
THE MARYLAND-DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ENLIGHTENMENT CAMPAIGN

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THE "Enlightenment Campaign" following the January meeting of the National Committee has enormously advanced the political understanding and influence of the Maryland-D. C. Communist organization. Centering around the study of Earl Browder's report, *Teheran and America*, there have developed a pronounced improvement in the quality of branch political discussions, an upsurge of theoretical study of the Marxist classics, a definite trend toward greater public understanding and acceptance of the party, and especially a more intimate and effective working relationship between Communists and non-Communists in the trade union movement.

There have also been problems, many of them, both ideological and practical. Moreover, some of these problems, even now, move very slowly toward solution. Yet, in the continuing struggle for theoretical clarity on the new perspective which the Declaration of Teheran has opened up for our nation and the world, there are being developed, first, a solid basis of political understanding among the membership, and secondly, definitely improved

methods of work. As a result, the Maryland-D. C. Communist organization looks forward with complete confidence to the crucial task of this period; namely, the building of real fighting unity of all democratic forces in this area—for the triumph of the win-the-war coalition in the 1944 elections, for a speedy victory over our Axis enemies and the destruction of fascism, for the organization of a just and enduring peace.

Branch Discussions

Beginning with the second week of January and continuing until now, every bi-weekly meeting of every branch in the Maryland-D. C. District has entered into a discussion of some aspect of the perspective and program outlined at the Plenary Meeting of the National Committee. Approximately 60 per cent of the membership has participated directly in these discussions. Others have been reached through bulletins which many branches mail regularly to their members. Moreover, a copy of Browder's *Teheran and America* was mailed to every member in the District; and the sale of the February issue of *The Communist*, carrying reports on the National Commit-

tee meeting, was unprecedented for this area.

The response of comrades to the political conclusions of the Plenum has everywhere been enthusiastic. Although full clarity on all the theoretical and practical implications of the Teheran perspective has still to be achieved, practically the entire membership hailed the National Committee's decisions with warm acclaim.

One significant initial reaction to the Plenum decisions came from a branch of white-collar and professional Negro comrades. They readily saw the historic necessity for the program outlined in Browder's report, but they expressed real concern over an erroneous report they had received that the party was now "giving up" the goal of socialism. Their anxiety grew out of the fact that they had come correctly to associate the achievement of socialism with the complete liberation of the Negro people, the primary basis upon which many of them entered the party. It required a thorough discussion of the application of Marxist political economy to the post-war world envisioned by the agreements of Teheran, and especially to the perspective now opened up for the peaceful transition to socialism, to reassure these comrades that the Plenum decisions are thoroughly consistent with its historic mission to lead the working class and the nation to the ultimate socialist solution of the problems which inhere in the capitalist organization of our society.

An extremely valuable outcome of branch discussions of the Plenum

decisions is a deepened understanding of, and heightened admiration for, the party's dialectical approach to the problems of history. Although the commercial press continues to snicker at alleged "flip-flops" in the party policy, our members are coming increasingly to appreciate the profound change in world relationships which was registered at Teheran. They see the increased strengthening of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition as the fruition of the basic anti-fascist policies which our party has consistently advocated throughout the past decade. They observe how unreal, grotesque and dangerous are the outmoded slogans of certain "liberal" and other groups who take pride in adhering to formulas which arose in a historic era which has now passed. Moreover, they grasp even more fully the earlier changes in Communist strategy and tactics in response to the sharp turns in history during 1935, 1938 and 1941. As a result, they are coming more and more to understand Marxism as the science of social change, as a body of living principles guiding to progressive action rather than a set of dogmas. Consequently, their respect for the Marxist leadership of our party and their confidence in it are immeasurably strengthened.

Most of the branch discussions during January and February were led by state and city party officials and other leading comrades. This procedure was necessary in order to assure a prompt and correct interpretation of Plenum decisions to all branches. Its weakness, however, lay in the tendency of party leaders to

dominate the discussions. Real democratic give-and-take by the entire membership was unwittingly discouraged by the "authoritative" presentations of the recognized leadership. In due time the obvious corrective was applied. Discussion leaders are now selected from the branch itself. Although city and state officials still attend and participate in branch discussions, they consciously avoid giving "the answer" to every problem that arises, leaving it to the membership to think through to correct formulations.

