

- Gagged by the Party Bureaucracy!

-- Membership Meeting in a Reply to Maynard Krueger's Threats

new policy." "No campaigns against the decisions are allowable and those decisions are to take immediate effect".

Now the decisions say nothing about the left wing. From a strictly legal viewpoint they apply to Wisconsin, to Altman as well as to the left wing. And comrade Krueger went to great lengths to emphasize that point. But in effect the only ones against whom the decision will operate will be the left wingers. First because they are the only ones interested in carrying out a campaign among the members on questions of policy and second because the right wing will use the decisions as a pretext to expel the left wing.

Comrade Krueger told you how insistent Wisconsin was in its attempt to induce the NEC to change or modify the convention resolutions on war and trade unionism. What does that mean in actuality? Did Wisconsin carry on a campaign among the general membership of the party with the purpose of convincing the membership that the convention resolution was wrong and that a new one was necessary? Needless to say that is not the method of Wisconsin. What the Socialists from Milwaukee did was to whisper in Krueger's ear that a change is necessary in these resolutions or else... and the "or-else" meant a threat. And I am quite sure that Krueger told the Wisconsinites not to worry, that everything would go along smoothly.

The revolutionary left operates in quite a different manner. If it is dissatisfied with any resolution or decision it immediately appeals to the membership; it carries on an agitation amongst the ranks in order to convince a majority of the correctness of its viewpoint. It is because the left wing carries on an agitation in the open, educating and convincing the membership, that the party leadership was so anxious to muzzle it.

Krueger Creates Straw Men

Here I want to mention something that is of great importance in showing that the NEC is trying to becloud the issue. Krueger spoke about the campaign of Wisconsin to change convention resolutions and decisions. And he thundered that neither Wisconsin nor Cannon, Shachtman and Goldman would be permitted to carry on an agitation for changing convention resolutions and decisions. It is so easy to create a straw man and then proceed to demolish him.

Let me ask comrade Krueger: what convention resolutions or decisions have we been campaigning against? Let him name one. Not that we particularly like all of the resolutions and decisions passed at the convention and not that we think it is criminal to carry on an agitation against them. But the fact is that we have not said or done anything about any of the convention decisions or resolutions. On the contrary, we claim, and I think with some justification, that the NEC has violated the convention resolution on the People's Front. Certainly the NEC has flagrantly violated the convention decision on the publication of an inner party organ.

Did not the convention decide that an inner party organ be published where all groups would find space for its articles? More than three months passed and not a trace of such an organ.

Why? Because money is lacking, will be the answer of those responsible. But that answer shows how little the leadership is able to evoke sufficient enthusiasm amongst the membership so that money can be raised to publish necessary papers. But I suspect that it is not so much the lack of money as it is an indifference to a real discussion on vital problems and a fear that in any discussion the left wing will be most persuasive.

If there has been any violation of convention decisions it has been by the NEC and not by the left wing

The Left Wing Has Been Disciplined

I want to emphasize the fact that it is not a crime to be opposed to a convention resolution and to carry on a theoretical discussion against such a resolution. In a revolutionary party where democratic procedure necessarily prevails there will always be discussion on all convention resolutions; what will be demanded of the minority is that it does not act contrary to any convention decision. I defy anyone to point out one instance where the left wing has acted contrary to any convention resolution.

What is in question is not a campaign against convention resolutions but against NEC resolutions on fundamental problems. Is the NEC resolution on Spain a convention decision? Is the NEC gag resolution a convention decision? Not by any stretch of the imagination!

By what authority has the NEC decided that its resolutions and decisions are to be immune from criticism by the membership? Such a doctrine would mean that an NEC could violate all the fundamental principles of socialism with impunity. Such a doctrine would transform the party into a Stalinist monolithic party and that of course would mean the death of the party as a revolutionary force in the labor movement.

