

"SUPPORTING LA GUARDIA BETRAYS SOCIALISM"

So Said Clarity, But Accepts NEC Betrayal and Leads Expulsions

Two inter-related questions confronted last week's meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, upon the answer to which depended nothing less than the existence of the organization.

The first was the decision taken by the Thomas-Altman administration in New York to sell out the party to the La Guardia Republican-Fusion machine and the American Labor Party bureaucracy—a decision adopted in violation, not only of the best socialist tradition, but directly in violation of the specific decision almost unanimously adopted by the national party convention in Chicago only six months ago.

The second question was the action taken by the rump City Central Committee of the New York right wing in expelling more than 120 left wingers from the party and, in effect, proscribing from membership all other left wingers—an action involving the expulsion of between 400 and 500 comrades in New York City alone. Together with this came the announcement by the right wing combination of its intention to make a drive for the mass expulsion of all the "Trotskyists" all the supporters of the left wing, throughout the party nationally.

Two Questions Are One

No half-way intelligent person failed to understand, long before the N.E.C. convened, the inseparable connection between these two questions and their significance for the future of the Socialist Party. The La Guardia proposal simply meant the complete abandonment of the class struggle and the drowning of the S.P. in the morass of class collaboration and People's Frontism.

The mass expulsions of the left wing were the indispensable prerequisite for the carrying out of an abrupt termination of the development of the party towards revolutionary Marxism. It was, so to speak, quite in order that the most vigorous initiators and proponents of the first action should at the same time be the ones who most loudly demanded the second. The victory of the right wing could only mean the end of the Socialist Party.

Even more clearly known than the position of the right wing, was the position of the left. Both these tendencies in the party knew where they stood, what they wanted and how to proceed in order to obtain it. Both of them were perfectly well aware that, while it was still possible to occupy a shabby intermediate position on a number of issues in dispute for the past year or two, on these two life-and-death questions, vitally affecting the immediate action and existence of the party, the choice had to be made: either with the liquidators and traitors, or with the revolutionary Marxists.

Clarity's "Line"

Only the leaders of the Clarity group sought to maintain, until the very eve of the N.E.C. meeting, that it was still possible to take a position distinct from both these "extremes", who annoyingly insisted that everybody quit straddling; only they could (they said) take a definite, vigorous position which, avoiding the Scylla of "Trotskyist sectarianism" and the Charybdis of brazen reformism, would be "thoroughly Marxist" and, at the same time, prevent a split and preserve party unity. They were especially confident of their im-

pending successes, for was not the N.E.C. "theirs", was it not a "left wing" Committee, was it not the mighty rampart of Marxism which the right wing could never scale?

Let us therefore summarize the results of the N.E.C. meeting. It can be done, and all the political conclusions drawn from it, in the space of a few sentences.

(What did Altman demand? The endorsement of the La Guardia line of the right wing, denounced as a "betrayal of Socialism" by the Clarity leaders.

Altman's Line Carries

What did Altman get? By a vote of eight to seven, the N.E.C. gave the right wing carte blanche in carrying out their decision not to auction off the S.P. but to hand it to La Guardia and the A.L.P. for nothing.

What did Altman demand? The immediate expulsion of the left wing throughout the country, one and all.

What did Altman get? By a unanimous vote of the "left wing" N.E.C. all the supporters of the SOCIALIST APPEAL are to be expelled throughout the country, forthwith and summarily.

What This Means

For a person capable of thinking politically, these eight sentences are sufficient to demonstrate the complete victory of the right wing on the decisive questions and to indicate the road back to the Old Guard-Stalinist position which the party is now traveling at a furious pace. Yet, a few additional comments on what happened at the N.E.C. meeting are necessary to illustrate fully the wretched role played by what passes for leadership in the Clarity group; for it is precisely about this leadership that vestigial illusions still remain among some of those in the party who earnestly want to fight the right wing.

"Betrayal", Said Clarity

The Clarity leaders took a position against the La Guardia policy of the right wing. They even forgot themselves so far as to denounce the right wing policy in the most violent terms.

