

theses, the Labor party was visualized as the alternative to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie! It was planned to be the principal lever in unseating the Gompers bureaucracy. It was regarded as the source for an immediate "mass" Communist party. It was conceived as an embellished and more palatable substitute for the Communist party. It was viewed as an unavoidable and necessary "reformist" stage through which the American workers had to pass before they were ready for Communism, and which the Communists had to initiate, to build up into a strong movement, whose reformist programs the Communists were to write and defend, whose leadership was to be "in our hands" from the very beginning so that, presumably, it would not become "anti-Communist" or "too reformist". Not by accident did this shameful period in the history of American Communism embrace also the disgraceful "maneuver" with the petty bourgeois La Follette movement, and the flourishing of the "two-class party" theory and practice. Since they all functioned under the ideological domination of the Right Center bloc which had conquered power in the Comintern and stood upon its theoretical and political platform, all the party groups of that period shared to varying degrees the responsibility for the essentially revisionist conceptions that lay at the basis of the whole "labor party period", and the practices that flowed from them.

All these conceptions and practices must be thrown overboard, because they were originally wrong. The Centrists motivate the change of course they have undertaken on this score with the contention that conditions have changed, that we have entered a "third period" and because the reformists have "now become social fascists". This motivation is both false and dangerous, and leaves the real problem undecided. It is no rejection of the disastrous course of the party, but the maintenance of the basis for its repetition in the future. To condemn a "labor party policy" now because of an alleged "third period" and an alleged transformation of the reformists into "social fascists" leaves the door wide open for a return of the "labor party policy" when the "third period" gives way to a "fourth" and the "social

fascists", or their "Left" wing, produce a new set of reformists of the old Fitzpatrick type.

The American Communists cannot undertake to organize a petty bourgeois workers' party "standing between" the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Abstractly considered to be sure, were there a mass movement which would organize a labor party, the Communists would have to take up the question of working within it as a revolutionary nucleus. But this is a different matter entirely. Moreover, it is a matter which has less of a timely significance today—even abstractly—than in past years, since there is no substantial movement at all for a labor party in the 1932 elections. The Communists will enter that campaign under their own banner and in direct struggle against their reformist antagonists, the Socialist party.

It is the reformists of all shades, the Thomases and the Muses, who seek to set up this petty bourgeois party as a wall against the workers' progress towards Communism; in this work, they are only fulfilling their mission and role of prolonging as much as possible the "reformist period" in the development of the American working class. It is no accident that the Right wing liquidators of the Lovestone group have as the central point in their program the idea that the Labor party's formation is an essential and imperative step for the American workers, which the Right wing is ready to initiate to form and build up. It is this perspective which it recommends to the Communist movement as a whole to adopt. The Left Opposition, at its formative stage, leaned in the direction of this reformist perspective which constituted to a certain extent an uncritical carry-over of the preceding group struggle in the party, prior to the time when the Left wing took shape and was established as a political grouping distinct from all the others in the movement. The former establishment of its Marxian position dictates a break with this early standpoint and the adoption of the one outlined here. The adoption of this revised point of view, the result of clarification in its own ranks, marks a step forward that will enable the Opposition to bring greater clarity on this vital problem into the revolutionary and labor movements as a whole.

The Position of the Communist Movement and the Tasks of the Party

The possibilities for a rapid revolutionary advance of the American movement encounter a tremendous retarding influence in the form of one of the most striking contradictions in the international labor movement: the growing gap between the increasingly favorable situations and the decreasing capacities to exploit them of the official Communist parties. This holds true with particular force in the United States. It is the work of closing the blades of this opened "scissors" that invests the Left Opposition with its historic significance.

In spite of the manifold multiplication of objectively favorable opportunities for progress, the Communist Party of the United States has, in general, only stagnation or regression to record. At a time when its ranks should be increased manifold, it is barely able to hold its own. This phenomenon is all the more impressive in face of the obvious increase of sympathy among the masses for the ideas of Communism and the Soviet Union, and the demonstrated readiness of hundreds of thousands to rally behind the leadership of the Communists.

