

"New Group" For a "New Party"

The Gitlow Group and the Field Clique Form a "Principled Bloc"

The crisis in the international labor movement has assumed such formidable proportions that no group or current, not even the smallest one, has been able to escape its effects. Some of them have been forced forward, as in the case with sections of the socialist movement. Others have recoiled to an even more reactionary position, as in the case with the bulk of the Stalinist movement. None has been able to stand completely still. Even what seem to be the most inert and obscure little groups have at least been compelled to run around in circles in order to create the illusion of motion.

Essentially in the latter category is the "Organization Committee for a Revolutionary Workers Party," formed by the Workers Communist League (Gitlow group) plus B. J. Field and Co., a group expelled for treachery from the Communist League of America. A few preliminary remarks on this union, which do not pretend to exhaust the question any more than is sufficient for the moment, will not prove to be unilluminating.

The Negotiations with Gitlow Group

The last issue of the *Voice of Labor*, organ of the Gitlow group, contains a report of its "Negotiations with the Left Opposition." The report is not only startlingly inaccurate, but it bears such an interesting relation to the subsequent Gitlow-Field fusion, that it requires retutation.

The report reproduces three documents: 1) the brief outline draft submitted by our delegation to the representatives of the Gitlow group as a basis for discussion; 2) the draft resolution submitted to us in its place by the Gitlow group; 3) a formulation against the theory of socialism in one country, proposed by us, and with slight amendments, finally agreed to by Gitlow.

So far, so good. But the *Voice of Labor's* account of the negotiations, and what happened to these three documents, belongs to the school of fictitious literature.

Fundamental Questions

2. Upon an examination of the second document submitted in the discussion, the Gitlow group resolution, our delegation decided not to lose itself in a discussion of it point by point without first attempting to establish agreement upon one after another of those points which we considered fundamental—agreement upon which would have facilitated enormously a discussion of the secondary questions, and possible agreement upon them, too. This was essential because the Gitlow document, being more detailed and pretentious than our first draft, was such a muddle of confusion, half-truths, ambiguity and downright semi-Stalinism, as made its consideration as the draft for a joint statement inconceivable. A few examples will suffice:

The theory of the united front from below is rejected, but not a word is said about its complement, equally Stalinist, which yielded such disastrous results in the Anglo-Russian Committee, in the alliance with the Kuo Min Tang—in the period between 1924 and 1928. Why? Because with Gitlow the crisis in the Comintern really begins with the expulsion of the Right wing in 1928-1929. He is against the "third period" of Stalinism fundamentally in the same sense as is Lovestone, as is (or was) Bukharin.

Ambiguous Formulations

The theory of socialism in one country is not even mentioned, its place being taken by the ambiguous, and by no means accurate, term: national Bolshevism. Becker at first denied that the Stalinists have ever stated their advocacy of the theory in print. Gitlow refused to reject the theory specifically because Max Eastman is right: you can't win over the workers with negative slogans! (Compare the social democratic argument against the Communist contention that you can't win socialism by casting ballots for parliament.)

"Stalin's break with Marxism and Leninism on the Russian question" is confined exclusively to those points where Gitlow is really at one with Bukharin: against super-industrialization, bureaucratic collectivization; premature abolition of the N.E.P. The break with Marxism and Leninism of the joint Stalin-Bukharin period—against industrialization and planned economy, the alliance with Kulak and Nepman—is studiously ignored.

"Socialism in One Country"

3. We therefore politely laid aside the Gitlow draft and proposed instead a concise formula on the fundamental question of "socialism in one country". In its final form, jointly accepted after considerable debate, it read: "The theory that the building of socialism can be completed in a single country, according to which a classless society can be constructed in one hand, without the spread of the proletarian revolution to the advanced capitalist countries of the world, which presupposes an uninterrupted co-existence of the workers' socialist state and capitalist countries, has had the consequence of a break with Leninism in Soviet internal policy, and in practice on the international field—the abandonment of the world revolution."

