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THE COMMUNIST PARTY, U.S.A., IN CRISIS

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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Summary	1
I. Introduction	2
II. Background	2
III. The CPUSA Faces the Facts about Stalin	5
Rank-and-File Opinion	7
The Official Position	9
The Draft Resolution	11
IV. Communist Admissions of Russia's Anti- Jewish Policies	15
Rank-and-File Opinion	16
The Official Position	18
The Yiddish-Speaking Activists	19
V. The CPUSA Splits Over Hungary	22
Rank-and-File Opinion	25
VI. The Present Outlook	28

Summary

Since the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, when Khrushchev delivered his report on Stalin's crimes, the American Communists have suffered crisis after crisis: de-Stalinization, Communist admissions of crimes against Jews, rejection of Russian domination over Poland, and the Hungarian workers' revolution.

Under the impact of de-Stalinization, CPUSA leadership divided into three factions: Stalinist, headed by William Z. Foster, party chairman; Khrushchevist, headed by Eugene Dennis, the general secretary; and Titoist-Gomulkaist, headed by John Gates, editor of the Daily Worker. Under the stress of the Hungarian revolution, Dennis and Foster have moved closer to each other; but important sections of the CPUSA, particularly the New York and Pennsylvania groups, are siding with the Daily Worker. No faction has yet renounced support of the Soviet Union.

Communist admissions about the destruction of Jewish culture and liquidation of Jewish leaders in Russia aroused general consternation and condemnation, but the continued hostile attitude of the Russian party toward Jewish problems has silenced CPUSA leadership on this question. At present only the Daily Worker, Freiheit and some groups in the membership continue to demand that the Soviet Union give concrete evidence of a change in attitude toward Jews and Jewish culture.

In preparation for the CPUSA convention in February 1957, the National Committee issued a draft resolution setting forth the party's new line, but this document did not resolve the differences among party leaders and failed to satisfy the membership that changes in theory and organization would be made in accordance with the new situation in the international Communist movement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since February 1956, when the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union shattered the Stalin myth, the international Communist movement has staggered from one crisis to another, notably the Poznan workers' uprising, Gomulka's accession to power in Poland, and the Hungarian revolution. American Communists, in particular, have been in continuous upheaval. The crisis in world Communism, less than a year old, has been more shattering to the American party than a decade of the Cold War.

This report, after presenting a general picture of the state of the Communist Party in the United States on the eve of the Twentieth Congress in the Soviet Union, discusses a) the effects of the Twentieth Congress on the American Communists, b) the effects of Communist revelations of anti-Jewish policies and practices in the Soviet Union, and c) the effects of the Hungarian uprising.

II. BACKGROUND

Since the end of World War II, the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) has undergone a continuous decline in membership and influence. The party's break from the united-front strategy that it pursued during the war and from its policy of political action through the Progressive Party was in large measure responsible for isolating its members from the labor movement and the mainstream of the country's

political life.¹ The Soviet Union's post-war aggressiveness, its opposition to the Marshall Plan, and its creation of the Cominform to replace the pre-war Comintern further isolated the CPUSA. As the Cold War progressed, it became increasingly apparent that Communists were agents of the Soviet Union and actual or potential spies and saboteurs, rather than mere apologists for the Soviet Union. Revelations of espionage by American Communists probably disillusioned some members of the party who had joined out of misguided idealism. Legal action by the United States government and local agencies against Communist and Communist-front groups harassed the party, driving it almost completely underground and probably further isolating many party units from contact with non-party groups.

With the outbreak of the Korean war, the party practically ceased to recruit new members. The rate of turnover had always been extremely high but now few new members joined, while many old ones left. The FBI has estimated that by the end of 1955 party membership was down to about 20,000. The organizational secretary of the New York State party organization (the

1. In Communist parlance, this change in line represented a shift from a so-called "right" or "right opportunist" deviation (generally any policy of seeking open alliances with non-Communist groups) to a "left" or "left sectarian" deviation (generally a "class war" policy involving rejection of alliances with any "class enemy" or "class betrayer"). The "right" line usually accompanies a "soft" Soviet policy in international affairs; the "left" line accompanies a "hard" Soviet policy. A policy is characterized as right opportunist or left sectarian only after it has been repudiated; it is a line while in force and a deviation afterwards.

largest and most effective of all party sections) has admitted that in the last ten years the New York organization has lost more than two-thirds of its members.²

Most of the remaining members of the CPUSA are middle-aged and older. (The report of the New York State organization says that "two-thirds of our present membership are over 40 years old.") To a large extent, the CPUSA is a two-generation party. The pre-World War I immigrants from Czarist Russia, who have continued to associate themselves with the aspirations of the Bolshevik Revolution, were followed into the party by the American-born who joined the Young Communist League and the party in the heyday of the Popular Front, during the Thirties. Only a small proportion of this hard core are industrial workers; most are small businessmen, storekeepers and professionals. More than half live in New York and most of the others are concentrated in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Detroit and Philadelphia. Organized in small units, these members in recent years have had as their primary function maintenance of the party organization, activity in a Communist front, and

2. "The Status of Our Party: Excerpts from a report by the State Organizational Secretary on the New York State Organization, Given to the National Committee," Party Voice (issued by the N.Y. State Communist Party), July 1956. Herschel D. Meyer, a high-level party insider, in his The Khrushchev Report and the Crisis in the American Left, (Brooklyn, N.Y., Independence Publishers, 1956), says that since 1945 the party has lost 85 per cent of its membership.

infiltration into bona fide community and political groups.