The leadership imposed upon the party behind its back at the Seventh Convention has showed a tragic bankruptcy in all fields. The condition which the Third Congress of the Comintern described as the "crisis in the leadership on the eve of the revolution" exists to a greater or less degree at all times. In the United States where the party has been confronted for the past two to three years with the need of adjusting itself to the new situation and of reaping a rich harvest of new strength, influence and prestige in the working class, this crisis has assumed a permanent character, increasing in acuteness in direct proportion to the increasing possibilities for success.

The steady loss in party membership commencing with the inauguration of the Ruthenberg-Pepper-Lovestone leadership in 1925, has barely been checked by the new leadership. With the opportunities for growth almost unprecedented, the party membership is still considerably below 10,000, that is, less than half the 1924-1925 figure. The arbitrary, bureaucratic regime in the party, moreover vitiates even the present low figure: the new member remains in the ranks of the party only for a very short time. The turnover in membership is enormous. Literally thousands of new members join the party only to take the place of other thousands who leave, and to be displaced in turn by other new recruits. The party members are ruled like political serfs, the regime is increasingly mechanized; all live and free internal life, all initiative, all inquiry and discussion of vital problems are strangled upon appearance. The functionary rises to leadership upon the basis of ever-ready obedience to the leader next in rank and immediately demands the same obedience from those "below" him; he falls from leadership on the basis of the theory of scapegoats. Leadership based upon an ability tested in such a manner that "those who are led" may see, based upon fruitful initiative and independent thought, upon devotion to the movement instead of to the authorities of the day, is non-existent in the party. Appointments have almost universally

replaced elections. The membership is taught a reactionary contempt for theoretical considerations and is instilled instead with a vulgar "practicalness". It is told, in effect to do the work it is commanded to do and not to do any thinking or discussing about it. It is constantly taken by surprise with new "turns", in which the old policy is just as little explained away as the new policy is justified. Bewildered by the constant changes ordered from above by a leadership floundering in its own incompetence, offended and degraded by the internal regime, like that of Prussian army officers, the worker-Communist drops out of the party or sinks into a passivity from which he is only infrequently raised by the frenzied, hectic "appeals" for "shock troop activities" by a leadership incapable of regulating a healthy party life. While tried revolutionists, loyal to the party and educated in Communist principles, are summarily expelled, new members are recruited directly into the party from street meetings and demonstrations, without any serious qualification test, without any subsequent education to fit him for membership in the highest organ of the proletariat, the party. Finally, the general political-ideological level of the membership has suffered an alarming decline.

These are some of the results in the party of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Centrist leadership which can remain at the head of the party only by strangling it.

The record is no less disastrous in those movements under the party's leadership. The T. U. L. and its affiliated unions have been reduced to skeleton organizations (resolution of the Proffintern). The I. L. D. has stood still or declined (resolution of the International Red Aid Plenum). The Unemployment Councils which, together with the party, stood at the head of demonstrations embracing hundreds of thousands of workers, are reduced to their weak party fractions and an ever-changing handful of sympathizing workers. The "Anti-Imperialist League" has saved itself the trouble of being formally liquidated as a petty bourgeois stamping ground by its virtual decay. The other auxiliary organizations show the same or a worse picture. In none of these organizations, particularly in the Left wing unions, is the non-party workers (and often enough even the party member!) made to feel at home. The party bureaucracy is so uncertain of its policies that it dares not submit them for the workers to judge them as applied in practice: it must therefore force its policies and its leadership upon the workers and even the party members by outrageous mechanical measures. This fact alone is an objective testimony to the fallaciousness of the present political course. The workers, however, cannot be won to Communist leadership by tricks or violence. They can be won only by persuasion and by their own experiences. The attempts to win them by the present methods can only result in continuous losses and defeats.

