

The Role of the Socialist Party Leaders in the Struggle Against War and Fascism

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ANOTHER chapter in the history of the struggle for a united front against war and fascism has now been finished, from which definite conclusions can be established regarding the role of the Socialist Party leaders on the basis of our concrete experiences in the United States.

The incident which marks the end of this chapter is the withdrawal from the National Committee of the American League Against War and Fascism of the last of those national figures of the Socialist Party who had been formally on record for the united front and who had become known as "left" representatives through their activities in the American League. The history of the experiences since the United Front Manifesto of last spring, issued by the Communist Party, constitutes a most serious political lesson for the American working class. It is necessary, therefore, to review systematically the whole chain of events of this period.

The United Front Manifesto of the Communist Party created tremendous interest and support among broad circles and especially among the working class members of the Socialist Party. This began to crystallize itself around the Provisional Committee which had been established to organize a general United States Congress Against War to which were invited all working class and anti-war organizations. This Committee from the beginning was unconditionally supported by the Communist Party and at all times represented in its composition a majority of non-Communist elements. It was the broadest united front that has been developed in the United States in the post-war period. Its appeal became so great that finally the Socialist Party National Committee considered it necessary to take a stand and conduct maneuvers designed to break up this united front.

This maneuver was carried out in the following way: The Socialist Party National Committee decided to adhere to the United States Congress Against War provided satisfactory conditions could be worked out between its representatives and the Arrangements Committee. A conference was held in which the Socialist Party representatives proposed the addition of eleven Socialist leaders to the

Arrangements Committee and at the same time raised the question of stopping all criticism of one organization by another as a condition for the united front. The Arrangements Committee, on motion of the representative of the Communist Party, accepted the nominations to the committee and declared that the question of criticism would be dealt with by the Arrangements Committee only in relation to the preparations for the Congress, that all questions regarding such preparations should be thrashed out in the Arrangements Committee before public criticisms were made. On its part the Communist Party immediately published a statement of policy, making clear its attitude on these questions to everyone. This statement, published in the *Daily Worker* of July 17, declared:

"It was the representative of the Communist Party, Comrade Robert Minor, who made the motion which was adopted to accept the eleven nominations of the Socialist Party. Comrade Minor correctly declared that the Communists have no interest in limiting the Congress or its preparatory committees and no desire to establish any organizational control. In the Arrangements Committee neither can there be any question raised which predetermines the decisions of the projected Congress. The calling of the Congress is not yet the establishment of a united front. It is only one step in that direction. The Congress itself, by the program which it will adopt, must furnish the real foundation of the united front in the struggle against war.

"The Organizing Committee for the Anti-War Congress very wisely adopted, from the beginning, the policy that all participating organizations preserve the complete right to agitate and propagandize their own special views on the question of war, and to attempt to win the Congress to their particular proposals. This right, of course, includes that of mutual criticism. . . . If and when the Anti-War Congress now in preparation adopts such a minimum program of struggle against war, the Communist Party declares its readiness to enter into such a united front of struggle for this program. The Communists will loyally fight for this program, together with every organization and every individual who sincerely and honestly performs his part in such a fight. The Communist Party is even prepared to suspend its criticism of other organizations in the united front during the execution of the united actions, provided that the agreed-upon measures of struggle are carried through unhesitatingly and loyally to the end. It reserves the right at all times to expose and denounce every breach of agreement, every sabotage or betrayal of the struggle."

The Communist Party considered this public declaration necessary because we had no confidence that the leaders of the Socialist Party earnestly desired to help build a real united front. Our misgivings were quickly confirmed. Within a few weeks the Socialist Party publicly withdrew its signature to the united front call, as their first act after affiliating to the Committee.

The Socialist Party explained its withdrawal as being caused by resentment at continued Communist criticism of Socialist policy throughout the world and in the United States, interpreting their entry into the Committee as having given them a guarantee of the cessation of criticism.

