

League Replies to Weisbord Letter

(Continued from previous issue)

Weisbord denied the existence of Centrist in the Communist movement and characterized the Stalinists and Lovestonites indiscriminately as "Right wing" groups, and then to make confusion worse confounded he placed the Communist League in the same category. That is why he had so much difficulty in deciding which group to join. That is also the principal reason why he demanded that the Left Opposition and the Right wing should "work together", and why he himself tried it, in the "Textile Unity Committee", with such disastrous results.

The present attempt to evade a serious correction of this basic error by denying that it was ever meant that way, or by maintaining that "the whole question seems to be one of name" (as though a precise attitude toward a political tendency is possible without defining it) does not square with the previous programmatic declarations on the subject, continuously repeated in the conflict with us and contrasted with our "sectarianism" in rejecting them. In his article in the Militant for September 15, 1930 Weisbord expounded his theory as follows:

"However, it seems that comrade Trotsky is incorrect in designating the struggle between Bucharin and Stalin (and the national groups around them) as one between Right and Centrist tendencies in the Communist movement. It is in reality a struggle between two forms of the Right. But philosophically and politically the conception of a Centrist COMMUNIST wing is wrong. Centristism can be used as designating Stalinists but not Communists. This was Lenin's usage of the term. Practically, it gives the illusion that the Centrists are more to the Left than the Right and that Centrists are more easily swayed and have no real policy of their own."

It is quite obvious from the foregoing that between this viewpoint and that of the Left Opposition there was no mere difference in words but in analysis, and consequently in the conclusions deriving from it. On the basis of this formulation, as well as the practical proposals repeatedly made, comrade Weisbord is entirely correct in saying to Trotsky: "You are concerned to efface the difference between the official party, the Right wing fraction (Lovestone group) and even the American League. This makes it easy for you to remain in an eclectic position and defend your right of a bloc with the Lovestone group."

The reply of the Weisbord group to Trotsky's letter "emphatically denies the implications" of this estimate, and further denies ever having proposed a bloc with the Right wing. Again the present contention is refuted by the previous declaration and proposals. In this same article in the Militant referred to above there follows from this analysis of the groups the following conclusion: "At the same time all Communist groups must work together on the basis of the recognition of the Communist character of each group. The Communist Majority Opposition group and the Communist League group by working together can help to reestablish mass work and to resist the violent tactics of the party officialdom. They can help to separate the Communist movement as a whole from the Mensheviks and can deal a death blow to the theory of Fascism and social Fascism, thus winning the advanced workers to a Leninist conception of party democracy. Only such a working together of Communist groups (only this!) can raise those fundamental principles of Leninist organization that can reconstitute an International of Lenin."

If this is not a bloc with the Right wing, what would such a bloc look like? How hopelessly the Communist League would have compromised itself before the Communist workers and before the International Left Opposition! It ought to be perfectly clear now to everyone, including Weisbord, that the League National Committee was right in maintaining that such conceptions had nothing in common with the Left Opposition. We saw in this the crux of our conflict with him and still see it that way. Most of the other differences flowed from this. In our reply (Militant, September 15, 1930) we said:

"It is with comrade Weisbord's proposals on the various groups in the movement that the Left Opposition has its sharpest disagreement. Advocacy of such views by a leading comrade is contrary to all we stand for. . . . That is false from beginning to end."

And further:

"How can we, the Marxist wing of the movement, unite with the semi-Menshevik wing (a bloc which under present conditions would mean a movement directed against the official Communist movement) in order to 'separate' the Communist movement as a whole from the 'Menshevik'? How can a bloc with the Right wing 're-establish mass work', when it is the whole philosophy of the Right wing that has brought the Communist movement into such isolation from the masses (Chinese revolution, British general strike, India, etc., etc.), into opportunistic swamps from which Centrist is now trying, ineffectively, to issue by means of the ultra-Leftist rope?"

"Such a policy, combined as it is with comrade Weisbord's entirely false estimate of Centrist (his denial of it, in fact), is the shortest road to destruction of the Left Opposition and a disavowal of its historical function."

