

The Burning Question In France

Towards Opportunism or Towards Marxism --- There Is No Other Road

CONVERSATION WITH A COMRADE FROM THE SAINT-DENIS DISTRICT

After the events in Germany, Doriot, foundation member of the Communist party of France and a member of its Central Committee, requested a wide discussion in the party on the united front question and a revision of its insane policy of "united front from below". The Central Committee dared not bring this question into the open and tried to "influence" Doriot by a combination of cajolery and threats. All the attempts to get a hearing in the party press, to have his point of view presented to the party membership having failed, and realizing that the aim of the party apparatus was to isolate him completely from the membership, Doriot made his views public in the paper, *L'Emancipation*. This brought matters to a show-down. Doriot found himself outside the official party but carried the whole district Saint-Denis (about 400 members) with him.

The party apparatus is cracking under the pressure of the rank and file, clamoring for real unity of action of the proletariat in struggle against fascism. Saint-Denis tore itself away from the official party, but whether it is going? In the brilliant article reprinted below from our French organ, *La Verite*, the author indicates the road it should follow. Tr. note—S.W.)

—If one is to believe *L'Humanite*, you are following us into "the camp of the counter-revolution". In that case when are you scheduled for expulsion from the Communist Party? And what do you think of doing?

—As to our expulsion, the Central Committee will not be long in pronouncing it. For the Saint-Denis district decided by over 350 votes against just a handful to break off relations from now on with the party leadership. What will we do? Give life to our Vigilance Committee and help the workers to establish more of them throughout the whole country to resist fascism.

For Unity There Must be a Vanguard Party

—To realize the unity of action of the workers, is very fine; we support you on this point for which we have been fighting for a number of years (you recall the German events). To fight, the working class needs unity despite all its political divisions: reformists and revolutionists must close ranks. But if you break with the Communist Party because it tramples the teachings of Lenin on the United Front, I do not believe that you want to trample the teachings of Lenin on the question of the party. If a party which calls itself Communist, if the Third International is no longer the organization of the Marxist vanguard of the proletariat, it is necessary to build a new party and a Fourth International. Will your district harness itself to this task?

—We do not want to trample the teachings of Lenin, but we refuse to follow you in the building of a party and of an International. These organizations cannot be set-up arbitrarily.

—I agree with you that it is harmful to set up organizations arbitrarily; that is why we, the Communist League, have combatted the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement which was an apparatus contrivance for evading unity of action with socialist organizations by utilizing the cover of literary and artistic personalities, of whose talents I cannot judge, but who are absolutely devoid of responsibility before the organization of the working class.

You have recognized in action that Amsterdam-Pleyel did not permit the safeguarding of real unity of action of the workers. Others (Autonomous Federation of Employees, Action Socialiste, etc.) have come to the same conclusions. It is necessary to come to an understanding to do away with this arbitrary combination which can only stage a few meetings where a Thorez (member of the C. C. of the French party—tr.) can parade, but which, as a consequence, can create obstacles to unity of action in every community, in every quarter, by opposing itself to all committees of real organizations which may exist.

If No Party Exists We Must Create a New One

Let us do away with artificially set-up organizations. But the working class needs a party, a Communist International. If none exists now, we must work to build it up, we must pose the problem clearly: this does not mean that we can solve it in a couple of days.

—Of course, it is not arbitrary to say that the working class needs a Communist Party, but to build it you need definite conditions. It would be premature today, the masses would not follow it: they will follow the Vigilance Committees, they are for unity of action. To pose, as you do, the question of creating a new party to be oneself from the masses.

—I cannot entertain the argument of "splitters"; you are a Com-

munist and consequently you know well that to gather the vanguard to the proletariat means not only not to split it but to create the basic condition for rallying it in struggle. But I will take up your other arguments: it is too soon, we are too few. You advance arguments of opportunism but not of principles. Is it too soon because the masses are not there? For one, I am certain that we are more numerous than Lenin was at the end of 1914 when he proclaimed "Long live the Third International"; he knew the masses well, and at certain moments was not afraid of being almost alone; secondly, how can we lead the masses to an idea, to a conception without explaining it to them clearly? It cannot be too soon for laying down a clear political basis and this is the surest means of becoming more numerous.

