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Where do We go from Here?

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

An Examination

of the Record

of the

14TH NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA.

by AMERICUS

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THE 14TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

OF THE C. P. U. S. A.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RECORD.

The magazine Political Affairs for September, 1948, provides 174 pages of stenographic reports of speeches made in the 14th National Convention of the Communist Party U.S.A.. The careful study of this record confirms the previous judgment, made on the basis of fragmentary newspaper reports, that the Convention failed to define or answer the most important problems facing the American workingclass. The Convention dealt with a multitude of questions - - but not the most important ones. Above all it gave no answer as to why the CPUSA has, during the past three years, lost a large part of its mass following among the workers of the most important industries, why it has lost the initiative in the organized labor movement, and why the Wallace movement is moving rapidly toward a collapse of all its early promises.

The Convention seemed to be quite unconscious of its failure. It showed no doubts, uneasiness, or misgivings as to the present trend of developments in the workingclass. On the contrary, it was smugly self-satisfied and even boastful of its "achievements" - - the word it used to denote a record of three years continuous losses of one position after another among the workers. The Convention supported the claim, voiced by W. Z. Foster, to be "among the first, if not the very first" Communist Party in the world to give a clear answer to the problems of the post-war world. It cited its claim that "delegates from 34 Communist Parties", early in 1947, mistakenly rejected the correct leadership offered them by Foster. It claimed that the Nine-Party Conference of September, 1947, belatedly adopted the course long urged by the CPUSA, and could make no corrections in American Communist policy. "Quite the reverse", declared Foster, "the decisions arrived at by the Nine-Party Conference affirmed the correctness of our line." In brief, according to the record under examination, the CPUSA has, in time and before all others, given the line for the world Communist movement, and finally brought all its parties into line. Foster is thus "among the first, if not the very first" Communist leader in the world. (See pp. 823-824).

Basis for this grandiose self-congratulation is the claim that Foster, and following him the CPUSA, "discovered America" as an imperialist power with ambitions to dominate the world; "other parties" awoke to this reality belatedly, and after ignoring Foster's urgent warnings.

It is cautiously suggested, in the subtle paraphrasing of Stalin (from his Speeches on the American Party in 1929, in which he denounced Foster as an "unprincipled factionalist" who tried to turn the Communist International into a field of political "stock market speculations"), that at last "the Communist parties of other countries understand the vital role" of the CPUSA, and that "this is the significance of the greetings that have been pouring into this Convention from Communist Parties all over the world." (p. 833).

It was "in the spirit of Communist modesty", said Foster, that he brings forward these claims.

These boasts may be merely noted here, and set aside to await their proper evaluation by the leaders of world communism. Our task is the more limited one of answering the question: "What achievements in the American class struggle did this leadership bring to the Convention, as foundation for the claim to be 'among the first, if not the very first' Communist Party in the world?"

The prime test of the work of a Communist Party is its relations with the workingclass as a whole. That was the subject-matter of the work of the so-called "Labor Panel" of the Convention. We therefore turn to the "report to the Convention on the Labor Panel". (pp. 857-879).

There we learn, incidental to labored arguments that nothing is basically wrong with CP policy toward the trade unions, that:

"The trade unions are today on the defensive."

"There is considerable confusion and division in trade union ranks."

"Some serious setbacks were received" by the left wing of the labor movement (UAW, NMU, TWU, painters, and "others" are mentioned).

At no point, however, is it recognized as a fact (we do not even raise here the matter of its being "explained"), that these "setbacks" were of an uniquely important character -- that they were administered by the rank and file members of the trade unions, that their form consisted in masses of workers turning away from the Communist and Left leadership!

At no point is it recognized that these "setbacks" add up to a total which can only be described as a general wrecking of the powerful left wing movement which for ten years held the initiative in the whole American labor movement.

At no point is it recognized that disruption and scattering of the basic forces of the trade union left wing is the root cause and explanation for the disintegration of the broader progressive camp, the Roosevelt coalition, the splintering of which opened the door of American politics for the reactionary camp to ride into power.

The thesis of the "report on the Labor Panel" is that despite these "setbacks", "since our 1945 Emergency Convention, our Party's trade union work has been extended and strengthened." The report admits that "these setbacks and defeats are a serious blow to the entire workingclass and to our Party." But it goes on to insist boldly that they must be explained, not by any defects in party policy or leadership, but solely by "the impact of the general offensive of American imperialism" (that is, by the blows of the class enemy), plus the condition of "a temporary watering down of union consciousness" due to the influx of young workers into the industries!

The left wing, with its several million followers, was of course never Communist. But the Communists (less than 1% of the labor movement) played a key role through a series of alliances with non-Communists. The "report of the Labor Panel" notes that "these alliances fell apart", but just how and why this occurred is left a deep mystery, except for the ever-present "impact of the general offensive of American imperialism". Apparently the left wing was expected to win victories without any opposition from its class enemies, but these were so ungentlemanly as to deliver blows against us, and therefore we were defeated!

At one point in the "report on the Labor Panel", the appearance is created of a "self-critical" facing of facts.

This comes in a discussion of "The NMU situation". Here also, however, it is emphasized that "the objective factors referred to above generally apply here in force" (that is, we lost because the enemy hit us!), and the fact that the rank and file turned their backs on the Communist leadership is hidden in a mass of words. There is given here, however, "a mere statement of some subjective factors" (that is, mistakes by the Communists) which made the situation worse. This "mere statement" is more revealing of the true situation than all the labored "theoretical" arguments. It consists of 7 points, which are worthy of quotation in full:

"1) There was no real understanding, much less mastery, of the united front tasks, especially on the ships.

"2) There was never a real understanding of how to broaden out the base of the Left bloc within the N.M.U.

"3) It is a tribute to the Negro and Puerto Rican seamen that they were the main support of the Left. It is clear, however, that without a rounded-out support from all sections of the membership, the Left would in the end become weakened also among the Negro and Puerto Rican workers.

"4) The Left allowed itself to be gripped in a frozen factional situation, and the factional poisoning of some of our own forces prevented the hammering out of a correct united front policy with members and leadership at ship committee level.

"5) The inner situation diverted the Left from developing effective activities around such key issues as the Progressive Party.

"6) The tendency to hesitate on the part of some in the Left leadership, despite their integrity and good will, resulted in mistakes at crucial moments.

"7) The Left did not always have an adequate strategy for their struggle. The need of the workers in this industry is industrial unionism. The Committee for Maritime Unity had the elements

of a correct strategy, but once it was defeated, no satisfactory substitute was found."

What a picture! Who could ever guess from reading this description of practical bankruptcy that the same Left seamen from 1935 to 1945 could have justly, without exaggeration, be given an exactly opposition description -- as follows:

1) They displayed the deepest understanding, even "mastery" of the united front tasks, especially on the ships.

2) They showed a deep understanding of how constantly to broaden out the base of the Left bloc within the NMU.

3) They gave the outstanding example of complete unity of native and foreign-born, white and Negro, workers.

4) They never permitted the crystallization of a factional situation, either frozen or fluid, because they understood factionalism would poison the Union and even their own forces, and would make impossible the hammering out of correct policy at all levels.

5) The Left leadership of the NMU always kept the membership healthily involved in the broadest political and cultural activities of the general progressive movement.

6) They never hesitated in crucial moments, because their correct general policy guarded them from situations where their natural instincts would rebel against Party line.

7) They always had an adequate strategy for the unity of the entire maritime industry, based upon the knowledge that this could not be forced from above, by clever manoeuvres and blue-prints, but must arise from the conviction and common consent of the membership of various existing unions together with their elected leaders.

Thus we see that the seven strongest points of the Left seamen from 1935 to 1945, became thereafter transformed into their seven weakest points. Why did this change happen? The seamen en masse had not changed. Only the leadership they received from the Communist Party had changed.

The "report on the Labor Panel" admits:

"We must say quite frankly that the National Committee bears a certain responsibility for some of these weaknesses."

But that admission is not "quite frank". The truth is that the National Committee, and especially Foster, bears entire responsibility for all of these weaknesses which express the character of Party work in relation to trade unions from the moment Foster assumed control of the Party.

The steady process of deterioration and decline of the Left-progressive wing of the labor movement, has continued through three years since the Party Emergency Convention in 1945. It is not a sound foundation for boasting today about the Party's "vanguard role", or the claim to be "among the first, if not the very first" among Communist parties.

In Europe there are many Communist Parties which emerged after the war as real mass parties, at the head of a majority of the working class. Because the workingclass has rallied around these parties, they exercise a decisive influence upon the destiny of their countries. But they almost all speak of their role with a degree of real modesty, not verbal modesty which replaces the character with the word. There was one exception, a party whose leaders conspicuously boasted, that of Yugoslavia. Subsequent events showed this was a sign of a deeper sickness. What shall we think of a party leadership which boasts of being "among the first" when its former worker-followers are abandoning it en masse?

In the 40-page main political report to the Convention, one page is devoted to this crucial question. This page is more empty than even the "report on the Labor Panel", and is confined to abstract generalizations. Significantly, it passes on immediately to the Wallace movement as "the key which the progressives in the trade union movement must now seize upon." (p. 810).

The Wallace movement is, indeed, being used by the Party leaders as a "key" - - but a key to lock up, out of sight and possibility of examination, the catastrophic situation of the trade union left wing, not a key to remedying its dismal situation. If any evidence is needed to prove this fact, we find it in the "report of the Labor Panel" on this point. There we read the following:

> "The trade unionists should obviously be the majority force in the membership, leadership and activity of this new party. From all available public information, as well as from our observations in the communities, this does not appear to be the case. . . .
>
> "The situation in many of the Left-progressive unions is especially disappointing, precisely because one expects greater results from them . . . .
>
> "A major weakness of the Progressive Party is precisely the overwhelmingly non-labor character of its leadership . . . . But this criticism also applies to the Communist trade unionists, even more than to the others. It is merely phrase-mongering to 'agree' with the statement of our Draft Resolution that the new party 'marks the beginning of the end of the two-party system' if the Communist trade unionists themselves are guilty of neglect in strengthening the role of the trade unions in the new party . . . ."

These sharp sentences understate the actual situation. But they suffice to show that the Wallace movement is not improving the situation of the left wing in the trade unions, and also that the left wing is not improving the position of the Wallace new party within the labor movement. Each is relying upon the other, and each is weakening his partner. The accusation of "phrase-mongering" thrown against the trade unionists has a certain validity, however, only because these trade unionists are copying the practice of the leaders at the head of the Party.

Thus the position of the "Left-progressive-Communist" bloc deteriorates in the political mass movement, as well as in the trade unions.

This is the fundamental fact which the 14th Convention of the C.P.U.S.A. refused to face, which it covered up with a mass of words -- some good and much of it bad -- and with declarations of good intentions for the future. With its mass foundation in the workingclass being dissolved under it, the Party could not possibly give a correct answer to any problem -- so long as it refused to face and learn how to change this fact.

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THE 14th NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

Section II

In the first Party Convention held since the end of the war, it would be expected that a characterization of World War II and its results would be given, as the necessary foundation for a judgment on the world relationship of forces, and all consequent strategical and tactical conclusions. One looks in vain, however, for such a characterization of the war and its results, either in the Resolution or the main political report.