From the preceding alone, it is obvious that Weisbord has not sufficiently revealed the source of his own fundamental error in this key question, the nature of it, or even the fact that it existed in the form in which he really presented and interpreted it. Without clarity on this score, there is no assurance whatso-

We print here the final installment of the statement of the National Committee of the Communist League of America (Opposition) on the Weisbord group's reply to comrade Trotsky.

ever against the recurrence of the utterly false conceptions entertained by Weisbord or against the introduction of them into the ideological stream of the League. We consider necessary a more candid and less ambiguous re-statement of comrade Weisbord's position on this point.

THE QUESTION OF MASS WORK

The formula behind which Weisbord continues to take refuge from the attacks upon his false positions in principle, is "mass work". The Opposition has never been and is not today able to agree in any sense or to any degree with the standpoint in this question advanced by Weisbord prior to his recent statement. In Weisbord's conception, the question of the Opposition's work among the masses was made an inseparable part of his idea of a bloc between the Marxist Left and the Right wing liquidators. It is for this reason, and not because of our "sectarian opposition" to "mass work", that the League steadily rejected, and still does, the crude program advocated by Weisbord. As Trotsky wrote in January 1931:

"Certain comrades—to be sure, only individual ones (in the literal sense of the word)—speak for a bloc with the Lovestonites in the name of . . . 'mass work'. It is hard to imagine a more ridiculous, a more inept, a more sterile project than this. Do these people know at least a little of the history of the Bolshevik party? Have they read the works of Lenin? Do they know the correspondence of Marx and Engels? Or has all the history of the revolutionary movement passed them by without leaving a trace? Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of the American League has nothing in common with such ideas."

And again, in his recent letter to Weisbord, comrade Trotsky again points out that "mass work" as such does not exist as a question to be disputed in the ranks of the Left Opposition, but is indissolubly bound up with a correct position in principle, which Weisbord did not possess and which, consequently, vitiated his whole conception and rendered it sterile and reactionary:

"Mass work must be on the basis of definite principles and methods. Until the time that, in a number of fundamental questions a necessary unanimity will be attained, disputes on 'mass work' will inevitably remain lifeless."

And several months ago, comrade Trotsky pointed out in his letter to Weisbord, just as we had done in our discussions with him:

"Before one turns to the masses, one must construct a principle basis. One begins as a propaganda group and develops in the direction of mass action." (Militant, November 23, 1931.)

The Communist League at no time opposed mass work as such, but we always considered the question as part and parcel of the means of the organization, its resources, the concrete situation of the moment, the relation of forces and above all, the fundamental principles of our action. This is evidenced by even a cursory knowledge of the past of the League. In Minneapolis, virtually at the inception of the League, when all our energies were bent upon the ideological and theoretical front, the Opposition even went so far as to present its own candidate for Mayor in opposition not only to the bourgeois candidates but also to the Stalinist nominee, a step taken upon the basis of our estimation of the concrete conditions of the time and place. This holds for several other campaigns undertaken by the League in that locality. In the case of the three indicted New York Marine Workers, despite the active opposition of the official party (and unfortunately, of Weisbord himself), the League took the initiative in organizing the movement for their defense and bearing the largest part of the work in their behalf. In Illinois, not for the first time, the League is even now engaged in its own independent campaign to advance

the views of the Left Opposition among the miners in the present strike and new-union situation.

In the first years of its existence, the League was necessarily obligated to bend all its energies to the task of marking itself off organizationally and, above all, ideologically from all the other currents in the proletarian movement, especially from the Right wing and the Center, as well as from all confusionist and accidental streams. We had acute nature, in order to attain the necessary degree of clarification in principle—against the advocates and tendencies of a second Communist party, against semi-syndicalist elements, and other currents of an equally destructive nature. Especially, these circumstances inexorably and necessarily shaped the main characteristics of the League's activity.

There is no doubt that conditions are now maturing for a turn. The intensive propaganda work carried on by the League has borne fruit in the consolidation of the initial cadre of the Left Opposition which is the pre-requisite for the movement to "develop in the direction of mass action". The latter is an imperative necessity. But it stands in no contradiction to our past concentration upon propagandistic activities; on the contrary, the turn to mass work which must now be made could be accomplished only upon the basis of what has gone before it. As long ago as December 12, 1931, the Militant declared in speaking about the expansion of the press of the League:

"The roots of our movement are spreading wide and going deep. In all these developments we see the proof that the conditions are maturing for a transformation of the form and character of our organization. There is reason to believe that we are on the way toward a breaking out of the narrow confines of a purely propaganda bloc."

