

The Politics of Gus Tyler--A Genuine

How the Centrist Leadership of the Clarity Group Reacts to the Crisis!

The liberal is the political product of the most hopeless and helpless class in modern society—the bewildered, desperate, floundering petty bourgeoisie. If only the two great social classes would behave with cultured restraint and mutual consideration, he thinks, society could be preserved from explosive shocks—above all, the liberal could be preserved from mental discomforts and his inevitable fate. As the inexorable class struggle sharpens, with the proletariat assembling more definitely in the camp of revolution and the bourgeoisie in the camp of Fascism, the liberal can think of no better counsel to give than to instruct the Fascists in the eminent superiority of the democratic way of exploiting the masses and preserving private property and to admonish the workers not to "provoke" Fascism by their militancy and boldness. The uncontrollable social forces that make the two antagonistic camps irreconcilable, that make the complete victory of the one at the expense of the other, inescapable, appear to the distorted eye of the liberal only as impertinent interlopers in what should be a world of Urbanity, Love, Virtue, and above all, Peace.

The Liberal and the "Sectarians"

It is not, mind you, that he is not as much opposed to Fascism as anybody else, he always hastens to assure the proletarian revolutionist. He's as much opposed to it as the next man. But you must not be so aggressive, so discourteous, so violent, for he who takes up the sword shall perish by the sword. And when the revolutionists ask the liberal—ever so politely!—to step aside quietly so that they may come to grips with reaction and smash it before it has grown too strong to be halted, the injured liberal throws up his hands and exclaims: "Impossible sectarians! Not even their best friends can work with them!" Almost a century of experience of revolutionists with petty bourgeois liberalism has more than earned the latter the adjective "rotten".

In the Socialist Party today, we have a genuine case of rotten liberalism in the persons of the Clarity leadership, and more specifically of its most active journalistic apologist, Gus Tyler. Tyler has not found it difficult in the past to acquire at reasonable rates a superficial reputation for a radicalism which malicious tongues sometimes whisperingly characterize as "Trotskyism". But in the three-cornered struggle that has developed in the party for more than a year, Tyler has demonstrated with increasing clearness that underlying his radicalism is something that vitiates it at every decisive and crucial moment. He is at bottom a Party liberal—left wing, to be sure, a "friend of the Trotskyists", of course, even their "best friend", but nevertheless a liberal.

The last lingering doubt which some may have foolishly entertained on this score has been dispelled by Tyler himself, in the form of his two recent caucus circulars and the editorial in the August 21, 1937 issue of the Clarity faction organ, the Call.

Political problems can only be analyzed and resolved politically. It is necessary to state this platitude because so many "leaders" still think it can be done otherwise—by means of gossip, old

wives' tales, whispering campaigns, small-time maneuvers, apparatus combinations and cleverly put-over and promptly forgotten resolutions for the files. The crisis in the party is a political crisis. It is precipitated by the clash of antagonistic programs and the groups that advocate them. The programs and the groups must be estimated politically.

The right wing solution of the crisis is at the same time its program. Two sentences sum it up completely and accurately: It aims to liquidate the SP into a reformist, anti-revolutionary Fabian society, operating within a "Labor party" as an "educational force". It can do this only by first expelling the biggest obstacle to this course, the left wing. Since it does not have the support of the membership, it can achieve its ends only by bureaucratic and arbitrary action. For anyone who sees and thinks politically, this means that the responsibility for the split now taking place lies exclusively on the shoulders of the right wing. All talk about discipline, "violations", "Trotsky's orders", "secret letters" and the like, is just so much tawdry trimming for a plain reality which requires none.

The Left Wing and the Right are Irreconcilable

The left wing, like its right adversaries, realizes that the opposing standpoints are irreconcilable. The best will in the world, on either side or both, cannot reconcile liquidation with the struggle against it, reformism with revolutionary Marxism. Up to a certain point, it is possible for the two views to remain under one roof, as proved by the pre-war Second International and the SP since the Detroit convention. But beyond that point, that is, beyond the point where the views crystallize fully on burning questions of the day and come into head-on, unpostponable collision, not all the wise and good men in the world can keep the proponents of the antagonistic views together. It has been tried before without success. The fatal mistake of Gus Tyler is to try it again.