Reaction and Fascism
—You forget the principal task of the present hour: to bar the road to fascism and for that to develop committees of vigilance, to bind them to the masses. A new organization of the proletariat vanguard can crystallize itself in action and not in struggles over these.

—I am far from forgetting reaction and fascism, and it is precisely in order to combat them that I pose the question of the party, without opposing it, but on the contrary, by tying it to the work of the united front. To bar the road to fascism, to bar it once and for all, it does not suffice that workers oppose it physically at demonstrations, it does not suffice to denounce its infamies in Germany and Italy. Today we defend ourselves against the rise of reaction, but—and you have stated it in your "open letter to the C. I."—to be efficacious this resistance must transform itself into a struggle for power. The Vigilance Committee—you wrote correctly—must be a step towards the Soviets. But tell me from whom can we expect the proper slogans for the struggle of the Vigilance Committee, a program of action around which the slow process of gathering the masses should proceed? Not from the Socialist party, I am sure; and a anti-fascist com-

mittee is not a fountain of youth where the decrepit social democracy can rejuvenate itself. Nor from the masses as a whole; the masses undergo their own experiences which permit them to choose and to progress along the revolutionary road but on condition that they find a vanguard which, at every stage of the struggle, explains the situation to them, shows them the objectives to be attained, the methods to use and the ultimate perspectives. It is only by means of an initial nucleus, which acts in an independent and disciplined manner that the selection can proceed inside the Vigilance Committee. Without that, even the most numerous aggregation of workers would have no future.

The Vigilance committee is not a sufficient base to assure the life of the Saint-Denis district. To limit oneself to that is to condemn oneself to disintegration. None of the local nuclei which detached themselves from the Communist party escaped that: Municipalism, Pupism (Partie Unitaire Populaire—Tr.), social democracy eat into them.

"Soviets Without Communists"
One more word. Your committees of vigilance without a Communist party, they remind me of the slogan of . . . Mensheviks and counter-revolutionaries; by this I do not want to call you a Menshevik or a counter-revolutionist. When the October revolution found itself at loggerheads with its worst difficulties, when civil war and famine raged, the enemies of proletarian power advanced the slogan: "Soviets without Communists". The counter-revolution understood instinctively that even the Soviet form is not immune against its influence and were there no Communists in the Soviets to introduce into them class intransigence, counter-revolution could make use of Soviets against the revolution. And if this is true after the Soviets have conquered power, how much more true is it with regard to Vigilance committees which are not Soviets; one may be sure that Committees of Vigilance without Communists (that is without a party, since there is no communist action outside of an organization) could never be-

lieved to be a Communist party.

A Falsified Biography of Lenin

A book—a biography no less than a novel or a play—like a building must be constructed according to a plan and definite rules. The first law of biography is to tell the truth as you see it and understand it.

That is not the basis of Fox's biography of Lenin, nor is the book informed with the spirit of truth or even a respect for accuracy. Fox is no disciple of Diogenes. He lies about Lenin, about Trotsky, yes, about Stalin. In his biography all three appear like the caricatures in the mirrors at Coney Island: Lenin is seen as in a mist, suspiciously god-like; Trotsky is the Evil One; Stalin is the Bolshevik angel Gabriel of the Russian Revolution.

The truth is—Ralph Fox is a Stalinist, a leading member of the British Communist Party, a product and defender of the system of lies, slander, terror and defeat which has entered into history under the name of Stalinism. His work is written from that bias in support of its political needs.

But after all the thing has the form of a biography and must be judged as one. Let us examine its plan, first with regard to Lenin. If you have the patience to wade through its lies and distortions you will find the author's thesis explicitly and precisely stated on page 309. Lenin . . . had knowledge, intellectual power, vision; the power of swift decision and decisive action; courage beyond the normal; . . .

