

The Party and the Left Opposition

Dear Comrades:

In sending your conference my warmest greetings, I want to express myself once more and as briefly as possible regarding the general line of the German Communist Opposition.

It is clear to every one of us that the German Left Opposition is still extremely weak in comparison with the tasks posed before it by the entire situation. This weakness has been inherited from the past, and is the result of objective historical conditions as well as of the false policies first of the Maslow-Fischer, and then, of the Urbahns leadership. These people believed and taught all Opposition workers to believe that the official party must inevitably collapse and lose in influence, and that the Opposition, reinforced in its struggle with the party, will arise as a new party on its ruins. Consequently, every serious worker had to ask himself: if all that has been created in the course of the last ten to twelve years must collapse and new people build on new ground, what guarantee is there that the results are going to be better? This question is correctly posed. The only guarantee lies in the living experiences of the proletarian vanguard, and experience is gathered in events and years. Wide circles of revolutionary workers will begin to follow and confide in the Opposition, only when they are convinced by experience that it not only does not renounce all of the experiences accumulated—by Communism in Germany and in the entire world—but on the contrary, that it bases itself on these experiences in order to draw from them, together with the proletarian vanguard, the correct conclusions.

THE STRENGTH OF OUR PARTY IS OUR STRENGTH

Of course, the working-class, too, has its casualists, mere critics who form little groups that remain for years on the periphery of the labor movement and content themselves with impotent criticisms, apart from the large tasks and perspectives. These sprouts of ultra-Leftism rejoice over every failure of the Communist party, and hope superstitiously that out of the failures of the proletarian vanguard there will somehow grow up their own power.

With these sectarians, who in Germany play all the colors of the rainbow, we have not and can not have anything in common. For us, the victory of our policies depends not upon a weakening but a strengthening of the Communist party.

Is there any contradiction in this? Do we hear the possible objection—even a two-fold contradiction:

First: Can we expect a consolidation of the Communist party under the present leadership?

Second: Does not a consolidation of the party lead to a consolidation of the present leadership, which experience has proved incapable of leading the proletariat?

Both objections are incorrect, because they are not dialectic.

That the influence of the party can grow despite the present incompetent leadership has been proved anew by the last election. A correct leadership is the indispensable condition for durable successes and more so—for the complete victory of the proletariat. But a growth of the party's influence can take place in spite of the incompetent leadership, through the intercession of objective causes. We can say with certainty that the German party leadership has done nothing, beginning with the March days in 1921 and especially in October 1923, to this very day, but weaken the revolution, the proletariat. On the other hand, we have the hopeless international position of Germany, the avaricious and malignant policy of the German bourgeoisie, the infamous and treacherous rôle of the social-democracy, which force huge masses to tread the road of revolution. The fact that the bureaucratic Stalinist leadership, blind and self-confident, deaf and ignorant, opportunistic and adventurist as it is, by its entire policy prevents the revolutionized masses from rallying to the banner of Communism—this fact constitutes under the present circumstances a very serious source of strength for national socialism.

The increase of Communist votes at the last elections seems important by itself, when it is measured with the parliamentary yard stick. But it is extremely unimportant from the point of view of revolutionary possibilities and tasks.

We can say that at the last elections, the party gained the arithmetical difference between those masses whom the bourgeoisie and the social-democracy have driven towards it and those whom the leadership of the C. P. has repelled. And we can add with full justice that the gains of the German C. P. as those of all the other sections of the Comintern, would have been

By LEON TROTSKY

incomparably smaller, their losses far greater, were it not for the voice of censure and admonition of the Left Opposition, its analysis and its prognosis. No matter how weak we still are organizationally, we have nevertheless already become a serious factor in the inner life of the Communist party, and a factor of its consolidation at that.

