

Opposition Problems

Deeper into the Party!

By JAMES P. CANNON

In a previous article on the character and limits of our faction reference was made to the experiences of the German Leninbund, and to the flabbiness of principle which brought it to impotence and ruin. In this case, as always, confusion and looseness on principle questions were bound up with errors in tactics which contributed to and hastened the debacle. One of the greatest errors of the Leninbund in this field, as the results have shown was its false attitude toward the Party. In common with the entire International Opposition we have drawn the lessons of the split in the Leninbund and reacted to a firmer intransigence in regard to principle questions. We must make use of these lessons also in determining our attitude toward the Party. It is particularly necessary now because we stand on the eve of new developments in the Party which will be vitally affected by our tactics.

A Question of Tactics

For us this is a tactical question. We do not make a fetish of the Party organization; our disregard of the bureaucrats' "discipline" is a sufficient indication that we do not put the form before the substance. What we are concerned with at the present moment is the composition of the Party, its influence among the radical workers and the present relation of forces in the struggle in the Communist ranks.

Our task is to win over the workers' vanguard to the platform of the Opposition. A tactic which gives us the best approach to them is the one we must seek and apply. A tactic which hampers our approach to them is wrong on the face of it. Such a tactic would block the path of future development for the Opposition.

Where are the American revolutionary workers today? This question we must answer first of all. Unless we close our eyes to all reality we have to recognize that the great bulk of revolutionary workers who play an active role in the class struggle today are in the Party, and around the Party. The Party has the unquestionable hegemony in the Left wing labor movement. Take the needle trades as an example. It is true that Communist influence has declined as a result of the monstrous errors of the Party leadership; but the Party remains the decisive leading force in the Left wing. The same thing applies to other fields, for instance, the miners'. There are many Communist workers not in the Party; there are many who have dropped out of the Party—thousands of them—but they are not an organized force.

It is possible, with an aggressive policy and an energetic independent activity, to reach some of these revolutionary workers directly and bring them into the ranks of our organization. This we must do. But the main road of approach to them is through the Party. Under the present circumstances and relation of forces a complete break with the Party—a course toward the organization of another Party—would weaken, not strengthen our connection with the Left wing workers who are sympathetic to Communism.

This relation is not fixed and final for all time; it simply determines the attitude for the present and the near future. In comrade Trotsky's letter published in the Militant some months ago he expressed the opinion that the relation of forces in America justified an orientation on our part toward the formation of an independent party. We did not agree with it at the time and we thought comrade Trotsky would change his opinion when he received more complete and detailed material on the situation in the Communist and Left wing labor movement. This proved to be case, as attested by a second letter from him.

Need Flexible Tactics

The peculiarities of our position as a body of expelled Communists impose upon us a flexibility of tactics. Dogmatic narrowness and one-sidedness will be fatal to our future development. We are confronted with the necessity of maintaining our position as a fraction of the Party, despite the prohibition of the officialdom, and at the same time of developing an independent organization with its own independent activities and its own discipline. To combine these tasks, to make each supplement the other is our problem.

The most important means of approach to the Party members is the tactic of the

united front with the Party. Our participation in the demonstration for the Indian revolution was an excellent illustration of this policy and we must follow more energetically in the future. On the same order is our offer to participate in the New York election campaign, our repeated attempts to enter into joint class struggle action with the official Party in behalf of the unemployed, the class war prisoners, etc. By these means we are continually refuting in action the slanders of the Party overseers against us and gaining in the sympathy of the Communist workers.

The Centrist leaders are always aroused to the greatest fury by our attempts to make a united front with the Party in common struggle against the class enemy. And that fact ought to be instructive for our own members. The bureaucrats fear our contact with the Party workers on the firing line of the class struggle. They fear the influence of our example. They fear our arguments and our slogans. They want to tear us away from all contact with the proletarian Communists. This ambition of theirs is quite understandable. But we must not help them realize it by false tactics.

The Party—that is the Party membership—is not a dead body. It is a living organism constantly under the pressure of the class struggle. It cannot be kept in a strait-jacket. The Party reacts to events. It is influenced by criticism—especially so when the Party members see the criticism confirmed in life. Things which have just recently happened in the Party and others which are in a course of preparation bear out this contention.

