

The Bolshevization of the Communist Party

By EARL BROWDER

OUR Party in the United States has just emerged from its first decisive period of Bolshevization, the period from the Sixth to the Seventh National Conventions (March 1929—June 1930). In this period our Party integrated itself with the world Party, the Communist International; it threw off the elements corrupted by bourgeois ideology (right-wing Lovestoneites, and “left” Trotskyists); it unified its forces and liquidated the long-standing factionalism which had poisoned it for years; and it made a decisive turn toward work among the masses. These were the fundamental achievements of the period closed by the Seventh National Convention. These achievements were made possible by the intervention, help, and leadership of the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

THE SITUATION AT THE SIXTH CONVENTION

To obtain the proper measure of these achievements, it is necessary to recall the situation of the Party at the Sixth Convention. That Convention was sharply divided into two warring factions, both of which had been poisoned by the “prosperity” of American imperialism and by the unprincipled factional struggle. The “majority” group, under the leadership and domination of Lovestone, Pepper, Gitlow and Wolfe, who were acting under the influence of the international Right-wing elements, was mobilized in open struggle against the line of the Comintern. This situation was thus characterized by Comrade Stalin, in his speech before the American Commission (May 6, 1929):

“It has become evident in the discussion that both groups are guilty of the fundamental error of exaggerating the specific features of American capitalism. This exaggeration lies at the root of every opportunist error committed by both the majority and minority group. . . . What are the main defects in the practice of the leaders of the majority and minority? Firstly, that in their day-to-day work they, and particularly the leaders of the majority, are guided by motives of unprincipled factionalism and place the interests of their faction higher than the interests of the Party. Secondly, that both groups and particularly the majority, are so infected by the disease of factionalism that they base their relations with the

Comintern, not on the principle of confidence, but on a policy of rotten diplomacy, a policy of diplomatic intrigue."

The Executive Committee of the Communist International, on May 18, addressed an open letter to all members of the Party, which thus judged the work of the Sixth National Convention:

"The E.C.C.I. is compelled to record that at the Convention and after it, not only was there no appreciable result achieved in the matter of doing away with factionalism, but on the contrary, the factional struggle has become still more accentuated. Due to the unprincipled factional struggle, the Sixth Convention of the American Communist Party had failed to produce the results which it should have produced in regard to Bolshevization and to the establishment of a healthier condition within the Party."

After analyzing the opportunist errors of both groups in the Party, the E.C.C.I. Address called upon the Party to carry through an "enlightenment campaign concerning the decisions of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern" and the various decisions of the E.C.C.I. regarding America. The immediate tasks of the Party were thus stated:

"In the course of this enlightenment campaign, while waging a struggle against all opportunists who want to fight the Comintern, while uniting in that struggle all honest and disciplined comrades who are loyal to the Communist movement, the Communist Party must concentrate its attention on the most important questions of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat in America—on the question of unemployment, struggle for social insurance, wages, working hours, work in the existing trade unions, work for the organization of new unions, struggle against reformism and struggle against the war danger. The C.P.U.S.A. must strengthen its work in regard to recruiting and retaining in its ranks new cadres of workers that are joining the Party, especially of the working youth. It must widen its agitational and organization work in the big plants, in the main branches of industry and among the Negroes, and must secure for the Party an independent leading role in the industrial struggles of the working class that are developing, organizing in the process of the struggle the unorganized workers."

The response of our Party was immediate. The Central Committee "accepted and endorsed" the Address and set itself to win the entire Party for the Comintern line. By the beginning of October, the Plenum of the Central Committee was able to record its entire success in this task, in the process of which Lovestone, Gitlow, Wolfe, and a total of about 200 followers (mostly petty-bourgeois intellectuals) who fought against the decision, were expelled from the Party. The Party was unified on the line of the Comintern.

BETWEEN THE OCTOBER AND APRIL PLENUMS

In the October Plenum was registered the immediate beneficial effects of the application of the Comintern line. The Plenum called attention to "the clear outlines of the oncoming economic crisis," and consequent sharpening of class relations, for which it mobilized the Party; the unification of the Party, and the concentration of its forces, was signalized and completed by the drawing into active work and leadership those elements which had been excluded for factional reasons; and the Plenum launched an intensive Recruiting Campaign for new members.

Within a few weeks, the correctness of the perspectives and analysis of the Central Committee was dramatically proved by the stock-market crash and the deep economic crisis which ensued. The renegade Lovestoneites and Trotskyites, whose class treason had already been exposed by their open struggle against the August First demonstration, completed their isolation from the revolutionary movement by their shameful repetition of the formulae of Hoover about the "fundamental soundness" of American capitalism and their open fight against the correct analysis of the Party. The Recruiting Campaign renewed the Party cadres with several thousand fresh proletarian elements to replace those "tired" elements unable to make the turn, and the small group of renegades. The Party plunged into mass work.