Because the CPUSA has had its strength in the old-timers, with their cult of Stalinist Russia, it is little wonder that the Twentieth Congress of the Russian Communist Party seems to have had a more crushing impact on the CPUSA than on parties in other countries.

III. THE CPUSA FACES THE FACTS ABOUT STALIN

The Daily Worker's news reports and comments on the Twentieth Congress gave its readers no indication that anything unusual had taken place in Moscow. Though excerpts from Mikoyan's anti-Stalin speech had been published in the New York Times on February 19, 1956 and evidence was piling up about the planned destruction of the Stalin myth, it was not until March 13 that the Daily Worker³ acknowledged the Soviet attacks on Stalin. On that day Alan Max, its managing editor, admitted that he had been "jolted" and went on to say: "Any Marxist who says he has not been jolted is either not being honest with himself, in my opinion, or minimizes the extent of the developments now in progress in the Soviet Union." He then wrote:

Many things bother a person like myself:
where were the present leaders during the
period when they say that collective leader-
ship was lacking? --what about their own
mistakes in that period of capitalist

3. The Daily Worker is published daily, Monday through Friday; the weekend edition, dated Sunday, is entitled The Worker.

encirclement? --are they giving proper weight to the achievements of Stalin?

Max also blamed American Communists for uncritically having accepted the very things which were being condemned in Russia and concluded by urging readers to write their opinions on the subject. Five days later the first significant letter was published. It was by Ring Lardner, Jr., one of the "Hollywood Ten." Lardner attacked the failure of Communist journalists to face the implications of the Twentieth Congress and condemned the "cult of personality" not only in regard to Stalin, but also in regard to the CPUSA's adulation of William Z. Foster, party chairman.

Foster had already published an article in the Daily Worker which showed his reluctance to accept the new line of de-Stalinization. A few days later, Eugene Dennis, general secretary of the CPUSA, published a series of questions and answers on the Twentieth Congress in both the Daily Worker and Political Affairs, the party's monthly theoretical journal, in which he defended the Russian party's policy of de-Stalinization.

The lines of difference on Stalin's record were drawn almost from the start, and in the ensuing months it became even clearer that there were basically three factions in the party. The first was the group headed by Foster, which tried -- tactfully, of course -- to defend Stalin against the attacks of Khrushchev and his allies. Foster had led the CPUSA during the last decade of Stalin's rule. As a disciple and follower of

Stalin, his reputation and influence required a defense of Stalin and Stalinism.

The second group, led by Eugene Dennis, the CPUSA's general secretary, followed the Twentieth Congress-Khrushchev line and identified itself with current Soviet policy. The third group, led by John Gates, editor of the Daily Worker, accepted the criticism of Stalin but was also critical of Khrushchev. It welcomed the Russian party's retreat on Tito and hailed the possibility of independent "national" Communism.

Rank-and-File Opinion

Differences among the leaders of the CPUSA and their failure to issue an authoritative statement on de-Stalinization compounded the confusion in the rank and file. The Daily Worker opened its columns for an exchange of opinion unprecedented in the past generation, at least -- for forthrightness and spontaneity. Here are some pro-Stalin views:

"A.F.," March 25:

The critics of Stalin are ungrateful sons of a great father. Let any one of them boast he could have done better....Judging from what is happening today, Stalin was justified in mistrusting his co-workers; he went on alone in the great work and this adds to his greatness.

"F.M.," a worker from Grand Rapids, March 26:

I was for Stalin, I'm for Stalin and I will be for Stalin. If Stalin was bad for the working-class, why are the capitalists hollering against him so much?

"E.H.," April 10:

I don't understand Khrushchev, telling us about the achievements of Stalin while he attributes it to the Communist Party and at the same time blames Stalin as being a one-man ruler. If Stalin was a one-man ruler then all these accomplishments are thanks to Stalin. On the other hand, if the Communist Party accomplished all that, then Stalin was not the ruler but they were the rulers.... The mistakes they blame on Stalin but the great accomplishments they take for themselves.... I think it's terrible to attack a great man like Stalin, the Stalin who saved humanity from Hitlerism.

But many Communists began to view de-Stalinization as offering an opportunity to criticize both Russia and the CPUSA:

"Hank," March 29:

The decision to throw the columns of the Daily Worker open to readers' comments about the 20th Congress of the CPUSA is perhaps the best indication that the lessons of that Congress are being properly understood here....We demand of the bourgeoisie that they permit free discussion of socialist ideas....Too often we have failed to apply it within our own ranks. It seems to me that a certain contempt for the rank and file is implied in the constant fear that "destructive" criticism had to be stifled....