Of course no such guarantee had been or could be given. But that this was not their real motive, but merely a convenient excuse, was revealed clearly by the fact that the action of the National Committee in withdrawing from the Anti-War Congress had been taken on the basis of a letter from the New York City Committee of the Socialist Party to the National Committee, which had demanded this action as a question of principle. This letter is a historical document which must not be forgotten. The letter opens with a statement that the writers have learned of the decision to affiliate to the Anti-War Committee by reading the minutes of the National Committee, and then proceeds:

“Your action has caused considerable misgivings among the members of Local New York, and at the last meeting of its Executive Committee, it was decided to ask the N.E.C. to withdraw from the conference for the reasons stated in this letter. The undersigned committee was elected for the purpose of communicating our opinion to you.”

The letter then proceeds to explain that the New York leaders of the Socialist Party are opposed to any united front, whatever the conditions. The letter states bluntly that it is a fixed, a “consistent” policy of all Socialist Parties affiliated to the Labor and Socialist International *not* to join a united front against war, and gives this as the reason for the N.E.C. to try to break up the Anti-War Congress. The letter says:

“The N.E.C. has evidently not realized that by the proposed participation the Socialist Party of America has placed itself at variance with the L.S.I. The Labor and Socialist International and all affiliated parties have consistently refused to join similar conferences, as, for instance, those at Amsterdam and Paris. . . . Believing, as we do, in solidarity with the International, we are opposed to participating in the proposed conference, even if the conditions laid down by the N.E.C. were strictly lived up to.”

It was on the basis of this letter that the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party decided to withdraw from the Anti-War Congress.

The Socialist Party leaders had calculated that this maneuver would succeed in breaking up the Congress. They were mistaken. The United States Congress Against War had taken too deep roots

to be so easily broken up. A few weeks later 2,700 delegates gathered in the Congress from all over the United States, representing the broadest variety of organizations.

CREIDENTIAL COMMITTEE REPORT

"Report of the Credential Committee submitted by Delegate Jack Herling: This report covers the delegates registered at this Congress up until 10 A.M. Sunday morning. We have not questioned the right of any delegate to this Congress to be seated.

"Delegates are present at this Congress from 35 states in the United States and from three foreign countries. The total number of delegates at present registered is 2,616, listed under the following general categories:

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|----------------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| Anti-War and Peace Org.. | 178 | Communist Party | 130 |
| Anti-Fascist Org. | 19 | Young Communist League | 70 |
| Labor Defense and Relief. | 172 | Socialist Party | 9 |
| Educational and Cultural. | 364 | Y. P. Socialist League.... | 1 |
| Religious Groups | 14 | Other Political Parties | |
| Language Labor Groups.. | 253 | (Conference for Prog. | |
| Fraternal Labor Org.... | 370 | Labor Action, Comm. | |
| Trade Unions | 450 | Party Opposition, Official | |
| Factory Committees | 147 | Representatives) | 18 |
| Unemployed Organizations | 135 | People's Lobby | 5 |
| Farmers' Organizations .. | 41 | Continental Congress | 1 |
| Veterans' Organizations .. | 37 | National Guard | 1 |
| Women's Organizations .. | 106 | Rifle Club | 1 |
| Negro Organizations | 19 | Anti-War Mass Meetings. | 4 |
| General Youth Org. | 129 | Miscellaneous | 19 |
| Student Groups | 79 | League of Nations Ass'n | 1 |

In the United States Congress Against War further efforts were made to break up the Congress from within by the Lovestone renegade group. This proved so overwhelmingly unpopular with the mass of Congress delegates that it was quickly defeated and those leaders who had a tendency to rally themselves to such an effort to split the Congress retreated.

The Congress unanimously adopted a manifesto and program for the struggle against war. This manifesto and program was the foundation for a united struggle against war and fascism to which every delegate present in the Congress pledged himself and to secure the endorsement and active collaboration of his organization. It is well that everyone should reread that document as the foundation for judgment as to who has been true to the pledges of this Congress. The document reads as follows:

"Appeal to the Working Men and Women of America;
"To All Victims of War:

"The black cloud of imperialist war hangs over the world. The peoples must arouse themselves and take immediate action against the

wars now going on in the Far East and Latin America, against intervention in Cuba, against the increasing preparations for war, and against the growing danger of a new world war.