Then, says the Voice of Labor,

"the declaration of the Workers Communist League (i.e., Gitlow's above-mentioned draft...-S.) including the above formulation was agreed upon by both sides". In order to maintain our polite tone, we will simply call this assertion preposterous and incorrect. The formulation on "socialism in one country" was and remains the single, solitary document ever agreed to between the Gitlow and our delegation during the negotiations. It was just as possible for the main Gitlow draft resolution to be "agreed upon by both sides" as it would be for us to apply for membership in the Gitlow group.

Declaration of Four

4. Without returning for a moment to the Gitlow draft, we put forth again the question of the new International and the Declaration of the Four. Gitlow's narrative reads as though we threw this question into the discussion arbitrarily, unexpectedly, unwarrantedly, like a bombshell, without previous mention. But his own report prints our first outline draft in which this question occupies no insignificant position. It had not been withdrawn at any time; it had been held in abeyance, we repeat. Having reached agreement on point the first (socialism in one country), we proceeded to a discussion of point the second.

And here, let it be pointed out, we did not demand for a moment that Gitlow endorse the Declaration of the Four out of hand, as Gitlow infers. Gitlow's draft resolution showed us the inadvisability of such an attitude. We merely presented the Paris Declaration and said: "This contains the fundamental points for fusion. Please tell us where you agree with it, where you disagree with it, and why, and our discussion will be facilitated. Gitlow did not merely refuse to endorse it (which was not requested), but even to state his views on it! Why? Because he had had nothing to do with drawing it up; he would not have some document drawn up by he knows not who, and where, and how, rammed down his throat (!); he had had his fill of the Comintern, not only in Stalin's time, but even in Lenin's; it had been falsely organized from the outset, in 1919; and above all, he stood for the conception that first the national parties must be built up solidly, with a native program and leadership, and then they would all coalesce into an international of equals."

The Paramount Question

Our delegation then went so far as to offer to submit the Declaration in the name of the four "European" groups which had signed it, but in our own name, as our own discussion draft, for comment, agreement or disagreement with Gitlow. He obstinately refused to move from his position. In the warm discussion, he revealed that his group had indeed taken a step forward in one field by breaking with the Lovestone Right wing; in other fields it still occupied the same ground, or had taken a step backward. The negotiations had come to a stalemate on that paramount question of fundamental importance: internationalism, the surest touchstone of the genuine revolutionary and revolutionary group.

Having laid bare our incompatibility in principle with the Gitlow group—at least for that stage of our relationships with it—we nevertheless continued to have relations with it consonant with the degree of political harmony which did exist between us and which

field where we came in contact. At that time, the field was bounded by the hotel and restaurant workers branch of the Amalgamated Food Workers, where a group of our comrades were members, and the Gitlow group had two of its militants functioning. But here too we encountered difficulties, not so fundamental in character, but nevertheless, as was subsequently revealed, significant enough.

Policy of the League

The policy of the League aimed at the formation of a bloc between ourselves and the Gitlow group in the A. F. W., as a Communist nucleus around which a broader group of Left wing and progressive workers could be rallied for the purpose of strengthening the union, assuring it a militant, class conscious leadership and policy, preparing it for a successful strike, and saving it from degeneration in the hands of the conservative, patriotic, elements on the one side, and the Stalinist vultures on the other. Gitlow and his group agreed at the outset with this conception.

Fighting this view, alternately with open and covert opposition, was the Field group, at that time organized as a faction without program or principle in the ranks of the League, and specifically in our food workers fraction. Despite repeated warnings from the League—backed by its membership, its policies, its discipline and its committees—the two leading officials of the union, Field and Kaldis, conducted themselves not only in violation of our policy, but with such arrogantly bureaucratic contempt for all and sundry in the Amalgamated as was not only disgraceful for a Communist, but even for an ordinary conscientious trade unionist.

Their outrageous, unconcealed disdain for all their collaborators was displayed not only toward League members in the Amalgamated, but particularly toward two militants of the Gitlow group, Costas and Kaldides. We insisted at one fraction meeting after another upon a comradely bloc of Communist workers with a Left wing program. Field and Co. opposed the bloc with the two Gitlowites, then formally accepted it on paper, and systematically sabotaged it.