"A.G.," April 2:

Not only did we actively defend abuses where we had no proof of guilt, merely a statement from the Soviet party, unsubstantiated by fact -- where, with perhaps some justification, we gave the leaders the benefit of the doubt and assumed they had good reasons why they couldn't make such proofs public -- but we even went so far as to defend things that we knew were outright lies.

"A.B.C.," a member of the party for twenty-two years, July 9:

1. Why is there no democracy in the USSR?
Surely the manner of replacing Malenkov by

Bulganin, and the changes in policies, were not done by means of any democratic process such as we know.

2. We always thought that capitalist countries would rather export capital than raise the standard of living of their own people, and that the export of capital was the economic essence of imperialism, of finance capital. Now the USSR is engaging in vast programs of capital export when the needs of their own workers are far from met. Tell us how this socialism is different from capitalism.

3. How can William Z. Foster speak honestly of the "unspeakable Beria" when we all know that he and we have not seen the indictment nor the trial proceedings nor the Malenkov report to the CPSU central committee and have only a few phrases (from the men who had him shot) to go by. Do we have to quote back to Foster what he wrote about Tito, likewise on hearsay only?

The Official Position

The turmoil in which the Communists found themselves was summed up by Max Weiss, Educational Director of the CPUSA, in a report to an enlarged meeting of the party's National Committee in New York City, April 28 - May 1, 1956.⁴ He complained:

The disclosure of mistakes made under Stalin's leadership came as a stunning surprise to our party leadership and members. We have not been prepared for this despite the attention paid to all the political preparations for the 20th Congress. Neither did we grasp the full extent of the mistakes made even when Khrushchev's report was made available.

4. This report was published as a 40-page pamphlet, The Meaning of the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, New York: New Century Publishers, May 1956.

Weiss commended the Daily Worker "for its boldness and political courage in attempting to give leadership to the discussion at a moment of great unclarity in the ranks of the Party," but he went on to say that "some wrong and harmful formulations were included" in some editorials "which caused great confusion."

Finally, on June 24, the National Committee issued a statement commenting on the State Department's publication of Khrushchev's speech. This statement, undoubtedly a compromise reached among the various factions, expressed the party's devotion to Communism and Russia, but it went on to declare:

We cannot accept an analysis of such profound mistakes which attributes them solely to the capricious aberrations of a single individual, no matter how much arbitrary power he was wrongly permitted to usurp. It is just as wrong to ascribe all the mistakes and violations of socialist principle to a single individual as it was to ascribe to him all the achievements and grandeur of socialist progress in the USSR.

Since similar views had been expressed by other Communist parties, the Russian Central Committee adopted a resolution on June 30 rebuking the foreign parties for their criticisms. Obediently, the National Committee of the CPUSA went into session again, and on July 25 it issued a statement which conformed completely to the Russian position:

We believe that the resolution of the CPSU provides a convincing answer to the Big Business enemies of Socialism who claim that the gross mistakes made under Stalin's leadership are inherent in Socialism. Not only does the socialist character of the system remain in the Soviet Union, despite the mistakes and injustices under Stalin's leadership, but

during the past three years important steps have been taken to correct the mistakes of the past, to further democratize Soviet life and institutions, and to establish guarantees that such harmful injustices will never occur again.

The Draft Resolution

Early in May 1956 the National Committee announced that a national party convention would be held in February 1957. Later that month the National Committee advised that it had arranged for space in the Worker in which members could express their ideas about what should go into a new draft resolution that would be issued in September for consideration before the convention.

The National Committee leadership had compromised its differences on de-Stalinization and had bowed, as always, to the dictates of Moscow. But acceptance of de-Stalinization required the formulation of a new party line and program. A platform had to be found which would win back the membership to a party that was self-convicted of having for decades worshipped a maniacal killer.

There were some defectors, and even of those who remained many complained, "We have wasted our lives." "Liquidationist" trends were apparent: some Communists and some sympathizers were urging the party to disband or reorganize on more modest lines. Eugene Dennis, in his report to the National Committee meeting on April 28-May 1, had suggested an "approach to all honest socialist and Marxist-oriented groupings and individuals," but was vague about a future "mass party of socialism." Joseph

Starobin, the Daily Worker's foreign editor from 1942 to 1954, when he presumably quit the party, in a letter to the Nation published on August 25, urged the party to dissolve and its members to join with other leftist groups in forming a new movement. John Gates, members of the Daily Worker editorial board, and Steve Nelson favor the party's reorganization into a political action group, not unlike Earl Browder's old Communist Political Association, or a political educational association, not unlike the Fabian Society. This faction also puts strong emphasis on loosening and democratizing the party's structure and making allowance for dissent and freedom of discussion within the party. Foster, in an article "On the Party Situation," in Political Affairs for October 1956, accused the New York State organization of the party of being aligned with the Gates-Worker-Nelson faction.

