

SOME SECOND THOUGHTS ON OUR FIRST PRINCIPLES

By JAY LOVESTONE

IT HAS BEEN a long time since so many members of the Communist Party have been in as questioning a mood as they are these days. Not since the big split in the American and other sections of the Communist International in 1929 have so many Communist sympathizers indicated as much and as grave doubt about the general line of the Comintern.

Why this new phenomenon? How come that such manifestations are possible after years of untiring effort by the Executive of the Comintern (ECCI) and the synthetic leaderships it has imposed on the parties, to extirpate root and branch all critics and critical ideas?

One need but look at the present program and practice of the C.P. of the U.S., whose leadership is carrying out the newest Comintern line faithfully and blindly, to find the answer to these questions. One need but examine the idiotic turn this line has taken in that ideological sewer of the Comintern—the Communist Party of Canada—and the tragic turn it is taking in the banner party of the C.I., the French C.P., to understand why it is that increasing numbers of proletarians in and around the Communist Parties are either in revolt or in disgust.

What is this new policy of the Comintern? How is it translated into life? What should members of the Communist Party do about it? What should workers do about it, who are Communists but who find themselves unable to join the official Communist Party? Is there a way out of the mess into which the Communist Parties have been led and the debacles which are being hastened?

Essence of Newest Line

The sum and substance of the newest line of the Comintern is the following: The present world situation is everywhere characterized by a struggle between democracy (bourgeois, capitalist) and fascism. In some countries fascism has already won. There the job of the Communist Parties is to do everything possible to bring back this democracy (Germany). In other countries, the menace of fascism is growing—in varying degrees, of course—(France, England, U.S.) Here, the main task of the Communists is to save capitalist democracy from the onrushing hordes of Fascism. In both cases it is necessary for the Communist Parties to establish permanent collaboration (coalition) not only with organizations and political parties of the lower middle class but even with those of other sections of the capitalist class so long as they are prepared to defend the democratic state (the form of government now prevailing in the U.S., Great Britain, and France). This collaboration of "all anti-Fascist forces" is to be secured by the Communists even if it means giving up the right to propagandize the principles of Communism, even if it means giving up independent working class action in defense of the most elementary immediate interests of the proletariat. The fight against the fascist savages is all and nothing else counts, according to this approach.

More than that. This line is carried over into the realm of international policy. The programmatic declaration on the war question made a few months ago by Comrade Dimitroff provides for the various Comintern sections rallying to the defense of the democratic (capitalist) countries against the aggression of the fascist (capitalist) lands. This means that the Communist Parties are no longer to try to win over the

working class to a program of militant class struggle against imperialist ruling classes in cases where these capitalist classes insure their domination thru the so-called democratic form of state—especially in case of a foreign war with a fascist state.

These tactics of class collaboration at home—in the so-called democratic countries—have been baptised with the name of People's Front. These tactics of defense of the "democratic fatherland" against Fascist assaults from abroad are paraded as efforts in behalf of universal peace and progress. The latter is really an extension of the former. The two are organically tied up. Both sets of tactics are a monstrous violation of the Marxist-Leninist teachings on the state and the revolutionary struggle against capitalist, against imperialist war. As "brilliant tactical maneuvers", as strategy modelled on the theory of the "Trojan Horse" (Dimitroff), they are suicidal. As an even momentary break with Communist principles, such moves are costly beyond calculation—regardless of the nobility of the motives animating the "tacticians". Here is not a matter of being dogmatists. It is not a question of parroting mechanically and devoutly a phrase or finding of Marx, Engels, Lenin—or even Stalin. It is a question of turning your back on some of the most fundamental experiences and lessons of history. It is a question of testing theories and policies in life.

Back To First Principles

On this basis only will we examine some of the concrete acts of the Comintern and its sections—since the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1935. We regret exceedingly that we are compelled to recapitulate and reaffirm a number of positions which we always thought were axiomatic for all Marxists, for all revolutionaries in the labor movement. To this repetition of the obvious we must resort because the C.I. has with increasing frequency and crudeness, since the Seventh Congress, been acting in utter disregard and even contempt of the principles of Communism in regard to bourgeois democracy and imperialist war. Besides, it is necessary to recall attention to certain basic ideas and principles in order to see more clearly the sinister significance of the practical application of the newest line of the Comintern in the struggle against Fascism and imperialist war.