False Picture of Lenin

It is true; Lenin had courage, intellectual power, knowledge. But the possession of these qualities did not by themselves distinguish him from thousands of men in the world's history, nor yet from hundreds of revolutionary leaders. Nor does Fox allow for a peculiar combination of these qualities of Lenin which could conceivably explain his greatness.

Fox himself must have felt the shortcoming of his explanation for he attempts to add in the same sentence quoted above, precisely that quality which, in his opinion, distinguished Lenin from all men in all the years of the world's recorded history, and explains his greatness: ". . . but yet the most striking thing in his whole character is that he was a man like other men". Here is wisdom! Lenin was great because he was not!

But it is not a laughing matter. For this stupidity serves Fox as a means of misrepresenting Lenin and all that he stood for. It would take a volume equal in size to Fox's lamentable work to set right the errors and lies he encompasses in 313 pages.

Suffice it to say that on this basis Fox has no need to explain Lenin in relation to the epoch in which he lived, the conditions in which he worked, and the impres-

sion he made on the world and the movement. For the explanation lies entirely in Lenin himself. Thus Fox can entirely neglect the question of internationalism so decisive for Lenin. A sentence or two for the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences and not a word about the first four Congresses of the C. I.! So it is with Lenin's fundamental analysis of the post-war epoch of capitalism as one of wars and revolutions. There is very little discussion of it so that it is impossible for Fox to illuminate Lenin's historic struggle against the Second International which culminated in the founding of the Third.

No Word of Lenin's Ideas

As a result there is not a word—literally not a word—about Lenin's conception of a revolutionary communist party as a centralized, sternly disciplined organization based on a democratic, inner life. How could anyone with the knowledge of what a Stalinist party is like today discuss Lenin's conception of what a vanguard party should be!

What results is that Fox, looking at Lenin through the colored glass of Stalin's embalment of Leninism, makes a mystic out of a great, human, revolutionary leader. Read the passages in which assassins are turned from the execution of their foul designs by some mysterious force in Lenin which transcends all human understanding and "explains better than a thousand political theses what was happening in Russia".

If Fox is forced to exercise some restraint in his treatment of Lenin, the current needs of Stalinism give him carte blanche to heap abuse and lies on one of the great figures of the revolutionary movement of the modern proletariat. In his treatment of Trotsky Fox reveals himself as a literary assassin: Trotsky underestimated the peasantry; he agitated for peace during the war; he patronized Lenin; he was wrong in the revolution of 1905; he was a leader of the Liquidators; he was responsible for the defeat of the Finnish revolution; he was only a figure head in the armed insurrection of October; he bungled the military direction of the civil war; he was partly responsible for Lenin's death; and so on and so forth.

And all this structure of lies rests on a thesis, if you please, which the author is not ashamed to advance as the solemn truth: "Trotsky's whole political life and outlook were colored by the outlook of those petty-bourgeois elements in Russia whom history had forced on to the revolutionary stage". Let us put a cross over the slander and pass on.

Fox advances no explicit thesis about Stalin. But there is one. Let us put together what he says about

come Soviets and would never take power.

The Struggle Against War
And then one other question intrudes itself into the question of the struggle against fascism and for power; that is, the question of the struggle against war. Who will lead this struggle? Strictly speaking the committees of vigilance could organize actions against the preparations of war, against the two-years service, etc. But who will lead the anti-fascist work, who will launch defeatism? In the united front you have socialists, imbued with patriotism or pacifists, defenders of the League of Nations. Soon you will find the latter even within the official Communist party due to the Soviet Union's entry into this association of brigands.

—I warn you openly that we will never approve of your attacks against the U.S.S.R., we will never join you in that.