Even after de-Stalinization no longer seemed a crucial issue, there was conflict over relations between the American and Russian parties. Foster apparently favors the traditional subordination to Russia, while Gates is for more independence. Dennis seems close to Foster on this question. All factions, it must be stressed, accept the thesis that Russia is a socialist, peace-loving and progressive country.

On September 13, a draft resolution was adopted by the National Committee; all thirteen members voted for the resolution at that time, Foster and Benjamin Davis with reservations. Subsequently Foster changed his vote to oppose the resolution.

Essentially the draft resolution represented an attempt to conciliate different views in the party and yet to keep the CPUSA in harmony with international Communist policy.⁵ It therefore praised de-Stalinization and strongly criticized the Stalin-Foster era of the previous ten years. Considerable emphasis was put on the party's "left sectarian" errors, with a few generous gestures toward party "achievements" in this period. It is probably in large measure because the document criticized the party's "mistakes" under Foster's leadership that Foster finally voted against it.

The criticism of the Foster period pacified the "right" faction in the party. But in trying to hold the CPUSA to the Khrushchev line, the National Committee failed to take any satisfactorily concrete position on some of the basic questions that had aroused the membership: internal party democracy; relations with Russia, Tito, and the satellites; a reexamination of party theory, and reorganization of the party.

The draft resolution offered the membership very little guidance on these questions. It made some vague promises of increased democracy within the party organization, but sternly rejected "factionalism."⁶

5. Failure to view the draft resolution in the context of the Communist crisis following de-Stalinization is bound to lead an analyst astray. The consequences of that failure are apparent, for example, in Walter Millis' recent Fund for the Republic pamphlet, Communism and Civil Liberties.

6. An amendment on this subject was released on December 23, 1956. For details, see p. 30.

As for party relations with Russia and the international Communist movement, the draft resolution tried to satisfy the different factions in the party, all of which subscribe to the thesis that Russia is a "socialist" country. Admitting that the CPUSA had "uncritically" followed developments in Russia, the resolution promised that the party would now "engage in comradely criticism of the policies and practices of the Communists in any country whenever they feel this necessary." A passage that seemed to indicate a concession to the Gates faction (and therefore aroused the opposition of Foster) suggested some basic revision in Communist theory. It proposed screening out of "Marxist-Leninist" theory those aspects of Lenin's principles which seemed outdated or which were valid only for Russia.

But the draft resolution rejected all proposals for reconstituting the party. Concerning Dennis' vague suggestion about the future possibilities of a "united party of socialism," the draft resolution declared:

Such a development can by no means be expected as a quick and easy solution to the common problems of all socialist groupings, or to the specific problems of our own Party. Least of all could this objective be advanced by any tendency to weaken or dissolve the Communist Party. On the contrary, it is essential that the Communist Party strengthen in every way its organization, mass work and general influence.

All the other proposals to reorganize the party were dismissed as liquidationist or unjustified in present circumstances.⁷

7. An amendment on this subject was released on December 23, 1956. For details, see p. 30.

The first impression the draft resolution gives is that agreement was reached among the members of the National Committee and that earlier differences were somehow harmonized. But the very vagueness of the resolution on key issues is the best evidence of failure to reach real agreement.

IV. COMMUNIST ADMISSIONS OF RUSSIA'S ANTI-JEWISH POLICIES

Following the Twentieth Congress came admissions about Communist crimes against Jews. On this matter, too, the leadership and the rank and file tried to evolve a point of view that would be appropriate to the needs of the party.

The admission of Communist crimes against Jews and Jewish culture was published on April 4, 1956, in the Communist Folks-shtimme, a Warsaw Yiddish-language newspaper. Almost every important American party leader expressed himself on this subject and both the Daily Worker and the Morning Freiheit published innumerable articles, editorials, and letters.

Many of the statements by party leaders expressing shock and dismay were undoubtedly sincere; others were probably made opportunistically, to satisfy the disturbed rank and file and to show non-Communists that Communists were indeed concerned about the fate of Jews. Party spokesmen also took upon themselves the responsibility of promising that the Soviet Union would soon repair the damage done to Jews and to Jewish culture, in line with the article in the Folks-shtimme.

The Daily Worker and Freiheit went one step farther than the party officials. They demanded an explanation from Soviet

leaders about what had happened to Jews and Jewish culture and a guarantee against the repetition of such crimes. They also freely admitted their own guilt in having too readily accepted Russian "explanations" about the destruction of Jewish culture.

Rank-and-File Opinion

Comment by the rank and file of the party was, oddly enough, more divided than among the leadership. Many letters expressed shock and dismay at the revelations.

"S.G.," Daily Worker, April 17:

I write to you in deepest shame for myself, other progressives, and you, and with realization of our grave negligence, in regard to the issue of the Soviet Jewish writers -- unheard from in the last eight years.

"Yehiel Pelzenmacher," Freiheit, May 20:

You comfort us with patience; revolutionary justice will punish the guilty. This is scant comfort. What will the dead have from it? After such shocking revelations, isn't there a need for a revision of the entire Communist philosophy?...For 36 years I didn't tolerate any criticism of the Soviet government. Today I can no longer do this.