A long time after the echoes of our expulsion had died down in the Party, after it seemed on the surface, that all our contact was broken—the Party was startled

a few weeks ago by another bombshell. This was the declaration of Hugo Oehler for the platform of the Opposition followed the next week by a whole group of young Communists in New York. There are more to come. Just the other day we received a letter from a comrade in a city where we had no supporters up till now. The letter states that a number of comrades have been reading the Militant very attentively for some time and that they are about ready to make a declaration in our behalf. Hardly a week goes by without similar news.

There can no longer be any doubt that our propaganda is penetrating into the Party ranks and influencing the Communist workers more and more as they see it borne out by events. What is happening now is not the adhesion of isolated individuals here and there, but the beginning of a movement for the Opposition. We are breaking through the wall reared against us by the Centrist leadership. The second layer of Oppositionists is taking shape in the Party.

The Character of the New Movement

The new movement for the Opposition shows certain distinctive features. Its main current is made up of the best types of proletarian Communists who have been attempting to carry out the policy of the Party on the battle-field of the class struggle. Here they are confronted with the contradiction between the bluff and the fakery of the Party jacks-in-office and the realities of the situation. The more these comrades in the field try to apply the official policy the more they bump their heads against this contradiction. The result is a gradual awakening to the fact that something is amiss.

They begin to criticize and to propose modifications, and are met with accusations of "Right wing tendencies" and threats of discipline. The swivel-chair generals in the Party office have no sympathy for the grievances and complaints of the fighters in the field. Slogans and "instructions" cost the Browders nothing; they don't have to carry them out. Therefore they can be as bomb-

astic as language will allow. Not so the Party workers in the field.

Deprived of the right to discuss anything really important in the official Party channels, the comrades begin to discuss among themselves. The gap between them and the leadership widens. This process has been going on now for a long time. That it has not exploded before now in a faction struggle over questions of current policy is accounted for by the terror regime in the Party and the lack of "prominent" leaders. This lack of leadership is not altogether a minus quality. While it retards the open manifestations of the proletarian current it drives it deeper into itself, compels it to weigh the questions more carefully and to relate them to the fundamental issues.

The logic of the situation drives the proletarian revolt in the Party toward the platform of the Opposition. Only on that basis can it develop into a real power. There are some who understand this already but who shrink from its implications. To think the conflicts through to the end means to connect the contradictions in local policy with the national, and the national with the international. This leads inevitably to a consideration of the standpoint of the Opposition. To study the platform of the Opposition objectively and honestly means, for a conscientious worker Communist, to support it. This means "disgrace", loss of "position", Expulsion. Slander. The severing of social relations and other trifles. Some fear this. Others go forward resolutely and tell the truth to the Party. Such a type is Hugo Oehler. There will be other Oehlers.

Closer Bonds with the Ranks

It is our most important task at the moment to establish closer bonds with this coalescing proletarian movement in the Party and help it to take shape as a genuine political force. We must help from a political standpoint. We must stimulate its organization.

Regardless of the vacillations of some of the potential leaders, this movement in the proletarian ranks of the Party will develop and go forward. It will do this because it is rooted in the deepest needs of the Party of the proletariat to coordinate its policy with the realities of the class struggle. And this is not a question of empirical and short-sighted shrewdness and practicality. It is a question, in the last analysis of the Marxist fundamentals on the main issues of international import from which, and only from which, the correct everyday tactics flow. To make this clear to the revolting workers in the Party ranks is the task of the Leninist Opposition. In order to do this we must have the closest contact with the Party. We must go deeper into the Party. The decisive trend of this movement in our direction, already noticeable, is a justification of our attitude toward the Party. The successful development of the movement into a new fighting regiment for Leninism will confirm these tactics beyond all further dispute.

As the new developments show, the Party cannot be judged by the apparatus. With most of these people political stultification has been blended with moral corruption, and their reclamation is beyond the power of politics. Not to trust them, but to fight them; not to count on them for the regeneration of the Party but to see that they will be its first victims—that is our attitude toward them. It is different with the Communist worker who has no axe to grind. Let us not forget this distinction.

