

'Lovestoneites' and Progressives

by Ben Gitlow

The article by Herman Morgenstern in the *Day* of July 5, 1932 is a very interesting one. The article maintains that the "Lovestoneites" are in a "tragic" position in the right wing unions. The writer refers to the needle trades unions and to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in particular. He bases his conclusions on the recent developments in the I.L.G.W.U. He maintains that the mistake which the "Lovestoneites" made when they returned to the right wing unions is responsible for their present plight. Instead of carrying on an independent course for the purpose of spreading their views, the "Lovestoneites" made the error of uniting with existing groups of the old regime which they found in the unions when they rejoined them. The groups, the writer claims, only assumed a cloak of progressivism to win the support of the left wing masses who were returning to the unions due to the collapse of the dual-union policy of the official Communist Party. To these groups of the old regime an alliance, a wedding as he calls it, with the "Lovestoneites" was everything to be desired. It fitted into their plans and afforded them the opportunity to appear before the masses, as long as it was advantageous, as progressives. When the time came that either they must act as progressives or lose their positions, they discarded their progressive cloak and appeared in their true light as part and parcel of the old regime. And the "Lovestoneites," much to their surprise, awoke one morning to find that the bride had flown, that those with whom they had united had acted in such a way that, under no circumstances, could they approve or be responsible for their acts. The "Lovestoneites" were left abandoned without sufficient strength to go it alone and to go along was also quite impossible because it placed upon them the responsibility for sins of others which, under no circumstances, could they bear.

What Are The Facts?

Let us examine the situation, deal with the facts and draw the necessary conclusions. According to Morgenstern, the final curtain has fallen, the play is over. Morgenstern agrees that the position and policy of the "Lovestoneites" in the trade unions are correct, that it is necessary to work inside of the existing unions, that the policy of the Communist Party to split the unions and set up dual unions is wrong. Then, if he agrees that the general policy is correct, how does it come that he reaches the conclusions he does?

Because at the recent convention of the International held in Philadelphia and following the convention, certain leaders of the center groups in Locals 1 and 9 and in Local 22 have not acted as progressive leaders should.

Can we say that because Levy and Kurtzman have taken certain steps in the union which the progressives cannot endorse or support that ipso facto the whole policy of the "Lovestoneites" of uniting with groups in the union was wrong?

Morgenstern himself does not reach such a conclusion actually, but he states that the first and biggest mistake was the unity of the "Lovestoneites" with other groups in the union. Morgenstern must admit in his article that the unity was correct in principle and that the unity plan of the "Lovestoneites" was good, but that it did not work out according to plan. The block between the "Lovestoneites" and the center groups in the International was formed upon a definite program for bettering the union, changing its policies, for winning better conditions for the workers thru militant action. It was a block against the reactionary officialdom and their policy of collaboration and harmony with the bosses.

Who Are The Center Elements?

Were the elements with which the "Lovestoneites" united elements of the old regime? Morgenstern claims they were and are. He claims that they adopted progressivism because it paid them at the time, making it possible to win the left wing masses who were returning to the unions.

At the time the block was made the leaders and the rank and file of the center groups represented elements in the right wing union who were in opposition to the bureaucracy of the union and its policies. These groups were in existence before the "Lovestoneites" rejoined the unions and before the influx of the left wing elements from the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union. In fact, left wing workers who followed the official Communist Party line fought against these groups and lined up with the reactionaries against the center. The center, as a group of leaders and rank and file members, was an opposition force of a progressive character in the union. It was absolutely correct and necessary to do everything to cement a block of the center with the left on a concrete program for the purpose of directing the movement more definitely to the left and of organizing the masses for a more effective struggle to build up the union as a progressive, militant organization.

In making the block there was no guarantee that it would lead to a permanent block or to a consolidation into one left wing organization in the union. Nor was there any guarantee that the leaders of the center would for all time favor an alliance with the left.

When the block was made it showed that there took place, for the time being, a definite alignment of the center with the left for the purpose of

carrying out a progressive program in the union.

