

Ten Years of Struggle For a Workers' Party

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American section of the Third International. Aided by our international organization, with which we always maintained close ties, we went through these stages of development with a conscious understanding of the objective circumstances which made them unavoidable.

Our record is by no means free from mistakes and omissions in carrying out our tasks. But, by and large, we knew what the tasks of the moment were and allowed no one to swerve us from them. Most of the internal struggles, in which our cadres were unified and tempered, occurred around questions of this type. The individuals and cliques who left our ranks for oblivion came to grief in almost every case because of their refusal to recognize the political realities which dictated the tactics they opposed. Hermits may forsake the world of reality, revolutionary politicians never.

A Tough Start

It would be hard to find anywhere in the history of the labor movement a struggle that began under more unfavorable auspices for immediate practical success than ours. The Communist International, representing and symbolizing the great Russian revolution in the public mind, dominated all radical labor thought and activity; and Stalinism, its real face not yet exposed in practice, reigned triumphant in the Comintern and all its sections. Moreover, the Comintern was then swinging into the frenzied radicalism of the "third period" and beating the drums for the first five-year plan and its dazzling records of industrial progress in the Soviet Union.

In these circumstances we had to begin our agitation about the theory of "socialism in one country" and the problem of the Chinese revolution. A more "impractical" venture could hardly be imagined. Nobody wanted to listen to the "hair-splitting." We appeared to be waging a Quixotic war about theoretical refinements and far-away places while the Stalinists were "doing things." We were cruelly isolated and appeared to be hermetically sealed in our isolation. Our ostracism was complete. Even social affairs, such as are common now for virtually every branch of our party, were impossible for us in those days. We had very few friends.

The Power of Program

But we knew the truth and were never daunted. We had read Trotsky's "Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern," and we knew that the program decides everything. We are often asked if we were taken by surprise by our expulsion from the party and the gangster campaign against us; and if we had not counted on a quick victory. No, we understood the situation pretty well and were prepared for a long struggle. This long view was instilled into the minds of all our comrades from the start. It was a decisive factor in their stubborn endurance which astounded all our enemies.

We never had a single captulator in our leading cadre, and extremely few in the ranks when the enormous pressure put upon them is considered. Malkin turned rat after awhile and Gerry Alard, who is a professional captulator, went back to the Stalinists after they had squeezed him a bit. That's about all; there may have been four or five others, but I cannot remember their names. Our ranks were never once shaken or disturbed by desertions. From this an important lesson may be derived: in order to hold out in a hard fight it is best to weigh everything and count the cost before you start.

The First Persecution

It was a hard fight, especially in the first days. We had no money, no connections and very few members. At our first convention, about six months after the expulsions, about 100 comrades throughout the country were represented. We were also subjected to persecution by the Stalinists. The campaign of slander depicting us as "counter revolutionists," familiar to all now, was something rather new then and more effective. Organized bands of hoodlums were sent to break up our public meetings by force. Sometimes they succeeded and sometimes they got the worst of the fight. Comrades selling the "Militant" were attacked; individual comrades were waylaid and beaten up. Our homes were burglarized and, a few days later, stolen letters and "documents" were published in the Daily Worker. All this availed nothing.

We stood our ground and fought. We were armed with confidence in our program and its future; that is the best prescription for sustained courage in a political fight. The movement of unfalsified bolshevism grew, slowly and painfully, but it grew. The cadres became hardened in the struggle. The whole campaign against us—the slander, the hoodlum violence and the burglaries—



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was all organized and directed in the first six months by Lovestone & Co., who controlled the C. P. at that time. Then they were also expelled and given a dose of their own medicine. That converted them to "democracy"; at least, so they said.

Firm Line of Principle

During the first years of our struggle the reaction in the Comintern coincided with a general reaction and passivity in the American labor movement. The left wing of the workers' movement was completely dominated by Stalinism basking in the light of the first five-year plan. Under these conditions there was nothing to do but direct our message to the Stalinist workers, to maintain our position as a faction of the Comintern fighting for its reformation and to concentrate our extremely limited forces on fundamental critical and propagandistic work.