In their statement as the minority of the New York municipal Campaign Committee (Zam and Delson), they characterized the right wing proposal as "capitulation" and "betrayal" and the right wingers as auctioneers ready to sell the S.P. to the capitalist parties backing La Guardia and to the A.L.P. bureaucracy.

Now these are fairly weighty words, and it might have seemed that they were written down with full knowledge of their importance and their implications. The observer unacquainted with the Clarity leadership would have been further impressed by their repeated declarations that they intended to fight against the sell-out to the bitter end without let-up. Those who, like ourselves, were better acquainted with the centrists, knew that they would not and could not fight the treachery to socialism advocated by the right wing. They could not fight (and by fight we do not mean merely the writing of a resolution!) for the simple reason that nobody can fight a battle if he has decided in advance to capitulate to the enemy. And that is precisely what the Clarity leadership did, and what its whole preceding course indicated it was going to do at the N.E.C. meet-

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ing, all bluster and braggadocio to the contrary notwithstanding.

Clarity Capitulates

It was, therefore, not surprising to the left wing when, after the vote had been cast in favor of La Guardia and the People's Front, the Clarity leaders in the N.E.C., not excluding the Oh so radical Tyler and Trager, announced that they would submit to the decision of the majority.

How touchingly noble! What divine humility! What a gesture of restraint! What a model of discipline!

Never Serious

The fact of the matter is that the Clarity leaders did not take the fight seriously. After the vote for La Guardia (which, always remember, they call a policy of treason to socialism, nothing less!), did they demand of the N.E.C. a referendum of the national membership on the question? Not at all! Did they demand of the N.E.C. the calling of a special emergency convention to allow the membership to express itself against the sell-out, as it undoubtedly would? Not at all! The Clarity leaders allowed this vital question to be settled bureaucratically, at the top, without demanding that the membership be given the opportunity to intervene. It is true that only an irresponsible group would demand a referendum on every little disputed question, or demand an emergency convention every week in the month. But the question involved in this dispute, if we are to take Clarity's own word for it, is whether or not the principles of socialism shall be betrayed!

Clarity Leads Expulsions

A far more decisive criterion by which to measure the seriousness of the Clarity leadership's fight against betrayal, is their attitude towards the expulsion of the left wing. The prosecutors who arraigned the left wing at the N.E.C. meeting were not the right wingers, not the Altmans and Siegels who appeared against us at the Central Committee of the New York Local. This time the distinction belonged exclusively to the Clarity group. Here they showed their power, their strength, their ability to take the leadership away from the right wing! The sub-committee which brought in the report demanding our expulsion was composed of three Clarity leaders and nobody else: Tyler, McDowell and Krueger. The bureaucratic thoroughness with which the mass expulsion of the left wing nationally was recommended in the sub-committee's report exceeded anything that Altman and Thomas had ever proposed. It was a perfect example of how centrists seek to compensate for their impotence against the right wing by brutality and intolerance toward the left. In three weeks, says the Clarity ukase, which the entire N.E.C. endorsed, every supporter of the Appeal must be expelled from the party, and any local or state organization failing to do so is subject to the same penalty.

Bear in mind, in considering this appalling resolution, the following simple facts:

The whole Clarity leadership had not only denounced the expulsion of the left wing by Altman in New York, but had re-

fused to recognize the authority of the City Central Committee on the grounds that it was illegal. At the N.E.C. meeting, it dropped its pretense of opposition to our expulsion and led the campaign to extend it nationally. "You want to take the Trotskyists out of Altman's grave and put them into the Clarity grave?" asked Lewis. "Yes," replied Krueger. (By the way, is it not a little unwise for the dying to speak of graves in any connection?)

Confusion Confounded

After denying the appeal of the left wing and voting to expel it, the "Clarity N.E.C." thereupon voted to condemn the Altmans for having expelled the left wing illegally, by means of a fake two-thirds majority! And if this is not sufficiently senseless, Krueger introduced his motion (which carried!) to condemn the branches which, with Clarity's consent, had refused to recognize the illegal Altman Central Committee. According to Krueger, Altman's Committee was illegal, but the branches that refused to accept its illegality were no less illegal! In this N.E.C., such a series of motions passes for wisdom, forthright leadership and a sane sense of balance.

