

# Lovestone Prepares the Front with Musteism

By MAX SHACHTMAN

It is a bare two years ago that the Lovestone faction, then in control of the Party, combined with the present stratum of incompetents of the Foster group, to expell the Left Opposition from the Party for demanding a discussion of those vital issues that lie at the bottom of the present struggle in the Communist movement. The principal weapons of the Lovestone faction then—as they are of the Foster faction today—were calumny and misrepresentation of our point of view, combined with the use of such powerful arguments as the blackjack, the thug's knife and the burglar's jimmy. Their later "change of heart", while it eliminated the more "powerful arguments" did not cause them to reject the "principled" weapons in their arsenal, and they have continued to use them to this day.

## Lovestone's First Accusation

One of the main charges made against us by the Lovestone faction in the early days of our expulsion was that, aside from being the agents of world imperialism and counter-revolution, we were also the allies, or tools (every thesis worded it differently in conformity with the author's temperament) of the reformists of the Muste school, fighting against Communism and the Party. Lovestone, it will be remembered, was then advancing the brilliant postulate that the "Trotskyists are the crassest expression of the Right danger", while he and his faction were the Old Guard Bolsheviks of the purest water. Idiomatic as this sounds today (and it was no less idiotic when first formulated), it was seriously placed before the Party bureaucracy who just as solemnly voted nine to one that it was gospel truth.

We said and proved at that time that the Lovestone faction was the American representative of the International Right Wing, that it was composed of corrupt opportunist leaders and apparatus men, the logic of whose position would compel them to go over further to the Right and end in the swamps of social reformism. As to our estimation of the "progressives", it was not affected by Lovestone's spurious cries about the "Trotsky-Muste alliance" any more than it is affected today by the hoarse shouts of the Browder-Foster-Bedacht combination. We established our point of view on the progressive movement and its leaders from the very beginning and have had no reason to change it to suit factional expediency, which was done, however, as has now become as clear as day by the Lovestone group. In the Militant of March 1, 1929, we said:

"The virtual abandonment of the old unions by the Communists, who have stood at the head of most of the opposition movements in the past five years, facilitates the emergence of the reformist group and affords the Socialists an opportunity to regain some of their lost positions. The new movement (i. e., the C. P. L. A.) is a challenge to the Communists for the leadership of the coming fights.

"These 'progressives' are weather-cocks who reflect certain winds blowing in the labor movement. Their emergence now with demands which connote militancy is an indicator of the radicalization of the workers growing within the old unions as well as in the ranks of the unorganized masses. Their role, objectively speaking, is to express this radicalization in words, to harness it in action and to head it off from any real collision with the capitalists and the A. F. of L. machine."

In our Platform, published February 15, 1929, we said further:

"The recent manifesto of the pseudo-progressive group of the Labor Age is primarily a reflection of this discontent in the ranks of the unions which the reformists seek to divert into harmless channels. The appearance of the new movement, even in a nebulous form with pseudo-progressives at its head, is a sign of the abdication of the Communists and the Left wing who in recent years have led these movements. The Party must penetrate every movement of opposition and revolt against the bureaucracy, forming united fronts with all honest progressive workers, exposing the particularly deceptive and dangerous role of the pseudo-'Left' and pseudo-progressive leaders and struggling against them for the leadership of the opposition movements."

Later in the same year, in the Militant of September 15, 1929, we continued to express the point of view we still hold to:

"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."

## How the Estimates Have Been Tested

The two years that have elapsed since our expulsion has afforded more than ample opportunity to test the validity of all the contentions in this question; Lovestone's and ours. The latter has been verified by a dozen experiences; the contemptible record of the MMuste adherents in the Illinois coal fields; their persistent genuflections before the A. F. of L. high priests in the textile field, particularly in the southern strikes; their respectable campaign on unemployment; their anti-Communist virulence which is backed up by the solid Socialist front of Oneal, Thomas and Co.; and so on and so forth. As to Lovestone's contentions concerning the "Trotsky-Muste alliance", they were put forward in cynical disregard of established facts, and were thrown overboard just as cynically and with just as little explanation. But for that, in striking confirmation of our evaluation of these Right wing adventurers the fantastic allegations of "unity" made against us have given way to the reality of unity between Lovestone and Muste—and worse. It is not the first time that such displacements have occurred in the struggle against the Left Opposition!