This was the task in hand, imposed upon us by all the circumstances. We tenaciously adhered to this line and repulsed every attempt to divert it in favor of rainbow-chasing expeditions. Super-radical people demanded "independence" from the Comintern and concentration on "mass work." That would simply have meant a futile exercise in trying to jump over our own heads. The tactics of a political grouping, its methods of work and the tasks it sets for itself at the moment, and even the form and conditions of its existence, must all be determined by time and circumstance. The fear of isolation and the attempt to circumvent it in periods of reaction by artificial means only brings a disintegration of the Marxist forces where it does not lead to their opportunistic diffusion. Such pundits as Welsford and Field, who attempted these miracles on their own account after we finished the debate with them, achieved a unique combination of these unhappy consequences.

It was necessary to carry out the struggle in the Comintern to the end, until the fallacy of its dogmas would be confirmed in great actions before the eyes of the masses. In the period of the greatest ideological confusion and demoralization it was necessary to concentrate on fundamental theoretical criticism, to reassemble the forces of the vanguard man by man, to rearm them with a correct program and thus prepare the future work among the masses. If we had not stuck resolutely to this conception at that time, if we had listened to the demagogues and "mass work" quacks, we would not be celebrating our tenth anniversary today. There would be nothing to celebrate.

The German Events

The German catastrophe of 1933—the capitulation to fascism without a battle—signaled the downfall of the Comintern as a revolutionary factor and simultaneously induced a shake-up in all other workers' organizations. The left wing in the Socialist Party, especially in the youth movement, began to take shape. The Conference for Progressive Labor Action (C.P.L.A.), a heterogeneous body of trade unionists, began to crystallize out a militant political tendency. Within a year the upturn of the economic cycle in the United States and the introduction of the N.R.A. unleashed the first great wave of strikes. New times; new conditions. It became a life and death necessity for the Bolsheviks to reorient themselves, to seize upon the new possibilities to break out of their isolation and find the road to the masses.

Our organization reacted to the German events with magnificent energy like a tightly-coiled spring in release. The *Militant*, published three times a week during the acute crisis following Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, electrified the movement. Our influence began to grow visibly day by day. In common with our international movement we made a sharp and definitive break with the bankrupt Comintern and began to steer a course toward a new party and a new international. Contacts were established and negotiations initiated with various forces in other organizations looking toward unification in a

Revolutionary Tasks and Work in the Trade Union Movement

By V. R. DUNNE

A Marxist understanding of the state and of the role of the revolutionary party as the vanguard of the class, without which the class cannot raise itself to power, results in our having a different attitude towards work in the trade unions than that held by any other organization claiming to represent the American workers.

Alone of all parties in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party advocates that only a Workers and Farmers government, basing itself upon nationwide councils of elected representatives of the workers and farmers, can solve the economic and social problems facing the masses. It flows from this concept that our party must extend its influence to all sections of the economic organizations of the workers and farmers—particularly of the workers, because it is the working class that will lead all the oppressed in the onslaught on capitalism and the fight for a socialist America and a socialist world.

Our Task

The task of our party consists of gaining influence over the trade unions—more, of winning, through the trade unions, influence over the majority of the working class.

We can only succeed in this if the methods used by our party in the trade unions help to build the unions, to strengthen them, to increase their influence among the unemployed, the farmers, the oppressed minorities and the small people of the city. That the trade union work of our party, limited in scope as it has been up to now, has been based on a correct policy is verified by the truly remarkable way in which unions in which our members are active and influential have thrived.

Because the Socialist Labor Party and the I.W.W. answered "no" to the question: shall revolutionists work in reactionary trade unions? they doomed themselves to sterility.

Because the Socialist Party and the Lovestone group have degraded socialist politics to the level of trade union politics, their work in the mass movement has not resulted in diverting the labor movement from subservience to the capitalists.

The movement for the Fourth International took shape in America and throughout the world, not only in the fight against the

theories of "socialism in one country," of "social fascism," etc., but in the struggle against the theory of dual "red" unionism fostered by the Communist International until 1935. Lenin in 1920 had demonstrated theoretically, in his "Left Communism," that for communists to turn their backs on reactionary unions and invent new "revolutionary" unions was to render "the greatest service to the bourgeoisie."