There exists a very precise characterization of the war. It was given by Stalin, in his speech of February 9, 1946, as follows:

> "As distinct from the First World War, the Second World War against the Axis States from the very outset assumed the nature of an anti-fascist war of liberation, one of the tasks of which was also to re-establish democratic liberties. The entry of the Soviet Union into the war against the Axis States could only strengthen -- and actually did strengthen -- the anti-fascist and liberating character of the Second World War."

Why did the 14th Convention of the CPUSA carefully avoid saying yes or no to this characterization of the war? Obviously, this was because the Convention leaders disagree with this judgment but, for reasons of expediency, wish to hide this disagreement. This attitude expresses a profound underestimation of the progressive forces in the countries of bourgeois democracy in general, and in particular in the U.S.A.

This underestimation puts its mark upon the entire proceedings of the Convention. In the main political report and in all discussion, the anti-fascist and anti-war camp is defined as those forces aligned with the Wallace new party, and all others are assigned to the camp of reaction, fascism, and war to establish American imperialist rule over the world. Indeed, the workingclass itself "participates in the responsi-

bility for this betrayal of the cause of labor and the nation" by tolerating its existing leadership (p.788), and can join "the cause of labor" only by establishing a new leadership. This definition reduces the progressive anti-war camp to a small minority in America, and excludes the overwhelming majority of the organized workingclass. With such a judgment, of course, the strength of the reactionary, fascist, camp is grossly overestimated.

This is the erroneous political judgment at the base of the spirit of defeatism that dominated the Convention. This defeatism is but poorly masked by phrases of shrill defiance against the reactionary camp, and by appeals and directives for "unity and struggle" addressed to the workingclass, with which the Convention record is plentifully decorated like raisins in a cake. Of course, if all this good advice was accepted, and the workingclass "united all its forces" on the Roosevelt-Wallace program, reaction would be defeated. But the central problem of the Convention was precisely to answer why the workingclass, long united behind Roosevelt's program by an 80% majority, comes to the same program led by Wallace only in a ten percent minority or less. The Convention answered this question only by citing the blows of the enemy, "the impact of the reactionary offensive." But to concede that enemy blows can confuse and divide the body of the workingclass and drive it into the enemy camp, is itself an enormous overestimation of reactionary forces, and a confession of bankruptcy by the Communist leaders who make it.

The result is that the Convention, instead of examining the problem of how unity of the workingclass and the whole progressive camp can be re-established, intensified the policies and attitudes which during the past three years have more and more separated the Party from the main body of the workingclass. The attention of the Party and its followers was directed, not toward the reintegration of the progressive majority camp in the country, but toward the probable victory of fascism to which the only answer is socialist revolution. Thus, the climax of Foster's speech, opening the Convention in Madison Square Garden, was the following:

> "And above all, our Party knows that if American imperialism, despite the resistance of the peace forces, should succeed in launching a new world war, this crime would seal the doom of world capitalism. For the outraged peace-loving masses would then put an end to the obsolete capitalist system and speed on faster than ever to their inevitable goal." (p. 776).

This formula, often repeated by Foster for three years, neither inspires the workingclass nor intimidates the reactionaries. It is generally interpreted on all sides, and by the Party as well, as meaning that there is no practical, effective obstacle to the march of American imperialism toward world conquest except "the final conflict", the proletarian socialist revolution in America. The Party has been given an immediate perspective of concentration camps, storm troopers marching in the streets, a full-fledged American version of Hitlerism, against which it must fling words of defiance but which can be defeated only when the American workingclass rises up to establish socialism.

It is due to this perspective, still far removed from American reality, that the Party has been so indifferent to catastrophic losses of its positions in the organized labor movement. The trade unions are regarded as playing a reactionary role, unless they are already prepared to accept revolutionary leadership.

The Convention saw in the advance of reactionary forces into power an expression of a supposed "break through on the ideological front" by fascism. If this is more than a mere phrase, it means that the masses, and especially the workingclass, are supposed to have moved to the right since the end of the war. This estimate is false. The political ideas and moods of the masses are more progressive today than in 1944, or 1940, or 1936. If the reactionary camp is sweeping into power in America, this is not at all due to "ideological" victories of fascism among the masses. It is the result, rather, of the atomization of progressive leadership, the splitting up of which has opened the gates to the enemy. If the enemy is relatively stronger, this is mainly because it has concentrated its forces, while the progressive camp has permitted itself to be split by feuds, factions, and personal ambitions of rival leaders and groups. Give the progressive camp a united leadership (and this is not a Utopian aim, since it recently existed!), and it would quickly be stronger in the country than ever before.

This basic political fact was hidden, ignored, even denied, by the 14th Convention. Thereby the Convention grossly overestimated the forces of the enemy and underestimated those of the progressive camp. Thereby it presented the central tasks of the movement in a distorted form.

The Convention was unable to formulate the task of uniting the progressive majority. The reason for this was, that it did not recognize the existence of such a progressive majority. It could not recognize this majority's existence, without recognizing the Party's own errors which contributed to and hastened the fragmentation of progressive leadership. Because it had to explain its own loss of mass influence, not by its own errors but as the victory of fascist "ideology" -- even over many of its own members and former closest allies! -- it could not possibly recognize the existence of a progressive majority in the country. That is why the Convention came to the formula, expressing its false estimate of the relation of forces: The progressive camp is the Wallace movement; all else belongs to the camp of reaction, fascism, and war. For the Convention, the progressive camp has been reduced to a small minority and is still shrinking.

While exaggerating the "ideological" victories of fascism in America, the leaders of the Convention spoke much of, and based themselves upon, the increased post-war strength of the USSR and the countries of new democracy. This latter view, insofar as it dominated the thinking of the Convention, was its healthiest aspect. However, it is not an accident that the Convention failed to note and to refute the idea, which the reactionary camp propagates in a variety of forms as one of its most effective weapons among the American masses, namely, the idea that only American help to the USSR enabled it to survive Hitler's attack, that the USSR could not have won the war alone.

The failure of the Convention to answer this reactionary propaganda weapon is all the less understandable, since the CPUSA had given the strongest and most effective answer to this canard in the course of the war itself. But after the war, when Foster had taken Party leadership into his hands, the Party fell silent on this question and has not spoken of it since. It received no answer in the 14th Convention.

The reason for this silence is that during the war Foster was very pessimistic about the position of the USSR, he expected Leningrad and Moscow to fall to the Nazis, and he was as surprised as the bourgeois "experts" at the victory of Stalingrad. And Foster has never been known to admit an error, except the "error" of failing to stubbornly insist upon his own ideas. He will not admit he was wrong on this question, even indirectly by stating the correct position, until he is forced to do so. In the 14th Convention no one could force anything on Foster; he was the unconditional boss. The result is that the CPUSA receives no education whatever upon the basic strength of the USSR demonstrated in war, except that which comes from abroad. The ideological campaign of the reactionaries goes unanswered.

The same reason contributes to the Party's failure to discuss Stalin's estimate of World War II as "from the very outset" an anti-fascist war of liberation. From the beginning of the war until 1942, this question acutely disturbed the Party leadership. Foster and his chief theoretician, Bittleman, held that there were two distinct and simultaneous wars, one between the Axis States and the Anglo-American alliance which was purely imperialist, not differing in principle from World War I, and the other, between the Axis and the Soviet Union, which was a liberation war on the side of the USSR. American Communists, they said, must utilize the conflict between the Axis and the Anglo-Americans, but must resolutely continue to affirm that it remains purely an imperialist struggle on both sides, and the capitalist Western States cannot under any conditions play any progressive and liberating role, even conditionally and within defined limits. When the Party rejected their concept, and decided that Roosevelt's war policy made it possible to include America in the concept of a coalition of anti-fascist States which, as a whole, played a progressive and liberating role, Foster and Bittleman took up a diplomatic silence on this issue thereafter, but never admitted that they had changed their original judgment.

This was not then an "abstract" issue without very important practical consequences, nor is it now. During the war, this difference of concept gave rise to constant difficulties. One of the sharpest examples occurred at the height of the war, during the Battle of the Bulge, when the Germans threatened to break the Anglo-American lines and drive to the channel, which would have brought a collapse of the Second Front in the West. In that very period, a mass strike movement was rising in America, spearheaded by John L. Lewis, which was further shaking American morale at home as well as at the front, and was being exploited by pro-fascist advocates of a separate and negotiated peace with the Nazis.

That was a very critical moment in the war. The fact that Stalin took it seriously is recorded in the notes which passed between him and Churchill at that time. (See "Falsifiers of History", supplement to "New Times", Moscow, No.8, Feb.18,1948).

Churchill sent an urgent note to Stalin, saying the Anglo-American position was very dangerous, and asking for action in the East to relieve it. Stalin answered that weather was unfavorable, and plans for an offensive had been made for several weeks later, when the weather would improve. However, Stalin said, in view of the extreme urgency of the Anglo-American position, the Soviet command was advancing the date of the offensive, and carrying it out under the most unfavorable conditions. When the Soviet offensive took place, a few days later, it forced the Nazis to transfer several divisions from West to East, and enabled the hard-pressed Anglo-American armies to prevent the threatening break-through. It cost the USSR many extra thousands of lives, but clearly it was in the joint Anglo-Soviet-American interest. If the war was worth any sacrifices at all, clearly it demanded sacrifices at that moment.

In the American labor movement, however, there were powerful leaders developing a strike movement, who refused to give any consideration to its threat against the Western Front. John L. Lewis was aligned with the "America First" crowd, and against American participation in the war under any circumstances. He was joined at that time by the Social-Democrats, formerly the most extreme agitators for war, because they were in rebellion against Roosevelt's partnership with Stalin, and would rather lose the war than win it jointly with the USSR.

The left wing, inspired by the Communists, joined hands with the Murray-Hillman center group to oppose resolutely the spread of the strike movement. But it had to overcome the most stubborn opposition of Foster, who wanted it to go along with Lewis and the Social-Democrats in unloosing the mass strike movement. Even after he was decisively over-ruled, Foster addressed a large mass meeting in Chicago, in terms favorable to the strike movement and compromising the left wing position. Only by redoubled efforts was the strike movement held in check until the military danger had passed. Foster's role at that moment reflected, in general, his fundamentally anarcho-syndicalist tendency, and in particular his complete misunderstanding of the nature of the war.

There is, of course, nothing original in the Foster-Bittleman theory that the United Nations alliance masked two simultaneous wars of a contradictory character. It is a specific variation of the old Trotskyite "theory of permanent revolution", which, since the war, under Foster's leadership, has deeply penetrated

the CP cadres in various forms. Foster always had a weakness for Trotskyite theories, and in 1929 was publicly rebuked by Stalin for his Trotskyite alliances. Even when he is formally combatting the Trotskyites, he shows no ability or inclination to combat their theories. It is not an accident that during the three years of Foster's leadership of the Party there has been a plague of semi-Trotskyite groups and theories spring up among the membership.

The CPUSA misinterpreted the manifesto of the Nine-Party Conference which established the Cominform, as a belated confirmation of Foster's position. But the characteristic feature of that manifesto, in sharp contrast to Foster's war hysteria and empty threats of "revolution" as the answer, was its calm and confident assurance to the workingclass and peace-loving masses of all countries, that they hold the power to enforce peace and eradicate the remnants of fascism. Foster cannot see or understand this strength of the progressive camp, this favorable relationship of forces. Therefore, the Convention he controlled and guided could not work out for America the tasks laid down by the Nine-Party Conference.