The "Pair of Deuces"

Before the strike, this bloc was broken more than once. Each time our League committees were compelled to intervene, rap Field's knuckles, and heal the breach. On two distinct occasions, Costas and Kaldides came directly to our National Committee, begging us to intervene with Field and Kaldis, to demand of the latter that they put an end to their insufferably bureaucratic conduct which was not only driving the two Gitlowites to despair but which (according to them, and they were right in this instance) was endangering the whole prospect of the union and the impending strike. Costas, a regular official of the union, was being treated by Field and Kaldis with the insolence of Prussian officers toward a uniformed peasant. In his arguments against our policy of collaboration with the Gitlowites, Field coined the winged phrase: "They are only a pair of deuces."

With this attitude towards Costas (who was but one of scores who smarted under the same parvenu impudence), Field eventually isolated himself from the League, from the Left wingers in the union, from all the progressive elements, threw the doors wide open to the Stalinists who batted on the discontentment of the workers with Field and Co., and finally provoked his desertion by the workers who, he had so superciliously admitted to everybody, sat in adoration at his feet.

"Deuces" Become Allies

But, strangely enough, in his fight against the League and its policies, as he learned more and more upon the Rooseveltians and flag-wavers in the union, when the break with the League proved irreparable, Field abruptly converted his "pair of deuces" into allies. He rebounded from the League into the camp of Gitlow. At first, he led his few followers along that road with the explanation that there is nothing wrong with forming a bloc with another group in the trade unions. Finally he merged with the other group into a single political faction with a single political program—not Field's, but Gitlow's!

This faction, the "Organization Committee", has issued its program in the form of a leaflet "For a Revolutionary Workers Party". To read it is to arrive at an unmistakable conclusion: this is Gitlow and not Field. Or, more accurately, it

*These notes do not, of course, aim at an analysis of the hotel strike. They deal with it insofar as it is related to the subject in hand, i.e., the evaluation of the Gitlow and Field groups.—S.

may be Field, but it is not what Field overbearingly assured everybody he was when he broke from the League.

Example: at a general membership meeting of the League on November 26, 1933, where I reported on our negotiations with the Gitlow group, the jointly accepted formulation on "socialism in one country" was read. One motion was introduced, reading: "The assembled branches view the formulation relating to the theory of socialism in one country in the joint statement as dangerous and misleading." Field and Kaldis were among the tiny group which voted for that motion, as well as for this one (which was also defeated): "The National Committee is asked to reconsider the joint statement as too great a concession to the Gitlowites." At the end of the meeting, the minutes read: "Comrade B. J. Field abstains on account of the subordination of the role of the Party and the Labor Party question in the negotiations and also on the grounds of the X motion and resolution. Either Field associates herself with the Field statement."

League Not "Radical" Enough

In other words, two things at least were wrong so far as this super-Bolshevik-Leninist was concerned: our formulation on national socialism was too great a concession to Gitlow, and secondly, we had not yet proposed to Gitlow (nor did we ever, for the negotiations came to a sudden stop!) a point opposing his Right wing view on the Labor party.

Now, behold our intransigent, go-the-whole-hog Left Oppositionist, who broke from us with the declaration that he and not the League would thenceforward carry the banner of Lenin and Trotsky in the United States! He has successfully negotiated; he has successfully fused. And the joint program is a step backward even from Gitlow's original draft resolution of October 1933! Its views in a number of fields do not go so far even as those of A. J. Muste (see his article in *Labor Action* on the united front) in point of revolutionary position.

The theory of socialism in one country? Not mentioned. The black sheep of Field (and the white hope of Gitlow), the Labor party? Dead silence. The Fourth International? Careful evasion. They are for a "new international composed of the new revolutionary parties of the world." Which? Of all those to which Gitlow refers in his press work with equal enthusiasm, emphasis and impartiality—the I.L.P., as well as the Internationalist Communist League, the Norwegian Labor Party as well as the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Holland? Of some of them? Of none of them? The Soviet Union? Lovestone or Stalin or a petty bourgeois liberal with his war paint on could have written that paragraph "for the defense" of the Soviet Union.