In the days before the Seventh World Congress Marxists, Communists, never spoke of democracy in the abstract. Then they always realized that there is no such thing as pure democracy in a society divided into classes. Today, the official Communists seem to have forgotten—or at least act as if they have never learned—that history knows two kinds of democracy: the capitalist democracy of the type we have in the U.S., Great Britain, and France and the proletarian democracy of the type we have in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, until recent months it has always been the contention of all Communists—those in the Comintern as well as those in the International Communist Opposition—that, as the class struggle sharpens, the mask of bourgeois democracy falls off and you have the capitalist dictatorship, which it really is, in its open ugly, brutal form—Fascism. Until recently, the official Communists went along with us in point-

ing out the organic connection between the capitalist dictatorship known as "democracy" and the capitalist dictatorship known as "fascism." Time and again Browder himself pointed out how false it is to conclude that "fascism is the opposite of capitalist democracy" and that "this democracy is, therefore, the means of combating and defeating fascism." On countless occasions the party members had it drummed into their heads that it is impermissible to counterpose "democracy against dictatorship" and that "capitalist democracy is not the enemy but the mother of fascism, that it is not the destroyer but the creator of fascism" and that while it is true that "fascism destroys democracy" it is criminal "to propagate the falsehood that democracy will destroy fascism."

But perhaps the official party leaderships will tell us that "conditions have changed" since Hitler won Germany. Perhaps they will tell us that since Fascism conquered Germany a new situation has arisen—a situation in which bourgeois democracy is no longer a trick by means of which the victims are induced to pronounce their own condemnation in order to reduce to a minimum the force to be applied in maintaining the bourgeoisie in power? Or would our comrades in the leadership of the Comintern today have us believe that their new attitude towards the capitalist democracies is predicated on the conclusion that since Hitler came into power the so-called democratic states—especially the biggest ones like those of England, France and the U.S.—have become or have started to become much more genuinely democratic in their relations to the working classes and the oppressed colonial masses in their empires?

And turning to the field of international politics, that is the field of the international class struggle, would our comrades in charge of the various sections of the Comintern have us believe that in the event of a war between, let us say, democratic France and Fascist Poland on one side and Fascist Germany on the other side the French and Polish workers would have to rally to their national colors, become social-chauvinists, and patrioters of the most flaming sort in order to insure a defeat on the fields of battle for Fascist Germany? Would Comrade Browder and Hathaway, for instance, have Comrade X or Mr. Y, if he were elected to Congress in November, vote for the establishment of defensive naval bases in the Pacific in order to help defend democratic U.S. against "Fascistic Japan"? And would Browder and Hathaway say that if in the coming war in the Pacific the U.S.S.R. were lined up with the U. S., then the objectives of the Washington Wall Street government would be non-imperialist, would be progressive, in such a war against Nipponese imperialism?

New Line At Work In U. S.

Let us turn to the practical policies of the various parties of the Comintern for an answer to these questions.

In the present election campaign Comrade Browder has made "defense of democracy" the central issue. The Party convention last June adopted an election platform which made doubly clear that socialism is not an issue in this campaign. Yet, describing this purely reformist platform, the Daily Worker (June 25th) could only

say: "They lay down the planks over which 130,000,000 will march eventually to a 'free, peaceful, prosperous and happy America'." It is in this spirit that Comrades Amter and Powers recently appealed to the "Neighbors of the 10th A.D." in New York City: "For a Happy and Prosperous 10 A.D. Vote Communist." Hillquit at his worst did no worse. Really, if this Browder-Amter-Powers stuff is the line and program of the official Communist today, then, why did we split away from the Bergers, Hillquits and Waldmans and Thomases in 1919?