One result of this withdrawal of the "top" leadership to the background is a distinctly broader and more democratic discussion by the branch membership. Problems and issues which members formerly kept to themselves tend increasingly to be brought into the open for discussion. This, of course, is all to the good. The new problem that has emerged is how to keep the branch leaders from assuming the position of dominance voluntarily relinquished by city and state officials. There is still much progress to be made before genuinely democratic give-and-take, involving *all* the rank-and-file members, becomes the prevailing practice in branch discussions.

Another effect of the withdrawal of state and city officials from the leadership of branch discussions has been the emergence of new and more fruitful forms for such discussions. One branch tried the panel-discussion technique reported in the *Daily Worker* from the California District, with notable success. One

branch is becoming adept at the dramatic presentation of political issues—with sound effects and all. Several branches are organizing discussions around the Robert Minor series of questions and answers in the *Daily Worker*. Still another branch delegates some member to make a five-minute introduction of some one issue involved in the Plenum decisions, after which the meeting is opened for general discussion. A state official who observed this latter procedure commented: "I have never participated in a party discussion where so large a proportion of the members took an active part." The further development of such new forms of branch discussion obviously warrants the utmost encouragement.

The initial emphasis in branch discussions of the National Committee decisions was upon *general* understanding of the over-all policies agreed upon in the light of the Teheran perspective. There followed a period of greater emphasis upon more *specialized* aspects of policy—the new perspective and the struggle for Negro democratic rights, the 1944 elections, new forms of struggle by the trade unions, the current problems of political reorganization in Poland and France and Italy. To some extent there also developed a re-examination and application of basic Marxist postulates of political economy, imperialism, the role of the state, and the working class and the nation—all in the light of the perspective of Teheran.

Now, the emphasis in branch discussions has shifted again, this time to the practical *application* of the

Plenum decisions to the functioning of neighborhood branches and the tasks of the trade union movement in the immediate community. This is becoming the dominant emphasis in the pre-Convention discussions now under way. It is being fostered and guided through use of a printed *Pre-Convention Bulletin* distributed to all members of the Maryland-D. C. Communist organization.

New Classes

The ferment of theoretical discussion which the Enlightenment Campaign has stimulated in party branches led naturally to increasing demands by members for even more systematic study of fundamental Marxist theory. At the same time, there was recognized the special need during this period for advancing the political understanding of the party leadership, and also for providing some special "orientation" program for the new members being enrolled during the recruiting drive. The result is an ever growing number of specialized study groups which sorely tax the District's ability to provide an adequate corps of instructors.

Several classes have been organized for new members in different sections of Baltimore and Washington. They center around a series of four weekly discussions: (1) the background and history of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., its overall program and organization; (2) the background and development of World War II, up to the Moscow Conference; (3) the Conferences of Cairo and Teheran, their implications for victory and enduring peace,

and the related decisions of the January meeting of the National Committee; and (4) the organization and functioning of the community branch. These several discussions are rotated in four-week cycles. Each new member is assigned to one of the classes and is expected to participate in a complete cycle of four discussions, beginning at whatever point he enrolls in the party.

The experience with these new members' classes has been that the discussions are extremely profitable for the new comrades who attend, but that the record of attendance is very poor. It is now apparent that main reliance will have to be placed upon branch education programs for the ideological integration of new members.

One of the most vital classes in the District is that for branch organizers in Baltimore. It serves as a clearing-house for questions and issues which are raised in branch discussions and which require further clarification. The general procedure is for branch organizers to formulate the questions they have encountered, and for other branch organizers in the class—not the instructor—to supply the answers. This procedure not only stimulates maximum participation, but it also reveals to the city leadership the nature of the theoretical problems facing the several branches and the ability of branch leaders to cope with them adequately. A somewhat similar class is being conducted with community branch executives in Washington, D. C., with a more formal and systematic program of study.