The NEC will be compelled to deal with many new and important problems and if the principle were to be recognized that it can decide on all problems regardless of the opinions of the membership then the party simply becomes an instrument to execute the decisions of the NEC. A revolutionary Socialist, any kind of Socialist with an independent mind, cannot accept such a perverted view of the nature of the authority of the NEC in a socialist party.

The Question of Mass Work

According to the resolution itself it is motivated by a desire on the part of the NEC to have the party turn its face to the masses and to carry out the decisions of the convention. Let us analyze these concepts

No one can possibly object to the necessity of doing mass work. The party leadership connects that necessity with and makes that work dependent upon a cessation of inner party discussion, or better, of any campaign against NEC decisions. At the present moment there are three fundamental problems around which the party should conduct a campaign both amongst its members and its sympathizers as well as amongst the workers in general. They are: the Spanish struggle, the slaughter of the revolutionary forces in Russia and the great battles of the

C.I.O. in this country. Upon all of these problems there are serious differences of opinion and it stands to reason that no mass work can be done without first convincing the membership of the correctness of the NEC policies on these fundamental questions. What shall we tell the masses; around what ideas shall we mobilize them? Around the ideas of the NEC, according to the party leadership. What role should the party play in such a mobilization? That of mere followers. Such a concept can never set the party into activity and in fact the decisions of the NEC will prove that far from mobilizing the members for active work it will paralyze the party and no work will result.

It is because the NEC does not want the revolutionary viewpoint upon the important problems confronting us to prevail that the gag resolution was promulgated. The NEC, to cover up its inability to furnish any leadership, simply enters an order that mass work be done without attempting to win the party members over to its conception of mass work, assuming that it has any kind of conception on that subject.

In Activity We Yield to No-one

Once more I want to label the statement made by our opponents that the revolutionary left wants to make of the party a mere debating society as a complete falsehood. Need I mention the fact that there are party members active in Indiana Harbor in the steel strike? And all of them are members of the Appeal tendency. Take the Appeal group as a whole and take any other group in the party and it will be readily ascertained that amongst the Appeal group there is a much larger proportion of activists. Not that I am satisfied. I recognize our weaknesses but I say that our group is much stronger from the point of view of participation in the class struggle than any other group. The difference is that we insist on having our activity based on revolutionary theory.

Nor is the contention that we must now carry out the convention decisions any more correct than the cry that we must do mass work and not discuss. One does not and cannot carry out a convention resolution by repeating the words of the resolution. A resolution can be carried out only by applying its principles to the events of the day. A resolution indicates a general policy and direction and it is up to the leadership to apply that resolution correctly. And should something occur which is not covered by any resolution, should the NEC refrain from taking opposition on it? Of course not. It must take the best position it knows how and then be ready to defend it before the membership. At the time of the convention no one knew that events in Barcelona would take such a sharp turn. The NEC was nevertheless obligated to formulate a correct attitude on those events and the membership is justified in criticizing the incorrect attitude of the NEC.

But would we not be constantly arguing and thus prevent the doing of any work? Even granting that there would be considerable discussion and even granting that such discussion would interfere with activity, still there is no way to escape it. But it is absurd to contend that

discussion interferes with activity to such an extent that it should be abolished. What activity on Spain would there be if there were no discussion? Activities can result, in the long run, from correct policies and not from a prohibition of discussion.

The method chosen by the NEC to develop activity shows its inability to grasp the necessity of convincing the membership. Ideologically, I repeat, if the NEC finds a substantial number opposed to its policies it must either revise them or be prepared to show the majority that its policies are correct and thus isolate the minority if it persists in its opposition too long. There is no other way for a party to function. A party develops in struggle—participation in the struggle of the workers, struggle against opponent parties, struggle within its own ranks. He who fears the struggle must step out of the revolutionary movement.

