

A Review and Criticism

The Communists in the South

By HUGO OEHLER

The T.U.U.L. drive in the South, starting in 1929 at the very inception of the "new turn" in the Communist Party has not yet been analyzed. Our articles on the South have dealt with tasks and later with shortcomings and "self criticism" but none have followed this to a logical conclusion and explained the basic causes of these shortcomings. With the majority of the American workers unorganized, the building of new unions is on the order of the day but this is not separate and apart from our work in reactionary unions to unite the broadest forces possible against the labor fakery, reformists and sectarians. Such a correct relationship of these forces to expose the reactionaries existed in several of our past campaigns as exemplified by Passaic and the Colorado coal strikes, both cases isolating the A.F.L. fakery and gaining trade union support. In the first case the gain was nationally for the Communist leadership and in the second case mainly in Colorado and Wyoming by Communist forces for the I.W.W. leadership.

Only by the correct disposition of our forces in the reactionary trade unions and the new unions will it be possible for us to defeat the treacherous bureaucrats and build our influence in the labor movement. Let us review the Gastonia struggle and the southern campaign to find the causes of our mistakes.

In the economic development of capitalist society ever so often culminating points are reached when the psychological reaction of the workers to those changes making for greater oppression one form or the other are transformed into class ideology of a rudimentary nature. This change due to the material transformation can be accelerated and definite organizational results obtained providing the vanguard of the workers, the Communist Party is able to apply tactics and strategy based on a Marxian program for the concrete situation to crystallize the developing ideology to an organized class consciousness.

The stage of economic transformation in the West when the I.W.W. continued the traditions of the Western Federation, where the vanguard applied tactics with considerable success giving them a crystallizing of this changing ideology and an organizational base. The transformation in the South in the last several years is similar to the change in the West in the period spoken of, except (to our advantage) we are in a different stage of historical development. In the West at that period the vanguard was able to organize a considerable base but up to the present the vanguard has yet to accomplish this first task in the South.

A review of our activity in the South will throw light upon our success and failure that we may not repeat these blunders again. To begin with we must point out that our Southern campaign up to the present can register the following positive points:

1. We have brought for the first time in this section, the class issue into the struggle to advancing the workers' conditions.
2. Through our Gastonia Campaign (only considering the Southern end of the campaign) we have agitational though not organizationally, gained the wide support of American-born workers and cropper farmers to our broad struggle in spite of the rabid anti-Red campaign of the bosses.
3. We have proven agitational to a wide section of the Negro masses, Southern and Northern, that the Communists are the leaders in the struggle of the Negro masses.
4. To a fair degree we consolidated the unity of black and white workers at each step of the struggle and were consequently considered by these workers as the "best fighters" and known to the bosses and their henchman as the "worse enemies".

Since revolutionists don't need self-praise (nor the present official Party campaign of mechanical self-criticism) we will deal with the problem of how the class struggle could have been brought into the

In the beginning of our Southern work, before our forces were sent South the condition of the Gastonia area was in a state of tension without important open class conflicts. This period was a culminating point in the transformation of the new industrial South, dominating old forms of control and changing the "hill people" into machine automatons on a large scale.

Especially in the Textile section of the Southern industries was there a critical stage. A steady Southward shift of the cotton spinning section and an acute international textile crisis, accelerated competition between the North and the South. On the other hand modern mills with machines of enormous output had to be kept moving if the rate of profit was to be kept up. These contradictory forces resulted in intensifying the stretch-out system, in wage reductions, worse company town conditions and general lowering of the standard of living with wide-spread unemployment, pellagra and chain gang victims. Men, women and children of American born stock were being driven into open revolt and organization against these conditions.