Our Independent Activity

One way—and one of the very best ways—to give real support to those comrades fighting for our views inside the Party is to increase the independent activity of the Communist League. The stronger we are as an independent force, the more rapid will be our progress in the Party ranks. The steps we have taken since the Plenum of our National Committee toward the formation of an Opposition group in the needle trades unions as an independent factor has a special value and importance in this regard.

We cannot foretell every fluctuation of the struggle for Leninism in the Communist movement nor the forms it will always take. The main tasks and the main line, however, are clear to us. Under a shower of slander we are organizing the fundamental nucleus of the future Communist Party and we must connect this nucleus with the larger body of worker revolutionaries and win them for our platform. At the present stage of the struggle—which we visualize as a long one—it is above all a fight for the Party. A clear understanding of this will hasten our victory.

The Truth About the Bolivian «Revolution»

The much talked of "revolution" in Bolivia is nothing more than a change of power from the hands of one clique to another of the same semi-feudal military exploiting class. It is one of those many "revolutions" so frequent in the turbulent and instable "democracies" of Latin America at the same time that it reflects the struggle between those elements favorable to British imperialism attempting to scratch the political control of the country from the hands of those indisputably on side of the North American bankers.

The recent occurrences in Bolivia have not the revolutionary class character that the Daily Worker gives them when it states in a recent issue that the workers and peasants almost captured power, which the Party organ interprets as proof that the revolutionary movement in Latin America is becoming "deepened and extended". In other issues of the Daily Worker during the last few days declarations are made in the sense that the Bolivian masses, truly viciously exploited by financial capital are already completely radicalized in the spirit of the "Third Period". This is a false and childish method of analyzing the situation, born perhaps of the desire to make it appear that a real mass movement exists throughout Latin America. "Revolutions" of the Bolivian type, in countries where the mass of the population is made up of peasants with few workers, and where no true class consciousness has yet developed, always turn out to be means by which certain cliques of the exploiting classes dispute for power and for the right to serve imperialist interests.

The state of disorganization of the toilers of Bolivia, in the mines as well as in the countryside could not be less promising. In Bolivia there is no Communist party, nor for that matter any real working class organization. Under these circumstances how could the workers and peasants take power. With this state of affairs, to speak of the workers and peasants almost capturing power, results only in cheap phrase-mongering; it is a miserable bluffing attitude towards the workers that read the Party's press, disfiguring the facts.

At the present time the only ones who

have profited by the Bolivian revolution are certain military groups, some of the liberal petty-bourgeois elements and British imperialism, this latter only, in case the new regime does not reach an understanding with United States finance capital. These internal struggles among the exploiters in order to steal the booty from one another, offer an impulse to the masses for spontaneous participation in street fighting where they serve the ends of the opposition group, and as soon as the workers and peasants demand certain concessions bettering their conditions, they find the machine guns turned on them for the restoration of "order" and the "pacification" of the country.

A situation similar to that in Bolivia existed in Ecuador in 1925, and there were many comrades who interpreted the military rebellion at that time as a "social revolution", while others thought that a petty bourgeois democratic revolution had taken place; in reality it was nothing but a replacement of the dull swords of the old military chiefs for the sharper, newer ones of the younger elements.

Facts should not be exaggerated in this manner. A real analysis of each situation should be made in order to draw correct conclusions so as to better orientate the revolutionary movement of Latin America in particular and the international movement in general.

—CAMILO TORRES

Trotsky's Autobiography has proved to be a dangerous subject for critics of his standpoint to review. The bad luck of the New Masses with this enterprise has not only caused these dilettantes to regret their venture into the field of politics; it has frightened away others who once posed as experts on the menace of Trotskyism. The Revolutionary Age announced in a previous issue that it would review the book, but in the intervening period it thought better of this rash promise. It serves up instead a quotation from a German paper of the Right wing. We would like to know what Loveston has to say about the book. Or does he intend to surrender leadership in the struggle against Trotskyism to the New Leader, the New Masses, and the Daily Worker?