Small wonder that Upton Sinclair could declare in the Sunday Worker of September 20th: "I was interested to know that Browder's platform set forth in a leaflet dropped upon my front porch a couple of days before his meeting was for all practical purposes EPIC . . . I have never been much concerned about labels, and if the Communists want to boost for EPIC under another name it is all right with me". Not a word of disagreement with or criticism of this article (which was so proudly hailed) has yet appeared in the Daily Worker or any party organ.

On the basis of collecting all sorts of species into one grand broad "people's front" to struggle against fascism it is easy to understand how Major General Smedley Butler could win such an honorable seat in the councils of this motley "people's army" for freedom and democracy. But we wonder how the Party leadership feels and what the membership thinks of the outburst of this "people's major-general" against the efforts to raise funds for the heroic fighters in Spain. "What in hell is it our business what's going on in Spain?" roared this retired strike-breaker of the U.S. Marine Corps at an American League Against War and Fascism meeting a few months ago.

Replying to a query in the "Freiheit" of May 19th the editor let loose: "We can tell you only that if such a case should take place where Japan is threatening America and the Soviet Union and both countries agree to help each other in case of an attack by Japan, the duty of the American Communists would naturally be to support America in the war with Japan, because this would help the Soviet Union against Japanese imperialism." And thru applying the tactics of the People's Front to the campaign against imperialist war the American League Against War and Fascism formulated, last August, a model "Anti-War Treaty" which read in part: "The High Contracting Parties, the American League Against War and Fascism and the—do solemnly declare that it is their firm belief that the imminent danger of war now darkening the world can be warded off by tireless and united action on their respective parts."

In comparison with this rubbish about "tireless and united action between high contracting parties" (with apologies to the League of Nations), the People's Council for Democratic Peace and Freedom, which plagued us before America entered the last war, was extremely revolutionary! Keeping this non-revolutionary approach in mind, it is not difficult to understand how the "Daily Clarion", central organ of Canadian official Communism, could recently declare editorially: "We Canadian workers love our unions and political parties and will not permit them to be annihilated as were those of our

German and Italian comrades." We reckon that ex-premier Bennett and now premier King could well join a People's Front to save at least some of the political parties in Canada.

The Tragedy In France

But if application of the ultra-opportunist line of the Comintern in Canada and the U. S. appears ridiculous, the carrying into life of this line in a country like France, where the Communist Party is a serious factor, is assuming ever more tragic features. We herewith present but a few typical examples of how the Communist Party of France is applying the new strategy and deserting established Communist principles:

In L'Humanite of June 27, 1936, Jacques Duclos, member of the Political Bureau tells us:

"The Radicals are right when they declare that in adhering to the People's Front they wanted to realize a national union capable of facing the menace which weighs on us from a neighboring country's war-loving leadership."

"This preoccupation is in fact identical with the one that pressed us communists to struggle for the union of the French people, for a France free, strong and happy, whose destiny will be worthy of her glorious past."

"The Radicals are right when they declare that they refuse to accept any threat against private property, and we communists do not hesitate to proclaim that this is equally our own anxiety, in adding that what threatens property today is the powerful economic domination of the 200 families against which we strengthen all our forces."

"In summing up, the Radicals are right in recalling that the reforms which the parties of the People's Front have agreed upon are on the whole only the reproduction of the old program of the Radical Socialist Party."

Comrade Rocamond an outstanding C.P. leader in the French trade unions, was not ashamed to say in L'Oeuvre:

"The entire capitalist press condemns the CGT on the ground that it has provoked the strikes. This is the very opposite of truth." To emphasize his loyalty to the People's Front in the face of the rising strike wave, Comrade Rocamond even went so far as to complain that "there is danger that the movement will develop to a point in conflict with the general interests of the country."

From L'Humanite of August 23 we cull the following:

"The great idea of a 'French Front' as given out by Comrade Thorez in the name of our French Communist Party is going well. In the meanwhile, all who would like to see our country divided into two camps for civil war, all who want the nation divided so that it may be overcome more easily by attacking foreign powers, these are the people who oppose the 'French Front.' But for all they do or say, they will not be able to prevent the actual realization of a concept that is unconquerable because it is rooted in the heart and mind of every French citizen who cares about the interests and future of his country. . .