The crowning event of this period of the practical turn to the masses, was the gigantic demonstrations all over the United States on March 6th, day of struggle against unemployment. One-and-a-quarter million workers came into the streets at the call of our Party, under the slogans put forward by our Party, in a great demonstration for "Work or Wages" which shook the entire country, forcing for the first time a general public recognition of the depths of the economic crisis and the enormous extent of unemployment. This unprecedented demonstration, which at the same time revealed the fighting mood of the masses, was almost everywhere held under police provocations and suppressions unknown in this country in generations. Literally hundreds of Party leaders and rank and file workers were dragged off to prison by the enraged and frightened capitalists. Our comrades Foster, Minor, Amter, and Raymond were sentenced to three years in prison for leading the great Union Square demonstration in New York, where 110,000 workers elected them as a committee, together with Comrade Leston, to deliver their demands for unemployment insurance to the City Hall.

In the following May Day demonstrations, which were of unprecedented size and militancy throughout the country, approxi-

mately 350,000 workers participated, demonstrating once more that the outpouring on March 6th had been no accident, but that our Party had actually become the recognized leader of the masses thrown into struggle by the sharp blows of the economic crisis. Our Party had made its first serious steps toward becoming a mass Party, leader of the American proletariat.

THE SEVENTH NATIONAL CONVENTION

Upon this background our Party approached its Seventh National Convention. In preparation for this Convention, the Central Committee met in the April Plenum, but in no spirit of self-congratulation on its achievements. Our membership had been penetrated with the understanding and spirit of Comrade Stalin's words, when he said:

"The American Communist Party is one of those few Communist Parties in the world upon which history has laid tasks of a decisive character from the point of view of the world revolutionary movement. . . . For that end we must work in order to forge real revolutionary cadres and a real revolutionary leadership of the proletariat, capable of leading the many millions of the American working class towards the revolutionary class struggles. . . . The fight must be intensified for the forging of real revolutionary Party cadres and for the selection of real revolutionary leaders of the Party, of individuals capable of entering the fight and bringing the proletariat with them, individuals who will not fall into panic, but will sail into the face of the storm."

In this spirit the April Plenum sounded the keynote for the Seventh National Convention—the note of searching self-criticism, of frank and candid examination of weaknesses and shortcomings, of establishing the standard of judgment on our work, not on the comparison with the past, but on the contrast between the extremely favorable conditions for our work and the very limited extent of our organizational achievements. The task set by the Seventh Convention was, to overcome the gap between our wide and growing political influence among the masses, and our still narrow and slowly growing organizational strength.

THE STRUGGLE ON TWO FRONTS

In the preparation and carrying through of the Seventh Convention, our Party learned in life the meaning of the slogan of "struggle on two fronts" in applying the line of the Comintern, the struggle against Right-wing opportunism and the simultaneous struggle against "leftist" deviations which represent opportunism covered with left phrases. This struggle on two fronts, which had been hitherto expressed only (or mainly) in the simultaneous

struggle against the renegade Lovestone and Cannon groups, now had to be learned in application to Right and "left" deviations or tendencies in the practical work of the movement and in the various formulations brought forward in theoretical discussions of the problems of the Party.

The theoretical struggle for the correct line in the Seventh Convention was, first of all, centered in the estimation of the crisis and its perspectives. While establishing that the economic crisis shows the stabilization of capitalism approaching its end, that it brings close the realization of war, and that it will in many countries be transformed into a political crisis, and that the working class will be more and more unable to find any path except that of revolutionary struggle—at the same time, the Convention had to struggle against the "leftist" conception of the economic crisis as the automatic bearer of revolution, the theory of the "hopeless position" of the bourgeoisie, the "theory of catastrophe." This "leftist" tendency in estimating the crisis and its perspectives, while in words hotly opposed to the Right-wing underestimation of the crisis, leads in practice to exactly the same results, namely, passivity and paralysis of the Party, failure to mobilize and lead the workers in their practical every-day struggles which are the necessary basis for the future higher development of the struggle. High-sounding revolutionary phrases used as a screen or excuse for passivity, for pulling away from the difficult mass work, constitute nothing but opportunism with a "left" mask.

It is precisely this "leftism" which is the chief obstacle in the overcoming and liquidation of the Right danger, which remains as before the main danger to the revolutionary movement. The expressions of both these dangers noted in the Convention itself, were liquidated in the course of discussion insofar as differences of opinion in the Convention were concerned, but both dangers, Right and "left," remain before the Party in its practical work. The struggle on two fronts remains the directing slogan for the Party in determining its political line and practice. The Seventh Convention took this slogan from the realm of abstractions, and concretized it for the entire Party, giving practical examples of its application.