At no stage in our development has our aim and perspective been akin to a sectarian absence from the general class struggle, nor was our propaganda work ever conceived as an end in itself. We regarded it as the absolutely essential preliminary means for a successful approach to the masses in a revolutionary sense.

We do not find ourselves in agreement with that part of comrade Trotsky's letter to Weisbord. If it is to be given the interpretation placed on it by the latter, which says: "Let us admit, for a minute, that the American League lacks this or that possibility in mass work, I am ready to admit that your group would be able in that respect (i. e., mass work) to complete the work of the American League." Even in this hypothetical form it is necessarily based upon representations of Weisbord rather than upon our concrete experiences with him.

In this respect, the "Textile Unity Committee", constituted as an anti-party bloc between Weisbord and the Lovestone group, is a shining example. Had the League adopted the insistent proposals of Weisbord for "mass work" as construed by him, it would have discredited itself, blurred the lines between itself and the Right wing instead of making them stand out more clearly and raised the authority of the Lovestone faction. Yet this is precisely what Weisbord did by his T. U. C. against our most comradely contrary advice. The influence he had among the textile workers of Paterson went entirely to the profit of the Right wing partner in the bloc, and under the circumstances, had to go there. The T. U. C. was the springboard for the Right wing to the position it subsequently gained in the Paterson strike. Weisbord bears a share of the responsibility for this, although it must be said that he later broke the alliance and tried, during the Paterson strike in particular, to repair the damage. But the damage itself, and the policy which inevitably produced it, is the important aspect of the whole point.

We do not believe that the Weisbord group has a special formula for work in this field, or a special contribution to make, and we are in general opposed to the conceptions expounded by him on this subject. By this we do not aim to deny

that the addition of the Weisbord group would add to the forces of the League, even if not fundamentally, and by that increase its capacities to expand its activities in direct and more extensive participation in the class struggle as well as in the other phases of its work.

THE TACTIC OF THE WEISBORD GROUP IN OTHER QUESTIONS

Weisbord's letter raises a number of questions which we do not consider fundamental for the present discussion, which is calculated not for a solution of all the questions in dispute, and certainly not those of second and tenth order, but solely for the questions of principle. That is why we omit from consideration or even mention, on this occasion, many of the points dealt with in the letter of Weisbord. It is impossible to permit these issues to push into the background those which we consider primary. Thus, Weisbord raises among what he designates as "decisive questions" of dispute with the Opposition, certain points from which we take one as an example: "is it not 'decisive' that a League should be run by people who voluntarily turn over the names and addresses of members and sympathizers, subscribers to their paper, to the United States government?"

This is a sample of that distorted, indolent and naive "criticism" which muddies up the discussion of the basic questions and heightened the antagonisms against him. What he returns to is the fact that postal regulations require a filing of proof of circulation, etc., with the authorities at the time of applying for convenient second class mailing privileges—which has been done by the entire labor press in this country for decades. Nearly four years ago, at the time the Militant applied for second class status and rates, the initial orders from various parts of the country were presented to the postal authorities in compliance with governmental regulations as proof of circulation. This has been done by all working class papers, without anyone, at any time, having made an issue of it in the labor movement—for such an issue would have meant with the ridicule which Weisbord's present accusation justly merits. He could just as logically object to the filing of Communist petitions to put candidates on the ballot, for they are signed, with names and addresses, by thousands of workers sympathetic with the radical movement. We do not like the official regulations, but without the strength as yet to abolish them we adapt ourselves, for the sake of legal agitation, to bourgeois statutes, frankly and without apology.

Similarly with the Negro question, on which we allegedly have no position. This is not true. The League has taken a position on the fundamental aspects of the Negro question. The accusation of Weisbord is "true" exactly, and only, in so far as the League has not taken a stand on one phase of the Negro problem: the slogan of self-determination in the "Black Belt", a subject upon which the League has been conducting an internal discussion and will soon come to a conclusion. It is certainly not the merit of the League that it has spent such a protracted period in arriving at a conclusion on this question, but if Weisbord had used greater deliberation and caution, it is possible that he would not have arrived at so thoroughly false a position as he has in his own thesis. Neither the American party nor the C. I. ever considered this phase of the Negro question here of such decisive importance, from 1919 to 1928, as to utter a single word on it, and it was raised only four years ago by the Stalinist apparatus as their improvement upon the Leninist standpoint.