When the block was made it was made upon principle. Far from giving up their independent position in the union the "Lovestoneites" strengthened their independent position and carried on their ideological work on a much broader and more effective basis.

We are in no position to determine the individual motives of the leaders of the center groups, as Morgenstern does. Perhaps what has taken place recently in the International convinces Morgenstern of the correctness of his estimation of the center groups and their leaders.

But our group has not been quiet on the turn of events in the International. Right after the International convention we stated the following editorially in the *Workers Age* of May 28:

"However, in stressing the plight of the union due to its reactionary leadership and policies, we cannot overlook the altogether unsatisfactory role played by some prominent spokesmen of the center like Levy and Kurtzman, managers of Locals 1 and 9 respectively. In general, their fight against the black clique was feeble, half-hearted, and, at best, lacked punch. Besides, at the decisive moments, just when it was necessary to strike hardest against the Schlesinger-Dubinsky-Ninfa machine, precisely when it was imperative to dramatize the opposition to them, these forces didn't act as progressives should, engaging at best in shadow-boxing with the bureaucracy, and even went so far as to vote to put it back as the administration. Worst of all, was to give, at least in part, an endorsement of these class-collaborationists by accepting posts FROM THEM in their new administration. This is the real significance of Levy and Kurtzman accepting vice-presidencies at the hands of Schlesinger and Dubinsky. We cannot emphasize too strongly that we are not opposed in principle to progressives and left-wingers taking or receiving even the highest union offices. But we underscore with equal emphasis that it's one thing for an opposition to fight for offices and win some of them as AN OPPOSITION and it's quite a different matter to be given offices because it stops fighting, because it blurs the issues and hides and composes differences before the workers. In the first case, for an opposition to win some offices means vigor and growth; in the second case, it means paralysis and suicide as a genuinely progressive opposition."

We are not afraid to state our position clearly or make our criticism sharply then.

The "New Alignment" And Its Meaning

After the convention the vote of Levy and Kurtzman for Dubinsky for president of the International, their proposal of Heller for the secretary-treasurer, their general support of the Dubinsky administration, proves not only that on certain concrete matters they have acted independently of the block but that there is taking place in the International a new alignment of forces, certain leaders and elements of the center perfecting a new alignment this time with the right wing bureaucracy against, the left wing, against the Communists.

This new alignment is taking place primarily because of two reasons:

1. The progressive block of the "Lovestoneites" with the center suffered a serious setback in the recent dress strike which, due to the economic depression and the open sabotage of the right wing bureaucracy, ended in a defeat for the workers.

2. Following the recent national convention of the Socialist party, the Hillquit wing of the S.P. decided upon a policy of uniting all the forces in the trade unions against the Communists, especially against the "Lovestoneites" in the needle trade unions. They have exerted tremendous pressure upon the Jewish unions to force a union of all forces for a fight against the Communists. They have gone so far as to force leading Socialists to decline to participate in any united front movements which include Communists. I, myself, know of two incidents where prominent Socialist party members were forced to decline after they had indicated their acceptance to serve in one committee with me because I was a Communist.

The realignment of forces has taken place with an accelerated tempo in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The early death of Schlesinger has helped in this acceleration. It has put Dubinsky in a position where he can take the lead and exert pressure for definitely cementing and consolidating the new alignment.

One thing is certain: the new alignment does not indicate a change in the classical policy of the right wing bureaucracy. Even tho some organizational concessions may be given to the center leaders, the new alignment is based upon a continuation of the costly reactionary policies of the right wing bureaucracy. It is no accident that Dubinsky, who pursues the old policies towards the bosses and the workers, raises the cry of "harmony" and that now is not the time to "raise differences." And when the center leaders, like Levy and Kurtzman, acquiesce in the Dubinsky "harmony" plea, then they must realize that such harmony means freedom for the execution of Dubinsky's policies even to the extent of the sharpest and most bitter denunciation and attack upon the "Lovestoneites," as he has done at local meetings lately.