MOBILIZING THE NEGROES

The Seventh Convention marked a new period in our work among the Negro masses. Where at the Sixth Convention, our Party was even fighting against the correct Comintern line on Negro work, was distributing the opportunist pamphlet of Pepper on this question, and had hardly 50 Negro members in the Party, a sharp turn was registered at the Seventh Convention. Now our Party has

begun to apply the Comintern line, adopted at the Sixth World Congress, and the fruits of this were shown at the Convention in the presence of a score of Negro delegates (17%), while in the Party more than a thousand new members had been recruited, of whom a considerable number have become active Party workers. Immediately after the Party convention, we witnessed the presence of 173 Negro delegates in the Chicago Unemployed Convention of July 4th, testifying to the mass nature of the contacts with the Negroes which are being consolidated.

If the application of the Comintern line has shown such good results, however, this could not be credited to the clarity of understanding of the Party as a whole. The Convention report and discussion disclosed a large amount of confusion still prevailing, especially on the question of the slogan of self-determination. Deviations of this question were quite general, both Right and "left," and the whole Convention was not sufficiently keen enough in combatting them, taking too much of a tolerant attitude, as if they were "permissible" variations of opinion.

But such errors as the denial of the validity of the slogan of self-determination, which is the crudest form of the Right-wing deviation, or the opinion that the slogan must be immediately transformed from a propaganda slogan into a slogan of action, which is the "leftist" deviation—such errors endanger the whole line of our work among the Negroes, and it is necessary that the Party shall conduct a sharp struggle on both fronts. It is necessary to become intolerant of such errors, and conduct an energetic ideological campaign to liquidate them.

The Right wing denial of self-determination, as a valid slogan for the Negro masses, rejects the basic conception of the Negroes as an oppressed national minority, and rejects therefore the perspective of the development of a national-revolutionary movement among them based upon the Negro farmers and tenants of the South. Such a view renders impossible our tasks of mobilizing the main masses of the Negro race as allies of the proletarian revolution, on the basis of the struggle against the special exploitation from which they suffer. This deviation attempts to mask itself behind quibbles about the difference between "national minorities" and "racial minorities," claiming that the American Negroes come under the second category but not the first. But when asked what is the social-economic content of the status of "racial minority" as contrasted with "national minority," such comrades find it necessary to retreat still further into the swamp of bourgeois theories of biological categories as social factors.

The "leftist" theory, on the other hand, which maintains that

self-determination is an immediate slogan of action irrespective of the general level of revolutionary development in the entire country, is rooted in the erroneous conception of the South as a colony which can have a revolutionary development independent of that of the country as a whole. The transformation of this slogan into one of action is conditioned upon the maturing of a revolutionary situation for American capitalist society. The South, with all its specific characteristics which includes the semi-slave, semi-feudal remnants of the status of Negroes, remains an integral part of American capitalism, in which there cannot be an independent revolutionary crisis. The "leftist" theory tends to discredit the slogan by running too far ahead of events with it.

The Convention clarified the connection between the self-determination slogan, and the slogan of proletarian revolution. The slogan of self-determination is not put forward as dependent upon the establishment of the Soviet Power; at the same time, however, it is necessary for the Communists, especially the Negro comrades, to explain to the Negro non-Communists that the only reliable fighters for equality and self-determination for the Negro masses are the revolutionary workers led by the Communist Party, and that the only final guarantee of self-determination is the successful proletarian revolution. Only thus can the national liberation movement of the Negroes be linked up with the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. The demand for self-determination by the Negroes becomes a weapon to mobilize most important allies for the proletarian revolution.

FOR AN AGRARIAN PROGRAM

A sign of the Bolshevization process in our Party, was the discussion on the agrarian question in the Seventh Convention, on the basis of a draft program which has been before the Party for several months. This is the first really serious attention our Party has given to this fundamental question of proletarian revolution. Our previous neglect was itself one of the signs of the opportunist orientation and leadership of the Party.

No final documents were adopted on this question by the Convention, as it was the opinion that discussion has not yet been sufficiently thorough. But here also we can give the main characteristics of the right and "left" deviations, in theory and practice, as brought out in the Convention discussion.