"T.M.," Daily Worker, August 3:

Are we again going to accept everything coming out of the Soviet Union as gospel truth? It is important to us to find out what, basically, caused these distortions of Soviet life in order to make sure that they do not recur. It is not enough quietly to "repair the fences" as on the Jewish question, without going to the root of why these things happened.

But there were also many readers of both the Daily Worker and Freiheit who objected to criticism of the Soviet Union on the Jewish issue.

"A.F.," Daily Worker, April 24:

Your editorial "Grievous Deeds" written in indignation, anger and grief, could have been reserved for a better cause. The paper should not be so touchy. Doing so drags the paper into a cheap, religious, sectarian corner and it is not honest when done in the name of socialism.

"Max Sp.," Daily Worker, June 20:

The enemies of the Soviet Union were happy that under the Stalin cult Jewish culture there, which had bloomed, had a terrible setback. But from what we read new policies are in effect and socialism is being put back on the track. We can now, at least, look forward to great things. Itzik Feffer did not die in vain. Many have given their lives for socialism for a better world and for a peaceful world. We will live to see what they lived for come true.

"A millinery worker," Freiheit, May 25:

I would like to know if the struggle for peace has some relation to the Jewish people. If so and if Ehrenburg leads this struggle, then it seems to me he's doing something for the Jewish people. No? Or -- is it OK to be a war agitator as long as one reads Yiddish? I love Yiddish, but it seems to me that Jews who don't hold with Yiddish are also Jews....

"I. Even," Freiheit, July 3:

We progressive Jews dare not in the present moment of great sorrow and pain give up, lose courage and faith in the justice of the socialist ideal....Some people in the progressive ranks of Jewish communal life have given up because of the tragic events, going about hopelessly with pessimistic attitudes....Our comfort is that Jewish culture will again blossom in the Soviet Union, in spite of all our enemies, the enemies of the Soviet Union.

The Official Position

The National Committee's statement of June 24 on the Khrushchev speech contained three sentences relating to the Jewish question:

We are deeply disturbed by facts revealed in information coming from Poland that organs and media of Jewish culture were summarily dissolved and a number of Jewish leaders executed. This is contrary to the Soviet Union's historic contributions on the Jewish question. Khrushchev's failure to deal with these outrages, and the continuing silence of the Soviet leaders, require an explanation.

A few weeks later the party began to retreat from this position. It had become clear that the Soviet Union was not interested in Jewish culture or Jewish rights. The Kremlin not only had not replied to questions on this subject by Communists; various Soviet leaders -- including Khrushchev, Mikoyan, and Furtseva -- had issued equivocal and contradictory statements to visiting delegations. Most significant was the fact that when on June 27, Pravda reprinted from the Daily Worker an article by Eugene Dennis, "The U.S.A. and Khrushchev's Special Report," it deleted Dennis's reference to Russia's "snuffing out the lives of more than a score of Jewish cultural figures." To Dennis's remark about the "persecution of the Jewish doctors," Pravda commented in a footnote that doctors of other nationalities were also affected.

As a result, the CPUSA backtracked on this subject as well as de-Stalinization in general when it issued its second statement on July 25. No longer asking Khrushchev for an explanation,

the CPUSA volunteered to explain the matter itself. A phrase about the "happenings in the sphere of Jewish cultural institutions and their leadership" was its one remaining reference to Russia's anti-Jewish policy.

By September, when the party's draft resolution was issued, Russia's crimes against Jews had practically disappeared from sight. An indirect reference appeared only in the admission of the CPUSA's previous uncritical attitude toward the "mistreatment of certain national minorities" in Russia.

The National Committee of the CPUSA has given no further official consideration to the Soviet Union's Jewish policy.

The Yiddish-Speaking Activists

After the Folks-shtimme's revelations, Freiheit hailed as a new dawn every Soviet promise, official, unofficial or apocryphal, to rehabilitate Jewish culture. But contradictory statements and denials by Soviet officials about Soviet anti-Semitism and the fate of Jewish culture in Russia seemed to have more recently made Freiheit and its supporters somewhat more critical of Soviet promises. On October 12, 1956, twenty-six activists in Communist "Jewish work" addressed a memorandum to Nikolai A. Bulganin, chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, and K. Y. Voroshilov, President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which "urgently" requested the Soviet Union to issue "as soon as possible" a "public and authoritative statement dealing with the injustices suffered and with the measures being taken in the direction of reestablishment of

Jewish cultural institutions."

The twenty-six signers of this memorandum included the editor of Morning Freiheit, editors of the monthly Jewish Life, functionaries of the legally defunct Jewish People's Fraternal Order (whose lodges have continued to operate as "autonomous" clubs), some teachers in the Communist Yiddish schools, officials of some surviving Communist fronts (Emma Lazarus Federation, Jewish Music Alliance, American Federation of Polish Jews), and a few Communists engaged in "trade-union work." No high-level CPUSA official signed the document. Though it was dated October 12, the memorandum was not published in full until October 29 in the Daily Worker and November 4 in Freiheit.