"After ten years of futility, the World Disarmament Conference is meeting again to perform once more the grim comedy of promises, to screen the actions of the imperialist governments which are preparing more intensively than ever before in history a new war. The Four-Power Pact is already exposed as nothing but a new maneuver for position in the coming war between the imperialist rivals, and an attempt to establish a united imperialist front against the Soviet Union. The rise of Fascism in Europe and especially in Germany, and the sharpened aggressive policy of Japanese militarism, have brought all the imperialist antagonisms to the breaking point and greatly increased the danger of a war of intervention against the Soviet Union. The greatest naval race in history is now on among the United States, England and Japan. The British-American antagonism is being fought out in Latin-America already by open war—the so-called local wars being in reality struggles between these imperialist powers. The presence of thirty American warships in Cuban waters is itself an act of war against the Cuban revolution. The collapse of the World Economic Conference revealed only too clearly that the great powers are unable and unwilling to solve the basic international problems by peaceful means and that they will resort to a new imperialist war in an attempt to divert the attention of the masses from their misery and as the only capitalist way out of the crisis.

"The rapid rise of Fascism is closely related to the increasing war danger. Fascism means forced labor, militarization, lower standards of living, and the accentuation of national hatreds and chauvinist incitements as instruments for the 'moral' preparation for war. It sets the people of one country against the people of another, and exploits the internal racial and national groups within each country in order to prevent them from uniting in joint action to solve their common problems.

"The war danger arises inevitably out of the very nature of monopolistic capitalism—the ownership of the means of production by a small capitalist class and the complete domination of government by this class. The imminent war danger is only another expression of the fundamental crisis of the capitalist system, which continues its existence only at the cost of intensification of exploitation and oppression of the masses at home and in the colonies, and of struggle among the imperialist powers for a redivision of markets and sources of raw materials.

"Only in the Soviet Union has this basic cause of war been re-

moved. There are no classes or groups which can benefit from war or war preparations. Therefore the Soviet Union pursues a positive and vigorous peace policy and alone among the governments proposes total disarmament. Serious struggle against war involves rallying all forces around this peace policy and opposing all attempts to weaken or destroy the Soviet Union.

“The government of the United States in spite of peaceful professions is more aggressively than ever following policies whose only *logical* result is war. The whole program of the Roosevelt administration is permeated by preparedness of war, expressed in the extraordinary military and naval budget, mobilization of industry and manpower, naval concentration in the Pacific Ocean, intervention in Cuba, the continued maintenance of armed forces in China, the loans to Chiang Kai-shek, the initiation of currency and tariff wars—all of which give the lie to the peaceful declarations of the U.S. government.

“Under the guise of public works, the N.R.A. has diverted immense funds from the care of starving millions to the building of a vastly larger navy and to mechanization of the army. The widespread unemployment has been utilized to concentrate young men in so-called reforestation camps, which the War Department is using for trial military mobilizations. The military training of youth in the schools and colleges is being further developed. More and more, national holidays and specially prepared demonstrations are being used to glorify the armed forces and to stimulate the war spirit among the masses. Hundreds of factories are working overtime to produce munitions and basic war materials for shipment to the warring countries in South America and the Far East. A centralized war control of industry, along the lines of the War Industries Board of 1917, is being established. As in 1917, it is drawing the upper leadership of many trade unions into active collaboration in the war machine.

“This Congress against war warns the masses against reliance upon the League of Nations and Kellogg Pact as effective instruments of peace. The Congress declares that this illusion becomes particularly dangerous at the present moment, especially when it is put forth as in the recent Congress of the Labor and Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions as a method of combatting the war danger. We can effectively combat war only by arousing and organizing the masses within each country for active struggle against the war policies of their own imperialist governments, whether these governments are working individually or through the League of Nations.

“The Congress declares that the basic force in the imperialist

countries for struggle against the war danger is the working class, organizing around it in close alliance all of the exploited sections of the population, working farmers, intellectuals, the oppressed Negro people and all toiling masses and all organizations and groups which are generally opposed to war on any basis. This anti-war movement allies itself with the masses in the colonial and semi-colonial countries against imperialist domination, and gives full support to their immediate and unconditional independence.

