

Left Wing Will Not Allow Itself to Be -

Declaration by Albert Goldman for the Left Wing at the Chicago -

Comrades:

It would be idle to deny that we are approaching a very serious crisis in the life of our party, a crisis from which the party might emerge a complete wreck. A short while ago the Old Guard, composed of the most intransigent reformist elements, left the party but that only strengthened the party. We are confronted at present

with a different situation, a situation which can be characterized as the beginning of an expulsion drive of the left wing section of the party. While the exodus of the Old Guard left the party free to develop in a revolutionary direction, the expulsion of the revolutionary left can serve the interests only of the Stalinists and the Farmer-Laborites.

A dispassionate consideration of all the factors involved in the present party situation, a willingness to face reality and a fearless determination to compel the right wing of the party and its allies, the centrists of the Clarity wing, to rescind the decisions that threaten to bring bitterness and chaos into the life of the party, might induce the NEC to retreat from its untenable position and thus save the party from the convulsions that are almost inevitable if the NEC persists in its reactionary course.

What led the NEC to pass this gag resolution; what were the factors that caused the NEC to take a step which is unauthorized by the party constitution or the decisions of the last or any other convention, which is in violation of all traditions of party democracy? I shall not go back further than the Chicago convention in order to enumerate the factors leading to the well-nigh fatal resolution, on the high fatal resolution, on the

Convention Did not Settle Problems

It was clear to any intelligent observer familiar with the political currents existing in the party that the Chicago convention held in the latter part of March did not succeed in bringing harmony into the party. The gap dividing the revolutionary left from the various types of reformists was not bridged because it could not be bridged. Between the Wisconsin type of municipal socialists and the Stalinist type of reformism and the social-service brand of socialism—all of them representing the right wing—on the one hand and the revolutionary Marxists on the other hand, there could be no ideological peace. While at the convention the struggle between the combined right wing and the revolutionists did not come to a head it was clear that the convention did not resolve that struggle. Both sides left the convention with the feeling that the fight was to continue.

To expel the so-called Trotskyists was the aim of the right wing. Since that objective was not attained it can be said that the right wing suffered a defeat. Nevertheless the right wing won a major success and the left received a stunning blow through the suppression of the organ of the Appeal group. It is true that the delegates representing the Appeal group "consented" to the suppression of the Appeal but that "consent" came only as a result of the fact that they were in a small minority and they did not want to create any bitterness which would stand in the way of the peaceful penetration of their ideas amongst the ranks of the party.

To us the suppression of the Appeal was a tremendous blow

because we revolutionary Socialists depend on our ideas to win a majority of the party to our side. Every other group depends upon the political backwardness of the party ranks—that is also true of the centrist Clarity group—whereas the revolutionary Marxists can expect no victories without educating the party membership in their ideas. For us a paper to spread our ideas is indispensable but we were willing to be deprived of it in the hope that we could do our educational work by word of mouth.

And now the NEC wants to take our right of educating the party members by word of mouth away from us. And that without any decision of a convention.

New NEC Unable to Weather Storm

The centrists or Clarityites obtained a majority on the NEC. That fact left the impression that the party could go ahead on a fairly even keel, under the leadership of a group that had control of the party machinery. No one of course expected that the party ship would sail along without encountering any storms; they were inevitable both from the right and the left but since the centrists had a safe majority they could easily weather the storms. So at least it appeared on the surface.

A closer analysis of the centrist majority in control of the NEC could easily reveal the cracks and fissures in that majority. The more competent observers predicted that these who were nominally in control of the NEC would be unable, in any serious crisis, to hold the reins tight and furnish firm and confident leadership. The Clarityite majority was too heterogeneous, too weak and vacillating, lacking in experience and ability, and above all without any firm Marxian foundation, to chart an independent course. A constant shifting from left to right and from right to left, a straddling of fundamental issues was to be expected from a group whose main stock in trade was an ability or a supposed ability to maneuver and horse-trade.