More important than these secondary, exaggerated or non-existent issues, is such a question as Weisbord's conduct during the Marine Workers' Defense campaign, and toward comrades of his own organization with whom he was in dispute. In the former case, Weisbord took a position which, from the class standpoint, we still hold to be incompatible with the basic principles of class solidarity against the class enemy. His step of bringing his own comrade into court, called forth the sharpest condemnation from the League, and rightly so. From

of British India, and far below the 4,070 tons for Great Britain and the 27,500 tons for the U. S. To make matters worse for the coal that Japan does possess, which is good as bunker coal on ships, is unfit for cooking and therefore unfit for steel production. The high cost of coke is a major problem for the Japanese steel industry and renders her competition in this field utterly impossible under present technology. The cost of coke per ton of pig iron in 1927 was \$3.25 in the U. S. and \$7.50 in Japan. Only in China (with its 2,200 tons per capita reserves) is there coking coal in the Far East and even there not in large amounts.

Coal mining is far more difficult in Japan than in the other capitalist countries as the seams lie much deeper and are thinner. Less machinery being used, the output per miner is less. Thus each miner produced 1-2 ton per day in 1925 as against 4-1-2 tons for the U. S. Nor is this cost made up by cheaper labor—the output being 1-0 as great but the wages being 1-5 those in the U. S.

Textiles

Barred from rapid progress in the heavy industries by her lack of the necessary raw materials, Japanese capitalism has been forced—for other reasons as well—to turn to the lighter textile industries. Yet even here Japan is forced to import cotton, the raw material of greatest importance to her manufacturing. Supplied with an abundance of raw silk, Japan is nevertheless not a great manufacturer of silk but rather a source of raw material for the U. S. silk industry.

It is above all this poverty in raw materials that makes Japan a debtor nation, hyper-sensitive to world market conditions, unstable financially owing to difficulties of international payments.

III. The Imperialist Struggle for Markets

Japanese feudal-capitalism entered the world arena even later than German imperialism and her struggle for markets commenced at the very birth of her capitalism, particularly in competition with the powers in China. China and India, with half the world's population, form a fabulous market. But India is pre-empted by England. More than any other power Japan depends on foreign markets, for no other country exports so large a percentage of the total production of goods. The desperate effort of Japanese imperialism to subjugate China as a colony to function as market and as source of raw material, is the reflection of the stifling action of capitalist world economy on the further growth of Japanese productive forces. But China is also essential to U. S. capitalism and Chinese capitalists desire to exploit the home market themselves. Young as is Japanese capitalism, it has already passed through many crises and has had to limit its productive capacities again and again due to the competition for markets. Japanese capitalism is faced with the task of carving out its own markets by seizing China or by wresting colonies from the established powers. This external struggle manifests the desperate effort of the feudal-capitalist combination to maintain the inner exploitation of the workers and peasants.

Archives of the Opposition

«Socialism in One Country»

The central theory of Stalinism, around which revolve or from which emanate all the false policies which it denounces, is the idea of "socialism in one country". At one time, in the early days of the struggle of the Russian Opposition against the Stalinist revision of Marxism, Stalin, when confronted with an overwhelming array of excerpts from the socialist classics, admitted that the question of the possibility of constructing a socialist society in one country was first raised by Lenin in 1915. The implication was that up to that time the prevailing conceptions in Marxist circles ran counter to the theory. Since the expulsion of the Opposition from the party, Stalin and his satellites have rid themselves of the need of any apologetics for the theory, or of any qualifications. It is now advanced, not as a revelation first handed down from Mount Stalin in 1924, nor even as an innovation first introduced into Marxism by Lenin in 1915, but as an essential foundation stone of Marxism as such.