PROGRAM

"The Congress endorses the program of the World Congress Against War held in Amsterdam in August, 1932. It pledges itself to do all in its power to effect a nation-wide agitation and organization against war preparations and war. To this end we join together in carrying out the following immediate objectives:—

"To work towards the stopping of the manufacture and transporting of munitions and all other materials essential to the conduct of war, through mass demonstrations, picketing and strikes.

"To expose everywhere the extensive preparations for war being carried on under the guise of aiding National Recovery.

"To demand the transfer of all war funds to relief of the unemployed and the replacement of all such devices as the Civilian Conservation Camps, by a federal system of social insurance paid for by the government and employers.

"To oppose the policies of American imperialism in the Far East, in Latin America, especially now in Cuba, and throughout the world; to support the struggles of all colonial peoples against the imperialist policies of exploitation and armed suppression.

"To support the peace policies of the Soviet Union, for total and universal disarmament which today with the support of masses in all countries constitute the clearest and most effective opposition to war throughout the world; to oppose all attempts to weaken the Soviet Union, whether these take the form of misrepresentation and false propaganda, diplomatic maneuvering or intervention by imperialist governments.

"To oppose all developments leading to Fascism in this country and abroad, and especially in Germany; to oppose the increasingly widespread use of armed forces against the workers, farmers and the special terrorizing and suppression of Negroes in their attempts to maintain a decent standard of living; to oppose the growing encroachments upon the civil liberties of these groups as a growing fascization of our so-called 'democratic' government.

"To win the armed forces to the support of this program.

"To enlist for our program the women in industry and in the home; and to enlist the youth, especially those who, by the crisis,

have been deprived of training in the industries and are therefore more susceptible to fascist and war propaganda.

"To give effective international support to all workers and anti-war fighters against their own imperialist governments.

"To form committees of action against war and fascism in every important center and industry, particularly in the basic war industries; to secure the support for this program of all organizations seeking to prevent war; paying special attention to labor, veteran, unemployed and farmer organizations.

"By virtue of the mandate granted by the thousands of delegates from all sections of this country and groups of the population which bear the burden of imperialist war who, though they differ in political opinions, trade union affiliations, religious beliefs, and the methods of carrying on the struggle against war, are bound together by their desire for peace, and on the strength of its unshakable conviction that the struggle against imperialist war is useful only to the extent to which it effectively interferes with and check-mates imperialist war plans, this Congress calls upon the working class, the ruined and exploited farmers, the oppressed Negro people, the sections of the middle class bankrupted by the crisis, the groups of intellectuals of all occupations, men, women and youth, together, to organize their invincible force in disciplined battalions for the decisive struggle to defeat imperialist war."

From the time of the Congress Against War until February, 1934, serious beginnings were made in establishing a broad foundation of local committees and conferences throughout the country to carry on the daily work of the League and prepare for the Second U.S. Congress Against War. This work included such national actions as the delegation to Washington at the opening of Congress to protest against the war budgets; and a whole series of local and regional conferences including Chicago, San Francisco, Boston and students' conferences involving student bodies of scores of universities and colleges.

During this period, some Socialists actively participated in the work of the central leadership, notably J. B. Matthews, chairman; Francis Henson, one of the two secretaries, and Mary Fox, from the League for Industrial Democracy. The Socialist Party, however, never accepted this situation of their members participating in the united front against war and fascism. They put more and more heavy pressure against these leaders to force them to withdraw.

On February 16, and the days immediately following, these Socialists and two others announced their withdrawal from the active support of the League, declaring as their reason the events in the Madison Square Garden which they declared had been caused by

the Communists, which made it impossible for them to further cooperate in any organization that included Communists.

It throws a different light upon this action, however, to know that already before this date, the withdrawal had been determined upon by a Socialist Party conference which included some of these leaders. We quote from the minutes of the City Executive Committee of the Socialist Party meeting of January 24, which received a report of its sub-committee which had been set up to determine the duties of Socialist Party members in the L.I.D. and other "independent" organizations. This sub-committee had acted in meetings on December 21, 1933, and January 4, 1934, with the participation among others of Mary Fox, Monroe Sweetland, David Lasser, Joseph Lash and Jack Herling, who occupied leading posts in the American League Against War and Fascism. Among other questions discussed was that of "entrance into united front arrangements with Communists by Socialist Party members through L.I.D. activity contrary to the policies of the Socialist Party". The aim of the committee was declared to be "to arrive at a statement of policy governing future conduct". The conclusion of the committee was that "Party members should work and fight in their independent organizations against the united front with Communists when the Party does not consider the Communists' action genuine and sincere, but quite on the contrary, harmful and aimed to destroy the entire Socialist movement."