In this period when the Party should have sent forces South the Cannon-Foster group was fighting to correct the official American Party leadership, who had been given leadership on a platter by the Stalin-Bucharin regime. The Pepper-Lovestone group considered that this industrialization was to create a reservoir of reaction and that no work could be carried on now. The R.L.L.U. was the first to clamor for the new line that was soon to follow in the international movement but instead of a correction of the Right mistakes in relation to our trade union work and the United Front tactics a mechanical swing to the Left was taken.

After months of fooling away time comrade Beal was sent South in February 1929 inadequately supported one way or the other. In fact from that period up until the October 13th conference and today the decisive voting majority at the Center of the Communist Party did not know what it was all about and was often a brake instead of a help. The mechanical shift at the top in these hectic days for the Lovestonettes was no remedy, because such is never a remedy for anything except bureaucratic consolidation. Beal's glowing reports of what really could be done in the South and the A.F.L. activity opened the eyes of more forces at the Center, some to reality but most of them to the possibilities of dashing spectacular "victories".

More forces were sent South and the pivot point of activity was properly selected as Gastonia, the cotton spinning center with the Loray Mill as the pace setter. This pre-strike stake with the intense activity of a small force was entirely new to

Southern conditions, but several comrades with Beal did excellent work under the circumstances.

The leading committee was committed to a "rolling-wave theory" which in practice relied too much on the spontaneity of the masses and spectacular dramatization and not sufficiently on preliminary organizational activity.

The A.F.L. had already started their second drive since the war in the Southern textile field and were "coming in and taking over revolts of the workers" in Elizabethton, Greenville, Lexington, Ware Shoals Marion, etc., trying to get any kind of agreement with the bosses, selling out and leaving if it became too hot as they did in Ware Shoals and other places. The driving force of this campaign were the Musketees who as a new development at this stage stood in between the reactionaries and the best progressives who in the immediate past had supported the Left wing led by the Communists.

Our mechanical interpretation of the policy of building new unions and the rejection of the United Front policy as a swing away from the Right blunders of the past in the united front action put a taboo on all kinds of united fronts, if not in words then in deeds.

This resulted in our refusal to utilize throughout the country all possible forces, so badly needed in that concrete situation, against a powerful enemy that was concentrating all forces against us.

In the Loray Mill, where the National Textile Workers Union was concentrating its forces the company had increased the stretch-out and systematically, department by department was reducing the workers' wages. Five thousand workers was the full time capacity of the mill. Before the union was ready for the counter-attack the Manville Jencks owners of Loray started discharging union members.

This precipitated the strike and over 2,500 quit work. This was inopportune for the union, for a little more time would have found them better situated. Mass picketing followed. A great number of these workers were in a strike for the first time and were new trade union recruits which means that more emphasis should have been put on preliminary organization work.

This premature forceful break could have been overcome by the tried and tested tactic so well used in the Lawrence 1912 strike and many times since. The tactic of going from department to department at the inception of the strike in an organized planned manner—Strike!—Strike! and pulling switches, etc. This was not done. The failure at the start to close the mill pre-determined the tempo of the positive force and choked the fighting spirit of the workers on strike making a breach with those in the plant and enabling the bosses to play these two forces against each other to our disadvantage. Naturally, workers in the nearby mills did not gain the necessary inspiration from the strike, especially considering the training of these workers in any kind of class struggles.

(To Be Continued)

India

Browder vs. Luhani

Leadership among the Stalinist section of the Communist movement has become a very specialized function. In the motley collection that serves as the American "leadership", the specific function of Earl Browder is to "expose the counter-revolutionary renegades". That his "anti-Trotskyist" endeavors are limited structurally to abominable and deliberate falsehoods and politically to a vulgar admixture of Lester Wardism and a handful of Marxist platitudes is simply traceable to the natural character of the man. The trouble, however, is that he is permitted to inflict his sorry leadership upon the Communist Party.