—And I will answer you no less openly: we have never attacked the U.S.S.R. Consequently you do not have to join that which does not exist. What we have done is to combat a policy which we consider false, harmful to the October revolution and to the world revolution. You struggle against the policy of the C. I. in France; do you believe that it is independent of the general policy of the C. I. and also of the policy of the U. S. S. R.? When Lenin and Trotsky led the Communist and the Soviet Union they did not practise two contradictory policies, one a good, the other a bad one: the policy of the C. I. and that of the Soviet Union complemented each other in serving the needs of the international proletarian revolution. When the revolutionary wave receded, when the workers' state had to make concessions, its leaders explained this openly to all the workers. While today, what do you read in *L'Humanite*? First, that the revolutionary movement in all countries does not stop growing, that it goes from success to success, that at the same time the U.S.S.R. marches at a rapid pace to socialism, and finally, that the U.S.S.R. is about to join the League of Nations. Do you believe that this act is a manifestation of strength, of power?

Opening New Homesteads

Knowing that an increased food supply meant a great increase in the exploitation of the greater cultivatable land areas, vast areas of free homestead land was opened up, particularly in the west. But this was not determined wholly and solely by the Malthusian obsession. The rapidly developing industrial East was absorbing more and more of its working population into the factories and the development of West and Midwest agriculture was a necessary corollary. Land values continued to mount and while the periodic crises of capitalism hurt agriculture it continued pretty much as a going concern for many years.

Later on the requirements of American imperialism demanded further increased acreage. The imperialist world war which took tens of millions out of production and set them to the task of destroying life and the means of life brought with it a pressing demand for foods and fibers to "win the war for democracy". In the seven years from 1913 to 1920, from 30 to 40 million acres was brought under the plow in the United States. Land values mounted sky high. Almost every conceivable inch of land was brought under cultivation and this on the very eve of a constricting world market. Humpty Dumpty was indeed preparing for the great fall.

Present-day Capitalism in the U.S.

Modern capitalism in the United States today is characterized by two things:

1. The United States is the creditor nation of the world, and
2. It is imperialist and forced to export capital to all parts of the globe.

The tremendous effect this has on present and future agriculture in America can be seen when we remember that our position to the European market has been completely reversed since the world war. Before we shipped agricultural goods to Europe to pay the interest on debts owed. Now we must be prepared to receive these from Europe since it is Europe who is the debtor and we the creditor. So much for the United States position as the creditor nation.

Now a brief word concerning the second characteristic mentioned above. The surplus profits of the capitalists which could not be reinvested profitably in American business has been invested elsewhere (1) by loans to Canada, Mexico, South America, Africa, Australia, and Asiatic countries who in turn can only balance their international payments by selling on that same world market on which American agriculture has in the past loaned so heavily, and (2) by the direct investment of American capital in foreign land holdings.

Why Agrarian Crisis is Insoluble
The foregoing are the most significant reasons why the crisis in American agriculture is not merely passing but permanent. Out of the World War there emerged a completely changed orientation among the European ruling classes. Italy and Germany strive toward a national self-sufficiency, England tries in every possible way to favor her own over-seas possessions, other European countries favor Poland and Denmark for the sake of trade advantages whereby they may unload some of their own surplus industrial products, while Japan, for the sake of its Indian market, is quite willing to buy Indian cotton. Britain, while not satisfied with this agreement, looks on for the sake of profitable alliances later on in the event of a war against the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the most significant facts of the changed international position in agriculture can be gleaned from the following figures. Between 1913 and 1932 the United States increased its areas for the production of principal crops from 290,000,000 acres to 320,000,000 or a little more than 10%. In the

his master: Stalin really organized the insurrection in October 1917; it is implied that he saved the day for Lenin in April when "he threw the great weight of his authority behind the theses (on bourgeois democracy) presented by Lenin"; Lenin turned Stalin "into a kind of specialist for saving the situation at desperate moments on almost every front. Indeed Stalin himself wrote to Lenin that he was being turned 'into a specialist for cleaning the stables of the war department'!"

Enough! Enough! The major thesis of the book should now be clear: Lenin was a demi-god; Stalin is his flesh-and-blood continuator. Trotsky's record and activity challenge the whole, false conception. Trotsky must be destroyed even if it is necessary to rewrite history, slander Trotsky, lie about Stalin, deify Lenin.

History and truth, like murder, cannot be long concealed. They must make their way through all obstacles into the thinking of the masses. They are doing it now. And as they do Stalinism and its prostituted servitors are fast becoming an abomination in the labor movement.