Our Forecasts Justified

The period immediately following the convention proved both of our major premises. One, that the ideological struggle between left and right was bound to continue and, two, that the centrist majority on the NEC would be helpless in any serious situation.

No resolution on Spain was passed at the convention; the arrangements were so bad that the most important problem before the convention was left unsettled. The NEC took it upon itself to formulate a resolution on Spain. It was a typically centrist resolution—"on the one hand and on the other hand". It characterized the Caballero government as a provisional revolutionary regime, uttered pious hopes about the necessity for going forward to socialism and in effect gave political support to the Popular Front regime.

The left wing was outraged at the resolution. It began a strenu-

ous and systematic campaign throughout the party against it and the campaign met with great success. The success of that campaign infuriated the Stalinist section of the right wing led by Altman and scared the centrists.

Spanish Events Intrude

Events were unkind to the centrists. The ink on the Spanish resolution was hardly dry when the Barcelona workers were compelled to take up arms against the attempt of the Popular Front government to disarm them. The revolutionary left, although in political disagreement with both the anarchists and the P.O.U.M., supported them unconditionally against the counter-revolutionary attack of the Popular Front. The right wing defended the Popular Front; the centrists regretted the action of both the government and the workers of Barcelona.

We of the left wing had no hesitation whatsoever to give our support to the Barcelona workers. Long before the Call published articles on these events which showed that the aggressors were the parties of the Popular Front Government we characterized the events correctly. Not because we had any more information on the subject but because we had been following events in Spain from a revolutionary Marxist viewpoint.

Again the revolutionary Socialists started a campaign and again we were successful. It goes without saying that a revolutionary Socialist could never keep quiet when revolutionary workers are being murdered by Stalinist and right wing Socialist butchers. We would be betraying the cause of revolutionary Socialism by our silence.

Around the question of the Spanish events the struggle became bitter, especially in New York. It is natural that in those sections of the party where Stalinist ideas are strongest the fight against the revolutionary left is most bitter. I do not claim that Altman belongs to the Stalinist organization. I do claim that in practice his political line is a Stalinist one. His friendliness to the C. P. is notorious as well as the fact that the C. P. never attacks him in its press. While in his political line he is Stalinist, in the inner party regime he has shown himself to be on the same plane as the Old Guard. The same maneuvers and the same tricks characterize his attacks as characterized those of the Old Guard. In his determination not to permit the left wing any opportunity to present its views and in his petty tactics to achieve the expulsion of the left wing he is not a whit inferior to the Old Guard.

Before the Chicago convention Altman undoubtedly favored the expulsion of the revolutionary wing of the party but he dared not raise the question openly. But after the left began its campaign on the Spanish resolution Altman and his followers no longer concealed their intentions. An insistent clamor came from them for the expulsion of the "Trotskyists".

Norman Thomas' Attitude

Nothing helped the Altmanites in their campaign for the expulsion of the left wingers as much as the attitude of Norman Thomas upon his return from Europe. Thomas' attitude on the question of Spain was never very clear.

Just as his attitude on every crucial question is never very clear. His visit to Spain where he was the guest of leading figures of the Popular Front Government led him to come out more openly in favor of that government and to become far more critical of the revolutionists who were in opposition to the Loyalist government. His attitude to the workers of Barcelona who defended their right to bear arms showed clearly that in a crisis he would place himself in the ranks of those who are against the revolution.

No sooner did Thomas return from Europe than it became clear that his influence would be thrown in favor of Altman's campaign for the expulsion of the left. I presume he felt there was no room in one party between half-hearted defenders of the Spanish assassins of the revolutionary workers and the bitter enemies of these assassins.

A factor of great importance in the events that led to the NEC gag resolution is the attitude of Wisconsin. There the party is to the right of social democracy. It was only an accident that caused Wisconsin to remain in the party instead of leaving with the Old Guard. With its comparatively large number of dues-paying members Wisconsin could always demand a price for remaining in the party. The centrists were at all times willing to pay that price.