Foster relies upon frightening the masses with the threat of war, in order to drive them into the anti-war camp. He relies upon frightening the bourgeoisie with the threat of revolution, in order to drive them away from the reactionary war program. With both these phases of his tactic, however, he merely plays into the hands of the reactionaries, and achieves his ostensible aim in neither case.

The 14th Convention, therefore, gave little help to the American workingclass in penetrating the false pretenses of the Marshall Plan, and exposing the inner contradictions and ultimate bankruptcy of the present American bi-partisan reactionary foreign policy. It permitted the clear and simple outlines of the world picture, which discloses the unconquerable position and growing strength of the democratic camp in world affairs, to remain obscured by abstract formulae and interminable chatter about secondary matters. It masked the clay feet of the American imperialist collossus -- the contradiction in which it adds new weaknesses with every additional ally (Chiang in China, Greek royalists, Spain's Butcher Franco, the Ilse Kochs and Hjalmar Schachts of Germany) and by crude domineering even outrages and undermines its blood-brothers of the British, French and Italian reactionary bourgeoisie.

The American workers should be told, in simple concrete language within the comprehension of all, about the weakness of the American reactionary policy. Above all, the myths and illusions surrounding the atom-bomb, as the "trump card" in international relations, the "irresistible weapon" which makes American reactionaries "supreme" in the world, should not be unthinkingly repeated, but exposed as the fakery they are, torn to pieces and discredited, by constant repetition of the simple facts, that the atom-bomb is more dangerous to America itself than to any other country, that even reactionary military experts admit, among themselves, that the atom-bomb is mainly a "psychological" weapon, a bluff; that even if it remains an American monopoly (a dangerous assumption!), it is more than offset by more deadly weapons of mass destruction equally available to the USA and the USSR; and that a speculative World War III could not possibly end in victory for either side by military means!

The new relationship of forces in the world, that came out of World War II, renders impossible a military decision of the disputes and differences between "East and West" - - that is, between a reactionary capitalist USA and the socialist USSR, and the camps lined up with the two world powers.

That is the fact that shatters the dreams of an all-conquering American world empire, of an "American fascism". This fact, stark and simple in its main outlines, within the comprenhension of the broadest masses, should be the main ideological weapon of the regathering of the progressive majority of Americans, to take the destiny of our country and the world out of the hands of the reactionary minority.

But the 14th Convention of the CPUSA shut its eyes and turned away from the road to unity of the progressive majority. It stubbornly marched toward more complete isolation from the body of the organized workingclass, consoling itself that it is at least gaining a radical middle-class mass party. But even this illusory gain is slipping like sand through the fingers of these blind leaders.

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THE 14th NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

Section III

How did the 14th Convention judge the strength of the Wallace movement? What perspectives did it indicate for the new party's future? What did it have to say about the relationship between the labor movement and the new party, and its future course? And what role did the Communists assign to themselves in the new party?

The Convention gave contradictory answers to all these questions; it stood firmly on both sides of each debatable issue.

"The rising might of the new people's anti-monopoly party and coalition", declared the main political report, is so great that the American ruling class "is losing faith in the possibility of governing effectively by bourgeois-democratic methods." (p.783). That is, indeed, a claim of very great strength! But later on, in listing the tangible alignment of organized forces (p.800), it cautiously claims only the narrow left wing.

"The new party is shattering the deadly two-party system", it is claimed (p.775 and numerous other places). This means that the new party will emerge from the elections with a vote comparable, in some degree, with the major parties, and as a firmly consolidated major political factor in the country; it either means that much, or it is altogether a meaningless, demagogic phrase. At the same time the Convention saw the reactionaries making "alarming advances" (p.786), "to check and defeat" which, "is possible - - if labor adopts an independent class position", which it explains, labor has not done because "we were able to influence only a minority in the CIO - - albeit a sizeable and influential minority - - and only very negligible forces in the A. F. of L." (p.787). The condition of the "labor and progressive movements" is one of "division, confusion and backwardness". (p.789). Thus the promise for a bright future for the new party is made conditional upon something happening, which is not happening now, and which the Convention can predict, not upon measures being undertaken to bring it about, but by some miracle of "spontaniety."

"To halt the drive toward fascism and war, the new people's

coalition must be led by the workingclass and its most class-conscious sector", said the Convention (p.790). This is laid down as an axiom, repeated in innumerable variations. But the actual condition revealed in the "report on the Labor Panel" is that only the left wing unions support the new party, and these with many hesitations and weaknesses, that it is difficult to get even the Communists to be really active, and that the new party is "overwhelmingly non-labor" (i.e., middle class) in its leadership. The Convention had no explanation of why this is so, and no directive as to how to change it - - except, of course, the empty and inevitable exhortations that "it must" be changed, apparently by the exercise of pure will-power.

What role was outlined for the Communists in the new party? Two different, and opposite, answers were given by the Convention. "They are brazen liars who charge that the Communist Party is trying to dominate the new party", declared Foster (p.775). "We Communists have no desire to 'take over' the new party, nor could we if we would", echoes the more soft-speaking political report. But, on the other hand, the new party "must be led by... its most class-conscious sector" (p.790); "the American working class, and especially its Communist vanguard, must...gather around itself all patriotic and democratic elements...and give it (the new party) fighting workingclass leadership." (p. 792). Obviously, the ambiguity of this double-answer solves no problems. The non-Communists in the new party, worried about how to regulate their relations with the Communists, are not interested in quibbles, in clumsy exercises in "semantics". Instead of an answer to their legitimate questions, they are merely told to stop worrying ("Nobody in this hen-house but us chickens!"). The problem, which requires a full and frank discussion, putting all cards on the table, and reaching a practical working relationship, is dismissed as not worthy of a real answer.

The Convention thus entangled itself in ambiguities, because it was unable to face up to this question fully and frankly, not having clarified the problem in its own thinking. It had forgotten the basic attitude established 100 years ago by Marx and Engels, that in matters of program and political discussion, the Communists have nothing to hide or dissemble, that "the Communists disdain to conceal their aims", that they can unite and work with all progressive parties and groups, honestly and loyally, upon a mutually agreed basis and program.

Behind this issue of "leadership" (or "domination"), which is only a surface problem, important though it is, there is involved a much deeper, programmatic, issue. Wallace and his non-

Communist associates wrote the platform, the program, of the new party. It is well-known, being the program of Roosevelt (except the new plank for nationalization, to be discussed separately), around which the progressive majority of the nation had been rallied for years. It is a "reform" program, explicitly affirming the continuance of American capitalism. It is "anti-imperialist" - - but only in the colloquial, Roosevelt ian, sense of opposing the reactionary camp's plans of aggression and conquest, not in the sense of proposing a new foundation for American policy; it is "anti-monopolist" - - but only in the same sense.

The Communists, however, give these terms another meaning, that which is contained in Marxist-Leninist theory, which says that in an advanced capitalist country, like America, imperialism and monopoly are inherent in capitalism itself, and can be abolished only together with capitalism, by the establishment of socialism. In the Marxist-Leninist sense, anti-imperialist and anti-monopolist are fundamentally anti-capitalist.

When Wallace and the Communists agree upon an "anti-imperialist" and "anti-monopoly" party, they are, therefore, agreeing only in words but not in their meaning, not in the real substance of a program.

The Communists could have dissolved this ambiguity. The Convention could have explained that the Communist program, Marxism-Leninism, holds that imperialism and monopoly can be fully defeated only by the establishment of socialism. It could have made clear that the new party and Wallace stand for quite a different program, of "reform" which leaves intact the basis of American capitalism (which is imperialist and monopolist by nature). It could then point out, that it supports the Wallace program, as Wallace understands it, quite simply and honestly, because the masses are not ready to support a socialist program, and this is the most advanced program upon which there is the immediate possibility to unite the majority. This program, with majority support, is adequate for the immediate purpose, to prevent war and avoid the worst economic crisis that threatens, and since the Communists want to avoid war and crisis also, as long as possible, they quite honestly join and support this movement without any ulterior purpose, not to divert it to other aims. The Communists know that in such a broad coalition, with a non-Communist (non-Socialist) program, they cannot be the leadership, in the sense of wielding authority; they can only be an "influence", according to the value of their work and the weight of their arguments in

the common councils. Such a statement would have clarified both Communists and non-Communists, and would have laid the basis for healthy and sound working relations in carrying out the agreed tasks.

The 14th Convention did not do this. Instead, it deepened the ambiguous relationship that has arisen, and reduced it to a system. Thereby it intensified all suspicions and strained relations in the new party, and reduced its effectiveness for the election and afterward, to an immeasurable degree.

The Convention declared: "A new initiative is necessary on the part of the advanced workers to widen the Progressive Party's trade union base and to heighten labor's political leadership and influence within the new party." (p.803).

By what means is this to be done? By an intensification of the very policies which have already resulted in narrowing down the new party's labor base, isolating it from the main body of labor? By making the new party also a new battle-flag in the right-left split in the CIO, a split which was threatening to become complete even before the new party appeared? The inevitable result of such a "new initiative" is already seen, in the United Electrical Workers Convention (UE), the leaders of which withdrew their expected endorsement of Wallace on the grounds that it would "split the union wide open"!

In July, before the new party and the CP held their conventions, the Wallace movement was strong enough in the trade unions to bring from the dominant leadership announcements that they would not support any candidate for President, that they would, as the saying goes, "sit on their hands." But after the Conventions, the right-center leaders were no longer afraid of the Wallace movement. They boldly came out in support of Truman. That was the result of the "new initiative" of an old policy that had already failed. It is not very helpful to proclaim that "labor must not only endorse and give general support to the Progressive Party" (p.803), if the proclamation results only in former supporters drawing back from final action, and labor generally coming out more strongly than before <u>against</u> the new party.

"In this connection", says the main political report, "it is appropriate to comment on the remarks of a leading new party spokesman" (this means Wallace!) "to the effect that if we Communists really wanted to help the new party, we would run a Communist Presidential ticket. Here the argument was advanced that

such a step would lose the new party 100,000 votes, and gain it 3,000,000." (p.806).

The comment that follows is most remarkable, in that it does not even attempt to refute Wallace's statement of fact, except to call it "questionable". It merely declares that the Communists have their own reasons, independent of the size of Wallace's possible vote, for not accepting Wallace's suggestion. This despite repeated statements, in other contexts, that "it is essential, obviously, to bend every effort to achieve the <u>maximum number of votes</u>" (emphasis in the original) for the new party. (p.803).

No attempt is made to refute Wallace's judgment on this question, obviously because it is irrefutable, because it corresponds to the actual situation.

The situation in 1948, insofar as this narrow issue is concerned, is closely comparable to that of 1936. At that time the judgment of the CP was, that Roosevelt must be assured the maximum number of votes, that Landon must be defeated at all costs. Precisely for that reason, since an endorsement of Roosevelt by the CP would have cost him 20 times as many votes as it gained him, the CP put its own ticket into the field, and made a campaign designed to strengthen the Roosevelt position.