The left wing has said that those who give political support to the People's Front after it massacred the Catalonian workers, are the defenders of the butchers and assassins of the Spanish workers. Is that true, is it politically correct? Tyler does not stop to ask this decisive political question, as a revolutionist would. It is true that at the Philadelphia N.E.C. meeting he mumbled that Caballero and Co. had played the same role in Barcelona as Scheidemann and Noske had played when they crushed the Spartacists in blood. But that was just a speech, a "radical speech", and had no political consequences for Tyler. In his caucus circular, he does not bother with the detail about taking the side either of Noske or Spartacus; he confines himself to the indignation of the Party liberal who is outraged because the left wing calls a spade a spade: "When one resorts to such characterization, the next logical question: Can you be in the same party as 'butchers and assassins of the Spanish workers'?"

Good. Let us ask in turn: Is it not true that the Zam-Delson statement on the New York municipal elections calls the Thomas-Altman position a "hidden and cowardly support" of La Guardia, a "capitulation to the

By Max Shachtman

backwardness of the workers", "putting the Socialist party on the auction block", and a "betrayal of socialism"? Is not "the next logical question" to Tyler: "Can you be in the same party as betrayers of socialism?"

For our part, the answer is unambiguous: We fight tooth and nail against the LaGuardia-socialists. We have no intention whatsoever of being in the same party as betrayers of socialism, much less of making a combination of any kind with them.

"There is proof positive that the Trotskyist wreckers want a split!" Tyler will exclaim. Again, there speaks the Party liberal. It is not at all a question of "wanting a split". The revolutionist merely recognizes the fact that a split in the S.P. is just as unavoidable today as it was over a year ago, and for the same basic reason. At that time, no power in the party was able to prevent the separation of the corrupt Old Guard from the rest of the membership, although the "sectarian Trotskyists" were not to be found in the ranks of the party. Today, a similar situation has arisen with the "new" Old Guard of Thomas-Altman-Lewis-Wisconsin. At that time, the real problem was not the prevention of the split, but the reduction of the split to the smallest proportions and the consolidation of the party on a revolutionary basis against the right wing splitters. And, precisely because the "Militants" of that time (Altman-Thomas-Tyler-Zam) did not understand the problem correctly, the split was a big one and the party was not properly consolidated. By their vacillation, by their groveling before McLevy, the "Militants" ended up with McLevy taking the whole Bridgeport organization. By the same policy towards the Reading Old Guard, they ended up with a crippled organization in Pennsylvania. Is it so difficult to foresee that the same policy today will only result in the Hoan-Porter crew keeping the whole Wisconsin organization and in Thomas and Altman having similarly unnecessary success in New York and elsewhere?

Now, what does Tyler reply to the question which we (and the situation itself) have put to him?

How Does Tyler Answer the Decisive Question?

We know the stinging words with which Tyler describes the right wing. For a serious revolutionist, such characterizations would preclude completely the possibility of collaborating with such elements—and most certainly not against the left wing. As to the latter, Tyler, only five months ago, gave the following political estimate, again, in words: "The Trotskyists, as opposed to the various right wing and centrist tendencies in our party, are essentially revolutionaries. On the basic questions of a revolutionary program: the state, Popular Front, and the war question, they stand with the revolutionaries against the right and centrist elements. The Trotskyists, moreover, stand with the other revolutionaries in the party against liquidationism, against parliamentary socialism, against pacifism, against popular frontism, against national defensism. Hence, on all the basic revolutionary questions the Trotskyites and all revolutionary so-

cialists should be able to work together."

To be sure, Tyler expressed opposition to the "methods" and the "psychology" of the Trotskyists, and pointed out the difficulty of "assimilating" them; but even this difficulty he then laid at the door of the rest of the party. The important and decisive point, however, is this: according to his own words, Tyler (and presumably, the group for which he speaks) has absolutely nothing in common politically with the right wing (i. e., the liquidators and betrayers), whereas with the left wing, he has a common political platform "on the basic question of a revolutionary program".

For a genuine revolutionist, and not for a wordy Party liberal who does not think or act politically, such a judgement as made by Tyler would dictate the following course: "Even if, as a result of some poorly digested texts of Lenin, I must carry on my 'fight on two fronts', it is nevertheless plain that I must make a solid block with the Trotskyists, with whom I have so much in common—politically, fundamentally—to fight mercilessly and at every point against the liquidators and traitors with whom I have nothing in common. This is a course which my own written documents make it impossible for me to escape."