The District staff, itself, has initi-

ated a long-time program for weekly discussions of basic Marxist theory and its application to the present period. Attention is given to Marxist postulates regarding imperialism, political economy, the role of the state, the working class and the nation, the national question, the farm question, dialectical and historical materialism, the nature and role of the Communist organization, and the history of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. The class promises greatly to raise the theoretical level of the District leadership—if its much-harried and busy members can resist the constant temptation to forego scheduled theoretical study and discussion in order to give more attention to the ever-pressing problems of party organization.

The Negro question is coming in for increased study and discussion as a direct result of the Enlightenment Campaign. The Negro Commission in Washington has undertaken a systematic, long-term program of study of Marxist theory on the national question, with special application to the problem of integrating the Negro people into American society. Several Washington branches have also worked out co-operatively a three-session study program on the theoretical and practical aspects of the current struggle for Negro democratic rights.

A recent branch discussion in Baltimore turned to the question: Why are so few Negro comrades theoretically prepared for responsible party leadership? Here was opened up one of the most serious questions facing the District, where Negro comrades constitute an ever-increasing pro-

portion of the membership, but a very, very small proportion of city and District leadership. The question was subsequently raised in an informal discussion with several leading Negro comrades. All were keenly alert to the problem and eager, themselves, to participate in a special study program geared to the urgent need for more theoretically prepared Negro leadership.

As a result of these discussions, there has been organized a weekly class involving seven or eight leading Negro comrades. The study program includes a Marxist interpretation of Negro history, the theory of the national question, current problems in the struggle for Negro democratic rights, and more general postulates of Marxist theory. Time is given at each meeting of the class for informal discussion of any theoretical or practical problems which have arisen during the week. Effort is being made to involve members of the class in a series of mass activities in the community. The common hope of the District leadership and of the seven or eight students is that within a few months there will emerge from this class at least a few real Marxist leaders of the Baltimore Communist organization.

In addition to these, there is a new and growing class of Communist and non-Communist housewives in Baltimore, which serves the dual purpose of Marxist education and recruitment. Many branches in Washington, Baltimore, and Western Maryland have set aside definite periods, in addition to their regular branch discussions, for the systematic study of Marxism. A class has

recently been organized among Slovak comrades in Baltimore, which it is hoped will soon be paralleled by similar classes with other national groups.

The Baltimore branch educational directors decided to initiate, for themselves, a program of bi-weekly study and discussion on the use of the Marxist classics during this period, with special reference to their application to the perspectives and problems which stem from the agreements of Teheran. They began with a discussion of "The Nature and Role of the Marxist Party," based upon Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* (Chap. VIII), *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (pp. 44-52), Williamson's "New Problems of Communist Organization" (*The Communist*, February, 1944) and Jerome's "The Communist Vanguard" (*The Communist*, April, 1944). Over a period of time, this group plans to review the whole range of basic Marxist postulates in the light of the present period, and thus to achieve a more functional command over the theoretical premises which underlie our party's program. Such an ambitious project by branch educational directors opens up exciting possibilities for a still more general revival of Marxist study in the District. This group is the key to the education of the membership as a whole.

General Public Reactions

Effective measures to interpret the National Committee decisions to the general public have been far from adequate in this area whose political atmosphere is constantly polluted by

the Hearst-Patterson press and the fulminations of Dies and Tydings and Bilbo and their ilk. Some such measures have been taken, however, and they are bringing wholesome results.

Twenty Communist Party radio broadcasts have been made as a part of the Enlightenment Campaign, two in Cumberland, six in Washington, eleven in Baltimore, and one over a statewide hook-up. Among them was a series of eight Sunday afternoon discussions over a Baltimore station. This latter series, which was widely advertised, included talks on "Lincoln and Today's War Against Fascist Slavery," "300 Years of Struggle for Negro Freedom," "Who Are the Communists?" "Capital and Labor—Key to Victory," "American-Soviet Relations in the Post-War World," "Post-War—Prosperity or Chaos?" "Issues in the 1944 Elections," and "The Communists' Message to Trade Unions."