—STAMM.

Recovery "For the Farmers"

No Solution for the Agricultural Crisis Is Possible on a Capitalist Basis

In arriving at an objective understanding of American agriculture, its position and relation to world agriculture, it is necessary to know that the historic role of American agriculture has been that of preparing the foundation for the mighty structure of American imperialism. The young but vigorous capitalism of the post-Civil War days could not advance to maturity and power without the financial assistance of the European States. This assistance was obtained by ceaselessly pushing onto the European market every conceivable ounce of agricultural produce beyond domestic need and building its own economy on European savings.

Just about 1890 when this task was largely accomplished an artificially conjured spectre of starvation a la Malthus took possession of the minds of the American governing classes and an additional spurge was given to extension of the agricultural domain together with the extension of its scientific technique. Budgetary allotments to the Department of Agriculture began to run in figures of seven and eight numerals. It was during these years that we witnessed the launching of the giant irrigation projects, land reclamation, governmental experimental stations for crop improvement and a general back-to-the-land crusade.

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same period the other leading countries increased their acreage from 631,000,000 to 724,000,000 or more than 15%. The crop output in the foreign areas was far greater than this, being recorded in the neighborhood of 40% while the increase in American crop output is put at about 10% over the pre-war acreage.

"Too Many Farmers"

Quite recently and rather suddenly the American ruling class has discovered that there are too many farmers just as there are too many industrial workers, and the reason why there are too many is because they have produced too much. The penalty for this production of an overabundance is starvation and misery for those who in blood and toil and sweat have produced America's wealth. The burden of the ruling class has always been the problem of getting rid of surpluses at a profit. Now they are faced with a surplus population and its disposal is giving them no end of a headache.

"Recovery" politicians and their brain trusters have discovered the fact that 50% of the farmers in the U. S. produce 90% of the total value of all crops. Hence 50% of the farmers could be "withdrawn" from production with only a loss of 10% of the products grown for sale. To this end we have the subdivision of the farmers into two classes: "marginal" (rich) and "sub-marginal" (poor). It is proposed to "eliminate" the "sub-marginal" as a competitive factor and leave the field free for the "fit". The solution is (believe it or not) subsistence homesteads.

Turning the Clock Backward

Subsistence homesteads! Millions of people are to learn again the ancient arts of spinning and weaving. The clock of history is to be turned backward and millions are to return to the simple primitive peasant economy of a thousand years ago. And this at a time when the productive forces necessary for the creation of all the material requirements for all humanity has been developed to an exceedingly high degree. In the words of Marx

it is indeed time that the "productive forces have come into conflict with the existing property relations." Therein lies the problem.

The cost of such subsistence homesteads, which in the end is to be borne by the worker, is estimated at not less than \$2,500 per family and the total cost, if the plan were put into operation, would be a grand total of \$10,000,000,000. Thus while the living standards of the masses are driven to never low levels, and while the government continues to regard cynically and lightly the whole question of federal relief, the spending of billions to still further increase the suffering of the poor farmers and the workers, all for the sake of adding more millions to the coffers of the rich farmers, the food speculators and capitalists in general, meets with no serious opposition.

The Farmers' Way Out

Under capitalism there is no solution to the problem of the poor farmers. The crisis in agriculture is a part of the general crisis of decaying capitalism. The withdrawal of millions of farmers to the "self supporting" (!) subsistence homesteads would result in a still further contraction of the domestic market, purchases of industrially produced commodities would fall off to be followed by more unemployment, more speed-up, more wage cuts, more misery for the workers. Workers and farmers must get together against the starvation program of the "recovery" schemes of the Roosevelt New Dealers!

The Poor Farmers can solve their problems only by placing themselves under the leadership of the industrial proletariat, the only class in modern society which is historically fitted for the organization of a new society which will be based on production for use and not for profit, a society where the slogan will be: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. For the realization of this the old order must perish, must be wiped out, by the revolutionary masses.

—G. ROBERTS.