Lovestone's formal change of front, (formal, because it has been his view for a long time), comes simultaneously with the transformation of his paper into a weekly, which is to be the point of departure for a "deep participation in mass work". For the Right wing, this "participation in mass work" has always been expressed in the most disgraceful opportunist maneuvering and unty with any faker in the labor movement who was compelled to daub his cheeks with a spot of rouge in order to distract the attention of workers moving to the Left.

In recent years, this game has been played by the Right wing under the war cry against the Left of "Down with the sectarians". It was in the fight against "sectarianism" that the Chinese workers and peasants were finally put under Chiang Kai-Shek's iron heel; that the Communist Party was harnessed to the LaFollette-Fan Noli chariot so as to draw the petty bourgeoisie to power over the proletarian barriers; that the Communist lamb united with the Purcellian lion in the deadly comfort of the Anglo-Russian Committee. Incapable of working like Bolsheviks among the masses the Right wing fed the tendencies towards real sectarianism on the one hand, and of social reformism on the other. The same holds true of Lovestone's present "mass work" and "united fronts", which on the one hand give the Centrist sectarians demagogic arguments against a genuine united front of workers, and on the other hand, buttress the ramparts of reformism, Muste style.

## Gitlow on the Progressives

The official announcement of the change comes in an article by Ben Gitlow entitled "Progressives and Left Wing" (Revolutionary Age, 12-13-1930.) To those who are at all acquainted with the Lovestone method of elaborating policies, it is evident that the article is not a beginning but a culmination. That is to say it was written by agreement, for the record, and only after the preliminary negotiations had been held around the table with blinds drawn between Lovestone and Muste.

In this article, Gitlow discovers, almost two years after the fact, that the official program of the Muste group "is acceptable to the Communists and the left wing in the trade unions." And if the matter were allowed to rest there, things might not be so bad. But Gitlow continues to evaluate the Muste group by what he writes and even more by what he carefully omits to write. As the prospective ally of Muste within the executive committee of the C. P. L. A., that is, as a prop from the Left for Muste's ax-grinding against the extreme Right wing of Oneal and Co., it is essential for Gitlow to utter a few well-chosen words of criticism. One is directed with

one eye peeled for the Lovestoneite rank and file, at the "movement in general", in which its policies are gently chided being based on "faith in the bureaucracy." Lest anyone should misjudge this entirely loyal and well-intentioned "rebuke", Gitlow hastens to add: "It is the duty of the Communists in the trade unions to build up the Left wing forces in the unions so as to make possible a closer union and possibly an amalgamation of the genuine progressive forces of the Muste movement into the Left wing."

Since amalgamation is a rather serious affair, and assumes a closer political affinity than is required for a bloc we are entitled to know who are the "genuine progressive forces". Gitlow sheds illumination on this point with a heavy hand: "A definite break with the Socialist Party is inevitable just as soon as the progressives make a clean break with the bureaucracy. Such elements as James Oneal and J. B. S. Hardman (Salutzky), the errand boy of Sidney Hillman, have no place in a genuine progressive movement." By the process of eliminating these two elements, we arrive arithmetically at the "genuine progressives": Muste, Bright Budenz, Norman Thomas, Stanley, Hoelscher et tutti quanti.

## Who Are The Mustes.

These are the people who play the same role in the American movement—with all due regard to proportions—as the Purcells and Cooks played in the British movement. When the workers move to the Right, they are indistinguishable from the open bureaucracy or else lie fallow and unneeded. When the workers move to the Left, they act as sieves straining all the militancy out of the workers' moods for struggle, preventing the full force of the workers from striking at the body proper of the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class. That they serve at the same time as a channel through which the workers express their discontent is also true, and does not change the fundamental fact of the function they perform. Their wordy radicalism is not costly and obligates them to nothing; it is cheap, considering how effectively if temporarily, it deceives workers into faith in Left social reformism and retards their development to Communism and revolutionary struggle. In every sense of the word, they are brakes on the Leftward movement of the workers.

Gitlow does not say a word about this. The whole article fails to utter a word of criticism or even to mention Muste at all, except for the incidental reference we have just quoted, because to all intents and purposes, the Lovestoneites have already "amalgamated" with the Muste section of the C. P. L. A.—amalgamated behind the scenes, by purely diplomatic negotiations at the top without incommencing explanations to the rank and file workers of the Right wing.