In 1944 the position was quite different. By that time, the Communists had a long record of cooperation in the general progressive camp, the broad left wing was firmly united and in working alliance with broader organizations, and had reduced its life-and-death feuds within the labor movement to a minimum. It could directly endorse Roosevelt, without seriously weakening him, but on the contrary consolidating and raising the fighting spirit of the whole mass movement. It did so, and Roosevelt, while making a <u>pro forma</u> declaration that he did not invite Communist support, nevertheless did not even hint at the thought, which Wallace has bluntly spoken in 1948, that "if the Communists really wanted to help" they would run their own ticket! And Roosevelt's running-mate, one Harry Truman, answered the issue with the flat declaration that the Party welcomed all voters without distinction of their affiliations.

If the policy of the CP was really guided by the aim of the <u>maximum number of votes</u> for Wallace, then it would have tried to establish the conditions of 1944 before endorsing him, or, failing this, would have named its own ticket, as in 1936,

campaigning in such a manner as to give him maximum help. The course that has been followed means, obviously, that the aim of a maximum number of votes is, for the CP, subordinate to the aim of direct Communist participation in the Wallace organization.

How completely the Convention leaders misjudge the relation of forces in the labor movement and in the country as a whole, may be illustrated by a very practical example. The main political report forecast that "the proponents of the new party will undoubtedly make new united front approaches to the pro-Roosevelt Democrats among the electorate. Many of these, including certain candidates" (my emphasis) "will now be more ready to arrive at agreement with the new party."

Following out this judgment, the new party (with Wallace expressing his disagreement publicly!) offered its support, early in October, to a group of outstanding progressives on the Democratic ticket. But, contrary to the forecast, those candidates were not "more ready" for agreement. They spurned the support which was offered, with hostile statements. The movement for "more unity" resulted only in adding bitterness to the split, and demonstrated more weakness in the new party's position. The move which, in the beginning of the new party movement, could have added much strength to the Wallace campaign, came too late in October, and had the opposite result. Wallace, the "impractical idealist", had judged the reality more accurately than the "hard-boiled realists"; he had favored the move in the beginning, and opposed it in October!

The new party in its program made one innovation, one departure from the familiar program of Roosevelt. This is the proposal to nationalize the banks and insurance companies, and the steel, railroad and mining industries. This is indeed an important issue, and calls for a fundamental judgment of the historical moment in America. For, unlike many programmatic issues, this one is good or bad, true or false, not in general or for long periods, but only in very particular conditions and relationship of forces.

The 11th Convention hailed this innovation as the "heart" of the new party program, with a minimum of discussion.

The main political report correctly warned, in words closely following the classic teachings of Marxism-Leninism, that "demands for nationalization which are advanced irrespective of time, place and struggle" have the result "to breed illusions and play into the hands of demagogues" - - "or even assist in the process of fascization" .... "serve today to promote...the accelerated growth

of state monopoly capitalism."

Having laid this correct premise, the report proceeds:

"Contrariwise, the struggle for nationalization of the basic industries and the banks, when integrated with the struggle of the workingclass and its allies for a democratic people's government, can reinforce the people's mass movement...it can advance the struggle of labor and people to higher levels and in the direction of socialism."

This is a complete non sequitor; the conclusion has nothing whatever to do with the premise. After warning that "time, place and struggle" (that is, particular relationships of power) determine whether nationalization of industries is progressive or, on the contrary, only "promotes the accelerated growth of state monopoly capitalism" and "even assist fascization", the conclusion is drawn ("contrariwise", indeed!), that since the nationalization demand is "integrated" in the new party program, and that is a program of struggle, this proves it is correct, the warnings do not apply to our situation, and that nationalization is the "heart" of the anti-fascist program in America.

It would be hard to find a more glaring example of idealistic thinking in politics, of abandonment of the basic principles of Marxist-Leninist political thought.

A program of nationalization is progressive when the conditions of "time, place and struggle" are such that the workingclass and its allies are approaching, or have already reached, the point of taking over the state power - - as in most of Europe today. It is progressive when, by being applied under conditions of capitalism, it results in further weakening the power of the reactionary camp, and puts new obstacles to a restoration of that power. It is progressive when it installs a new peoples' political force into fields hitherto under the undisputed sway of the monopolists, and ousts the old ruling class and its representatives. Therefore, the statement that existing conditions call for a program of nationalization as the "heart" of the mass movement against the monopolists, is equivalent to declaring the existence of a major political crisis, in which the old order is tottering, and socialism is on the order of the day.

But the CPUSA has repeatedly stated, in the declarations of its National Committee plenary meetings, that it does not put the transition to socialism on the order of the day in

America. It justified its support of the Wallace new party, with its pro-capitalist program and its leadership by a millionaire, on the grounds that socialism is not the issue today. True, the 14th Convention proceedings do not repeat this judgment, in specific terms, but surely the assumption is justified that such a tremendous change would be made openly, if at all, and not smuggled into a Convention program under cover of an ambiguous declaration on nationalization!

Under existing conditions in the U.S.A., those basic conditions which would not be changed even by the election of Wallace as President with a supporting new party majority in Congress, the carrying through of a program of nationalization of banks and basic industries would have the result of strengthening the power of the monopolies, of giving them the means to harness the new party government to their chariot.

The inclusion of the nationalization demand in the new party program is, for the new party, merely a practical mistake which will be soon dropped, since the party is far from united on it. But the endorsement of this step, as the "heart" of the program, by the 14th Convention of the CPUSA, is a much more serious matter. It reveals that the present leadership of the CPUSA is more than clumsy and incapable in practical problems of the mass movement; it is also illiterate in Marxist-Leninist theory, it is able to recite accurately from the text books but has no understanding of their meaning, or of the relation of theory to the problems of the everyday real world.

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THE 14th NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

Section IV

The main political report to the 14th Convention accurately states that:

> "The U.S. monopolies, with their swollen profits and increased productive capacity, face a relatively restricted home market and a shrinking capitalist sector of the world. Their 'solution' is to embark on an aggressive program of imperialist expansion and intervention." (pp. 781-782).

> "Millions who fear mass unemployment and the impending crisis have been sold on the Marshall Plan, as a measure to ensure American prosperity and European recovery." (p.787).

After this statement of the central problem of the mobilization of the working class against the reactionary camp, one studies the entire 174 pages for an answer to the problem - - but in vain. It seems incredible, but it is a fact, that not a single paragraph or sentence can be found to answer this question, or even to hint that an answer is being sought. The 14th Convention avoided any discussion of the problem of markets as though it was avoiding the plague.

How, then, are the "millions who fear mass unemployment" - - and these are workers, the main body of the trade unions - - going to be "unsold" on the Marshall Plan, and rallied against it, if not one word is said about an alternative program which will answer the question of markets in a progressive and democratic sense?

This failure of the 14th Convention only registers and confirms the same failure in the practical daily work of the Party. It explains why leading Communists and their closest allies, delegates to the CIO Convention in 1947, failed to put up a fight against the Marshall Plan and even joined in

its unanimous endorsement. They were unable to fight it, because the Party to which they looked for guidance, had armed them with no arguments that could effectively counter the advocates of the Plan.

The "error" of the Communist vote for the Marshall Plan was not, and could not be, explained by the 14th Convention, because the Convention was not prepared to remedy the basic failure of the Party which caused the error.

The fundamental problem involved in the fight against the Marshall Plan may be briefly re-stated as follows:

American economy enormously expanded its productive forces during the war. But the domestic market has expanded far less, in proportion, and available foreign markets are more limited than before the war. Therefore the basic factors making for economic crisis are more powerful than they were just before the 1929 crash. Since it is not possible, under capitalism, to solve this disparity by expanding the domestic market to absorb production, the American economy is faced with the alternative, either to greatly expand its foreign markets by one or another means, or to accept the inevitability of an imminent shattering economic crisis of unprecedented severity. American economy must produce for the world market or collapse.

There are two possible answers (short of socialism) to this problem of markets for American surplus production, a reactionary answer and a progressive answer.

The reactionary camp proposes a "solution" through:(1) an enormous armaments program; (2) the Marshall Plan subsidy of exports for a transitional period; (3) utilization of the first two measures as a means to gain control over the rest of the world, transforming it into a semi-colonial market.

The progressive counter-program would answer the problem by: (1) elimination of armaments as rapidly as possible, and avoid any reliance upon them as an economic factor; (2) expand U.S. exports by credits and subsidies, to equal the full amount of exportable surplus production, eliminating the Marshall Plan aggressions against the sovereignty of other countries and all political discriminations, trading with socialist and semi-

socialist lands on the same conditions as with capitalist ones; (3) cooperation with all democratic forces in the world to assist in the modernization and industrialization of all lands, abolishing colonialism and all forms of domination of one country by another.

The progressive program was projected by Roosevelt, and became the foundation of his foreign policy, in which he realistically expected friendly collaboration with the Soviet Union. This program has been continued by Wallace, and the new party.

But the Communists, and the left wing that follows their ideological leadership, are "boycotting" this phase of the new party program. They refuse to discuss it openly and directly, but they make it very well known by other means that the Communists consider this is one of the "unsound" features of the Wallace program, an essential phase, in fact, of Wallace's concept of a "progressive capitalism" which the Communists openly repudiate.

In terms of political realities, therefore, the Communists occupy the ambiguous position of supporting and participating in the new party, uniting with it to attack the Marshall Plan, but rejecting its answer to the Marshall Plan. Since the only answer to the Marshall Plan in addition to that of Wallace, is to propose the immediate transition to socialism for America (and this the CPUSA has repeatedly declared is "not on the order of the day" *), therefore the Communists and their left wing allies stand without a counter-program, and when asked what, practically, shall be put in the place of the Marshall Plan, they stand mute without an answer.

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* (Footnote) For example, the report to the National Committee meeting of Feb. 3-5, 1948, published as a pamphlet under the title "The Third Party and the 1948 Elections", said (p.45):
"Such a (Wallace new party) government on the American scene ...would not yet present it with the task of breaking the rule of the monopolies and thereby effecting the transition to socialism."

This failure of the 14th Convention (and for three years before) to answer the problem of markets, is the most important single programmatic reason for the collapse of its efforts to give the Wallace movement a broad trade union foundation. (There are other, non-programmatic reasons, of course, even more decisive, which are discussed in other connections). It is the decisive reason why the CIO was able to send James Carey to Europe on the mission to bring a crisis in the World Federation of Trade Unions, on the issue of the Marshall Plan.

The CPUSA is thus falling between two stools. It does not bring forward, advocate, explain, and fight for the progressive camp's alternative program to the Marshall Plan; but neither does it advance its own distinctive solution of a socialist transformation for America. It stands on this question in a political vacuum - - a very uncomfortable and politically-unprofitable position, especially since this issue is the central point of all current world political developments.

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A characteristic feature of the 14th Convention is the absence of any systematic examination of the country's economy, or of any part of the field of economic problems. What is said on such questions is always a remark "in passing", "by the way", obliquely. But some of these passing remarks reveal an extreme carelessness with the facts, that expresses lack of understanding of what these facts mean.