In the absence of positive news about Jews in the Soviet Union, the Daily Worker and Freiheit, the latter more noticeably, have tried to use the subject of Israel as a means of holding on to the party's Jewish supporters. Despite the clear evidence of an anti-Israel policy by the Soviet Union, both papers have questioned Russia's position on Israel and have defended Israel's right to exist. But they have stepped warily, refraining from attacks on Egypt, Syria or Jordan, singling out Iraq among the Arab countries for obloquy -- Iraq is the only member of the Arab League that is also a member of the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact -- and condemning the United States and Britain, instead of Russia, as being responsible for the crisis in the Middle East.

There may be some basis for an assumption that national CPUSA leadership would prefer to ignore "Jewish problems" and

to be rid of the Yiddish-speaking activists. One party member, writing about "A Return to the Mainstream of Jewish Life" in the Communist Party's discussion supplement to the Worker of August 12, 1956, complained:

Our approach to Jewish work for too long has been weighted down with the thinking and cultural patterns of our Jewish comrades and intellectuals, who brought with them to this country the rich political, intellectual and trade union experiences from Czarist Russia, pre-war Poland, and other countries....

I believe that a change is due. A fresh approach is needed.

Party leadership seemed also to blame Jewish members for the "profound disturbance" in party ranks and for "overemphasis" on Russia's treatment of Jews. In Party Voice of September 1956, a member attacked the National Committee's statement for its failure to discuss Russia's anti-Jewish policy:

There are those who argue that the reason this problem [Russia's anti-Jewish policy] is so acute in New York, is because the bulk of the New York membership is Jewish. Aside from the fact that it is not wrong for Jewish Communists to feel keenly about this matter, the comrades who argue thus, prove, "the poverty of their philosophy."...

One need not be Jewish to feel sharp pain at such acts in a Socialist state. To cite the Jewish membership as the reason for crisis is as insulting as it is un-Marxian.

Party leaders were undoubtedly right in believing that the Soviet Union's anti-Jewish policies had seriously affected the CPUSA. Testimony to this effect appeared in an article by Irv Becker, a former full-time party official, in Party Voice, June 1956:

It is falsehood to contend that in this country, Marxists did not know that, as far as eight years ago, and coinciding with the campaign against "cosmopolitanism," the Soviet Jewish communities had been given severe cultural blows -- an end to several of their publications and to the activity of prominent Jewish figures -- or that in the Slansky trial, the Czech prosecutor had invoked anti-Semitism. Marxists in this country had the obligation to demand explanations as far back as then; innocent lives might well have been saved, and racism might not have been able to make more headway than it did. The opposite happened, and today there are more wedges between Marxists and the bulk of the Jewish masses. Today more Jews have lost faith in the ability of socialism [read: Communism] to end racism and more of them have been strengthened in the conviction that if there is hope of Jewish survival it lies along the path of bourgeois nationalism.

If the course of events behind the Iron Curtain had proceeded as "normally" as it did under Stalinist rule, it is quite likely that the differences in the CPUSA regarding the future of the party and specific issues like Russia's attitude towards Jews would have been quietly resolved. But the unsuccessful workers' revolution in Hungary precipitated the most violent crisis in the party's history.

V. THE CPUSA SPLITS OVER HUNGARY

The Daily Worker hailed Poland's peaceful and comparatively successful stand against Russian control; Gomulka's accession to power, the ouster of Marshal Rokossovski, the new Polish government's promises of more freedom and better economic conditions -- all were welcomed as evidence of the success of

the new line on the rights of the satellites to their own national forms of "socialism."

Hard upon Gomulka's return to power, Hungary took some tentative steps toward democratization. Laszlo Rajk, whose memory had already been "rehabilitated," was removed from a traitor's grave and reburied with state honors. The Hungarian workers took these developments seriously, demanding greater freedom and independence from Russia. Then, instead of acceding to the demands of the Hungarians, the Soviet Union sent in troops.

If these developments had occurred before the Twentieth Congress, the CPUSA would probably have endorsed the Soviet Union's position, as always, but six months of comparatively free-wheeling debate had changed the situation. After all, Khrushchev himself had taught that Russia could make terrible mistakes, and the National Committee of the CPUSA had admitted that uncritical support of Russia was an error. On November 1, about a week after Soviet troops "defended" Gero's government against the Hungarian workers, the National Committee adopted a statement that was released on November 4, the day on which Soviet troops resumed their war against the Hungarians and the Nagy government. The statement was adopted by a majority of the resident members of the National Committee: Foster was absent, but subsequently cast his vote against it; Dennis and Benjamin J. Davis abstained; James E. Jackson, Jr., voted yes with qualifications. It supported the position taken by the Daily Worker

and declared that the Polish and Hungarian upheavals

were initially and primarily mass democratic upsurges of the working class and peoples of these countries for democratization, for a solution to their economic problems, for full national sovereignty and equality in their relations with the Soviet Union.