We have frequently had occasion to present our readers with countless quotations from the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin which categorically contradict this utopian—by your leave—theory. Not a few of the pre-1924 writings of Bucharin and Stalin are available which speak as a matter of course concerning the impossibility of constructing an independent, national socialist society. To add to this lengthy collection, we present here a significant passage from the pamphlet by the Russian Marxist, A. Yashchenko, "Socialism and Internationalism", published in Moscow in 1907, and quoted approvingly in the "History of the First International" (page 11) by G. M. Steklov, the Bolshevik historian:

"From the economic point of view, the characteristic feature of socialist organization is unity in economic relationships, in place of the extent system of production—devoid of order, plan, and method, entirely uncoordinated to chance, competition and the struggle of interests—socialism will create order and stability. The work of production will then be in the hands of the whole community, as a unified economy; and it will be directed by the central authority. . . . The nearest thing to such a collectivity can only be an isolated socialist State does not of itself imply the introduction of complete order and harmony into economic life. In that case competition and the economic struggle between the various

this we have nothing to retract. The Left Opposition distinguishes itself by a scrupulous adherence to the fundamental concepts of class solidarity under all circumstances and can not tolerate the slightest departure from them in its ranks.

UNITY MANEUVERS OF WEISBORD

The partial turn which the Weisbord group has made toward the International Left Opposition, and thereby toward the Communist League, has to a considerable extent been vitiated by the paitry maneuvers in which he has since engaged in the name of unity with us.

He began with proposals to us for "united fronts" on single and subsidiary questions when the problem was the clarification of his principled position to be made in a preliminary statement of his group in which, as comrade Trotsky advised, he would "attentively revise your baggage so as to take care to uncover by that not only your manifest political faults but also the historical and principled roots of these faults." Before issuing this necessary statement, he called a public meeting to which members of the League were invited to discuss the question. Without any formal proposals to the National Committee of the League, and before any public declaration of a change in his position, he addressed himself to the branches of the League over the head of the National Committee with the request that he be invited to "discuss" the question of unity

will perpetually disturb the internal harmony of their relationships, for under the present conditions of the life of mankind, it is impossible to conceive of a State as economically isolated and independent. In fact, it is impossible to imagine the existence of a national socialist State amid States organized upon the individual system."

Fortunate is Yashchenko that he did not live and write under the Stalinist dispensation! For what he, as well as all Marxists, took for granted as impossible, has not only been made "possible" by decree of the Secretary but those who question the correctness of the new theory are free to meditate on their doubts in the prisons and places of exile to which the bureaucracy dispatches the Left Opposition.—S.

On Hopeless Idiots

On August 24, 1919, Lenin wrote:

"Either the dictatorship (that is, the iron power) of the landowners and the capitalists, or the dictatorship of the working class. There is no middle ground. In vain do the lords, would-be intellectuals and petty gentlemen, who have learned badly in bad books, dream about a middle ground. Nowhere in the world is there a middle ground or can there be one. Either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, covered with the pompous phrases of S. R.'s and Mensheviks about the power of the people, the Constituent Assembly, freedom, etc.—or the dictatorship of the proletariat. He who has not learned this from the history of the whole nineteenth century is a hopeless idiot." (Works, Volume XVI, page 305.)

What about the "democratic dictatorship" which Stalin and Bucharin included in the program of the Communist International? It is obvious that the democratic dictatorship, if it differs from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat, must stand somewhere between the two. But Lenin declares to us that "there is no middle ground", that only "petty gentlemen who have learned badly" can dream about a middle ground, or worse yet, "hopeless idiots". Can it be assumed even for a minute that theoreticians of these two categories had a hand in the program of the Communist International?

directly with them, attempting thereby once more to apply the well-known tactic of the "united front from below". This disruptive strategy which violated the whole essence of the engagements he undertook and the warning of comrade Trotsky that "before everything, you must keep clearly in mind that the road to the International Left Opposition leads through the American League; a second road does not exist"—has very properly encountered the solid rejection of all the branches of the League.

If Weisbord sincerely wishes to approach the League in the spirit of unity, it will be necessary for him to alter this strategy and retrace his steps in this respect. The Communist League is an organization and must be dealt with seriously as such through its duly constituted organs.