For example, the main report speaks of "the rapid maturing of the first post-war cyclical crisis of overproduction", although in vague and general terms. But it then proceeds, on the same page (782) to declare: "While the production of weapons of destruction increases, there is a steady decline in the production of means of production for peacetime purposes, as well as a critical shortage of many consumers' goods."

Now if the reporter had been seriously attempting to establish the "rapid maturing" of a crisis of overproduction, he could not have avoided the fact that, since the end of the war, there has taken place an enormous increase in the production of means of production, at a rate higher than ever before in peacetime, and not the "steady decline" of which he loosely speaks. If there

were actually a "decline", the maturing of the crisis would be less rapid - - it is precisely the rise that speeds up the crisis. Similarly, he would have found, not a "critical shortage" of consumers' goods, but the accumulation of inventories on an unprecedented scale, another main feature of the "rapid maturing" of the economic crisis of overproduction.

Such carelessness with facts, such loose thinking, run through the whole report, and are not confined to the remarks on economics, like a thread - - not a "red thread" - - that marks the absence of Marxist-Leninist theory and understanding.

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The refusal of the 14th Convention to put forth the progressive counter-program to the reactionary Marshall Plan, is a specific example of a general tendency of the Party leadership. This tendency is to mechanically copy the attitudes, positions and even the phraseology, of European Communists without consideration of "time, place and struggle."

European Communists, because they operate in an immediately revolutionary situation - - the period of transition to socialism - - are necessarily firm against all proposals that would restore capitalism to power, and against all theories that capitalist measures are "progressive" as opposed to their movement toward socialism. The CPUSA crudely and mechanically copies this attitude and approach in America, where the choice is not between socialism or progressive capitalism, but between extreme reaction and the Roosevelt progressive program - - a situation in which the CPUSA itself does not propose the immediate socialist choice.

But the present leaders of the CPUSA do not understand that what is "progressive" in America may be "reactionary" in Europe, (and vice versa), and they reject such a distinction of "time, place and struggle", branding it as a manifestation of "the theory of American exceptionalism."

The situation, therefore, calls for a review and re-examination of the whole history and scope of the Party's struggle against the theory of "exceptionalism", which it undertook in 1929 under the initiative of Stalin.

The "theory of exceptionalism" was developed in 1927-1929 by Lovestone and his group, who then held the leadership of the CPUSA. This theory declared that the unique features of American development, distinguishing it from other capitalist countries, had freed this country from those "laws of motion" which Marx had discovered in capitalist society, that America was an "exception."

On this basis Lovestone predicted, in 1928, a year before the great economic crisis broke out, that America was entering an "age" of sustained prosperity, analogous to that enjoyed by the British Empire in the 19th century. He said that even as Britain's glorious era had been called the "Victorian age", after the ruler under whose reign it began, so America's would be called "the Hooverian age."

When this "Hooverian age" revealed its reality, a short time later, in the form of "Hoovervilles" of unemployed millions, and the world economic crisis found its deepest expression precisely in America, this "theory of exceptionalism" collapsed, died, and vanished almost without a struggle. Therefore, the detailed examination and discussion of this theory was soon permitted to lapse, and it remained in the consciousness of the Party rather dimly, as the discredited label "American exceptionalism."

Now that label has been revived, and it is being fastened to any attitude or proposal that judges American problems as different from European problems. Since European Communists are generally applying a program of nationalization of banks and basic industries, therefore it is "American exceptionalism" to doubt that the same program must be advanced now for America. Since the Roosevelt program for determining national policy would be reactionary, if advanced for Poland or Czechoslovakia, where socialism is already being built, therefore it is "American exceptionalism" to maintain that it is progressive in the USA, and (since we cannot yet break openly with it!) we must make known its reactionary character by our silences, by our theoretical writings, and by ruthlessly crushing anyone in our own ranks who proposes to make a serious struggle to apply it. Since socialism is on the order of the day in Europe, it is "American exceptionalism" to object to, at least, smuggling socialism into the Wallace program! And so on, ad infinitum, ad absurdam, ad nauseam!

This light-minded application of the struggle against the theory of American exceptionalism is, in truth and in fact, not the opposite of Lovestone's theory that it might, at first glance, seem to appear. True, it claims, not that America is different from Europe, but that it is the same. But this is "opposite" only in the sense of being the opposite side of the same coin. Where Lovestone saw America as "exceptional", was in escaping from the general crisis of capitalism; where the present attitude of CP leaders sees America as "not exceptional" is in identifying it with Europe as in the same stage of development -- but in both cases it amounts to a declaration that the Marxian laws of motion are not effective for America. And that is the heart of the "theory of American exceptionalism," the attempt to escape from the Marxian laws into the free flights of fantasy.

The full anti-Marxist character of the theory of exceptionalism cannot be understood, until the essential identity of its two "opposite" sides has been grasped. America cannot escape from the laws of motion of capitalist society as a whole; it cannot find an exceptional road of development independent of, not determined by, those laws. Neither can America free itself from the laws of motion that govern the transition from capitalism to socialism. These laws begin with the workingclass as the bearer of socialism, with the Party as the bearer of socialist consciousness and leadership, with the unity -- the fusion -- of these two distinct and essential factors as the precondition that has been established in Europe for the transition to socialism -- but a precondition that has not been established in America, and which we are, at this moment, not approaching but, unfortunately, from which we are being driven back.

The idea that America is "advancing toward socialism" at a time and under such conditions, in which the Party is losing its most important mass bases in the working class, in which the Party tries to counter-balance this loss by substituting a radical middle-class mass party -- this idea is the very height of the theory of American exceptionalism. The idea that the Wallace new party is not a solution to immediate problems, but that it is useful to advance the struggle for socialism -- this idea is American exceptionalism to the n-th degree!

America cannot leap over the stages of preparatiion of the workingclass for socialism that Europe has already passed

through. Marxism-Leninism teaches us that there are "leaps" in history, sudden qualitative changes from a lower to a higher stage of historical development - - but that all such leaps have been thoroughly prepared by the accumulation of thousands and millions of small unobserved changes which are the true motive force of history. There are no leaps in real life which are merely the product of human "will-power" - - or fantasy.

Marxism, in rejecting unconditionally the "theory of American exceptionalism", by no means denies, or slides over, or underestimates the practical importance of every specific feature of America which makes this country different from other countries.

It is nonsense, not Marxism, to deny or ignore the fact that among all capitalist powers in the world, America was an "exception" in emerging from the war stronger than before, all others being weaker, and none retaining full rank as "first class powers."

It is nonsense, not Marxism, to deny or ignore the fact that only America, among all capitalist powers, is still capable of conducting an independent world policy, that it is "exceptional" in this respect.

It is nonsense, not Marxism, to deny that America alone, as an "exception", gives continuing force and viability to the shrinking world system of capitalism.

"Exceptionalism", as an anti-Marxist theory, does not arise from recognizing and drawing far-reaching conclusions from such "exceptional" facts - - not any more than "nationalism", as an anti-Marxist theory, arises from a full recognition and defense of the nation.

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The American Communists have the task to become more truly American than they are, before they will be able to become more truly Marxists-Leninists than they are. They must learn the specific and concrete problems of the American working class, before they can successfully rally that class in struggle for great goals. The 14th Convention, unfortunately, did not represent another step toward that goal, but rather a step backward.

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THE 14th NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

Section V

The 14th Convention failed to face and answer the issue of trade union unity, even as it failed to answer the problem of the Marshall Plan.

In previous Party Conventions, from the time of the rise of the CIO, the problem of trade union unity was a major problem, but only in the form of the CIO-AFL split and how to bridge it. The 14th Convention was confronted, however, with new splits all along the line - - all of them unfavorable to, and seriously weakening, the Left Wing.

The most serious of these new splits are:

a) The splitting away from the Left leadership of important sections of the membership, which had in the past followed the Left most loyally, in good times and bad. Such mass desertions of the Left leadership in some cases involved the majority of former Left-supporters, as in auto (UAW), among the seamen (NMU), and in transport (TWU). In other cases they were of sufficient volume to shift the balance of power from Left to Right or Center. Everywhere they seriously weakened the Left forces.

b) The splits within the leadership of the progressive coalition; the split between the Communists and the Center group, some Left leaders splitting with the Communists and joining the Center, and the splits among the Communists themselves (attaining major proportions in the NMU).

These developments make the problem of trade union unity a major and daily problem, at all levels and all phases of trade union life. Local union branches face the sharpest problems of maintaining their unity, and from there the problem reaches out into all higher levels of trade unionism, and penetrates all phases of the general progressive movement. Unity is becoming the all-pervasive, universal problem of trade union life, because everywhere it is threatened.

How did the 14th Convention evaluate this situation, and what measures did it adopt to remedy it?

First of all, the Convention grossly underestimated the seriousness and depth of the problem. It saw only a series of individual "setbacks in some aspects of our trade union work" (p.872; emphasis by the present writer). It showed no signs of recognizing that a basic deterioration had taken place in the position of the Communist-led Left Wing, endangering its very existence as an independent effective force in the general labor movement. The facts of this basic deterioration, and the resulting danger, are glaringly obvious, but the 14th Convention shut its eyes to their meaning. It reduced the scale of the proglem, from its true proportions as a crisis in the relations of the Party to the working-class, to the distinctly lesser one of setbacks in some aspects of trade union life.

Further, the Convention dismissed any question of wrong policy on the part of the Communists having played any role in worsening the situation, as unworthy of discussion. "The main reasons were a number of objective factors", it declared. Five such factors were listed, as follows:

1. "The impact of the general offensive of American imperialism."

2. "The anti-Communist hysteria and 'red-baiting'."

3. Defection of "the former Center (Murray) forces in the CIO, who broke the Left-Center coalition."

4. "Capitulation" by former allies, and "betrayal" by Left-Wingers (naming Addes, Thomas, Curran, Adelman, Quill, Eckart, Stone, Merrill).

5. "The increase in the number of workers - - especially of young workers"..."with a resulting temporary watering-down of union consciousness." (p. 872).

Now, it is necessary to note first of all, that only No. 1 and No. 5 of this list are in reality "objective factors" in any sense; the other items relate entirely to the "subjective" situation inside the labor movement. But even the two really objective factors cannot in any way explain "setbacks" to the Left Wing, since their natural effect, unmodified by some unfavorable "subjective" influence, would strengthen the Left, not weaken it.

Examine the first item. The reactionary American bourgeoisie conducts a fierce attack against the labor movement. The Left Wing grows weaker under the blows ("impact") of this attack, according to the theory of the 14th Convention.

But why should this happen? Should not a general attack upon the labor movement cause the Left Wing to grow stronger? These blows represent the sharpening of the class struggle. Why does the 14th Convention present the questions, in the form that the sharpening of the class struggle automatically explains why the Left Wing is becoming weaker, is suffering setbacks? The very foundation of Marxian theory is that the Left grows, and can only grow, under the "impact" of sharpening class struggle. But the 14th Convention insists upon another theory, that the sharpening of the class struggle is an "objective factor" decidedly unfavorable to the growth and consolidation of the Left Wing and, in fact, need only be cited to explain satisfactorily why the Left Wing suffers most serious loss of influence in the working class.

This is profoundly false and revisionist. As an "objective factor" the blows of the enemy can explain nothing but an advance of Left Wing strength; if, instead, the Left Wing declines, then this proves that the explanation must be sought in subjective factors, in wrong policies and practices of the Left Wing and its leadership.