The Hungarian Communist Party, by calling in Soviet troops had committed "a tragic error" and "dramatized the bankruptcy" of its policy. Furthermore, the events in Hungary and Poland showed that the principles of the Twentieth Congress "are yet to be fully applied in practice." (Note that this statement criticized the Hungarian Communist Party rather than the Soviet Union; it also attributed the upheaval in Hungary not to the Communist system but to the "distortions and repression that developed during the latter years of the Stalin period.")

By the time the time the statement was published, the Hungarian situation had become even worse. The National Committee of the CPUSA met again, some time in the middle of November, and November 19 it issued an open letter to the party membership on the "tragic events in Hungary." Admitting that there were differences of opinion in the National Committee, the open letter declared that the earlier statement of November 1 "was inadequate" and criticized a Daily Worker editorial of November 5 that had deplored the use of Soviet troops against the Nagy government. The open letter said that the use of Soviet troops by Gero "was a tragic error for which the Soviet Union must also take responsibility," but justified the use of Soviet troops against the Nagy government as necessary "to head

off the White Terror and . . . the danger of the formation of an anti-Soviet, Horthy-like regime...which would threaten not only the security of the USSR and other Socialist countries but world peace as well."

In an effort to appeal to all factions within the party, the open letter then declared: "There are no ready answers and we are in no position to give final judgment on the Soviet action. On this there are different viewpoints in the national committee and in the party."

Subsequently, various members of the National Committee published their individual views in the Daily Worker. Dennis, Foster, Davis, and Jackson were among those who supported the Soviet Union on Hungary; John Gates, George Blake Charney (legislative director of the New York state section of the CP), and members of the Worker's editorial board (Alan Max, Max Gordon, Joseph Clark), were critical. Toward the end of November, the debate became personal and acrimonious. Max Gordon cited a letter by Dennis as an example of "blind apologetics." Davis described a Daily Worker editorial as "going off half-cocked." Dennis blamed the Daily Worker for looking at the Soviet Union "through the eyes of the American imperialists." Clark accused Dennis of misrepresenting him and Alan Max attacked Dennis for using invectives like "anti-Soviet" to "quash all discussion."

Rank-and-File Opinion

With the national leadership of the party disagreeing so violently, it was natural that there would be sharp differences

on the lower echelons and among the rank and file. Within party units, clashes of opinion were sharp and bitterly expressed. One party member of nineteen years' standing wrote that he had attended a meeting at which the majority of the speakers and the audience opposed the position of the Daily Worker on the Hungarian situation. He concluded:

But now I do not want to belong to an organization whose members feel socialism should be imposed on the ends of bayonets. This is not the socialism I worked for and dreamed of.

A member of the Connecticut State Committee of the C.P., on the other hand, sought to dissociate himself from the statement issued by that group condemning "the intervention of the Soviet army in the present Hungarian situation." When the staff of the Lower East Side New York section of the party wrote to the Daily Worker voicing "strong protest and indignation" for its position on Hungary and supporting Foster and his group, a member of this section denied that the letter expressed the views of the rank and file and added that "any declaration issued by leaders is valueless and misleading when it does not reflect the range of attitudes of the members they are supposed to represent." The Erie County, N.Y., section of the CPUSA adopted a resolution condemning the use of Soviet troops in Hungary and demanding their immediate withdrawal (Buffalo has a large Polish population), and urged the National Committee to reconsider its position. The Executive Press Committee of L'Unita, the party's Italian-language monthly, opposed "the sudden liberalization of the

Daily Worker following the 20th Congress," but a letter signed "Group of Italian-Americans" urged broadening the Worker's editorial staff to include "representatives of non-Communist Marxist groups."

Clubs and individual members vehemently expressed their opinions on the Hungarian situation. Here are some examples from the Daily Worker of views condemning the use of Soviet troops:

"A.E.," November 16:

Those who claim that the USSR was right in insisting on a friendly Hungary have a twisted conception of the friendship in a one hundred twenty millimeter tank gun.

"Ex-Know-Nothing," November 30:

I don't want any part of a movement which is going to condone the actions of the Soviet troops against the Hungarian population....Am I anti-Soviet? I don't think so. I just don't believe that I'm as naive as I once was about the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

"Frank A.," December 7:

While Dennis implies that American Marxists share his views on the situation there, I think it would be more accurate to say that many American Communists are concerned with our general secretary's dispassionate endorsement of the Hungarian bloodshed.

"Former Party and Union Organizer and Party Member for 15 Years," December 13:

The Soviet crimes in Hungary have compromised every progressive person in the world. Our responsibility must be to oppose all that is evil, whether we find it here or in Hungary or in Prague or Belgrade. Davis and Dennis and Foster...are trying to lead us down a path which leads to the death of our movement in this country.