The present party policy is still based upon the twin ideas of a stormy upsurge of the American workers under the leadership of the Communists and the frontal attack upon the "social fascists", i. e., upon all those who are not under the

influence of the Communists. The first idea leads the party into premature actions into adventures, from the defeats of which it frequently recoils to the most vulgar opportunism (from "fight the police" and capture the streets to fight for . . . soup kitchens). The second idea alienates the Communists from the non-party workers particularly the progressive-minded and socialist workers, and enabled the treacherous leaders of the latter to render and keep their followers antagonistic to Communism. The first step of real progress for the party demands as a pre-requisite that both these ideas be condemned and rejected. The party must, instead, take as its point of departure the lead that the premises for a genuine radicalization already exist in the United States; that the capitalist offensive during the present crisis opens the perspective for widespread Communist influence in the coming struggles; that this influence can be won by mobilizing the workers of all political and economic opinions in a genuine united front on the basis of a concrete minimum program of struggle.

It is not the objective situation which is the cause for the shortcomings and defects in the party today. This cause is rather to be sought and uprooted in the party itself, in its leaders and their policies. What are the immediate steps that the party must take to mitigate and eventually to purge itself of the crisis into which it has been thrown?

1. The party must shake off the bureaucratic regime which strangles its initiative, its independence, its ability to grow. The appointment of party officials must be discarded and replaced by their election upon the basis of qualifications. Free discussion must take the place of arbitrary commands from above. The party press must be opened immediately—and not only during the spurious "pre-convention period"—for a thoroughgoing and honest discussion of the party crisis by the party members.
2. The party must discard its exaggerated analysis of the tempo of development of the working class and must adjust its course to the real relationship of forces in the class struggle and the pace of its development. The party must finally rid itself of the ruinous baggage of remnants of the "third period", and particularly of the theory of "social fascism". A broad, genuine policy of the united front must be promulgated and every effort made to win the non-party workers on the basis of it.
3. The arbitrary and unconditional policy—both in theory and practice—of deserting the reactionary trade unions which still have a relatively large following must be radically revised. The party must again penetrate into every trade union and build up the influence of the revolutionists on the basis of concrete demands and daily struggles, with

The Left Opposition and Its Role in the Movement

The International Left Opposition came into existence as the counter-agent to the Thermidorian reaction in the Soviet Union and the bureaucratic degeneration of the Communist International. The Left wing did not establish itself outside the ranks of Communists or of the Communist movement. It was brutally and disloyally detached from the ranks of the official parties by the repressive organizational measures of the Centrist and Right wing bureaucracy, acting as the conscious and unconscious agents of reaction.

The present numerical weakness of the Left Opposition is determined by the defeats of Communism on an international scale. The Opposition in the Soviet Union and throughout the Comintern was organizationally defeated only as a result of the period of reaction in Russia (1923-1928), of the defeat of the German October, the Chinese Revolution, the English general and miners' strikes, of the victory of capitalist stabilization in Europe following 1923, etc., etc. The growth and victory of the Left Opposition, therefore, cannot be founded upon the defeats of Communism and the Communist parties; on the contrary, they are inseparably connected with the growth and triumph of international Communism. This determines for us our attitude to the official Communist parties in general, and to the American party in particular. Our aim is to strengthen the Communist party, to regenerate it, to help cleanse it of the evils that corrode it, to help it to prepare and consolidate its victories.