The same analysis applies to Item No. 5, in the 14th Convention's list of "objective factors". The Left Wing became a power in the American labor movement precisely by its superior ability to organize hitherto-unorganized workers - - "especially young workers" - - and to make of them the best, the most reliable, fighters. That was how the CIO was built, and that is why the Left became such a power within the CIO. That is how things should be expected to be! That is the nature of the Left Wing! Why is this now suddenly changed? Why can the 14th Convention, quite simply and without explanation, describe the presence of "new" workers, "especially young workers", as an "objective factor" unfavorable to and weakening the Left Wing? If the Left has not forgotten its own proved skills, forgotten the whole history of its rise as a power within the working class, then it must see in the new workers, and especially the young workers, the natural basis of the growth and extension of its power. Again the 14th Convention is found to be thinking from false, anti-Marxist and revisionist premises.

Analysis of the other three "objective" factors cited by the Convention (which are obviously really subjective factors), reveal them as simply variations of the two already examined. Why should "red baiting" now "explain" why the Left Wing declines? For 12 years the CPUSA was able, with constantly growing success, to discredit and defeat the "red baiters" within the labor movement, as well as those who attacked the labor movement from outside. When was there a more ferocious period of "red baiting", for example, than that of the San Francisco general strike, and the events leading to the rise of the CIO? What more relentless red baiter did the bourgeoisie ever put forward, than General "Ironpants" Hugh Johnson, key man in Roosevelt's first official family, head of the National Recovery Administration? When was there a more intense and general anti-Communist hysteria than that of 1939-40, when America supported the projected Anglo-French military expedition to Finland against the Soviet Union? Yet in those most difficult times the Party, with only a fraction of the material and human resources which it had in 1945, defeated the red baiters, consolidated its forces, and emerged not only without serious loss of positions but even with many gains.

Upon what grounds can it be contended that workers who joined the Left Wing during previous storms of anti-Communist hysteria and red-baiting, who stayed with the Left loyally in good times and bad, should now be deserting the Left because of a new storm of red-baiting? The "explanation" simply does not explain. If these workers now leave the Left Wing and the Party, it is not because of red-baiting, but because the Party has failed to hold their confidence.

What, further, is the true significance of item No. 3, of the Convention's list of "objective factors"? The break-up of the Left-Center coalition was doubtless a heavy blow, a big setback. Why could not the Left maintain this coalition? It was the Left which played the decisive role in building it; the coalition was founded on the growing strength of the Left. The Left-Center coalition began to disintegrate in 1945. Its disintegration was caused by the demands of the Left for more decisive authority in coalition councils at a moment when its support among the mass membership was declining! The break-up of the Left-Center coalition was the result, not the cause, of the "setbacks" of the Left Wing.

It is equally false to try to fix the cause of the split, in the divisions around the Marshall Plan and the Wallace new

party. The split was taking place long before the Marshall Plan or the new party emerged, and these issues were the convenient occasions, not the cause, for deepening the split. On the contrary, it is more in accord with the facts to say that the Center group aligned itself for the Marshall Plan and against the new party, because it was already engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the Left, because the split was already taking place, and because on these issues the Left had demonstrated its inability to rally the masses, it had shown itself as vacillating and unsure, and unable to put forward and fight for a program which the masses could understand and support.

In such a situation the Center (by the very fact that it is a "Center" and not a "Left" group) could not possibly have been expected to take a course other than the one it did, that is, move to the right and deepen its split with the Left. The Left could have maintained the coalition, on a "left of center" platform, only by maintaining the preconditions for such a course - - namely, a left-of-center counter-program to the Marshall Plan and a left-of-center balance of forces in the labor wing of the new party. When the Left, after long and serious vacillations, swung overnight and without convincing its own followers, to an intransigent extreme Left position on these issues, the split inevitably deepened.

We come, then, to item No. 4 on the Convention's list of "objective factors" causing the decline of the Left Wing, that is to the "capitulation" and"betrayal" of individual leaders formerly associated most closely with the Left.

The names of the Centrists Addes and Thomas are, for example, symbols for the situation in the United Auto Workers (UAW). Yes, Addes and Thomas have capitulated - - but the Convention failed to note the fact and draw conclusions from it, that they capitulated after, in full alliance with the Communists, they had lost the majority of their supporters among the Union membership, after an unsound policy (joint product of Addes, Thomas, and the Communists) had resulted in the desertion of a majority of their followers to the camp of Reuther. It is this mass desertion that is significant and from which lessons must be drawn; the capitulation of Addes and Thomas is only an incidental result.

The other names on the list are those of men of the Left,

who were hitherto always identified more or less closely with the Left. They are men who, witnessing the debacle in the UAW, and threatened with similar developments in their own unions, one by one and under the pressure of developments which the Left leadership offered them no policy or perspective to successfully handle, but instead gave only a leadership of military command, broke away from the Left to seek another course.

Is this phenomenon correctly and adequately described by the epithets of "betrayal" or "capitulation"?

It is true, of course, that in a period in which the Communist Party has fallen into confused, ambiguous, and false policies and practices, such a moment will be seized by false friends and weak members as the moment to capitulate or betray. But it is not true that everyone who rejects the Party leadership in which they have lost confidence is thereby, ipso facto, a traitor.

The CPUSA went through such a period in 1927-1929. At that time it was Joseph Stalin who directed our Party to the way out of the swamp of opportunism and unprincipled factionalism into which it had wandered, and put it on the highway to a fruitful 15 years of progress. Speaking of these problems of the breakdown of Party authority at that time, Stalin said:

> "...The authority of the Party must inevitably suffer in the eyes of the workers, and the workers, instead of flocking to the Party, are compelled to quit the Party ranks. And that is what we are now observing in the American Communist Party."

It is often the "best" workers, Stalin pointed out, who find themselves "forced to leave the Party."

Our present Party leaders claim that it is only the worst elements, capitulators and betrayers, who have rejected their leadership. They claim that all who have left them, have done so in order to pass over into the camp of imperialism and the Marshall Plan.

This is the kind of half-truth which serves to cover up and justify a dangerous falsehood. It is false to describe the mass desertions of Party following as a movement to the right of these masses, as capitulation and betrayal. It is false to say that all

leading figures who went with these masses, against the Party, are traitors. It is therefore only a half-truth, which covers up falsehoods, to speak of these developments only as capitulation to the enemy, because in truth they do disrupt the fight against the Marshall Plan.

The seamen of the NMU, who repudiated the Party leadership in a general membership ballot by a ratio of 5 to 2, after loyally following the Party for many years, were certainly not moved by the slightest desire to capitulate, or to support the Marshall Plan. Indeed, during the moments they were turning against the Party, they witnessed Party spokesmen voting in the CIO Convention to endorse the Marshall Plan; they read articles in the Party press, written by members of the Party's top committee, defending this action. They have never been given an explanation of why that vote, and the articles defending it, were wrong; they have never been offered the progressive counter-program to the Marshall Plan!

While the seamen were thus, by the actions of the Party, confused on the Marshall Plan, they were, however, quite clear that they could not accept the Party's practical guidance in the inner life of the NMU, that the tactics of Party spokesmen in the Union, actively supported by the Party, were intolerable. This is because the Party, while it vacillated on the Marshall Plan, fought without vacillation to remove Joseph Curran from the union leadership - - an aim which a big majority of the members, including many Communists, totally rejected. The fight against the Marshall Plan was bogged down, so far as the seamen were concerned, by the vacillations of the Party and its entanglement in the factional fight against Curran.

The situation in the NMU is only a sample of the general condition throughout the CIO, and the labor movement in general.

The 11th Convention deceived itself and the Party, when it washed its hands of any responsibility for the disintegration of the great Left Wing movement, and put the blame upon individual "capitulators", "betrayers", and "agents of Wall Street in the labor movement." It multiplied this great error, when it tried to pass its own responsibilities in this question over to the working class as a whole, when it declared (p.788):

"The working class, to the extent that it tol-

erates such leaders and their policies, participates in the responsibility for this betrayal of the cause of labor and the nation."

The arrogance of this dictum, that the working class itself is betraying the cause of labor, is a revelation of the basic cause for the decline of the Communist-led Left Wing. It is an extreme example of what Lenin described as "Communist conceit", of "superiority" and condescension toward the workers, an attitude whose end result is the attempt to set up a system of military command over the workers, instead of uniting and guiding the workers on the basis of consciousness and conviction.

The 14th Convention gave a super-abundance of commands to the American workingclass, but very little guidance. That is why it left unanswered the burning problem of trade union unity.

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THE 14th NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

SECTION VI

The 14th Convention raised the slogan "For the Mastery of Marxism". It listened to many exhortations on the importance of theory. The fact that it failed to apply Marxist theory to the most important questions before it, has been exposed and examined in previous chapters. How, then, did the Convention propose to master Marxism?

Foster, theoretical and practical leader of the Party since 1945, explained the question as follows:

> "In our Party", he said, "we have comrades who are well-developed theoretically; the trouble is, however, that our theoretical work has never been organized. On theoretical questions we have worked planlessly, on a hit and miss basis." (p. 831).

This simple statement is very informative and illuminating. Since Marxist theory is a guide to action, and the action of Marxists is the expression of their theory, it means that all the work of the Party is "on a hit and miss basis". That means, in short, that the Party is guided by pragmatism - - a characteristic American "theory" the central point of which is the exclusion of theory from practical affairs.

What did the 14th Convention decide to do about this unsatisfactory state of affairs? It approved a remedy which Foster explained he had discovered, a decision to "set up a theoretical commission in the Party."

Foster explained: "This is the first time in the history of our Party that we have had such a commission." That is true. There is no shadow of doubt also that here the CPUSA is "the first" among all Communist Parties in the world! Here it is not merely a matter of being "among the first". Never before did a Communist Party conceive the task of mastery of Marxism as one to be referred to a "theoretical commission" and solved as a problem of organization.

This wonderful new American invention, as Foster explained it, is composed of a series of "sub-commissions" to which are assigned "very practical" as well as "deeply theoretical" tasks. Since the parent of these "sub-commissions" is itself a "sub-commission" of the National Committee, its offspring should, in strict accuracy, be known as "sub-sub-commissions". (Inasmuch as the "merit" of these bodies derives from their removal of theoretical questions from the scene of operative leadership, the further the better, we may expect the later appearance of "sub-sub-sub-commissions" &).

Foster mentions only two of these sub-commissions, one to prepare a history of the Party and another on "women's work". Regarding the latter we are, surprisingly and as an exception, told of the theoretical content of its work, presumably as a sample for the whole of this elaborate organizational set-up. Foster describes it in the following words:

"I shall mention only one more of our theoretical sub-commissions. This is the commission on women's work. Undoubtedly, as regards theory, our Party is weak on this question. It is a very complex matter and for us presents many unsolved problems. The sub-commission is going to tackle some of them, especially the illusion of male superiority. Undoubtedly our Party, in spite of our position for full equality of women with men in every field of activity, is afflicted with false and harmful concepts. Of course, the general population is literally saturated with them. The commission on women's work will try to throw some light on this important question, and the men in our Party are going to have a going-over on this matter in the near future."