Many members defended Russia's actions in Hungary as necessary to suppress "fascism" and "American imperialist subversion":

"Joe Campin," November 6:

I am patiently waiting the return of sanity in the editorials of the Daily Worker. With the editorial on Hungary one week ago, I saw the disappearance of a Marxist approach to history.

"S.H.," November 28:

I assure you that I am in full agreement with many, about Stalin's "doings" in the last years of his life. I say in the last years, because Stalin and the workers...established Socialism in Russia. However, to save a country from turning to fascism, if there is no alternative (and there was not) the rebels had to be crushed.

"Bronx Family," December 13:

We would remind all our indignant friends that this is not the first time that the Soviet Union has "embarrassed" them (to wit, the so-called partition of Poland and the Nazi-Soviet Pact). We stood by them then and history has vindicated our judgment. This is another such moment when courage is needed.

VI. THE PRESENT OUTLOOK

As of the end of December 1956, the CPUSA seems to be split. Dennis, in his efforts to keep the party together, has moved closer to the Foster faction. The Gates-Worker faction, with the support of most of the New York State, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut sections seems to be holding its own.

Most of the Negroes in the party, leaders and rank and file, seem to be behind the Foster-Dennis-Davis pro-Soviet group. (It may be assumed that the colored party members, like many people

in Asia and Africa, look upon racism and traditional colonialism as the prime evils to be fought. Hence the tendency to relative indifference about Eastern Europe.) Jews in the party seem to be split, with the workers tending to support the Russian position while the intellectuals and Yiddish-speaking activists have deepened their concern about the Soviet position on the Jewish question.⁸

To a large extent, the debate within the CPUSA over the Hungarian question represented a continuation of the debate on the proposed new line of the party in the draft resolution issued in September. The Hungarian revolution reopened the wounds -- already bandaged and partially healed -- inflicted by de-Stalinization and Communist anti-Jewish policies. The new controversy served to exacerbate the old. In the words of the chairman of the New York State section of the party: "We must say we are in a crisis!"

8. On December 16, Freiheit published an extraordinarily long editorial, reversing its previous reliance on Soviet promises of concessions to Jews. This editorial rejected all Soviet promises of good intentions and demanded concrete proof of a return to "Leninist national policy." Though denying the existence of government anti-Semitism, it admitted that there was anti-Semitism in Russia and demanded prompt and forthright government action against it. The editorial also demanded a public rehabilitation of Jews in Russia in the wake of the Moscow doctors' plot, an answer to previous representations, and a revision of the Soviet attitude toward Zionism. It nevertheless expressed its belief that the Soviet Union was a "socialist" country and had, in the past, done much in behalf of Jews. This editorial was very critical of Khrushchev for his negative remarks about Jews, but stopped short of calling him anti-Semitic. This editorial was published also in English translation on December 23, in Freiheit's English page.

On December 23 the National Committee issued a message to the state conventions and clubs of the party deploring some "tendencies," manifested in the course of discussion, "to substitute invective for serious argument," and proposing two amendments to the draft resolution. These amendments deal with internal party democracy and proposals for reorganization of the party, the former having been dealt with inadequately in the original draft resolution and the latter having been summarily rejected. Now, facing the opposition of the "right" faction, the National Committee compromised in an apparent effort to reunite the party. In place of "democratic centralism" (decisions made by the party's highest echelon and imposed on the rank and file), the National Committee's first amendment proposes "majority rule with specific provision for the right of dissent after decision while guaranteeing our ability to act in a united way"; the right of dissent after decision represents a major concession -- if it is meant seriously. The second amendment backtracks on the draft resolution's rejection of all forms of reorganization. The National Committee now takes the view that though such proposals are not admissable for discussion at the convention, they may be taken up by the next National Committee for consideration and exploration.

The decisions to be adopted at the CPUSA convention in February 1957 will be determined by several factors. The most important obviously is the Russian performance in Poland and Hungary. Russian toleration of Polish "democratization" and a

calming of the Hungarian situation may bring about some reconciliation in the National Committee of the CPUSA. This would of course help to keep the party together. On the other hand, limitations on Poland, a continuation of a harsh Soviet policy toward Hungary, and further Soviet vituperation against Yugoslavia may compound the party's difficulties.

Efforts by Foster and Dennis to stack the convention with delegates from the "left" (insinuations to this effect have been made in the party press in connection with dues-payment requirements for eligibility to vote) may alienate the "right" faction of Gates, his editors, Steve Nelson, and the New York State section.

Also important are the extent and depth of oppositional feeling among the rank and file. Some individuals and possibly entire party units may already have become too estranged to continue to give unquestioning allegiance to party leaders here or in Russia. The problem they face, should they desire to break with the party, is to find some political fringe group that will be acceptable to them and also prepared to welcome them as allies. Otherwise, these people face political and social isolation for an indeterminate period.

All these factors -- ideological, organizational, political and personal -- will determine the future of the party and affect the outcome of the convention. At this point no one, including the party leadership, can know whether the party will split or whether some measure of unity can be restored. Nor can we yet know whether expulsion of any faction leader is in the cards or whether disaffection may lead to defection.