, and different tactics must be applied in the approach to each. Millions of workers are still in the fold of the social democracy and their leaders have not yet been "unmasked" to them. The "united front from below" cannot be regarded as the exclusive legitimate form of the united front. It cannot be any less permissible now than in the days of Lenin to engage in united fronts from "above" as well as below, if that does not take the form of the Anglo-Russian Committee replacing the mobilization of the masses and the independence of the party, by mere combinations with the leaders. It is the Opposition that has been fighting all these years for the independent role of the Communist Party in England, in China and elsewhere. The idea of Workers and Peasants Parties and Blocs as a substitute for the party should be expunged from the program and strategy of the Comintern.

MAURICE SPECTOR.

All's Well in the Party, Says the Daily Worker!

Outside of a few splits, another few score of expulsions, a series of defeats, a burglary or two, the latest information from the Party shows that it has reached—or is it about to reach—the Apex of Unity and enter into a period of uninterrupted growth. The following are a few of the choicer bits of news that seem to have been omitted from the Party press, probably for lack of space.

The Young Communist League has been given a strong dose of new functionaries, to replace those expelled and removed. The hungry Fosterite wolves, kept from the apparatus for years, are coming into their own. Gil Greenberg has been made District Organizer in New York, to replace the incompetent Pershing; theoretical weight has been added to the new D. O. by making Mates agit-prop director, after his removal from Pittsburgh, where his place is taken by Sam Herman. Morris Tomash is now D. O. in New Jersey, Jack Childs in Kansas, Piccoli in California, Pobersky in Chicago, Clem Forsen in St. Paul, Art Stein is saving the recalcitrant Seattle League for the new line. The peerless Frankfeld is now running the Detroit League.

The Right nevertheless continues to make headway. Lovestone's caucus circulars say that: The Boston District Bureau voted down Puro's proposal (on Aug. 24) to endorse the Address and the expulsions. A reorganization has taken place, Bail, the Party Organizer, has been removed, and his regeneration is hailed with glee in a Lovestone faction document. A few months ago another document covered the same Bail with yards of mud.

In the Anthracite district, the Bureau voted down Stachel's proposals, and removed the imported Organizer, Gorman, packed his grips and sent him home. The Bureau reversed the decision of the National secretariat to expel Frank Vrataric by a vote of 7 to 2. The Bureau was thereupon itself wiped out and a district secretariat of 3 takes its place.

The Seattle Y. C. L. Bureau refused to allow the National Committee representative (Stein) "to disrupt and wipe out the growing League organization" (writes Lovestone). Subsequently, the C. E. C. emissary, and specialist in unification, Jakira, "straightened out" the situation by reorganizing the whole district. Ditto for California.

At a meeting of the New York needle trades fraction, almost one hundred members voted against the reports of Foster, Stachel and Weinstone. In addition, Sascha Zimmerman, the Party leader in the Needle

trades, is to be expelled for supporting Lovestone. Removal from his position in the Union will "naturally" follow. (Here, as in so many cases, the *Volkzeitung* and the *Jewish Forward* carry the news long before it is announced in the Party press!)

Albert Weisbord, suspected of conciliationism, has been removed by the Party from the secretaryship of the National Textile Workers Union, and replaced by Eli Keller. These purely administrative, mechanical and factional methods are guaranteed to destroy the new unions before they are out of their swaddling clothes.

Bedacht and Stachel are still on a precarious perch in the Party. Lovestone reports that the Comintern has cabled for information on their part in the notorious Lovestone cablegram. The idea of Bedacht and Stachel being dumped out of the new leadership into which they ran at the last moment, is delightful to contemplate.

Dr. Moissaye J. Olgin, arch-Bolshevik of the very purest water, has finally been made secretary of the Jewish Bureau and editor of the *Freiheit*. That's what we call a real pogrom on the Jews.

Lovestone continues the publication of his faction documents, and raises a loud outcry about "the Trotskyites, whose platform of yesterday has been adopted by the Political Committee for today." Although we have been assured a thousand times that Trotskyism is wiped out, we are shown the spectacle of Lovestone accusing the Party of being Trotskyist today, and the Party officials accusing Lovestone of having united with the Trotskyites! However, neither accusation has an ounce of merit.

A Lovestone circular says: "It is also important to know that Pete Shapiro, an agent of Cannon in the Party, is being suggested for the Lenin School for his magnificent services—to Trotskyism." This is malicious stuff, sent out solely for the purpose of preventing Shapiro from getting his well-earned trip across. Everyone knows that Shapiro flees in panic from a Trotskyist approaching a mile off. His slight hesitation and doubts of the first couple of days after our expulsion have completely disappeared. He now believes with deep conviction that socialism can be completely constructed in one country alone or in one city, or one back yard alone—in fact, he believes anything and everything that he is told to believe. When one has faith (and a bit of discipline, too, eh?) one can even say of socialism what the Biblical Peter said of the church: "On this rock shall we build."