In this system of "theoretical sub-commissions" and sub-sub-commissions, with a content as explained in the above-quoted paragraph, we have been given without doubt the characteristic mark of Foster as theoretical and practical leader of the Party. It measures with considerable accuracy the level to which the Party has been brought by this leadership.

The "very practical" function of the "theoretical commission" in the 14th Convention was, to serve as explanation why the Convention was not asked to discuss and define its attitude toward a multitude of unanswered questions of theoretical significance. Since a "theoretical commission" had been established, it must be given time to prepare a "report", say in a year - - or two, or three - - before these questions are taken up for discussion. After all, we must have our questions well-prepared, we must not be precipitate, we must understand that to introduce planning into our planlessness will require considerable time!

What we are confronted with here is not, however, a postponement of judgment on particular complicated questions until they have been thoroughly discussed and digested by the Party. On the contrary, we have to deal with a methodical suppression of the discussion of theory, and expulsion of theory from the work of the Party, from its branches, from its National Committee, from its Conventions. It is the well-known method whereby "practical" men banish those inconvenient and embarassing theoretical considerations which would call into question the practical decisions they are making each day, and which would question the results of their work. It is anti-Marxist. It is typical American pragmatism. Marxist theory, referred to the "theoretical commission" for some later "study and report", is thus disposed of for the time, but its absence leaves a vacuum which is immediately filled by bourgeois theory.

In earlier sections of this analysis of the 14th Convention, we have been dealing with specific examples of this general process. Thus, the Convention could not wait for a report from its "theoretical commission" before approving the theory that sharpening of the class struggle is an "objective factor" unfavorable to the Left Wing, which causes masses of workers to desert its leadership. Upon this theory the Convention based its whole attitude to the most significant developments in the labor movement. Perhaps, in coming years, the "theoretical commission" may correct this false anti-Marxist theory, and keep it out of the Party textbooks. But meantime it is the false theory which is the guide to action for the Party's daily work.

The 14th Convention refused to bring forward, explain, and fight for the progressive counter-plan to the Marshall Plan. In this it was moved entirely by a theory, a theory which had not been examined or discussed in any way, a theory which has not been referred to the "theoretical commission" for a report. The theory is that, since it is wrong to speak of "progressive capitalism", and since the progressive counter-program to the Marshall Plan would, if adopted, make America (a capitalist nation) progressive in world affairs, therefore

it is wrong to even imagine there could be any other policy than the Marshall Plan, unless and until America goes to socialism. This theory has been the cause of the Left Wing being sent unarmed to fight against the Marshall Plan, and thereby the cause of the Left capitulation, when it voted in the CIO Convention to endorse the Marshall Plan. But the 14th Convention refused to correct, or even to discuss, this wrong theory. It was taken "as given", without examination, just as the theory of "objective factors" weakening the Left Wing had been swallowed. In the meantime, there is no serious struggle being conducted against the Marshall Plan in the labor movement.

The Convention could not avoid noting the revival of Trotskyist tendencies in America, and their penetration into the ranks of the Party. It condemned by name some groupings which expressed these tendencies inside the Party, when they took the form of factions against the leadership. But the Convention conducted only an organizational, not an ideological, struggle against them. It failed to explain what is wrong with their ideas, what are the roots of their errors, why they arise just now. It could not conduct an ideological struggle, because these groupings take as their starting point the conceptions and attitudes of the Party leadership itself, and demanding that these be carried to their logical conclusions. Because the Convention was unable to re-examine its own preconceptions, it was further unable to conduct an ideological battle against the neo-Trotskyists.

The same paralysis of the faculties for self-criticism prevented the Convention from facing and answering the crisis that exists in the relations between the Party and organized labor. It is certainly difficult to reconcile the great Leninist concept of the Party as vanguard of the workingclass with the present situation in which masses of workers, after following the Party loyally for years, are deserting, turning their backs upon the Party, and blunderingly trying to find their own road. But the Convention, in its "planless, hit and miss" fashion, could not even admit that the crisis exists. It spoke much, and loudly, of its "vanguard role", which it performed in the fashion of military command, issuing orders to the workers and condemning as "traitors" all who disobey those orders. It entirely overlooked the fact that the tasks of the vanguard include listening to the masses and learning from them; it entirely forgot that the vanguard must be able to persuade, to convince, to win the confidence of, the masses of workers -- that without this ability it ceases to be the vanguard.

It would be incorrect to say that the Convention engaged in no self-criticism. It did speak of weaknesses in the Party's work in the labor movement. But, in its "hit and miss" fashion, it found these weaknesses only in the form of insufficient boldness, audacity, and unrelenting firmness in pressing to the end those very policies which the workers had rejected, and which were the cause of the Party's defeats. It refused any self-criticism for the refusal to listen to the workers, to learn from them, to accept their decisions democratically arrived at. It refused any criticism for the repeated violations by Communists of the most elementary rules of trade union discipline and orderly behaviour.

In this pattern of errors and failures, and the stubborn refusal to criticize or correct them in any way, there is to be seen the clear outlines of the Trotskyist concept of "vanguardism", which is the deadly enemy of the Marxist-Leninist concept of the Party as the most advanced segment of the workingclass, which leads the whole class by virtue of the confidence and love which it has won by its practical services in everyday life. That "vanguardism" which tries to exercise the leading role of the Party by means of arbitrary authority, by military command, inevitably leads to a profound split between the Party and the workingclass. And that is what is taking place in America at the present time.

This question is the most immediately practical, as well as the most deeply theoretical. It goes to the root of the Marxist theory of history, of the role of the class struggle, of the workingclass as the bearer of socialism, of the trade unions as the fundamental phase of the rise of the workingclass as an independent force in society, of the preparation of the workingclass to assume the ruling power, to defeat the bourgeoisie, to replace capitalism with socialism.

Marxism-Leninism equally and completely repudiates both of the false concepts of socialism which, on one hand, see it as the spontaneous and automatic product of the mass organization of the workers and, on the other hand, as being imposed upon the workingclass by the authority of an elite vanguard.

It is the very essence of Marxist-Leninist theory, which must be repeated and explained again and again and again, that the Party of socialism, the vanguard, must adapt itself to the living and powerful mass movement of the workers, the organized

labor movement, as its principal source of potential power. It must be understood and applied everywhere and always, that the relation between the Party and the class is a two-fold one, which runs both ways, that the Party must teach and lead and, at the same time, must learn from and be governed by, the workingclass.

Scientific socialists, of the line of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, always based their whole program upon the workingclass as the source of all power and authority. The aim of their program is to remove all authority which presumes to set itself above the workingclass. They never tired in combatting every idea of authority over the workingclass, exercised by command, whether it was expressed by Michael Bakunin and Johann Most in the days of the First Inaternational, by the Trotskyites after the October Revolution in Russia, or by the Tito deviation today. They constantly explained that the fusion, the organic unity, of the Party of Marxist science together with the organized masses of the workingclass, was the precondition of all progress. They combatted with all their power every deviation from this line which could lead to or deepen a split between the Socialist and Labor movements. These are the very foundation stones, the ABCs, of Marxist theory.

The 14th Convention showed in its deliberations, by its handling of all questions of relations between the Party and the masses, that it was guided by a different theory, that of a "vanguardism" which derives its authority from some other source than the confidence it is able to win from the workingclass. Faced with a deepening split between itself and the workingclass, it has no explanation other than denunciation of those who leave it as "traitors", and no guide for the future other than to intensify and deepen those attitudes and policies which produced the split.

It was because the Party attempted to command the organized labor movement into the new party of Wallace, that what it actually accomplished was the opposite, to constantly diminish Wallace's labor support to the vanishing point.

It was not merely ineptness of practice, it was also a profound theoretical inadequacy, that prevented the 14th Convention from recognizing that the Wallace movement was losing its labor base, that it was becoming almost entirely a splinter party of radical middle-class character, and that to the degree that it lost its power to help the immediate solution of problems it also lost its significance for the future.

In a blind fumbling for a way out of this contradiction, the 14th Convention displayed clear signs of beginning to think of the Wallace new party as a party in transition to socialism, transferring the main emphasis from its immediate tasks to these speculations about such a future. Thereby, while sacrificing what could be immediately gained through the new party - - if it were expanded to its full potential, instead of being contracted to a minimum sectarian scope - - the 14th Convention at the same time gave freedom of development to the most opportunistic illusions. It thoroughly masked the true nature of the Wallace new party as, in program, composition, and leadership, the American counterpart of the "third force" parties in Europe. The 14th Convention could not understand this, because in Europe the "third force" is reactionary, while in America it still had the potentiality of playing a progressive role - - and the thinking that guided the Convention rejected such distinctions of time, place, and the stage of the struggle.

Thus was hidden the important fact that the "third force" in Europe is reactionary because there the task is the immediate transition to socialism, which the "third force" opposes. But in America the "third force" (or "third party") still has progressive potentialities because the chief immediate tasks still remain those of such character that they can be accomplished within the framework of capitalism. When the immediate transition to socialism becomes the chief task in America, here also the "third party", in its dominant radical middle-class section, on the whole will pass over to the side of reaction. The sharp difference between the "third party" in America and the "third force" in Europe is in essence, therefore, a reflection of the different respective stages of the class struggle on the two continents.

By refusing to face and clarify this problem, the 14th Convention not only intensified all its immediate practical errors, which lead to a rapid narrowing down and isolation of the whole Left camp, but it also loosed a flood of opportunistic illusions about finding a cheap and easy way to a mass party of socialism.

It was pure self-deception when the Convention relied, as its weapon against such illusions, upon its "escape clause" to the effect that the Communists disagree with the "progressive capitalism" concept of the "third party". This cliche, this stereotype, is not an answer to but an evasion of the issue.

The progressive potentiality of the Wallace new party is related exclusively to the present moment in American and world history, to what it can accomplish under capitalism, and not at all to any speculative contribution it might be supposed to make to a future socialism - - a speculation based upon pure illusion in flat contradiction to Marxist theory.

It was the greatest failure of the 14th Convention, that it evaded or fumbled each and every one of these problems of Marxist-Leninist theory. It proclaimed its desire to master Marxism, but showed no ability to do so.

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THE 14TH NATIONAL CONVENTION CPUSA

SECTION VII

The 14th Convention report contains much talk but very little factual information on the state of the Party organization. There is but one definite statement which is capable of analysis by reference to previously established facts, viz.:

> "During the three-year period since the Emergency Convention, our Party has grown from a membership of 52,824 to over 60,000." (p.838).

Both these figures are questionable on the record. The Emergency Convention recorded a membership of 80,000, not 52,824; and a few days before the 14th Convention opened the present membership was announced as 56,000 (this figure was published in Pravda, Moscow, as well as in America).

At the Emergency Convention it was established that the 1945 membership registration amounted to 67,000, to which was added 13,000 members on leave in the armed forces, or a total of 80,000. No explanation is offered as to why this figure is now reduced by more than one-third, nor indeed is there any supporting material whatever for these or any other figures. In the absence of any explanation, the most favorable interpretation is that a new basis for measuring the membership of three years ago and of today has been meanwhile put into effect, but this is pure conjecture.