The Reactionary Stalinists But the Communist Parties throughout the world had long since turned their backs on Leninism. When the "Communists" re-entered the trade unions following 1934 they continued to wear the leading strings of the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia. With the drift to the right of Soviet policy,



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the trade union work of Browder's party has developed to the point where today this group is the most reactionary force in the labor movement. Whereas the fortunes of the Greens and the Hillmans are, after all, bound up with the fortunes of the movements which they head, the fortunes of the Stalinist unionists derive from Stalin and his clique. Unlike the Communist Party which until the spring of 1937 favored the A. F. L. over the C. I. O. only to swing overnight to the other extreme, the Socialist Workers Party has no fetishism for either set of initials.

Mistakes of the C. I. O. The C. I. O. has accomplished

a great historic task in organizing the heavy industries, a task that the craft unions could never have accomplished. The new C. I. O. unions succeeded, not only because they were industrial in form but because they utilized militant and revolutionary tactics (sit-down strikes etc.) to gain their goal. Had the C. I. O. continued its original policy of organizing the unorganized, of concentrating on the basic industries, of avoiding raids on established A. F. L. unions, there is little doubt but that, despite the blows of the depression, it would today be in a far better position in the American labor movement.

Desperate for organizers, Lewis committed a tragic error in opening wide the doors to the Stalinists in return for their unconditional support.

Weakened by the defeat of "Little Steel" and the hammerblows of the new depression, the C. I. O. organism could not shake off the Stalinist poison. On the West Coast and elsewhere the Communist-controlled C. I. O. has followed a brutal and callous anti-working class policy of raiding the lines of unions under the control of the progressives. In Minneapolis, the Stalinized section of the C. I. O. has not hesitated to connive with the bosses against the A. F. L., even to appeal to the courts for an injunction against the latter.

On November 14 in Pittsburgh, the C. I. O. will hold its first national convention, at which will be decided the question of who is to control that body: the workers or the Stalinists in a bloc with Lewis or said C. I. O. leaders. It can be bluntly stated that only to the extent to which the C. I. O. rids itself of Stalinism can it recover its lost ground and develop.

The Strength of the A.F.L.

A phenomenon not sufficiently appreciated by the students of the labor movement—not by Stolberg and not even by certain of our own comrades—is the manner in which the A. F. L. has not only withstood the effects of the depression and the competition of the C. I. O., but has even managed to gain a million new members. The A. F. L., having an experienced organizing staff and great sums of money at its disposal, was better able than the C. I. O. to take advantage of the ground-swell of organization which swept across

the country, and to stabilize it against the newly organized unions faced the ravages of the depression.

Despite the Greens, the Wolls and Tracys and Freys—incurably narrow-minded, selfish, jealous, divorced from the ranks—the A. F. L. finds itself, after three years of the C. I. O., with a membership approaching the all-time peak figures of 1919. To be sure, the A. F. L., in the struggle to maintain itself, has used the organizational forms and even, at times, the militant tactics, which it officially condemned in the C. I. O. This has a special meaning for us.

The A.F.L. convention recently ended in Houston was marked by the fight which Tobin led against the executive council for unification of the A. F. L. and C. I. O. Tobin today finds himself and his International Union in a commanding position in the American labor movement. The Brotherhood of Teamsters is the largest national body in the Federation and has an almost unlimited field for expansion. With the strategic position of the drivers in American industry, the I.B.T. can play an important role in unifying the movement.

The Road Ahead

On the road ahead, it is not impossible that a third national union grouping may arise. The history of unionism in other industrial countries indicates that such a formation is not out of the question. Forces that might go to make up such a body are Dubinsky's I. L. G. W. U.; the Printers; the Teamsters; the Sailors; the Auto Workers and Rubber Workers, etc. Should such a formidable group arise, it would have the power to bring great pressure to bear upon the top leadership of both the A. F. L. and C. I. O.

It is evident that unless labor succeeds in itself unifying its armies, Roosevelt, acting for American capitalism, will intercede to bring about unity from outside and above, in a way that can only have disastrous consequences for the independence of the trade unions.