Strikes and the National Guard

A bright page has already been added to the history of the American labor movement by the heroic struggle of the Minneapolis truckmen and the Toledo Auto-lite workers. The militant battle put up by them against overwhelming odds shows that the fighting spirit of the American working class is not crushed.

Since the inception of the NRA strikes have broken out often and frequently. But for genuine militancy and determination to win nothing like these two have been seen in the last few years. It of course redounds to our credit that members of our organization played a leading role in one of these—Minneapolis. But from both of these strikes, one lesson among others must be learned, if we are to take the lead in building a new revolutionary party.

The Police and Strikes

To a Marxist the role of the state is known in advance. That it will unleash its police against striking workers at the first sign of militancy on their part is elementary. Should this not suffice, the hiring of gangsters, the deputizing of "better elements", and the issuing of injunctions can always be counted upon to augment the regular police force. The gentlemen of the law are but too happy to be utilized against the workers. That their itching palms are usually greased by a grateful boss or association, plays, of course, no little role.

A policeman, however, is by and large only a glorified thug, sworn in to protect private property; backed by the state and considered by the average man as "the law," he becomes arrogant and bullying. Added to this is the fact that the average man is brought up to respect "the law" and that he rarely if ever demurs at a gruff—"git along now". The cop therefore assumes a contemptuous attitude towards him and his almost unbridled authority over people gives him qualities common to all bullies. He feels it needs but a wave of his club to rout any one.

Strikes Transform the Worker

But John Smith, the peaceful citizen, becomes changed into something entirely different during a strike in which he is participating, as the Minneapolis and Toledo police and special deputies found out to their sorrow. There the strikers were out to get the scabs and stop production. And this they did, despite police special deputies and the "better element", who were armed with guns, tear gas and clubs.

The blazing courage and brave fight of these militants put to rout the hirelings of authority and laid down the challenge of labor to the entire American boss class. What worker has not tingled from head to foot as he saw the picket lines, photographs and newsreels of these battles? What scab has not felt the icy hand of fear clutch his throat? It heralds the new dawn

of American labor and labor will look, listen and absorb the lessons.

Role of the National Guard

The capitalist class, when it sees its minions of the law—the police—powerless, resorts to other especially armed bodies of men to enforce its reign of terror. Chief among those used in industrial strikes is the National Guard. Up to now the National Guard has been the ace in the hole of American capitalism. It is at present its chief form of suppression and coercion of strike movements. However, the National Guard is by no means a force that cannot be neutralized. Sections of it can even be won over to the side of the working class. Indeed its very composition makes it ideal for weaning it away from the influence of its commanding officers.

Basically it is composed of young men and boys from the city, springing from proletarian stock and themselves proletarians, their average age being about 18 years. Most of them enlisted for a lark or because they are unemployed. The fact that they drill but once a week and have only two weeks camping mobilization during the summer, the discipline within it is not as strong as in the regular army. But that does not mean that it is loose or non-existent; as many a striker can testify.

It becomes then the stern revolutionary duty of the Spartacus Youth Clubs in their task of helping to build a new revolutionary organization to concentrate on these young workers dressed in soldiers uniform.

Tasks of Our Youth

Both the Yipels and the Y.C.L. have failed to do this. The former has hardly any of its membership enrolled in this important force. Their anti-war activity is confined to meetings and an occasional distribution of leaflets. Nor has the Young Communist League been able to do much more. Perhaps a few scattered Y.C.L.s here and there. Or at best a nuclei of two or three. Their activity is blessed with the same results that crown all Stalinist efforts—nothing comes of it.

The Spartacus Youth Clubs must assign a certain definite proportion of its membership to carry on work in the National Guard; that is, to enlist within it and to work there as if they were a fraction in a shop or factory. In their activity the youth comrades must be given every possible aid by the Communist League. Contacts must be made and leaflets put out on important issues. These to be distributed within the armory whenever possible.

To help build a new revolutionary party we must root ourselves in the trade unions. The events in Minneapolis have given us a grand start. It is clear that in the future we will again be faced by the National Guard. Therefore it is important that special work in this field be not neglected.

—AL DASCH.