There are a few evidences that these radio broadcasts have brought favorable responses from the public. The Baltimore *Sun* made the unprecedented request for a copy of the Executive Secretary's address on "The Meaning of Teheran for America," and played it up in a full and accurate front-page story which was picked up by other papers in the District. A number of letters and telephone calls of commendation have been received, along with requests for copies of radio addresses. Several persons are known to have joined the party as a direct result of the broadcasts. Formerly strained relations with officials of one large broadcasting station have become

warm and cordial; and even the obstinate attorney for the station, who for months has precipitated a fight over every Communist Party manuscript submitted for his approval, now passes upon proposed speeches with little or no objection.

The big weakness of the radio broadcasting program was failure to arrange for, and to *guarantee*, a large number of listening-in parties by comrades and their non-Communist friends. Effective organization to this end would have enhanced tremendously the value of the broadcasts.

Early in the Enlightenment Campaign, the District of Columbia party held a reception at its newly remodeled offices. It was attended by an unusually broad group of Communist and non-Communist citizens. Several ministers and civic leaders present expressed genuine appreciation for the party's approach to the problems facing the nation and the community during this period.

All branch meetings during the Enlightenment Campaign have been open meetings, with many non-Communists participating in discussions. Such meetings and discussions have proved to be the most effective technique thus far used to enroll new members.

Shortly after the meeting of the National Committee in January there was initiated a series of informal discussions between party officials and leading non-Communist individuals in Baltimore and Washington. In every case, face-to-face interpretations of the Plenum decisions brought forth attitudes of

greater respect and appreciation for the party's program.

Also during the recent period, one party District official has received invitations to speak to meetings of two non-Communist mass organizations. Another official played a leading role in a non-Communist mass demonstration against Negro employment discrimination and spoke at the City Hall Plaza meeting which culminated the campaign. In Washington, not long after the Plenum, two leading Communist trade union officials felt free for the first time to speak openly as Communists, taking part in a public panel discussion organized by one of the community branches. Only one who has experienced directly the political climate of the nation's capital can appreciate the full significance of this latter development.

There is no doubt that, despite continued slanders in the defeatist press, the Communist Party in the Maryland-D. C. District is coming more and more to be understood and accepted as an important force in the struggle for victory and enduring peace. This trend, although still not tremendous, has very definitely been pushed forward during the period of the Enlightenment Campaign.

Relations with Trade Unions

Copies of Comrade Browder's *Teheran and America* were mailed to a large number of non-Communist trade union leaders in the Maryland-D. C. District. Many of these leaders were also engaged in informal discussions about the decisions of the National Committee meeting and the implications of Teheran for the role

of labor in strengthening national unity in the country as a whole. Further, the Executive Secretary's radio address, "The Communists' Message to the Trade Unions," was printed as an eight-page accordion-fold pamphlet for wide distribution throughout the District.

The responses of non-Communist trade unionists to these approaches have generally been warm and appreciative. Many of them are coming for the first time to understand the true relations of the Communist organization to the trade unions. They are also getting rid of distorted notions, engendered by the press, as to the nature and import of the Plenum decisions.

As an important feature of the Enlightenment Campaign, the District leadership held a series of discussions with groups of leading trade union comrades representing the major industries in this area. The purpose of these discussions was to interpret the implications of the Plenum decisions for concrete programs of action by the labor movement in relation to the problems of the several industries.

Among other outcomes of these discussions with leading trade union comrades, there emerged several major problems of theoretical understanding which must be cleared up before the labor movement can effectively assume its responsibilities to the nation during this period.

First, there is far from adequate appreciation, by both Communist and non-Communist trade unionists, of the urgent need to apply the Teheran perspective of growing and continuing national unity to the im-

mediate problems faced by the workers in their industries. "Bethlehem Steel," some are inclined to say, "isn't pulling for Teheran; they're trying to break our union." Implicit is the assumption that the union must fight back in the old way, as the only means of self-protection. There is failure to understand that labor cannot solve today's problems merely through insistent demands upon management, but only as an organized and powerful force in the national unity demanding the right to collaborate with management and government in the interests of the nation as a whole.

