

3. - Stalinism and the Party Crisis

The relations between Stalinism and the crisis in the Socialist Party are numerous and profound. A proper understanding of the Party crisis is impossible without taking into account the influence of Stalinism upon what is happening in the Socialist Party. The relations are of several kinds: both external, in what the Communist Party has done and is doing with reference to the Socialist Party; and internal, through the activities of Stalinist agents within the Party, but far more important through the effect of Stalinist ideology on different individuals and groups within the Party.

Throughout the world, the Communist International is now the greatest obstacle within the working class to the achievement of the proletarian revolution. The entire force of the Comintern, backed by the mighty Soviet Bureaucracy, has undertaken the task of blocking the revolution. This means that it must, at all costs, prevent the growth of new revolutionary parties and the new revolutionary International. To do so must at all times be the first item on the Stalinist agenda.

Consequently, when the leftward development in the Socialist Party of the United States began to make headway, the Communist Party could not stand idly by. It had to exert every possible effort to keep the leftward development from maturing, to find means to seduce, drown or strangle it. These efforts we have witnessed during the past several years. They increased in intensity at the time of the great forward step marked by the split with the Old Guard and the entrance of the former Workers Party members. They continued unabated throughout the entire election campaign of 1936. In Browder's report to the Central Committee following the Elections, the drive to smash the Socialist Party was put forward as the key problem. The Party was flooded with literature, leaflets, articles, pamphlets in the pre-convention period. Since the Convention, the campaign of the Stalinists has continued with even greater bitterness, with speeches and editorials and even more with the campaign in the mass organizations—in the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, the unions, and the Workers Alliance.

The Stalinists' Aim

The aim of the Stalinists is not obscure. It is to drive all non-Stalinist ideas and all individuals who persist in holding such ideas out of the labor movement. This aim is imposed upon them by the nature of Stalinist world policy, and they cannot be content with anything short of its complete accomplishment. In this country, that means first to make sure that the Socialist Party does not become a revolutionary Party. And this in turn means to smash the Left wing in the Socialist Party, upon which the future of the Party as a revolutionary organization—indeed, its future as any kind of independent political organization—wholly depends.

Revolutionary Marxists, all Left wing socialists—called all of them "Trotskyists" by the Stalinists—are "counter-revolutionary fascist agents". "They are professional disrupters and saboteurs. They are against the unity of the working class. They are treacherous sectarians. They should be driven entirely out of the labor movement". And wherever Stalinists have sufficient power, they take steps to drive them out. "They are members of Franco's Fifth Column. They are impossible for honest workers to get along with. They are incur-

able factionalists". By all of these epithets, the Stalinists mean, of course, that Marxists are unalterably opposed to the ideas and program of Stalinism.

The Stalinists do not leave these characterizations on paper. They act in accordance with them. They refuse to enter a united front in which "Trotskyists" participate. They use their control of the North American Committee to bar Left wing Socialists as speakers. They frame Left wingers in the unions and the Workers Alliance. They demand the right to veto Socialist Party representatives on joint committees, in order to eliminate Left wingers. They beat up Left wingers distributing leaflets and literature. And day in and day out they hammer home their drive to smash the Socialist Party by expelling its Left wing.

Political Source of Right Wing

In considering even so briefly these facts we discover the final source of the campaign of the Right wing against the revolutionary Left. The source is: Stalinism. This is not at all to say that all of the adherents of the Right wing are Stalinists, which is not the case; indeed, there are some in the Right wing who consider themselves bitter opponents of Stalinism. But all the strength and vigor of the campaign of the Right wing derives at one or another stage removed from Stalinism. It is Stalinism which sustains and nourishes it.

This is shown, most obviously, by the fact that the Right wing contains as an integral and consistent part of itself many outright Stalinists (whether or not these are members of the Communist Party is irrelevant: they are complete Stalinists in ideology); the members of the Connecticut Committee of Correspondence; Paul Porter; the signers of the Wisconsin letter on the Trials; numerous single individuals scattered throughout the Party. Much more important, however, is the fact that the arguments and aims and method of the Right wing are all borrowed (sometimes with minor alterations in transit) from the arsenal of Stalinism. The central aim: the suppression and expulsion of the Left, is identical with the aim of the Stalinists. The political basis of the Right wing ideology—support of the Spanish assassins, attacks against the American Committee for the Defense of Trotsky, unbelievable bitterness against the perspective of the Fourth International, class collaborationist Farmer-Laborism—all of these, in the hands of the Right wing, are only watered down versions of the Stalinist program. It is from Stalinism that the Right wing learns its characterization of Left wingers as disrupters and factionalists, with whom "no one can get along" (they could not have learned it from experience, for during the past year it is the Left alone which has built the Party and advanced it in the mass movement). The Stalinist methods are likewise reflected in the exclusion of adherents of the Left from responsible posts, from the N. E. C., the press, from all important functions and committees in sections of the Party where the Right has control. In the Workers Alliance, Lasser spends the major part of his energies in struggling against the "Trotskyists" among his fellow party members. Even more: the ruthless and bureaucratic manner in which the Right wing conducts its campaign is only a faint copy of the time-dishonored methods of the Comintern.