Only—and here is the rub!—in the same issue of Socialist Clarity from which we have already plucked such a perfect Tylerian flower, he had something just as perfect to say: "Many years ago, there developed inside the labor movement a tendency which, while ready to underwrite almost any sort of a document, consistently refused to make such basic principles a guide for day by day action." Ay, there's the rub! For Tyler was not only giving a terse and flawless description of centrism in that sentence, but an autobiographical characterization of himself and of the "Clarity" group.

We already know Tyler's "basic principles", and the "documents" he is "ready to underwrite". Let us, however, look briefly at his "day by day action".

Tyler wrote a radical anti-war resolution for the Chicago convention. With that document, he considered his revolutionary work accomplished. He fumes indignantly at us in his caucus circulars because we still refuse to take his "radicalism" seriously. The Party liberal simply cannot understand that, for revolutionists, political documents cannot remain on paper but are written to be executed, particularly against those at whom they are directed. Have Tyler and Co. lifted a finger to put that resolution into effect in those circles where it was supposed to do the most good: the LID (as pacifistic as ever), the Italian Stampa Libera (completely Stalinized), the Milwaukee Leader (the same today as yesterday), Meta Berger and similars (still in the American League against War and Fascism)? No, not one finger, for that would have offended the right wing allies of the Clarity leadership.

Together with Tyler, we adopted at Chicago a fairly good trade union resolution. We meant it. And Tyler, Zam and Co.? Have they enforced it against Gross, Baron and the other petty trade union bureaucrats in the party whom Tyler now calls the "social base" of the right wing? Have

they enforced it in the Wisconsin organization, where it was so urgently required? Just the contrary. As we proved in the last issue of the Appeal, the Clarity leadership capitulated shamefully to the Wisconsin right wing on this question.

What significance has the equally good Unemployed Resolution of the convention when Tyler's NEC has allowed the WAA, founded and built by the SP, to become a watch-charm on the chain of the Communist Party, only because it did not dare take the indicated vigorous measures against the right wing's protegee, the Stalinist stooge, David Lasser?

Who Picked the NEC and How Does It Act?

In his gossipy grocery-store caucus letters, Tyler gets pathetically angry with the "Trotskyist school of falsification" and with Glen Trimble in particular for the latter's entirely apt description of the "Clarity NEC" as a body "handpicked by Wisconsin". Yet, for a person with a political eye, that description fits like a glove. Is it not true that Norman Thomas wrote Paul McCormick that he was opposed to the Appeal group having any representation at all in the incoming NEC, and that the Thomas opinion prevailed? Is it not true that when we proposed Albert Goldman for the NEC slate, Maynard Krueger declared to us, in the presence of Zam, Delson, John Fisher and others, while they were waiting humbly for an audience in the anteroom of the Wisconsin-Altman-Lewis delegations: "Wisconsin will never agree to Goldman"? Is it not true that the Clarity leadership demanded that we withdraw our four NEC nominations from the Chicago convention floor on the ground that, unless we did, the Wisconsin gang would not vote for and carry the "Clarity" slate? Is it not true that Trager was permitted on the NEC only when Clarity gave Wisconsin assurances that he would not continue as Labor Secretary? Is it not true that the only reason why the two theoretical leaders of Clarity are not even members of the NEC today (Zam and Tyler), is that Wisconsin vetoed it? What amount of corridor muttering can cover up these simple facts?

But didn't the NEC "endorse the Trotsky Committee" and confirm such a radical fellow as Tyler in the editorship of the Call? True, true. But what did that mean in practice. Tyler himself reveals this when he makes his abject apologies to Altman and Co. in order to prove that under his direction the Call was not at all deservant of criticism from the right. In order to show that there is really no cause for complaint from Altman and Wisconsin, Tyler bleats in his circular:

"Why are we not attacked for carryin, virtually nothing on all the executions recently? Why are we not attacked for not mentioning the new drive against the socialists in Russia—except in the one article which is attacked? Why are we not criticized for making front page news out of a world-shaking event—the new reaction in Russia? Why are we so violently criticized because we dare to write a single article in fourteen weeks, which is critical, after long columns calling for the defense of the Soviet Union? "Why?" (Fitting questions that deserve a fitting reply!)

Again: "Another charge (2 out of 7 charges) is that one of our