Second, there is the related tendency for many trade unionists to become overwhelmed by a multitude of unsolved grievances, and thus to lose confidence in the applicability of the Teheran perspectives to their industry. They fail to see that the effective approach to specific grievances must now be on the basis of labor's over-all role as the major force for strengthening national unity. The big need is for labor to establish a common meeting ground with employers for agreement on general policy—in the interest of war production and national unity. Only when there is agreement on general policy will labor cease to be harried by company obstructions to the settlement of specific grievances.

Third, far too few trade unionists fully understand that the national-unity implications of Teheran will not be realized automatically, but will come only through correct and persistent struggle. The labor movement will command respect and attention from management and gov-

ernment only to the extent of its demonstrated strength and continuous struggles for its necessary place to function with full effectiveness in the coalition of national unity. Let labor organize its power as an independent political force dedicated to the strengthening of national unity. Let labor demonstrate that the nation simply cannot solve its problems except through collaboration between government, management and the trade union movement. Then, and only then, will the decisive sections of the capitalist class be convinced of the necessity for constructive relations with organized labor.

Fourth, the labor movement is unduly laggard in mobilizing its full influence in the struggle for Negro democratic rights, both on the job and in the community. This is especially serious in view of the coming elections and the urgent necessity for unity between labor and the Negro people in order to assure the return of President Roosevelt to the White House and the election of a win-the-war Congress. Not only is it important for labor to establish firm unity with the Negro people; it is also easy of accomplishment. But the only basis upon which it can be done is for the trade unions to enter far more vigorously into the struggle for Negro democratic rights.

Finally, many trade union leaders still fail to appreciate how directly the continued freedom of our nation, indeed, its very existence, depends upon the closest collaboration and the maximum coalition with the Soviet Union within the framework of the Teheran agreements. Otherwise

it would be impossible for the Hearst press of Baltimore repeatedly to slander our great Soviet ally without a word of protest from organized labor. Otherwise the scheduled address of Gerald K. Smith in Baltimore would have evoked overwhelming mass protests from the trade union movement. Labor still must learn that it can no longer defend either its own or the nation's interests until it moves vigorously to smash the anti-Sovieteers who now function with relative immunity.

These are some of the still unsolved problems facing the Communist Party of Maryland-D. C. in its efforts to help the labor movement adjust its outlook and forms of struggle to the crucial task of welding all win-the-war, pro-Teheran forces in this area into a firm and fighting coalition of national unity. And the first step toward this end is redirecting trade union policy to achieve absolute clarity on the part of Communist members of the trade unions.

It is appropriate to end this discussion with accounts of two instances in which the Plenum decisions really were applied to the immediate problems facing the trade unions—and were found to work!

In one major war industry in Baltimore the union has long been beset by artificial divisions of "Right" and "Left," with consequent weakening of the win-the-war leadership, in which there is really little difference as regards the immediate political and other tasks of the trade unions during this period. In the course of the Enlightenment Campaign the

"Lefts" went to the "Rights" with a proposition to bury the hatchet, stating that *for or against the defense of our nation* is now the only valid basis for division between trade unionists or any other patriotic Americans. The proposition was accepted, with consequent enormous strengthening of the progressive forces in the union.

In another industry in Baltimore the union and the company have long been bickering and clashing over grievances. Every little issue led to a fight. Several weeks ago a committee from the union went to company officials and said, in effect: "It is natural that problems arise between us, and the only sensible way to solve them is to sit down and agree upon a general approach to

the handling of grievances. That we do so is necessary to hasten war production and safeguard the morale of the workers." The outcome was a comprehensive agreement which has notably speeded up the satisfactory handling of grievances and has brought qualitative changes in the formerly hostile attitudes of company officials toward the union.

The latter experience was a revelation to one trade union comrade, whose comment reflects a discovery many of his colleagues will make if they really come to understand and apply the Plenum decisions to the problems facing the trade union movement. Upon leaving the successful negotiations with the company, this comrade exclaimed: "Teheran is wonderful!"