We should not allow ourselves to be deceived by the occasional flare-ups of "anti-Stalinism" from the camp of the Right wing,

such as the recent articles in the Call, signed jointly by Sam Baron and the non-Party member, Liston Oak. Taking these articles as a concrete example, we may observe:

Spurious Flare-Ups Against Stalinism

(1) The conclusions of the articles are directly at variance with the speech of Baron to the New York membership, in which he repeated the slander that the Barcelona events were caused by Franco's Fifth Column within the POUM and the FAI. In large part, these articles represent an attempt on Baron's part to cover his tracks and to shunt aside the thoroughly justifiable reaction to that speech. And, in general, it is true in politics that a Right wing tries to put a strong Left foot forward just at the point when it culminates an attack against the Left.

(2) Baron has a strong personal grievance against the Stalinists from some time back, reinforced strongly last year by his run-in with them in his former union (the B. S. & A. U.) and kept alive by inconveniences

which he endured in Spain.

(3) Lastly and most important, if we examine Baron's "anti-Stalinism"—or that of virtually any other member of the Right wing—we discover that it is altogether without basis in principle. It is a purely bureaucratic opposition: Baron and the others object to the Stalinists because the Stalinists are the more successful bureaucrats. His objection is a form of envy. It has no roots, and can disappear overnight. This is brought out strikingly in his articles on Spain by the fact that nowhere in them does he attack the policies which govern the Stalinists; by the fact he does not even mention other organizations (for example, the Socialist Party) which have the same policies.

The same lesson can be drawn from Wisconsin. Even so short a while ago as the Cleveland Convention, the Wisconsin representatives were (apparently) the most bitter anti-Stalinists in the Party, threatening to withdraw if the united front resolution was passed. In their case, too, the opposition is now merely bureaucratic, with memories of a past (the "Third Period" of Stalinism) when it was something more. At Chicago such full-fledged Stalinists as Porter and Berger were

honored leaders of the Wisconsin delegation. Within their home State, they pursue a line identical with the Stalinists in their major activity, the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation; altered only by their need to continue for a while a non-Stalinist line with respect to the A. F. of L. (because of the local voter-getting power of the A. F. of L. machine, closely tied up with the Hoan forces) and their wish not to let the Stalinists have too much of the gravy.

To fight successfully it is always necessary to distinguish with absolute clarity the real enemy. In the present crisis in the Party, the enemy, or at the very least, the main enemy, the bulwark and driving power of the enemy's forces, is: Stalinism. It is Stalinism which above all will rejoice (and this a revealing test) if the Right wing succeeds: will rejoice even more freely than many members of the Right wing itself, for these have certain qualms as they look forward to the smash-up of the Party which their course promises. The Stalinists and the Right wing, however, will rejoice for only a short while, and in vain: the revolutionary tendency will emerge not weaker but far stronger from the struggle.

4. - Altman-Wisconsin-Lewis

The initial combination which went to make up the main body of the Right wing was formed by a coalition of the Wisconsin organization, the Altman group in New York, and the Lewis group in Massachusetts, under the leadership of Altman. At first glance this combination is rather incongruous: municipal socialists, left over by a kind of historical accident from the Old Guard; one of the most prominent sections of the old anti-Old Guard Militant grouping; and an old-fashioned, passive, L. I. D. group from New England. However, during the past year, the paths of these three have gradually come together. On the four key political questions they have discovered a remarkable unanimity: on Spain, on the Fourth International, and perhaps especially on the necessity for liquidating the Party into a Farmer-Labor movement—an end largely accomplished already in Wisconsin, in motion form in New York, and wished for eagerly by Lewis in his pre-convention documents in the Massachusetts State Bulletin. Above all, the three are unbreakably at one in their unrelenting opposition to revolutionary Marxism, and the revolutionary tendency in the Party. It is this last powerful motive which really keeps them together; when it is removed, they will no doubt again go their different ways.