The Left Opposition categorically rejects the narrow-minded, bureaucratic, philistine idea—propounded by Stalinism and shared by many pseudo-Oppositionists—that the Communist party is identical with its leadership. This is equivalent to saying that the party has decayed beyond hope, for the present leadership of the Comintern and the parties is bureaucratically and cynically degenerated and lives a purely parasitic existence. The party is something far greater to us—and to the thousands upon thousands of militant workers in this country who are in its ranks or under its leadership. The party is the embodiment of a system of revolutionary ideas which the apparatus men have been unable to destroy completely. In the eyes of the militant workers, it represents the life and the traditions of the workers' fatherland, the Soviet Union. It still embraces or influences the overwhelming bulk of the active organized and semi-organized revolutionary militants in the country. It is upon them that the Left Opposition bases its activities and its hopes for growth. We are conducting no struggle against the ideas, the principles, the traditions of Communism, but a struggle against those who seek

to discredit and destroy them. The Left Opposition is not a party; it is a faction of the Communist party from which it has been expelled by the bureaucrats against its will and against the interests of the movement. The Left Opposition does not seek to constitute a second party; on the contrary, it categorically repudiates all tendencies in that direction. The party of the Opposition is the Communist party. Its ideas are those established and tested for the revolutionary movement by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. The Left Opposition therefore strives at all times to be reinstated into its party, not upon the condition of an acceptance of all its ideas and principles, but only upon the condition that it is granted the elementary right of all Communist workers: the freedom to defend its revolutionary point of view at the proper time in the proper way, and through the proper channels.

This general attitude towards the party at the same time determines the attitude of the Left Opposition towards other groups in the labor movement. Its struggle against Centrism has not reconciled it to social democratic or anarcho-syndicalist reformism; on the contrary, it has rendered it more intransigent towards these petty bourgeois tendencies in the working class for it is against their influence in the Communist movement that the Left Opposition has been constituted.

All the fantastic myths and deliberate falsehoods to the contrary notwithstanding the Left Opposition conducts the most relentless struggle against the Right wing liquidators (Lovestone, Brandier, Seller, etc., etc.). The Right wing is a bridge from the Communist movement to the social democracy. That is what it was when it was the main partner in the leadership of the Comintern (1923-1928), and it is that even more so today, outside the Comintern. The Right wing does not move towards the social democracy at one step or in one straight line. In some places, it has already gone over completely to the social democracy (Czecho-Slovakia, parts of the Brandierites in Germany, Miller and Co. in the United States); elsewhere, it has "capitulated" to Centrism (Bucharin in Russia); elsewhere it exists "independently". But in any case, whether inside the party or outside of it whether the immediately next step of the Right wing is to the social democracy directly, or indirectly through the Communist party (by temporary capitulation), the course of the Right wing nevertheless remains the course of liquidating the Communist movement and its ideological foundations. This alone determines the fact that the Left Opposition makes no alliance or bloc with the Right wing, which means an alliance

against the Party. On the contrary, it makes every endeavor to unite the Communist movement against the liquidatory Right. This does not mean that the Opposition gives up the attempt to win to its ranks the militants who were driven into the Right wing by the stupid tactics and indefensible course of Centrism. Quite the contrary.

This viewpoint, further, determines the attitude of the Left Opposition to the opportunist and confusionist standpoint of Weisbord. Posing as an "adherent" of the Left Opposition, which he discredits, Weisbord seeks a bloc with the Right wing liquidators against the "party criminals" in order to do "mass work" and to separate the Communist movement "as a whole" from "Menshevism"—which is represented in the Communist movement by precisely these Right wing liquidators. Weisbord's course could only lead towards a second party which, of course, he can never constitute. The Left Opposition has no need or reason to go through the disastrous experiences of Urbahns, Paz, or Lovestone—a combination of whose policies and views are recapitulated as Weisbord's program. The views of Weisbord are incompatible with the views of the Left Opposition.

The task of the Left Opposition is not the organization of a new party out of the semi-reformist, semi-syndicalist, demoralized, passive, burned-out elements on the fringe of the Communist movement. Our task is the winning of the Communist workers to the principles which lie at our foundation. The first step in accomplishing this task has already been taken in the rallying of the initial cadres of our movement, constituted out of the most advanced Communist militants who, in the party in liberating themselves from the conceptions, and views of Centrism and the Right wing, and separating themselves from all groups and elements maintaining them, adopted the principles of the International Marxian wing. The preservation and training up of the first cadres has necessarily occupied the main place in the work of the Left Opposition in the United States since its establishment and has proceeded with considerable success in spite of the enormous difficulties, and with only an insignificant handful of capitulators to Centrism. The discussions in the organization, the absorption of the experiences of the Opposition in other countries, primarily in the Soviet Union, the publication of the MILITANT, the International Bulletin, and recently, the issuance of a number of fundamental works in English—all these have been of invaluable aid in educating the first cadres of the Left Opposition, and what is more, of breaking down a large measure of the hostility against us artificially fostered in the party by the apparatus.