The Right wing approach to agrarian problems is, first of all, characterized by its ignoring of class divisions on the land itself, treating "farmers" generally as a class, or, in a more disguised form, lumping together all "working" farmers. This is a denial of the

class struggle as it presents itself in life upon the land. The "leftist" conception, which arrives at much the same goal, is to oppose the agrarian proletariat to non-wage working farmers who are all considered as "capitalists." But in the United States, as in Europe, the Leninist categories of "poor, middle, and rich" hold good as the basic lines of class division upon the land, in spite of all opportunist chatter about the "exceptional" position of American agriculture. A Communist program in the U. S. also, must be based upon the theses of the Second World Congress and its elaborations since then, of firm alliance of the proletariat with the poor peasants, the neutralization of the middle peasants, and relentless struggle against the rich peasants who are part of the capitalist class. The first tasks of the Party in agrarian work is the organization and development of the class struggle upon the land.

The next refuge of opportunism in the agrarian question is the theory of the "technical revolution" in agriculture, the theory that finance-capital in its penetration of agriculture performs a progressive role, that agriculture is being "organized." Of course, there is even less basis for this theory—much less—than there is for its father, the theory of "organized capitalism." Especially in agriculture does finance capital disclose its parasitic nature, its role as strangler of technical progress. Especially in agriculture we see emphasized the decadent stage which capitalism has reached. It is not necessary to go to the center of capitalist industry to find the outstanding examples of decay and parasitism; we find this, rather, in the colonies and in agriculture. Finance capital penetrates agriculture to a tremendous extent—but primarily in purely parasitic forms. The overwhelming bulk of farm capital is controlled by banks, trusts, and insurance companies, but mainly in the form of mortgages on individually-owned farms, and of ownership of farms individually operated by tenants. The direct exploitation of the farmers by finance capital is predominantly through interest and rents; finance capital has merged with itself the role of usurer and landlord, and depends mainly upon these pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the farmers. Indirectly, but even more effectively, finance capital exploits the agrarian population by its monopoly of marketing facilities, of which the mass of farmers has lost all semblance of control.

The general unclarity on this central question of the penetration of finance capital in agriculture, and its role there, is reflected in the fact that even the Peasants International (Krestintern) addressed our Party with a letter in which it takes as its central point the "technical revolution," "tremendous developments of corporation farming," as the forms of "an extreme acceleration of the con-

centration of capital in agriculture." Such a point of view is incorrect, and reflects precisely the conception of finance capital as a progressive force in agriculture. The concentration of capital in agriculture still proceeds predominantly upon the technical basis of the individual producer, the individual tiller of the soil whose "technical revolution" is strictly within the limits of such individual production.

The Seventh Convention laid the basis for a correct general orientation on the agrarian question, and furnished the first practical approaches to the application of a correct Bolshevik line.

THE CENTRAL WEAKNESS OF OUR MOVEMENT

With the solution of the basic problems of political line, which the Seventh Convention recorded, there emerged into the forefront of our attention for the next period a new set of problems and a new kind of weaknesses for the Party to overcome. Now we find the basic problem of the Party, in the gap which exists between our rapidly growing mass influence on the one hand, and our very slowly growing organizational basis on the other hand.

This contradiction, this chasm, faces the Party with enormous dangers also to its political line. Such a condition is a breeding ground for political deviations, and a correct political line cannot be executed unless the Party and the revolutionary mass organizations find the road to successful building of organizations sufficient breadth to give a solid, permanent base for Party leadership of the masses.

Especially is this weakness to be seen in the trade union work, above all in the slow growth of the revolutionary trade unions in membership, although there is a tremendous extension of their influence. It is seen also in the weak condition of the work within the reactionary trade unions. It is also shown by the almost complete absence of systematic Party fraction work within the mass organizations.

The Seventh Convention placed this problem in the very center of attention. The building of the revolutionary trade unions was declared to be the first order of business of our Party. This task was emphasized not only from its organizational angles, but above all, it was shown that all political advances of the Party demand the execution of this task as a fundamental pre-condition.

But the Convention displayed its most serious weakness in its lack of sufficient practical use of the Convention itself as the starting point of overcoming this weakness. Theoretically, the problem was stated and answered, but the Convention, in its discussions, did not show sufficiently that the Party as a whole is really setting itself

in a practical way to the solution of this problem of mass organization. In this regard, the Convention must be judged as entirely inadequate.

Our task is the winning of the majority of the working class. But this slogan becomes only the most vulgar boasting, if we are unable even to win 50,000 new members to the revolutionary unions. The fact that this goal, set for the Trade Union Unity League and its affiliated unions, has been realized only 20 per cent, is a sign not that the goal was set too big, but that we have failed so far to mobilize our forces properly.

Foremost of all tasks set by the Seventh Convention is this: the overcoming of our organizational weaknesses, the consolidation and extension of our mass influence by crystalizing it into organization. Our Convention, with the help of the Comintern, laid a solid political foundation for the solution of this task. Now we must all go to work.