Latterly, Browder has been firing his paltry weapons at the Opposition for advocating the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in India (and China) as a democratic slogan to arouse and coordinate the struggles of the masses and lead them to the victory of the proletarian power over the imperialist and nationalist bourgeoisie. In the *Daily Worker* (June 18, 1930), he writes:

"The Trotskyites cover up their own surrender to the bourgeoisie in India and China with 'very Left' phrases about the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', violent opposition to the slogan 'democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants', and then practically replace both with the open bourgeois slogan of 'Constituent Assembly.'" (Our emphasis).

Browder's remarks on "surrender to the bourgeoisie in India and China" are of course instructive, and do not come from any mateur. Let us anticipate any criticism from readers on that score by reminding them that he banqueted with General L. Ti-Sin, the butcher of the Canton proletariat, AFTER this bourgeois Kuo Min Tang militarist had decapitated scores of Canton's best revolutionary fighters. He speaks with authority about "surrender to the bourgeoisie", for did he not bring back from China an official letter from the Kuo Min Tang expressing its most cordial thanks for the services Browder had rendered it in China.

But so far as the "Constituent Assembly" slogan is concerned, it is hard to say whether Browder is ignorant or base, for surely he must know the policy of the so-called Communist Party of India, advocated, so far as we know up until a short time ago. It is stated by no less an authority than G. A. Luhani, the Stalinist who replaced Roy and was the Indian "specialist" and spokesman at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. On the very eve of that Congress, Luhani wrote:

"Finally, the Communist Party of India, as the Party of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat has put forward the slogan of the convocation of a Constituent Assembly for determining the constitution of India...In putting forward the slogan, the Communist Party of India declares:

"...The demand should be the convocation by the National Congress of a Constituent Assembly which will be the supreme organ of the people's power and as such settle the question as regards the form of government, relation to Britain, etc. The entire people must participate in the election of the Constituent Assembly. Committees for the election of the Constituent Assembly should be set up all over the country. Representatives of all the political parties, workers and peasants organizations and all other democratic bodies will sit on these committees. The election campaign must be carried on throughout the country over a period of at least a year. The largest possible section of the population should be drawn into the campaign through mass meetings, demonstrations, strikes, etc." (International Press Correspondence, Vol. 8, No. 6, Page 133).

The quotations speak for themselves and they speak facts. But we cannot say as much for Browder.

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Open Letter to the C. P. on the Elections

June 28, 1930

To the District Committee of Dist. 2, Communist Party of the U. S. A.:

The deep-going economic crisis, the growing army of the unemployed millions, the renewed attacks on the living standards of the workers, prompts the capitalist exploiters of this country to initiate a ruthless drive against the Communist movement as the spear-head and most militant section of the entire American labor movement. The activity of the Fish Committee to "investigate Communist plotting" foreshadows a stage of wholesale persecution of the Communists, of jailings and deportations of revolutionaries. At such a crucial time the Left (Communist) Opposition deems it more imperative than ever that the enemies of the working class—the capitalists and their social democratic and labor bureaucrat lackeys—should be confronted by united Communist ranks.

Regardless of the fact that the present factional and Centrist Party regime falsely and stupidly slanders us as "counter-revolutionaries" and "renegades" and wages a campaign of hooliganism against us, we will never permit them to separate us from the Communist Party and the Communist

International. As adherents of the principles of Marx and Lenin—undiluted by either opportunism or adventurism—it is our duty at one and the same time to criticize and correct the official Party line in its deviations from Bolshevism, and also to demonstrate our closest solidarity with the Party in the fulfillment of its tasks in the every day class struggle.

In view of these considerations and of the objective political and economic situation in the country, we herewith offer our cooperation in the forthcoming election campaign of the Party to secure signatures to place Communist candidates on the ballot, to supply qualified speakers for the election meetings of the Party and to carry on whatever other election work is assigned to us.

Awaiting your acceptance of our offer,

With Communist greetings,

The New York Branch of the Communist League of America (Opposition)

In our next number there will appear a full report and critical evaluation of the Unemployment convention held July 4th in Chicago. Do not miss this number.