The Unemployed

Of the 35,000,000 workers, almost half are today unemployed. Any trade union policy that does not provide for these unemployed will bring disaster to the working class.

The A. F. L. nationally has disregarded the problem. The C. I. O. under the pressure of the depression, which hit the mass industries harder than the skilled trades, has after too much delay tackled the problem in many localities. On the initiative of progressives, many C. I. O. unions have unemployed sections, thereby binding the jobs to their working brothers. In areas like Detroit, these unemployed sections have achieved tremendous proportions and have been a major factor in maintaining the union's hold on the workers.

Both bodies or the new united movement will have to intervene much more vigorously on behalf of the unemployed if the jobless millions are to be saved from fascism.

Political Action

No sooner had the C.I.O. organized the great basic industries when the new economic crisis posed problems which the unions could not solve. The C. I. O. was forced to take steps toward independent political action of the working class. These first moves have been timid and bureaucratic. Nevertheless, they represent an advance over the Gompers tradition, and it is the duty of progressives to encourage this process and to give to the growing movement a bold program.

Historic Role of S. W. P.

If the Socialist Workers Party, the American section of the Fourth International, is to rise to its historic tasks, it must re-double its work in the union movement. The last year has seen us making great strides forward in both the A. F. L. and C. I. O. But we are progressing much too slowly. Time is short. It is truer than ever that our most important field in the coming period will remain the trade union movement.

No one claims that our party has said the last word on the problem of the relationships between the revolutionary party and the trade unions, or that we have achieved the final pat formula which will guide us in all the twists and turns of an American union movement that is becoming increasingly complex. But our policies are Bolshevik policies and represent the accumulated experience of decades in the world union movement.

Armed with these policies, our cadres can attract all that is healthy in the movement, can expand into proletarian armies that will lead behind them the American masses in the revolutionary onslaught against the cruel system which is preparing only greater misery, and against the insanities of imperialist war.

THE EARLY DAYS

By MAX SHACHTMAN

THE "DOCUMENT"

There are very few examples of the power and influence that can be exerted on the movement by forceful ideas than the "document," as we called it ten years ago. I refer to comrade Trotsky's criticism of the draft program of the Communist International



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written by Stalin and Bukharin for the Sixth Congress in Moscow in the summer of 1928.

In this country we had only a very faint idea of the fundamental issues involved in the struggle of the Trotskyist Opposition against the ruling clique in the Russian party and the Comintern—and that idea was a very carefully distorted and misrepresented one. Overwhelmingly preoccupied by what we thought were the all-important issues in the factional fight that raged incessantly in the American Communist Party, the comrades of what was then generally called the Cannon group paid very little attention to the truly world-shaking problems that were being debated in the Soviet Union.

Our one consolation was that we were always somewhat uneasy about the savage fury with which the organizer of the October Revolution and his comrades were assailed and the extreme measures that were taken against them; as a result, we allowed the Lovestoneites and Fosterites, especially the former, to distinguish themselves in the notorious campaign of Trotsky-baiting, and we confined ourselves to a passive acceptance of what was being done without joining in, either in writing or in speeches, with the attacks upon our Russian comrades.

How It Came to America

Our general dissatisfaction with the "American decisions" of the Comintern, which were, to us, so utterly and perversely wrong and "incomprehensible," formed the background for the attendance of our delegate, comrade Cannon, at the Sixth Congress. It was there that Trotsky's masterful criticism of the Stalin-Bukharin program, written in his Alma-Ata exile, was carefully circulated among picked delegates—members of the program commission and heads of the delegations. There is no doubt of the tremendous effect which the "document" had on all the delegates. But only Cannon, and Maurice Spector who was delegated from the Canadian party, decided to make the convictions which the unassailable logic of the criticism aroused in them, the basis for their future revolutionary activity. They decided to bring the "document" back to America and use it as the basis for organizing the struggle at home in solidarity with the Russian Bolshevik Opposition.

More easily said than done. For not only was each copy numbered, but the strictest instructions had been issued for the return of all copies to the Comintern Secretariat. What an eloquent commentary on the state of affairs in the Comintern as early as 1928 that responsible delegates to its Congress decided to steal and smuggle out of the country one of the most precious documents of Marxian thought! They found it necessary to purloin a document which, from any point of view, was rightfully theirs, and which they had a duty to communicate to those revolutionists in their own party (not to say all parties) who had delegated them to Moscow.