The "New Alignment" And The "Lovestoneites"

The perfection of a definite alignment between the center leaders and

the right wing will be temporarily a blow to the progressive movement in the right wing unions. In fact, the action of the center leaders in departing from the progressive program of the block has strengthened the right wing and very materially weakened the left wing. The progressive movement surely cannot be held responsible for the acts of some of its leaders, or even of individual members. If the whole progressive movement, if the block as a whole, would follow the center leaders in their present course, then that would have been a tragedy. That is far from the case. For the "Lovestoneites" there has been no hesitation in estimating the situation and the role of the center leaders. The "Lovestoneites" have stood by their program. They have fought and condemned those acts of the center leaders which they regarded as inimical to the interests of the progressive movement and the workers as a whole. In spite of whatever new alignments take place, in spite of treachery and betrayal on the part of leaders and groups, the "Lovestoneites" in the unions will continue to work for a progressive program and will be ready to unite with all forces who will work for the accomplishment of such a program of struggle. In spite of what Mr. Morgenstern believes, it will be done because on two things we will never compromise: (1) On our opposition to the right wing bureaucracy and its policies; and (2) on our position against the union splitting, disruptive, sectarian policy of dual-unionism of the official Communist Party.

We are Communists and realists enough to know that no matter what the alignment is, based as it is on a continuation of the harmful, costly reactionary policy of the right wing, conditions for the workers will not improve but will become worse. This is basic. This is the foundation of all progressive union opposition, the basis for progressive opposition for a left wing continuing. The "Lovestoneites," the Communist Party (Majority Group), are fully conscious of their opportunities and are prepared to grasp them. We face the future

SECTARIAN STERILITY AND CULTURE

by Jim Cork

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tionary tide in the working class.

Scattered thruout Landy's anti-Calverton article in the *Communist* and the critical "estimates" of Calverton in *Literature of the World Revolution* are some criticisms of objective validity. But the shifting of the argument from honest, clear treatment of the issues involved to accusations and name-calling, cannot clarify the issues. Such methods are not calculated to develop and draw closer intellectuals standing near the Party. They tend to drive them away.

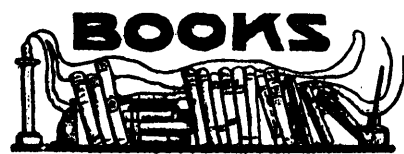
I take another instance of sectarian impatience with an especially dangerous tendency. It concerns a poem "Debs Was Big" which appeared in *Left*, whose merits as such (not very great!) it is not necessary to discuss here. Notice, however, the slant of the criticism which is made on the following grounds (in *Literature of the World Revolution*):

(1) "... an almost religious fetishization of an individual which has nothing in common with true revolutionary art"; (2) Debs did not rise to the truly revolutionary, i.e., Leninist, understanding of the events of 1914-1918; (3) "... not the name of Eugene Debs but that of Vladimir Lenin alone can serve as the symbol of their revolutionary emancipation."

As to the first objection, aside from the fact that there is nothing anti-revolutionary in eulogizing individuals who symbolize the revolutionary traditions of the working class, it comes with special ill-grace from one who in the very same article writes:

"... above all, of course, that genial and true disciple of Lenin, the leader of the world revolution, Comrade Stalin, under whose leadership the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union are going from victory to victory, under whose leadership the working people of the entire world are waging struggle against capital."

This is the type of eulogy that has nothing in common with revolutionary morality. The germ of truth contained in the first objection is distorted to apply to a different situation entirely. It is part of the job of Communists in the U. S. to revive and keep alive always in the consciousness of the masses the revolutionary traditions in American history. Lenin stressed this repeatedly, especially in his "Letter to the American Working Class." Especially important is it for a country with so relatively backward a working class. The best of Gene Debs belongs in the broad stream of this tradition. That "best," Communists make their own, of course, not without criticism of the "other" Debs. But there is criticism and criticism! To say that Debs was not a Leninist, misses the needs of the situation entirely. To counterpose Lenin to Debs sounds great, but is in reality a piece of stupid sectarianism. Leninism includes realistic tactics designed to develop the consciousness of the masses; it does not consist in mouthing Lenin's name on every occasion. For the masses to understand that Lenin alone can serve as the symbol of their



FRANKLIN PIERCE, Young Hickory of the Granite Hills, by Roy Franklin Nichols. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1931.