The three groups are well known to the membership. It is not necessary to discuss them at length. A few observations are, however, worth repeating.

The "mass base" of the Right wing lies in Wisconsin. Every month a check paying for 2,000 dues stamps arrives at the National Office (the role which dues stamps play in such matters as Party Conventions should be kept in mind). The maximum estimate of actual Party members in Wisconsin runs to about 400. The former members, and indeed most of the remaining 400, have transferred their allegiance to the Farmer-Labor Political Federation.

Wisconsin's "States' Right"

Wisconsin has always stood firmly on the traditional American doctrine of States' Rights. "Live and let live," they have tolerantly felt. It goes without saying that while the Old Guard was in the Party their rights were never infringed. Nor, in

this respect, has there been any change since the time when the Old Guard left. Wisconsin paid its dues, and that was the end of it. It had its members on the National Action Committee, but they naturally never attended meetings. The State Committee went its own way, worked out its own problems, joined the Federation, fought the C.I.O., conducted its own propaganda, supported its own paper (the Call has only 75 subscribers in Wisconsin), without ever bothering the national organization. But Wisconsin none the less has been feeling more and more restive. Rumors came across the state borders that the national Party had taken steps to the Left, that there were even determined revolutionists in the Party, that some of the literature and speeches of the Party were very close to Marxism. Such a state of affairs was irksome, and might prove grossly inconvenient.

Wisconsin came to the Chicago Convention in a truculent mood. There, though it succeeded in keeping adherents of the revolutionary tendency off of the N. E. C., and though it commended the vigorous measures against "factional" organs, yet it saw some of its worst fears almost realized. Quite unacceptable resolutions were passed on a number of subjects, and there was a good deal of talk about discipline. When the delegates returned, the clamor grew demanding that something be done. Voices were raised, calling for a walk-out. The difficulty was: where was there to go? The Social Democratic Federation could not be of much use to Wisconsin; there was not yet a national Farmer-Labor setup, and the Farmer-Labor Political Federation had not yet sufficiently matured. Still, something had to be done. Broad-mindedly, a representative (nominally of the Milwaukee Leader, but with expenses paid by the Milwaukee Local of the Party) was sent to the Pittsburgh Convention of the Social Democratic Federation. The report was not in all respects satisfactory. Membership meetings were held. And at them, and at conferences, the emissaries of Altman—for example, Lasser and Siegel—arrived. Siegel explained: Let us get together; we must join to drive out the Left wing; that is the first step toward any suitable solution; stay with us at least long enough for that; we will promise that you will not

be troubled by any discipline" or any demands to live up to Party Resolutions and the Party Constitution. There was some argument about just who should be driven out—only Left wing leaders, or all ex-WP members, or all these plus the Left Clarities; but the general plan seemed plausible and the deal was put through.

N.E.C. Capitulates to Wisconsin

The combination functioned smoothly at the Philadelphia N. E. C. meeting, and continued firm at the Special Session. Raskin and Minkley, in their own way, made clear where Wisconsin stood. They announced that Wisconsin would stay in the Party as long as the Party did not interfere with Wisconsin, and provided the purge of the Left and of Left wing ideas was carried through. They explained that Wisconsin objected to the War Resolution, the People's Front Resolution, and the Trade Union Resolution, and would of course therefore be unable to act in accordance with them in Wisconsin. The N. E. C. listened, cowered, and accepted. On the touchiest point of all—the Trade Union Resolution—administration was turned over to the Wisconsin State Executive. Wisconsin's terms were granted. Minkley graciously concluded that the Wisconsin members of the National Action Committee would begin attending meetings as soon as the Action Committee stopped talking about Spain and France and Russia, and began really trying to convince the man in the street about the superiority of socialist mayors.

Such, then, is Altman's main ally in his struggle against the Left: the Wisconsin organization, reactionary, entangled with old-line trade union bureaucrats, contemptuous of the Party, insolent and brazen in its attitude, social-patriotic virtually to a man, anti-revolutionary to the core.

Of Lewis not much need be said. His following has dropped to a pitiful, worn-out handful. He himself and his associates have made their perspective clear: Liquidation of the Party into a Farmer-Labor Party, any kind of Farmer-Labor Party, with the "socialists" functioning within such a party as an "educational group". One last Party duty remains: to join his feeble force to the lynch campaign against the Left.