It was through these two comrades, aided by an old Bolshevik militant then resident in Moscow, that the first copy of Trotsky's magnificent critique was brought out of Russia and made available to the vanguard revolutionists who laid the first solid stones in this country of the movement now united in the Fourth International.

Apart from our general background in the principles of communism, and our repugnance for bureaucracy, chicanery and opportunism which we had up to then considered to be mainly a phenomenon of the American party, we had nothing to start

with save the "document." But it proved to be more than enough.

The First Reaction

I was the first or second comrade in this country to have it presented to me to read—out of a hidden corner in one of Cannon's cupboards at home—and I shall always remember the excitement with which I read it through for the first time, and then a second and third time, and the stunning effect with which all my preconceptions and prejudices were exploded out of my mind. And the shame I felt to think that in the five years of the dispute this was the only important writing of Trotsky that I had read. How fruitfully provincial we had been all this time; how cruelly we had been victimized into ignorance, into going with the official line, by the Kremlin machine which was to accentuate its course in the years to come to the point of unprecedented monstrosity—a point which we simply could not conceive of ten years ago.

I cannot think of any single document that served its purpose better. Marty Abern, Jim Cannon and I—members or alternates of the party Central Committee—and our first associates, Rose Karsner and the late Tom O'Flaherty, did not need many discussions among ourselves to decide, after a thorough reading of the "document" to carry on the fight for our newly-acquired convictions regardless of the immediate outcome. Of the final outcome we have never had any doubts.

THE TRIAL

It was a serious enough affair, all things considered, but at the same time, if ever there was a funnier one, I have not heard of it. The Comintern delegation had hardly returned to the U.S., and we had scarcely begun our prudent agitation—we wanted to gain as much time as possible in order to reach our friends inside the party—than we were confronted with charges of conducting "Trotskyist agitation" in the party, with expulsion awaiting if we were found guilty. Our trial lasted for several days before an enlarged meeting of the Political Committee of the party.

The prosecutor-in-chief was none other than John Pepper, one of the hangers of the Hungarian revolution, aided by the then secretary of the party, Jay Lovestone. As nowadays, Earl Browder was the principal party nobody, with only this difference, that ten years ago he had not yet been appointed party Führer. Which doesn't mean that the Fosterites were in the least friendly. On the contrary, led by Bittelman they vied with the Lovestoneites in driving for our expulsion. It was at once amusing and revolting to watch them, like hounds on a leash, waiting to jump in ahead of Pepper and Lovestone with a motion for our expulsion, so as to be able to cable Stalin the news of their zeal in servility.

The Real Accusers

The stenographic record of the trial makes good reading even now, and some day it ought to be printed in full as a murderously telling portrait of our prosecutors and judges. We defendants, who perversely acted more like accusers, did not yet know too much about the great disputes; at all events, we did not know as much as we might or should have known. But we already knew a thousand times as much as our opponents in the Political Committee, who knew nothing but a few catch-phrases from the official filth in the "Inprecorr." We already knew enough and more than enough to answer the standardized slanders and falsehoods which served as arguments against the Opposition and its views.

Some of the questions put to us were exceeded in pricelessness only by some of the charges and "evidence" presented against us. The manager of the party bookshop was solemnly ushered in to testify that "only recently" I had come in to the shop to ask for some literature on China; and, he added, giving deadly weight to every word, "everybody knows that China is a Trotskyist question"! To read books was bad enough, but to read books on China—a Trotskyist question—was pretty damning.

The Great Heresy

Characteristic of that trial, and those which followed, was the dialogue between Lovestone and Ellis Sulkkanen, head of a group of Finnish party members who were tried for heresy after us: "LOVESTONE: You are prepared to help the party to fight against Cannon? . . .

"SULKKANEN: I have to find out and study what Cannon has to say. What program he has and what information he has.

"LOVESTONE: But you are officially informed that Cannon, Abern and Shachtman were expelled from the party. Do you, as a party member, think that your first duty is to

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