The Hypocrisy of Krueger

You have heard comrade Krueger in his speech here make a firm statement with reference to his attitude to Wisconsin, to Altman and to the revolutionary left. Krueger is impartial and intends to keep all groups under control. What hypocrisy there is in that statement! Krueger, at this meeting, can talk big to Wisconsin and Altman but his real attitude to them is one of pleading and belly-crawling. It is only towards the left that he is really capable of turning a hard and ruthless first. That is characteristic of all centrists: a threatening voice and a soft hand to the right, blows in the face for the left.

When Wisconsin showed dissatisfaction with the policy of the party on the C.I.O.—A.F. of L. struggle an agreement was reached that Wisconsin can interpret that policy to suit its own convenience. And undoubtedly Wisconsin's threats to leave the party, unless the left was curbed, had a great deal to do with the adoption of the NEC gag resolution. To appease Wisconsin and to assure its remaining in the party the centrists were willing to muzzle the left. Between Wisconsin and the left wing the centrists choose Wisconsin.

The demoralization of the party under centrist leadership contributed a great deal to the decision of the centrists to muzzle the left wing. They who talk so much about activity and accuse the left of consisting of mere theorizers have not shown the least capacity to mobilize the party for any activity. It is really ridiculous to hear Krueger accuse us of inactivity. As against Krueger himself the most inactive comrade of the left is tremendously active. But leave Krueger out. Take all those present at this meeting. I thought I knew the party comrades fairly well. But it is surprising to see so many whom I do not recognize. The dead-wood of the Clarityites far outnumber the deadwood of the Appealites.

The stay-at-home Socialists are here ready to vote against the left.

Bankruptcy of National Office

What campaign did the National Office start since the convention? Did it attempt to mobilize the party membership on the great questions of the day on Spain, on the events in Russia, on the CIO strikes? The only activity that one is conscious of as emanating from the National Office is the drive to re-register the members. Now that in itself is not harmful but one can hardly escape the conclusion that the re-registration was decided upon because the party leadership did not know what else to do and hoped that by some miracle the re-registration would catapult the party into activity. I must also note the small shopkeeper method of raising funds by charging ten cents for every registration.

The centrist leadership was all too anxious to place the blame for its own inability to furnish leadership upon the shoulders of the left wingers whom the centrists accused of devoting too much time to inner-party discussion.

Let me recapitulate the factors which led the NEC, in desperation perhaps, to look for a solution in muzzling the left wing.

1. The profound differences in principle between the right wing of the party, composed of the Altmanites, Wisconsin and the social worker type following Thomas, on the one hand, and the revolutionary left, on the other
2. The serious turn of events in Spain, the successful campaign of the left on the Spanish issue.
3. The bitter hostility of Altman against the left especially on the Spanish issue. The return of Thomas from Spain and his alliance with Altman
4. The threat of Wisconsin to leave the party.
5. The demoralization of the party ranks immediately following the convention, under the leadership of the centrists.

It is an indication of the type of leadership we have in the party that it sought a solution for the difficulties confronting it in a gag resolution. If an intelligent leadership finds a substantial proportion of the membership in opposition to its policies it attempts either to convince the membership through argument or to isolate the minority by consolidating the majority around correct policies. People who cannot cope with the arguments of a minority have recourse to administrative measures even before any discussion and especially when they see the minority gaining ground. The centrist leadership did not attempt to argue with the left wing minority (actually the left wing represents a majority of the active membership); spurred on by the right, the centrists found their solution in the gag resolution. The force that joined the centrists with the right wing was fear of the left.

The Heart of the Gag-Law

The heart of the NEC resolution is contained in the following sentences: "All campaigns in the party against party decisions, policies or institutions must be halted immediately." "While the present reorganization is going on, members are requested to suspend organized attempts to apply pressure for changes of policy and for the initiation of