Mutual Amnesty

The programmatic manifesto of the "Organization Committee" constitutes, politically, a literary picture of Field generously white-washing Gitlow. But the Emersonian law of compensation is not ignored. Kindness for kindness. In the *Voice of Labor* Gitlow does just as generous a job for Field. Two full pages on the hotel strike—not white-wash this time, but plain hogwash. The "leadership" of the union may have been a bit inexperienced, do you see, but otherwise its conceptions and conduct were impeccable. The Trotskyists made a mess of things, but not Field, not Gitlow. They collaborated perfectly, only they didn't get anywhere because the gods were against them. . . .

A new group? Not at all. An old group, the Gitlow group with its whole old program. It has merely gained a few new members, which we cannot truthfully begrudge it. It gained them by a little bit of mutual amnesty.

A new party? Not at all. It wants, not the old party, it is true, but a party concocted of political odds and ends: a bit of Bandler, a bit of Stalin, a bit of Lenin and Trotsky.

No, thank you!

—MAX SHACHTMAN.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE MILITANT. JOIN THE COMMUNIST LEAGUE

A Critical Analysis of the A. W. P.

2. The Political Meaning of "Adaption to the American Scene."

The trouble with the C.P.U.S.A., according to the A.W.P. Program is that "Throughout its history it has thought and felt in terms of Russian and European rather than American working class experience". This line is similar to the Lovestoneite "Stalin right in Moscow, wrong in America", but goes even further in elaborating the myth that "sectarianism" is the root-cause of Stalinist failure. The fallacy of the approach is given away in the fact that the Program treats the fifteen years of the C.P.U.S.A., as of a piece, merely referring in passing to the party's gains up to 1925, and explaining them as due to the party's "basking in the glory" of the Soviet Union. The entire significance of the date of the dividing line between the period of success and ensuing failure, which is the date of the rise to dominance of Stalinism in the Communist International, is lost on the A.W.P. The international scope and causes of the failure of Stalinism are obscured behind the phrase "sectarianism and partisan exclusiveness".

Origin of False Analysis

What has happened is that trade union progressives, reformists in politics, found themselves confronted by a Communist Party practicing dual unionism, refusing united fronts, and working only in organizations controlled by it. The reformists saw that these policies led to defeat after defeat, and yet were continued. Why? Instead of analyzing the structure of the party and discovering that its membership was powerless to change or even discuss policies; instead of tracing this absence of party democracy to the time when democracy was destroyed in the fight against Trotsky; instead of asking why the Stalinist bureaucracy does not permit party discussion; instead of asking why the C.I. and C.P.U.S.A. line is a melange of sectarianism and opportunism, of adventurism and cowardice, of everything, in fact, but a revolutionary analysis; instead of tracing the degeneration of the C.I. to the theory of socialism in one country—but the foregoing analysis is one that would only occur to Communist, to revolutionaries. Reformists naturally tended to a shorter analysis: "Dual unionism, social fascism, bureaucratic control, etc.—all this must flow from the doctrines of Communism." Even the clue to the real source of the malady, the absence of party democracy, whose absence could only mean that the bureaucracy rested, not on the membership, but on the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union; even party dictatorship was taken by some reformists to be part of the Communist doctrine. (Dictatorship of the proletariat, no democracy in the party—it was all one and the same thing.) We have no desire to rake up from the past the forms by which different C.P.L.A. spokesmen linked up Stalinist errors and distortions with fundamentals of Communism. The point of this reference to the past is merely to show the origins of their notion that the cause of Stalinist errors is "sectarianism." This term would be correct if the failure to set masses in motion flowed from Communist doctrine, as such failure flows from S.L.P. doctrine.