One of the main achievements of the Opposition has been its ability to contribute to the redressment of the party's course. By its comradely criticism to the party members and intransigent opposition to the zig-zags of the Centrist leaders, the Left wing has succeeded in influencing the policies of the party to a far greater extent than is apparent. The partial turn from "social fascism" and isolation in the needle trades was considerably accelerated by the propagation of our viewpoint. The sectarian policy pursued among the Illinois miners was largely cast overboard through the combined effect of events and the direct intervention and criticism of the Left. The results obtained in this field dictate an intensification of this work.

The Left Opposition cannot rest content with or confine itself simply to a repetition of its fundamental differences with Centrism on national socialism versus the permanent revolution, on the role of the party, on the nature of the colonial bourgeoisie, on the struggle against war, on the role of reformism, and so forth. It is the task of the Opposition to intervene actively, as an organized group, with its own proposals and program of action in every situation. This intervention must take place within and around the organized Communist movement, and not outside of it, without it, or without regard to it. The Left Opposition must appear not merely as an organ of criticism after the event. It can and should come forward in every field of the Communist movement's activity with proposals calculated to advance the interests of the movement, with the aim of showing by concrete action the correctness of a consistent Marxian line as against the confusion and zig-zags of Centrism. This work will not only strengthen the party and the general Left wing movement, but it will consolidate the Left Opposition by convincing the revolutionary militants, on the basis of their own experiences, that we stand firmly for the building of the revolutionary movement at every stage of its development.

Towards this end also, the Opposition must reorganize and consolidate its faction inside the party and Y. C. L., gaining to its side the best party militants, working inside the party and

league for their liberation from the Centrist bureaucracy, from opportunism, and adventurism. It is only by such intimate contact with the innermost life of the party and league that the Opposition will be able to accomplish the aims it has set itself.

The Left Opposition must now direct its attention towards a new wave of support from the ranks of the party. The contradiction between the interests and needs of the party, and the false course and incompetence of the bureaucracy, cannot forever be suppressed by the apparatus. The process of development in our direction will be considerably accelerated by the events in the international, and above all, by the events in the Soviet Union. The Left Opposition must be alive to the situation and drive ahead for a speedy crystallization of the new movement in our direction. This requires a firm tightening up of the ranks of the Opposition. As is inevitable, elements tend to enter our ranks as a place of refuge from the struggle. Others look upon their title of Left Oppositionist as an absolution from active, self-sacrificing daily work for the movement. The Left Opposition leave room in its ranks for such elements only at the risk of its own decadence. Tasks to every Oppositionist! Active daily work from every member! Great efforts and sacrifices for the movement! These must be inscribed upon the banner of the organization. The unavoidable organizational looseness that has been manifest up to now must be sharply checked and eliminated.

The Left Opposition has assumed a gigantic historical task: the restoration of the international Communist movement to the revolutionary principles upon which it was built up. In the United States this task is rendered doubly significant by the general backwardness of the working class, the weakness of the Communist movement, and by the magnificent revolutionary perspectives which are being opened up to the proletarian movement. The Marxist must be able to measure up to the heights of their task. Standing upon the firm foundations of the teachings of the leaders of the international proletariat, enriched by the lessons of the revolutionary struggles of the last two decades, irremovable in principle and remaining true to its own past, the Left Opposition goes forward to the struggles of tomorrow confident of the ultimate victory.

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