What is always most important, however, in the Party's vital statistics, is not the absolute figures but rather the direction of development which they disclose from year to year. Therefore, if these figures are founded in some objective measurement, and are not the product of deception, they will reveal the basic facts of growth or decline, even if in a distorted fashion. We will therefore provisionally accept the unsupported statement given to the 14th Convention, as having an objective foundation even though it is a different one from that used at the Emergency Convention, and proceed upon that basis to analyze the dynamics of Party member-

ship over the past 18 years.

The following table, covering the eight years before World War II, is constructed on the basis of data published in official Party Convention and National Committee Meeting reports:

CHANGES IN THE VOLUME OF MEMBERSHIP OF CPUSA.

At Beginning of the Year of:	Total Membership	Increase During Previous Year.	Percentage Increase.
1930	7,500		
1931	8,339	839	11 %
1932	12,936	4,597	55 %
1933	16,814	3,878	30 %
1934	24,500	7,686	45 %
1935	30,000	5,500	22 %
1936	40,000	10,000	33 %
1938	75,000	35,000 (two yrs)	36 %

The average annual rate of increase over the eight pre-war years, was thus almost exactly one-third, or 33%. Since this is figured each year on the increased number, by geometrical progression (like compound interest), the membership was multiplied by ten times in eight years.

The first war years constituted a period of fundamental readjustments of organization, during which statistics are incomplete and not comparable with those of 1930-1938. Over 80% of the Party's organizational cadres were inducted into the Army, and had to be replaced by comparatively untrained substitutes. Nevertheless, by 1943 relative stability had again been achieved, and the whole intervening period is summed up by the registration early in 1944, which showed 53,000 members, plus about 13,000 in the armed forces, or a total of 66,000. Continuing the above table, then, we arrive at the following:

1944	66,000	9,000 loss during 6 yrs.	2% per yr.
1945	80,000	14,000 increase	20% inc.

At this point the continuity of the table is broken by the unexplained reduction of the 1945 figure (in the statement to the 14th Convention) from 80,000 to 52,824. This drop of 27,176 may be the result of adoption of a new base of measurement, or

it may be a deliberate revision of the previous figure on the grounds that it was inflated (although the two sets of figures were compiled by the same apparatus, composed of the same persons). And there are two possible ways to continue the comparison, first to disregard the "revision" of the figures and treat it as a loss (a membership asset "written off" as "worthless"), or, second, to deal with the new figures as a new series with a different base and, therefore, comparable only as to trend and not as to absolute figures. These two different methods give the following two different results:

First Method:

1945	80,000	
1948	60,000	20,000 loss during 3 yrs. 10% per yr.

Second Method:

1945	52,824	
1948	60,000	7,176 Incr. during 3 yrs. 4% per yr.

These figures reveal that if statistics are taken without revision there is a decline of 10% annually since 1945, while if the new figures are taken at their face value there is an increase of 4% annually.

In either case, however, the fundamental trend stands out clearly: The Party has lost its normal capacity for growth. Even when we accept the most favorable interpretation possible, we obtain the following comparative dynamics of membership:

For 8-year pre-war average, 33 % increase.

For 1944, last full war year, 20 % increase.

For 1945-1948, 3 post-war years, 4 % increase.

Comparing pre-war with post-war, that is to say, the Party has lost seven-eighths of its recruiting power; comparing 1944 with 1945-1948, it has lost four-fifths of its recruiting power.

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As against this loss, there was registered in the 14th Convention a tremendous expansion of one phase of Party work, namely, the collection of money. In the report on organization, we read:

> "A high point of Party activity was reached in the Spring of 1947, at the time when the late Secretary of Labor Schwellenbach, proposed the outlawing of the Party. In answer to this attack our Party raised a fighting fund of $250,000 in less than 25 days. In fact, more than $1,000,000 was actually raised by the Districts." (p.835). "Our Party again appealed for a $500,000 fund to fight the Mundt Bill, and the membership responded, even though it had just carried through the Party-Press Fighting Fund Drive." (p.836).

There is no reason to doubt that the two cited instances are characteristic of the whole past two years, that the Party has received an abundance of finances beyond its previous most optimistic dreams, that the masses expressed their abhorrence of the anti-Communist hysteria by the most liberal donations of money.

This positive aspect of the mass defense of the Party has been accompanied, however, by a very negative development, which has a heavier political weight. There has occurred a very obvious shift of the center of gravity in Party activity, away from the self-activity of the membership and branches and away from the working-class, in the direction of the activity of the full-time paid apparatus of Party functionaries, which has expanded many-fold, and in the direction of the radical middle class.

In other words, the Party is in the process of losing its basic character as a workingclass Party.

This growing dependence upon its middle-class supporters reflects, as does the loss of most of the Party's recruiting power, the influence of the crisis in the relations between the Party and the trade unions, the split between Socialism and the mass labor movement.

The 14th Convention record is filled with evidence of this fact, and with feverish appeals to change it - - but no indication whatever of how it can be changed.

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Among the most serious symptoms of deterioration of inner-Party life has been the rise of a plague of small factional groups, mostly of a semi-Trotskyist character, during the past three years. The 14th Convention mentioned some of these by name, and proclaimed an organizational war against them. But it gave no political analysis of their significance. And the Convention concealed the extent to which this disease has penetrated the Party, and concealed the fact that the weapon of expulsion is practically the sole weapon with which they are combatted.

During the past three years there have been thousands of expulsions from the Party, unquestionably many times more than in the entire previous 26 years of the Party's existence. There was no report and examination of this question, however, in the Convention.

This phenomenon goes to confirm the conclusion, indicated by many other factors, that the decline of Party authority in the labor movement has been accompanied by a decline in the Party authority among its own members.

In the attempt to stem this wave of demoralization, the Party leadership has more and more abandoned the methods of education, persuasion, and conviction, and taken up the methods of military command within the Party, in much the same fashion and extent that it has tried to do in the broad labor movement. But whereas in the labor movement, there has been mass rejection of the commanding attitude, within the Party it has been accepted by and large without open revolt, except for isolated groups which have immediately lost their way in the swamp of Trotskyism. The system of military command has been frozen, as the only correct expression of the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, and was confirmed by the 14th Convention in the slogan: "Root out all petty-bourgeois concepts regarding Party democracy." (p.856)

It is, however, the present system of military command, of arbitrary authority, which is properly to be characterized as petty-bourgeois in character. The Leninist, the proletarian, concept of democratic centralism bases itself in winning the confidence of the working class, which the 14th Convention completely forgot about. The CPUSA, before it can solve its inner-Party problems and before it can restore its relations with the labor movement, will find it necessary to re-learn some fundamental lessons taught us long ago by Lenin and Stalin.

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The 14th Convention report makes it clear that the guiding slogan of the Party leadership, borrowed from the French Revolution of the 18th century, is "Audacity, more audacity, always audacity." It criticized itself only for not being audacious enough. It forgot that Lenin approved of that slogan as a guide only for the moment of armed uprising, and condemned it as a crime at other times. Following its false line, the 14th Convention scolded and threatened the working class, and accused the class of betraying its own cause. It scolded and threatened its own members, and accused them of all mistakes and weaknesses. But it was supremely confident of its own full righteousness. It suffered from a swelled head.

Many years ago Stalin uttered words which sound as though they were directed to the CPUSA of today. He said:

> "The authority of the Party is maintained by the confidence of the workingclass. The confidence of the workingclass is not to be won by force, for the use of force would kill confidence. It can only be won if the Party theory is sound, if the Party policy is correct, if the Party is devoted to the cause of the workingclass, if the Party is closely linked with the masses of the workingclass, and if the Party is ready and able to convince the masses that its slogans are the right ones." (Leninism, Vol. I, p. 37).

Stalin spoke sharply against those who think they can solve problems by invoking "the authority of the Party." He said:

> "Unless these conditions are fulfilled, 'the authority of the Party' and 'the iron discipline of the workingclass' are but an idle boast." (p. 41).

Stalin expanded this thought much further, and declared that even when Party policy is "right in the main", still the Party must know how to "wait" when "the time is not yet ripe." Here is how Stalin developed this important point:

> "Now let us contemplate another possibility. Let us suppose that, owing to the political backwardness of the workingclass, the Party policy (though right in the main) does not inspire general confidence or command general support; let us suppose that the Party has not yet been able to convince the workingclass that its policy is sound, the reason being (as the phrase runs) that the time is not yet ripe. In such a case, is the Party to take a decided initiative? Should the Party try to give a strong trend to the actions of the masses? No, certainly not! In such cases the Party, if it is to lead effectively, must know how to wait until it has convinced the masses that its policy is sound, must help the masses to learn this by their own experience." (p. 44).

In the development of this argument, Stalin quoted the words of Lenin, who branded as a "crime", "worse than a blunder", the plunging of the vanguard into a decisive action before the masses are ready to support it. Lenin's words, quoted by Stalin, were:

> "The vanguard cannot conquer unaided. It would be worse than a blunder, it would be a crime, to send the vanguard into the fighting line before the class as a whole (the broad mass) is ready to support it, or at least to show benevolent neutrality and fully determined not to go over to the enemy....For this the masses must have learned by their own political experience."

Stalin, as Lenin before him, always insisted that the Party should listen to "the voice of the masses." He said:

> "Now, especially, the Party must be ready to pay close attention to the voice of the masses; must have a fine ear for their demands; must display extreme caution and show peculiar elasticity in its policy. Now, more than ever, will the Party leadership of the masses be imperilled if Communists should suffer from swelled head. Let us never forget Lenin's golden words at the Eleventh Party Congress:
>
> " 'Among the masses of the people, we Communists are but drops in the ocean, and we cannot rule unless we give accurate expression to the folk consciousness."

The 14th Convention forgot Lenin's golden words!

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This examination of the 14th Convention was written during September and October. Just as the final section was being written there occurred the November 2nd elections. The results upset the applecarts of all the experts, none more so than the leaders of the 14th Convention. There has not been time to formulate the most important lessons of the November 2nd upheaval, but a few of the most obvious may be noted here in conclusion:

The 14th Convention nailed to its mast the banner:

> "A vote for either Truman or Dewey means a vote for eventual fascism and war."

But the masses, in the last months of the campaign, turned to the support of Truman, and the results were hailed all over the earth as a mandate for peace and progress!

The 14th Convention proclaimed:

> "The new party is shattering the deadly two-party system."

But the masses, operating within the two-party system, succeeded in registering their will beyond any doubt, and gave the two-party system its most decisive victory in generations, and a new lease on life.

The 14th Convention declared:

> "Inevitably the new party will rally support from all democratic and peace-minded sections of the population."

But the masses gave the new party only a little more than 500,000 votes in New York, and 600,000 votes in all the rest of the country, surely a miserly measure for "all democratic and peace-minded" Americans.

The 14th Convention did not know what was going on among the masses. That is a fatal defect for a Communist Party.

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Never before since 1929, did an American Communist Convention demonstrate that it had lost contact with the workingclass, that it did not know what the masses were thinking and feeling, as did the 14th Convention demonstrate so completely.

The present leadership of the Communist Party has cut a deep gulf between itself and the labor movement, between itself and the broad masses.

That gulf can be filled, and the Party can resume its proper place in the vanguard of the workingclass, only if the Party corrects its false policies, begins again to listen to the masses, and learns the full lessons of its present isolation.

- the end -

by
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