Clarity Hypocrisy

The Clarity leaders sought to apologize for themselves by declaring that while we were illegally and wrongly expelled by Altman, we had since violated discipline by publishing the Socialist Appeal and that is why we had to be expelled.

How lame and hypocritical! Let us assume for a moment that the publication of the Appeal is a purely formal question (which it is not, for it was suspended on the basis of an "agreement" that an inner-party discussion organ would be issued and, as is known, that did not appear). How did the N.E.C. in the past deal with the Old Guard, with its repeated and flagrant violations of party discipline, with its publication of a purely factional organ, the New Leader? Were the Old Guardsmen summarily expelled by the N.E.C.? Perish the thought! Month in and month out, every attempt was made to conciliate the Old Guard. Two years of inner-party discussion went on before a single action was taken against the Old Guard or its organ.

Cowardly Toward Rightists

But you don't understand, dear reader. The Old Guard was the right wing. Faced by the right wing, the centrists crawl and dally and whine and beg and capitulate. Their blood turns to water and their bones to rubber. But face them with a left wing and they promptly become vigorous, militant, aggressive, intolerant, intransigent, full of venom.

We were expelled, you see, for a serious breach of discipline. So say the Clarity leaders. But they also said that the right wing was guilty of a gross breach of discipline in selling out the party to La Guardia's machine a breach compounded with treason. What action did they take or even propose to take against the right wing? None!

In this appeal for the left wing, Shachtman referred to no less than twenty instances of gross violations of party discipline and policy by outstanding right wing leaders: Thomas, Edlin, Valenti, Lasser, Sweetland, Clemens, Lewis, Raskin, Benson, Altman,

Fox, Laidler, etc., etc. Not a single statement could be challenged; none was. Burt announced that an invitation had been telegraphed to Lasser to attend the N.E.C. meeting to discuss his line and position; Lasser did not even answer. Expelled? Not at all. A sub-committee is promptly appointed (for the 50th time) to visit him in Washington, hat in hand, to "discuss" with him.

Expulsions Are Political

The conclusion is inescapable: the left wing was expelled for purely political reasons. It was not expelled for violating discipline, but for its political opinions, and above all, because its political views were speedily becoming the views of the majority of the party (the majority of the active party membership is already with us), just as they have already become the views of the majority of the Y.P.S.L.

As for the Clarity leadership, the conclusion is annihilating and irrefutable. When all trifles and details are brushed aside, these basic political facts remain:

They are able to remain in one party and under the discipline of those "who are urging the Socialist Party to turn traitor to socialism" (Zam and Delson in the SOCIALIST REVIEW). They drive out of the party those whom, however "sectarian", they acknowledge to be revolutionar-

ists. They denounce the right wing as capitulators, as the New Old Guard, as people who "surrender to the trade union bureaucrats," as people guilty of a "betrayal of socialism", and are ready to live happily with this right wing. The left wing—revolutionists, fighters, enemies of the trade union bureaucrats, intransigent socialists—they cannot suffer to stay in the same party.

What respect can one have for those who submit quietly to traitors and expel revolutionists? Twist and squirm as they will, the Clarity leaders will not be allowed to escape an answer to this simple question and the responsibility for the consequences of their policy.

The Fight Begins!

The N.E.C. meeting is over, but not the fight. The bureaucracy of the right wing and the Clarity clique have made their position transparently and conclusively clear. They have taken their stand. It is now up to the party membership, to the revolutionary militants in the ranks, to speak and to take their position. To stand by silently, is to be an accomplice in the La Guardia betrayal and the expulsion crime. To stand by silently, means to allow the revolutionary socialist movement to be cut to pieces. The Clarity-right wing leadership has already done infinite harm to the cause of socialism. It has almost wrecked the movement. It was charged to lead. Roy Burt reported to the N.E.C. that although a re-registration of 5,000 had been expected (a miserable enough figure!), only 2,000 had re-registered as party members to date. A leadership could not record a greater bankruptcy.

Bankrupts have no place in the leadership. Bankrupts should not be entrusted with the leadership and direction of the movement. The membership of the party will not hesitate for another moment—we are convinced—in uniting around the left wing for the rebuilding of the party on a revolutionary foundation.