Professor Nichols has written an interesting political biography of that contemptible futility—Franklin Pierce, fourteenth President of the United States. As the author correctly states, the book tries to "explain him (Pierce) not as himself but as a type"—the type of "dough-face," in the political vernacular of the period, of the "Northern man with Southern principles," who, in the closing days before the Civil War, served the interests of the slaveowning aristocrats with a servility that won only their patronizing contempt.

Professor Nichols has written an interesting book, valuable alike for the story it tells of Pierce's career and for the light it throws on the times in which a man like Pierce could become President. But he has not achieved his purpose; he has "explained" nothing. There is an absurdly inadequate and unrealistic analysis of the social forces that molded the political life of the period and climaxed in the Civil War and there is no real attempt made to picture the career of Pierce as the expression of these forces. For this reason the biography remains unsatisfyingly superficial.

In all American history, it seems, there was no more pitiable mediocrity than Pierce elevated to the Presidential chair until we come to Warren G. Harding. R. H. Dana, Jr. wrote bitterly but accurately: "A New Hampshire Democratic, dough-face militia colonel, a kind of third-rate county, or at most State politician President of the United States!" A change of phrase and you have Harding! The historical role of mediocrities in American political life is well worth studying, but in this direction Professor Nichols has not contributed very much.

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fully confident that whatever setbacks have been suffered will be overcome.

Those who depart from the interests of the workers will, like Lady Macbeth, never be able to wipe away the stains of their treachery.

Don't weep, Mr. Morgenstern! There will be many more curtain drops before the final scene. The "Lovestoneites" are not romantic sweethearts, moody Hamlets, or misled babes, but revolutionary realists!

emancipation signifies already the completion of a process.

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The Suicide Of Sectarianism

The inner regime of the Party which allows no discussion, permits of no clarification, tends to perpetuate a situation crying aloud for correction. And so the sectarian attitude towards the masses continues unabated. It is reflected in that peculiar type of Communist snobbery which seemingly delights in repulsing the masses, and that just at a time they are coming closer. Under such conditions it is not surprising that recruiting on a large scale becomes impossible tho the objective possibilities in that direction are great. It is especially damaging in view of the fact that the swing to the left amongst the intellectuals is just at its initial stage and occurs in a country where the "interests" have hitherto been able to keep practically the entire intelligentsia in its orbit. The Party line in slowing up this leftward drift is really hurting the realization of its own objectives.

The recruiting of the Party amongst intellectuals has of course not been nil. It is significant to note, however, that in many cases, recruiting has been successful because of the very nature of the Party's sectarian line. The reason is not far to seek. The transition from bourgeois "radicalism" to crazy leftism in times of stress is a very natural one. Our radicalized intellectuals out-"left" even the Party! Communism for them is still much of an emotional abstraction. They do not see the A.F. of L. They do not see concrete everyday demands and tasks. They do not understand, in short, the realistic tactics necessary to develop a movement. The Party line being what it is, they find a natural home in which to rest their newly "politicalized" heads. In turn they only tend to strengthen the line. And wherever they have contacts outside, they spread the seeds of sectarianism.

American intellectuals, as elsewhere, are on the move. If the possibilities for work thus created are not to be frittered away, a decisive turnabout, and that speedily, to broad and flexible Leninist tactics is imperative. This is doubly necessary in the literary and cultural field, where the problems are perhaps not so cut-and-dried (relatively speaking) as they may be elsewhere. A welcome and correct departure has recently been made in the liquidation of R.A.P.P., the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, whose sectarianism was a scandal. How much greater is the need in a country like the United States where proletarian art is in its baby stage!

1) Lenin, *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, March 1925.

2) Quoted from *Literature of the World Revolution*, No. 3, English Edition.

3) As above.

4) As above.