The Rôle of the Thälmanns

But does not this consolidation lead to the strengthening of the present leadership? And is not the present leadership the main obstacle on the road to the proletarian revolution? The latter is absolutely correct. Thälmann, Remmele, Neumann are a combination of the worst features of bureaucratic irresponsibility, philistine self-satisfaction, barracks discipline and a peculiar adventurism of subordinates, one in which adventures are executed on command from the authorities and in which the adventurers know in advance that they will be left unpunished.

From political extremism, for which nothing exists save the "conquest of the streets" in the name of the immediate dictatorship of the proletariat (on paper), such a leadership can without any disturbance go over to possibilism by turning with every wind that blows from the petty bourgeoisie, even as far as chauvinism. The head of the officious Centrist is so constructed that all the winds of eclecticism constantly whistle within it. The revolutionary German workers would never tolerate this kind of leadership voluntarily. It is appointed, supported rescued and foisted upon the vanguard of the German proletariat by the Stalinist faction in Moscow. This is absolutely indisputable. But is it correct to say that a strengthening of the influence of the Communist party in the ranks of the German proletariat leads to a strengthening of the present leadership. No, that is not correct. This is the essential contention, false to the core, of all and every sort of ultra-Left and pseudo-Left sectarianism.

The Stalinist bureaucracy was able to attain its present power in the U. S. S. R. as well as on a world scale, only thanks to the enduring revolutionary ebb.

The Stalinist faction delivered its first blow at the Left wing, after the Brandlerist leadership had so disgracefully neglected the revolutionary situation in 1923.

The Stalinists submitted the Left Opposition to a merciless destruction, after Chiang Kai-Shek, yesterday Stalin's confederate, had destroyed the Chinese revolution. The years of capitalist stabilization were years of consolidation for the Stalinist apparatus. And that is by no means an accident. The decrease of mass activity, the decline of the revolutionary mood of the masses, the growth of apathy—these causes alone could make possible the enormous growth of party bureaucratism, supported on the state apparatus for material means and for means of repression.

Defeat of the Opposition Weakens Party

Thus the defeats of the international revolution, the weakening of the Communist parties, the weakening of the Left wing (Bolshevik-Leninists) within the parties and the growth of the power of the Stalinist apparatus have proved to be parallel and interconnected processes.

This simple and indisputable generalization alone permits us to construe several prognoses. A real radicalization of the masses and influx of workers under the banner of Communism will not mean a consolidation but a collapse of the bureaucratic apparatus. Thälmann, Remmele, Neumann—we repeat—can hold on to their leading positions only through the enfeeblement and the sterility of the revolutionary movement, only through a decline in the activity of the workers. Growth of Communist masses means a growth of revolutionary tasks, a growth of the requirements of leadership. The experiences of the last twelve years have

not been in vain. They have been stored up in the minds of thousands and tens of thousands of advanced workers, covered by a crust of formal discipline, but they will break open with all their force with the rise of the revolutionary period, when the advanced workers look with entirely different eyes upon the leadership that is destined to lead them in the decisive struggles.

The present increase of Communist votes, alongside of the growth of the fascist danger, must already have raised the revolutionary consciousness of the proletarian vanguard, and its critical spirit toward its own leadership as well. With this, the possibilities of propaganda and agitation increase also for the Bolshevik-Leninists.

What could destroy the Opposition, is the spirit of the street corner sect, which lives upon defeatism and malice, hopeless and without any perspectives.

In order to fulfill its historic rôle the Opposition must be impressed with the inseparable connection between the successes of the party and its own successes. Only in this way will the Opposition find its way into the ranks of the proletarian vanguard, from which it has been isolated by the combined forces of capitalist stabilization, the reprisals of the apparatus and the mistakes of its own leadership.

From what has been said it is clear that an unbridgeable chasm separates us from the Brandlerites and that the split with the Urbahns League was correct and salutary.

Therein lies the essence of the present situation: that while the Stalinist apparatus has become a deeply reactionary force supporting itself on capitalist stabilization and political sterility, the Opposition, on the con-

ditionary line and the banner of the party.