"The platform is short and clear: 1. Defense of national economy; 2. Security and independence of France; 3. Respect for the republican law."

"Who but the declared enemies of our people would refuse to accept these three points?" (Continued Next Column)

Southern Tenancy Is Capitalism's Dead-End

(Concluded from last week)

By MARY AUSTIN

Furthermore, it would be naive to think that the more enlightened planters are not aware of a need for more intelligent consideration of the problems of cotton economy. Consider, for instance, the statement by Colonel Westbrook, director of the Dyess Colony that, within five years time, approximately five million people now dependent upon cotton for their livelihood would have to seek it elsewhere. One form of such "enlightened criticism" is the growing realization that tenancy is extremely detrimental to the soil. Another phase of the economic problem, brought out by the commission is the disastrous result of over-capitalization of the land in relation to its earning capacity.

The New Problems

Faced, then, with this triple problem of clearing the much-maligned name of Arkansas, preparing for the possibility of enactment of federal tenancy legislation and the growing need for establishing Arkansas' agrarian economy on a sounder paying basis (intending as a by-product of such mature intellectual deliberation to pull the fangs of the Union and forestall future annoyance), the Honorary Commission considered the following proposals.

1. Government equalization of tariff benefits by export bounties to American producers. Far from aiding the tenant such a policy would aggravate his position. By putting a premium on the export of cotton internal consumption would necessarily suffer and money for such bounties would probably be raised by a tax which would fall

primarily on tenants, while only the planters would benefit from the subsidy. (Compare the effects of the AAA subsidies.)

2. State-induced efforts to develop industry in the South along the line recently laid down in Mississippi by passing legislation authorizing state-subsidies to new industries. While this idea is undoubtedly one which will be increasingly realized in the immediate future, the standard of living which can be expected from industries which have run away from a more expensive labor market offers no hope of economic gains to the southern tenant. The example afforded by the textile workers in the Piedmont and Tennessee Valley, who were induced away from their poverty-stricken farms to equally poverty-stricken mill villages indicates the future of a similar experiment in the Delta.

3. A federal program to encourage ownership of small farms "by lending money to capable tenants at reasonable interest rates and long time repayment plans."

The Bankhead Bill

Such a program, as embodied in the Bankhead-Jones Bill, was naturally the basis of most discussion. There is undoubtedly much in this Bill which sincerely aims to correct abuses which now virtually prevent acquirement and retention of land by tenants, yet the difficulties of realizing the desired effect are beyond the power of the capitalist system to overcome.

First, how would a Government Corporation acquire the necessary land? Government proponents of the Bill emphasize that no land

is arousing increasing criticism and opposition in the ranks of the C.P. and the Young Communist League in the U.S.

As long as such flagrant discarding of Communist principles prevails, that long will it be impossible to attain unity between the ranks of the Comintern and the ranks of the International Communist Opposition. Today, the prerequisite for Communist unity is more than a return to party democracy and collective international leadership in the C.I. Today, the first prerequisite for sound Communist unity is a return to those principles of Communism which the Comintern and its sundry sections have recently dropped or put into cold storage.

And today we call all workers who are members of the Communist Party to speak up, to discontinue their silence, and to resist and fight openly against the ultra-right course which will lead to disaster—as surely as the ultra-left line led to a debacle in Germany and elsewhere. We, of the Communist Opposition, do not hesitate to state frankly to you that unless you fight and fight hard and without loss of any more time, you will share in the guilt for the disaster ahead. We are not afraid of being called names for sounding the alarm. Nor should you. Infinitely greater sacrifices will be made by all of us in the interest of preserving and extending the ideas and ideals of world communism.

And today we call upon you comrades in and around the Communist Party to join our ranks so that we may together speed the day of a reunified, sound Communist movement in this country and thruout the world. Today, every Communist who desires to fight effectively and consistently for Communist principles and policies should enroll in the ranks of the Communist Party (Opposition).

LEWIS COREY

(Fourth Lecture of Series)

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