It was in carrying out this decision that the Socialist Party leaders later thought that they had found an appropriate excuse in the incidents at the Madison Square Garden.

The American League Against War and Fascism, confronted with the desertion from its national leadership by the Socialist Party members, was forced to take a position and evaluate the effects of these desertions. This was done in a statement signed on behalf of the League by Roger Baldwin of the Civil Liberties Union, Annie E. Gray of the Women's Peace Society, and Earl Browder for the Communist Party. This statement reads as follows:

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN LEAGUE AGAINST WAR AND FASCISM

"The Bureau of the National Executive Committee of the American League Against War and Fascism has before it the resignations of certain of its members connected with the League for Industrial Democracy. At the same time the Chairman of the Executive Committee resigns his post without resigning from the League. The reasons brought forward for the resignations center around the occurrence in the Madison Square Garden meeting of February 15.

"The Bureau of the League expresses its deep regret for the development of antagonisms which in any way contribute to widen-

ing the breach between any groups of sincere opponents to war and fascism. All such divisions bring joy to the war-makers and fascists. All of the efforts of the League have been to bridge existing divisions and to bring about united action on the basis of the program adopted in the great U. S. Congress Against War, September 30 and October 1, 1933.

"The League has used its efforts in the past, and will continue in the future, to avoid conflict or disruption among the forces fighting against war and fascism, whether members of the League or not. Agreements have been sought and will be sought, to promote the greatest possible unity and to prevent disunity—while preserving the fullest freedom of all organizations to conduct in their own way their campaigns. The League is not and will not be dominated by one political party. No majority in any committee now does or will represent any political party.

"The Bureau records with satisfaction that, in every case where it has succeeded in initiating a joint action, the result has been the drawing together of hitherto separated forces, thus strengthening the whole struggle against war and fascism. The highly successful conferences following the U.S. Congress Against War that were held in Chicago, San Francisco, Boston and many smaller cities; the series of students' anti-war conferences held in Columbia, New York University and regional conferences involving student groups from scores of universities; the delegation to Washington at the opening of Congress to oppose the war budget; the successful mass demonstrations and parades against Austrian fascism held under the auspices of the League in Chicago and Pittsburgh; these and innumerable smaller instances prove the vitality of the League's progress and the necessity of its work.

"The enthusiastic support that has developed for the magazine *Fight*, published by the League, and its widespread and growing circulation among the most diverse groupings throughout the country, give further evidence of the deep-felt need for precisely this organization.

"The League does not assume the function of passing judgment upon such disputes as that which gave rise to the resignation of a few members of its committee. It must emphatically be stated that no controversies as to tactics constitute a valid reason for abandonment of the program and principles of the League. Now more than ever this program is necessary. The extreme sharpening of the war danger and the rise of fascism throughout the world are putting a severe test upon all avowed enemies of war and fascism. It is to be expected that there will be desertions in this most difficult pre-war period. This is all the more reason why all true fighters against war

and fascism will steadfastly maintain and promote the principles and program of the League.

"The League urges all its members to stand firm on this position and energetically promote and extend the League organization and build a broader mass circulation for the magazine *Fight Against War and Fascism* and prepare for the second great U.S. Congress Against War, which, as decided last year, will occur in the coming fall. The League sincerely invites those few who have left to reconsider their position and return to their fighting posts. To replace those who remain outside, the League undertakes to bring reinforcements a hundredfold and to build an ever stronger united mass movement of all forces against war and fascism."

In the above statement, it is made clear that the American League Against War and Fascism will proceed with its work more energetically than ever and replace all deserters with additional reinforcements, that it will especially concentrate on building broader mass circulation of the magazine *Fight Against War and Fascism*, and prepare for the second great Congress Against War.