Relics of Reformism

Were the C.P.L.A. group sufficiently self-critical in their break with their reformist past, one of the most obvious elements for them to drop would be this talk of "Communist sectarianism". This phrase, and such phrases as "factional jargon" are relics of a time when not only were the C.P.L.A. group not revolutionaries, but thought that the international struggle of the two major tendencies in the Communist movement was just a cat and dog fight.

False Characterization of C. P.

To characterize as sectarianism the whole course of the C.P.U.S.A. is, therefore, essentially false. Such a characterization makes an incomprehensible mystery of the powerful vitality shown by the party from 1919 to 1924, when, according to the A.W.P. theory "sectarianism" and "thinking in terms of Russian and European experience" were just as much as later inbred in the party. Why should sectarianism not have prevented the swift growth of the party from 1919 to 1924—and then suddenly become operative after 1924? The C. I. and C.P.U.S.A. course from 1924 to 1929 cannot be characterized as sectarianism. As a matter of fact, that period was one of the most unprincipled opportunism, of hanging on to the tail of the reformists, here and everywhere. It is the period of the Anglo-Russian Committee, unity with Chiang Kai-Shek, support of La Follette, loyalty to the A. F. of L., etc. What can it possibly mean to attribute the failures of this period to "sectarianism and partisan exclusiveness"?

The C.P.L.A. came on the scene in 1929, the same year that the C.I. zigzagged from unprincipled bloc

with reformists to the theory of social fascism. It is probable, therefore, that the C.P.L.A.-A.W.P. is reading the whole history of the Comintern and its fifteen years in America in terms of these last five years. If this surmise is correct, the process is unintelligent, but at least understandable.

Behind all this talk of "sectarianism" and the exaggerated Americanism of the A.W.P. lies a healthy motive. They would like to cut through the "factional period" and out into the high road of American workingclass struggle. So would the Communist League, but it has the lessons of the "factional period", while the A.W.P. group were not in the revolutionary movement during these last ten years and have yet to assimilate its lessons. Its search for a "short-cut" is futile. It does seem simple to say of the C. P. that "it has thought and felt in terms of Russian and European rather than American workingclass experience". It does seem simple, to declare for a new party on the ground that the Stalinists are in "organizational subordination to the Communist International, which has tended in recent years to become a branch of the foreign office of the Soviet Union instead of the leader of the world revolution". But this ever so "simple" formulation ignores the whole question, why a "branch of the foreign office" is no longer revolutionary.

No "Simple" Analysis

By all means, let us come before the masses with a clear and simple program, understandable to all workers. Let not the A.W.P. forget, however, the distinction between a clear and simple program, and the by no means clear and simple mass of events and theoretical knowledge on which such a program must be based. Marxism in all its ramifications is not simple, but without it as a foundation no program can lead anywhere. Leninism, with its analysis of imperialism and nationalism, its development of the Marxist theory of the state, its contributions to the strategy and tactics of revolution, its enunciation of the role of the party and the non-proletarian masses, its conception of the place of democratic centralism and the soviets—all this is not easily learned, but it must be learned by a revolutionary party. The ten year struggle of the Internationalist Communists, involving a further clarification and refinement of every fundamental question of revolutionary theory and strategy is certainly not a simple story to read, but without understanding and acceptance of its lessons, any new party gravitating toward a revolutionary outlook will find itself drifting between Stalinist centrism and reformist centrism.

There are no easy short-cuts. And the reasons given by a new party for its existence logically determine its policy. If "sectarianism" "failure to adapt itself to the American scene" is taken as the cause of the degeneration of the C. P., then the A.W.P. policy will be a frenzied adaptation, an exaggerated Americanism, which, if it does not degenerate into outright chauvinism, will certainly be a policy of gross empiricism, susceptible to all the errors of all previous workingclass activity, in America and elsewhere.

What strange fruit may be born from the Americanist approach? Consider the implications of the following statement by Hardman at the conferences: "The revolution in America will be the American revolutionary movement, not the revolutionary movement in America. It was not by accident that we called the party the American Workers Party instead of the Workers Party of the U.S.A."

—FELIX MORROW.

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