The further march of developments will reveal ever more clearly, provided we have a correct policy, that the ruling apparatus has fallen into complete antagonism to the needs of the party, while the fate of the Opposition, on the other hand, has become bound up with that of the party and the proletarian revolution.

Dangers Confronting the Opposition

In the past half year the German Opposition has accomplished a good bit of preparatory work. A separation of the fundamental lines has been executed, a separate organ, *Der Kommunist*, has been created and it has struck a correct course in relation to the official party. Finally, hand in hand with the other sections, the basis has been laid for an international organization of the Left. All this, in its entirety, forms the conditions for the development of a correct policy and consequently also for the growth of the influence of the Bolshevik-Leninist faction. And yet, only an insignificantly small part of the historic work, which faces the Left wing of Communism, has been accomplished. Loss of time, as well as the neglect of a revolutionary situation is a thoroughly real danger, posed not only before official Communism but before the Opposition as well.

Experience has proved anew how much time is lost by petty conflicts and group struggles which are inseparably bound up with the life of sectarian circles. There is no other method of getting rid of this inheritance of the past than that of holding up to view the gigantic revolutionary tasks in all their greatness, and that of mobilizing the spirit of sacrifice and devotion of the best elements of the Opposition for their solution. I wholeheartedly hope that your conference will do justice to this great task.

With firm Communist greetings,

L. TROTSKY.

Prinkipo, September 17, 1930.

Father Manuel and Comrade Epstein

SAN ANTONIO
THIS IS THE MAN
EL PADRE MANUEL
GOD IS WITH US
CROSSES, ROSARIES, MEDALLIONS,
HOLY PICTURES
HARRY EPSTEIN
423 Delmar St.,
San Antonio, Texas

workers" after six. The sacred fire burns within him at all time.

At six in the morning, he is again transubstantiated. Comrade Epstein once more becomes Father Manuel. Again, like a humble friar, he wends his way from door to door, urging the benighted to greater piety and selling them his crosses, rosaries, medallions and holy pictures. Of such is the Kingdom of God. This is the resurrection and the faith.

This is a true picture of a party member in San Antonio. We invite the Daily Worker to challenge it. The rest of the party membership there is not much better. They make an economic living by fleecing the Negro and the Mexican, and save their political soul by shrill protests of loyalty to the latest party "line". It goes without saying that they consider Trotsky worse than wrong. How long will this rubbish be tolerated in the party?

—CHARLES CURTISS.

After this was written, the *Daily Worker* published a statement announcing the expulsion of Epstein. The other Epsteins of varying shades remain. It is barely necessary to add that the statement also makes an attack on the "Trotskyists" and on comrade Curtiss in particular. The attacks on the Opposition are not new; they are an unoriginal repetition of Father Manuel's political philosophy. The attack on comrade Curtiss is, of course, a typical Stalinist "payment" to the Opposition for the crime of having pointed out in time an open sore in the movement which the Stalinists themselves only discover long afterwards.

OUR NEW PAMPHLET

Right after this issue of the *Militant* goes off the press, we are preparing to print a new pamphlet in the series which we have planned. It is "World Unemployment and the Five-Year Plan" by Leon Trotsky. The pamphlet deals with the proposal advanced by the Left Opposition for combining the unemployment crisis with the demand for the extension of credits to the Soviet Union to enable it to make more rapid progress with the industrialization and collectivization of the country. In addition, it contains a reply to the objections made to this proposal by the *Rude Pravo*, official organ of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. The pamphlet is admirably suited for distribution, especially at the present time. The introduction is written by Arne Swabeck, with special reference to the situation in the United States. Orders should be sent in immediately. The rates are 10 cents per copy and 7 cents in bundle orders of five or more. Send funds and orders to the *Militant*.

DEBATE

"IS THE PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP NECESSARY?"

James P. Cannon
Communist League of America
says, YES!

Walter Starrett
"Road to Freedom"
says, NO!

at the
LABOR TEMPLE
14th Street and Second Avenue
on
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1931

Admission: 35 Cents

AUSPICES: JOINT ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE.

8 P. M. sharp