A special problem arose in connection with the position of J. B. Matthews. Matthews had been elected by the Congress to the Executive Committee of the League, which, in turn, had elected him as chairman and member of the Bureau of the Committee. On February 21 Matthews telegraphed from Detroit where he was on a speaking tour that he was "resigning chairmanship American League". Upon his return to New York, when questioned in the office of the League as to the meaning of his telegram, he stated that it "meant nothing more nor less than he said in the telegram." The other officers of the League, after a week's vain efforts to interview Matthews, finally called a meeting of the Bureau, including Matthews, stating in the letter calling this meeting that "this letter is being sent to all members of the Bureau who have not yet resigned". Matthews did not attend this meeting, but sent a letter in which he said, "I had hoped to attend the Bureau meeting this afternoon, but it is absolutely out of the question". He then proceeded to state his opinion that the difficulties confronting the League are "insurmountable" and asked that the further decisions of the Bureau be communicated to him. In this letter, he further declared, "my resignation as chairman meant only what it actually said and concealed no implied judgments beneath the words". It was upon this basis that the League's statement declared that "the Chairman of the Executive Committee resigns his post without resigning from the League". After the issuance of this statement, Matthews wrote a further letter on March 11 which registered his "astonishment" that his communications had been so interpreted and said, "Let us clear up

any further possible misunderstanding making it final and unequivocal that I bear no relationship of any character whatsoever to the League”.

The evolution of Matthews' position may be further understood in the light of certain other facts. For example: he was under charges in the Socialist Party for expulsion on the grounds of his activity in connection with the League; he was called for trial during the period in which these resignations were taking place and used his resignation as a defense against expulsion from the Socialist Party; the Socialist Party thereupon decided not to expel him but to suspend him from membership for one year; thereafter the *New Leader*, the official Socialist organ of New York City, began for the first time in more than a year to advertise Matthews as a speaker before Socialist Party branches; the League for Industrial Democracy sent him on a long speaking trip on its behalf.

Since this latest large-scale concerted effort of the Socialist Party leaders to break up the American League Against War and Fascism, events have already demonstrated that again they have failed. The League is, on the contrary, again moving forward, gaining broader support and serving more than ever as the rallying center for all forces sincerely opposed to fascism and war. In the few weeks that have elapsed we have already witnessed a broad conference in New Jersey which voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with the League. At the Student Conference Against War and Fascism in Columbia University, the forces of the Socialist Party and L.I.D. made a determined and bitter assault against the League, trying to prevent the conference from affiliating, but without success. By an overwhelming vote the conference confirmed its affiliation and adopted a program fully in harmony with that of the League Against War and Fascism. The Chicago committee, elected by a broad conference in that city some months ago, has endorsed the statement of the Bureau regarding the resignations. New forces of considerable significance which had hitherto not been drawn into the work of the League, have declared their adherence and taken over direct responsibilities for its work.

In these experiences of the past year in the effort to build a broad united front against war and fascism, we have classical examples of the role of the Socialist Party leadership in its relation to the question of working class unity. These events have taken place at a moment of the extreme sharpening of the war danger. At every stage of development of this movement against fascism and war, the Socialist Party had only one determining aim in mind. That was to prevent at all costs the collaboration of the Communists in this movement—that is, to prevent the unification of all forces against fascism and

war. It was ready to break, not only with the Communists, but with the large majority of non-Communist organizations and individuals in this movement rather than be associated with a movement that included Communists. Such intransigence on organization questions, is of course, only the cover for the Socialist Party opposition to the program of struggle laid down. They fight against the League because the League has a clear platform of struggle against war and fascism. They think that if they can exclude the Communists from the League they will have a chance to break the remaining elements away from this program of struggle and lead it towards collaboration with the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal policies leading to war and fascism, a collaboration which the Socialist Party is developing more and more clearly with every new development of the crisis.

The record of these experiences therefore becomes an essential part of the experience of the entire working class in the United States, gives the basis for a correct evaluation of the Socialist Party leadership and its self-assumed role of fighter against the united front of all sincere enemies of war and fascism.

This record should be preserved for the education and information of all new rising forces of leadership organized in this broad mass movement against war and fascism.