The sections of the resolution dealing with the support of the Call, the regulation of meetings and of the sale of literature are not in themselves bad but indicate the same tendency to settle problems by command. Take the question of the Call. It seems to me that if I were in the leadership of the party and the party organ would not be supported I would either change the nature of the organ or educate the party membership to the correctness of the organ's policy. But that is asking a little too much from the present leadership. I know only that obedience is due it and it must obtain such obedience by decree. No one questions the right of the NEC to ask that meetings be organized for the purpose of explaining the policy to the members. But it has gone further and practically ordered that no meetings be held except when it calls for them. If any one is acquainted with the Stalinist "enlightenment" campaigns he can see that the NEC has copied another leaf from the book of Stalinist monolithism.

Towards an Index Prohibitorum

The decision on regulating the sale of literature is obviously intended to prevent the revolutionary wing of the party from selling Trotsky's books and pamphlets. What piffness! Soon we shall have an Index Prohibitorum.

What will be the effect of this foolhardy, undemocratic resolution? Should it actually be carried into practice the end of the party as a living force can be predicted with certainty. The communist movement can afford to be monolithic; its reformism and its intolerance of opposition weakens it somewhat but the effect is not visible. One of the inducements for workers to join the S. P. must be its democratic procedure; to it must be attracted all the independent revolutionary spirits. It is the freedom of discussion within the party that makes a revolutionizing of the party possible. Destroy that and you have simply a vest-pocket edition of the Communist Party. As such there is no place for it because it can have no historic function.

I do not think that the resolution of the NEC can be realized in practice. It is contrary to the constitution, the resolution and the traditions of the party. Here and there expulsions will result, especially in New York where Altman will use the resolution as a pretext to get rid of left

wingers. I do not think that a revolutionary Socialist can accept such a resolution. Is it conceivable that a revolutionary Socialist can keep quiet on the important struggles of the working class and on decisions of the NEC which violate all concepts of democratic procedure? I am not advocating a wholesale defiance of the NEC; I am just predicting that the NEC will have to expel every revolutionary Socialist from the party. In other words the NEC will have to destroy the party in order to compel a strict observance of its decisions.

Strictly construed this meeting is a violation of the decisions; strictly construed any attempt to initiate a referendum will be a violation of the decisions. Of necessity we shall institute a referendum and carry on a campaign in favor of rejecting the NEC decisions. Will that be construed a violation? I shall wait for the NEC to reply. If it will, then it means that the NEC is determined to split the party; it can mean nothing else.

Appeal's Proposals For the Crisis

What do we of the Appeal group suggest and demand in order to avoid the catastrophe that is being threatened by the NEC resolution? We demand the restoration of party democracy which means the immediate rescinding of the NEC resolution. We demand the execution of the convention decision providing for an inner party organ where we can present our viewpoint. The delegates representing the Appeal viewpoint were induced to agree to the suspension of the Appeal on the promise that an internal party organ would be published. The failure of the NEC to provide for such an organ justifies us in resuming publication of the Appeal. We demand further that no expulsions of left wingers be tolerated. If the NEC fails to take drastic action to stop Altman from suspending or expelling left wingers, it will be conclusive proof that the NEC is intending to split the party. No arguments of a technical nature will help the situation. At least the NEC must come out with a blast against those who are expelling comrades and refuse to recognize the expulsions because in reality the expulsions are for the purpose of destroying the left wing movement.

These demands are the minimum for the restoration of peace in the party, for the creation of an atmosphere where the left wing feels itself free to work for the revolutionizing of the party. If they are not granted then the onus for the chaotic conditions bound to ensue will rest upon the NEC.

Are these demands so unreasonable? Is it unreasonable to ask for democracy and freedom of discussion? Is it unreasonable that the NEC be asked to live up to the decision of the convention providing for an inner party organ? Is it unreasonable to ask for a stop to expulsions? To ask these questions is to answer them. All comrades of whatever viewpoint should endorse these reasonable demands. To build the party into a revolutionary instrument it is necessary to have freedom to propagate the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. And these ideas and the right to present them, the comrades of the Appeal group will never surrender.