The Right wing, i. e., the liquidationist point of view on trade union work, which does not and cannot have anything in common with the revolutionary point of view is to strengthen this brake. It unites either integrally or in bloc with the Left reformists by putting the Communists under their command. If a bloc or united front with Left social democrats is necessary and tactically advisable—and very frequently it is, and should be made—it can only be done by rigidly maintaining the organizational and political independence of the revolutionists, by making temporary agreements even with the reformist leaders in order to set the workers in motion—but to set them in motion can be accomplished only by an incessant struggle against these leaders. Lovestone following here the classic position of the Right wing under which the Stalin-Bucharin regime operated for years in their unity with the national bourgeoisie of China, the labor bureaucracy in England, and others, pursues a directly opposite path.

The Right wing is the principal instrument—whether it is conscious of it or not—of the forces opposed to revolution for the liquidation of the Communist movement, and its degradation to the position of the social democracy. The unprincipled merger with Muste and his associates is only a replica of what has happened with the Right wing groups in other countries. One need not be the seventh son of a seventh son to foretell the role the Lovestone group will play in the Muste movement. We have had a harbinger of the next future in the shady game the Right wing has just played in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union Local 1,

New York. There the Lovestoneites made a united front to elect the notorious Louis Levy as local manager, the same Levy who expelled the Left wing workers from the union, and who now hypocritically poses as a "progressive" because Sigman, whose loyal henchman he has always been is at odds with the ruling section of the bureaucracy. Against Levy, the Revolutionary Age had not a single word of criticism to make, but on the contrary, practised a deliberate deception announcing in the first issue of its weekly "MILITANTS (!) WIN IN LOCAL 1". In other words the "mass work" and the "united fronts" of the Right wing consists of investing treacherous elements like Levy with the approbation of a revolutionary label. If so thoroughly discredited a type as Levy can find aid and comfort, even for a day, from Lovestone, why shouldn't Muste and Thomas expect at least as generous a deal?

Not the least characteristic phase of this whole situation is the manner in which the Lovestone leaders have consummated their plans. Their problem is indeed, no small one: to lead their membership into a merger with social reformists of the Levy or Muste stripe, to confront the workers in the Right wing camp with a blunt decision would never do for the Lovestone leaders, first, because it would be the honest way and second, it would shock them out of faith in the leadership. It must therefore be done gradually almost imperceptibly, by "enlightenment" while the arrangements have already been signed and sealed at the top.

Little by little, therefore, the tone of criticism of the Muste group is moderated, thinned down to a whisper. Yesterday's social reformists and weak-kneed pseudo-progressives become today, "militants" and "genuine progressives"; tomorrow they will be irreproachable comrades-in-arms. Yesterday, the Revolutionary Age, out of habit and regard to the membership, still spoke of Lore's Volkszeitung as "counter-revolutionary"; today, it isn't such a bad paper after all, especially when you recall that Lore is on the C. P. L. A. executive committee. Muste is brought down to the Lovestone open forum, not so much as an ideological opponent with whom to dispute, but to show the ranks that he is not half as black as he is painted (and Muste, it should be added in justice, delivered a speech which fitted this plan like a glove; he has his own troubles with Oneal and doesn't mind so harmless an ally as Lovestone). The idea is to put the thing over "in small doses", for it would be too hard for any worker trained in the Communist movement to swallow at one gulp.

In turning his face to "mass work", that is, to the role of chamberlains of the Left social democracy, Lovestone at the same time inevitably turns his back upon the Communist Party and the Left wing, that is, upon the bulk of the revolutionary movement in the country. The desire for a second party—hanging between social democracy and Communism—has been at the back of the Lovestone leaders' minds from the beginning. Naturally, the resistance of the Communist workers in the ranks is encountered here.

The first feeler is out now, in the person of Bert Miller, who accuses the leadership of "sectarianism", that is, of not going fast enough away from Communism. This is no faction fight; it is a division of labor. Miller demands an accelerated tempo and does it as clumsily as he always does everything else. Lovestone holds back so as to yield "reluctantly and under pressure" later on. That Miller is condemned, means little, if anything. It should be remembered that Lovestone took his followers out of the Party under a barrage of attack on Bedacht because the latter—scoundrel that he was!—favored affiliation to Brandler. While shouting at Bedacht, Lovestone led his followers into Brandler's camp—"skillfully" and by degrees. Miller today is Bedacht yesterday. An incidental figure himself he is nevertheless the dusk of Lovestone's twilight.

Bertram Wolfe, who has coined more luckless phrases than any other two men in the Right wing, once accused the Left Opposition of "travelling with express speed" away from Communism. We are not prepared to say at exactly what rate of speed the Right wing has moved away from Communism, in the last two years especially but it has become pretty plain that they are not impeded in their voyage by any heavy principled baggage. And the little they took along with them at the start cannot last long at the rate they are going.