The National Committee of the League emphasizes that it is desirous of consummating the unity of the Left Opposition with the Weisbord group with the greatest clarity, of putting no petty obstacles in the road but, on the contrary, of facilitating the rapprochement to the extent that considerations of principle permit. It is ready to have aside small and secondary questions for the moment, and refrain from converting them into conditions for unity, in the sense that within the framework of one organization the normal processes of internal democracy will permit a discussion and satisfactory solution of all the questions which still divide Weisbord from the League. But on the basic questions, the National Committee cannot and does not propose to make the slightest concession which would only militate against the soundness and future progress of the Opposition.

Impelled solely by these considerations, the National Committee views the problem from the point of view that the next step must now be taken by the Weisbord group. This step and what follows from it, we conceive as follows:

1. The Weisbord group, on the basis of the present statement of the Communist League, should reconsider its reply to comrade Trotsky and elaborate such a declaration as it will more seriously and more satisfactorily constitute a revision of its ideological baggage, especially on the questions of Centrist and the bloc with the Right wing. We do not regard its letter to comrade Trotsky as adequate, for the reasons outlined in this statement, and we deem a re-statement by the Weisbord group an essential preliminary to further steps of unification.

2. Upon the basis of the statement by the Weisbord group which we propose in the preceding point, the National Committee will request representatives of the "Communist League of Struggle" to be selected for the purpose of holding a joint meeting at which a formal discussion of the respective standpoints of the League and the Weisbord group may be discussed with the aim of arranging both the remaining points of difference—which we hope will be reduced to a minimum at that stage—and any organizational details that may be involved.

—NATIONAL COMMITTEE
COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF
AMERICA (OPPOSITION)

JAPAN

Its Rise from Feudalism to Capitalist Imperialism and the Development of the Proletariat

By Jack Weber

(Continued from last issue)

II. The Dearth of Raw Materials

Without ample coal and iron reserves no country can aspire to a place of first rank among modern industrial powers. Lacking in adequate home reserves of these essentials, Japanese capitalism is under the imperative necessity of importing them from abroad. In this respect and more generally, Japan ranks with Italy.

Influence of Iron Ores

In 1928 Japan produced 8% of the total iron ores she consumed. Of the 92% she imported 11% came from Japanese colonies and the remainder mainly from China and Straits Settlement. The known iron ores of the Far East, including Japan, Korea, Manchuria and China, are so small in quantity that if Japan were to consume these ores at the per capita rate of the U. S. the entire body of ores would be exhausted in 15 years. Manchuria has reserves whose metallic content is equal to that of Germany or of Great Britain, but these ores are of such low grade that they are hardly reckoned as ores in the U. S. Large outlays are necessary for the extra operation of preparing them for use since they must first be chemically treated to

obtain a higher concentration of metal. Thus no solid metallurgical basis exists for a steel industry of enduring importance. Nevertheless, despite the cost handicap, Japan maintains her steel industry through tax exemptions, high subsidies and protective tariffs, obviously for armament purposes. The government arsenal founded at Yawata in 1900 produces 1-2 the steel used by industry but operates at a serious loss each year in spite of the high rates charged for the steel products; for example, round steel bars costing \$43 to \$51 per ton are sold in Germany for \$25 to \$30. Japanese capitalists submit quite willingly to this handicap to strengthen imperialist militarism which aims first of all to seize those parts of Asia which can supply basic raw materials and food.

The Problem of Coal

Measured in terms of coal production, Japanese industry is far from an advanced stage. The output is 1-2 ton per capita as compared with over 4-1-2 tons for the U. S. and over 5 for the United Kingdom. Even if we include hydro-electric power (converted to tons of coal) Japan's position is not improved. The coal reserves of all Japan are only 118 tons per capita, less even than those

of British India, and far below the 4,070 tons for Great Britain and the 27,500 tons for the U. S. To make matters worse for the coal that Japan does possess, which is good as bunker coal on ships, is unfit for cooking and therefore unfit for steel production. The high cost of coke is a major problem for the Japanese steel industry and renders her competition in this field utterly impossible under present technology. The cost of coke per ton of pig iron in 1927 was \$3.25 in the U. S. and \$7.50 in Japan. Only in China (with its 2,200 tons per capita reserves) is there coking coal in the Far East and even there not in large amounts.

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