

Letter to a C. P. Functionary

On "Social-Fascism" And The Trade Unions

by Bertram D. Wolfe

The following letter was sent by Bertram D. Wolfe to a Communist Party functionary doing responsible and important work in answer to a letter of his.

For obvious reasons the name of the comrade and several sentences had to be omitted from Wolfe's answer as printed here. We reprint the letter because it answers questions of interest to all Communists and sympathizers.—Editor.

June 23, 1933.

Dear Comrade:

Thanks for your letter raising points of criticism, doubt and disagreement. A few remarks on the points you raise:

1. Social-fascism

The phrase, "social-fascism" was invented in order to lump Social-fascist support of capitalism together with Fascist support of capitalism thus justifying the rejection of a united labor front against Fascism. It did incalculable harm to the relations between the Communist and Socialist parties, between Communist and Socialist workers. It prevented the party from differentiating between Social-democracy and Fascism. Differentiation is the beginning of all understanding. Its dangerously wrong character as an accurate formulation (it may have felt good as a term of abuse) has been frightfully demonstrated in Germany.

2. Trade unions

You recognize that the trade union line of the party has been marked by sectarianism for the past three years. It began to go wrong prior to three years ago. The first blunders were made by us, when we were in the leadership of the party. Under the pressure of the new "left" line as imposed upon us by Losovsky, we split the United Mine Workers and formed the National Miners Union. We should have fought that. We didn't for two reasons: (1) We didn't yet have the guts to fight for correct tactics at all cost and (2) we had not yet clearly formulated our conceptions. After or during the expulsion period, this false line was raised into a system, here and internationally. It proved most disastrous in Germany, for there the party was responsible for the fate of millions. The party withdrew from and destroyed its influence in the German unions, built paper "red unions," "work ed" in the old unions to undermine them and split them, with the result that, when the crisis came and the party called for a general strike (July 20, 1932; January 30, 1933), the party's once powerful influence in the German unions had been reduced to zero, NOT A SINGLE UNION—NOT A SINGLE FACTORY—WENT OUT ON STRIKE TO BLOCK THE RISE OF FASCISM TO POWER! You can't call a general strike from outside the mass unions.

From the above, it should be obvious that the sectarianism of the American party in its trade union work is not due to the incompetence of a few functionaries, or the failure of our group to accept the wrong line and carry it out more "intelligently." The more intelligently it is carried out, the more disastrous is a wrong line. The line came from the present leadership of the Communist International, was carried out on a world scale and produced disaster everywhere.

3. How to correct the party's line. You imply that we "forced the C.I. to throw us out rather than accept a decision on tactics." Further, that we "stay outside and ridicule," while the fight should be waged inside to correct the party's line.

I cannot too strongly emphasize that we are not outside by choice and that we do not ridicule the party but seek to correct its line for its own sake, for the sake of Communism. The fight to correct the party's line must be made, for the present line prevents the growth of the party. It must be made inside, BUT IT IS SO IM-

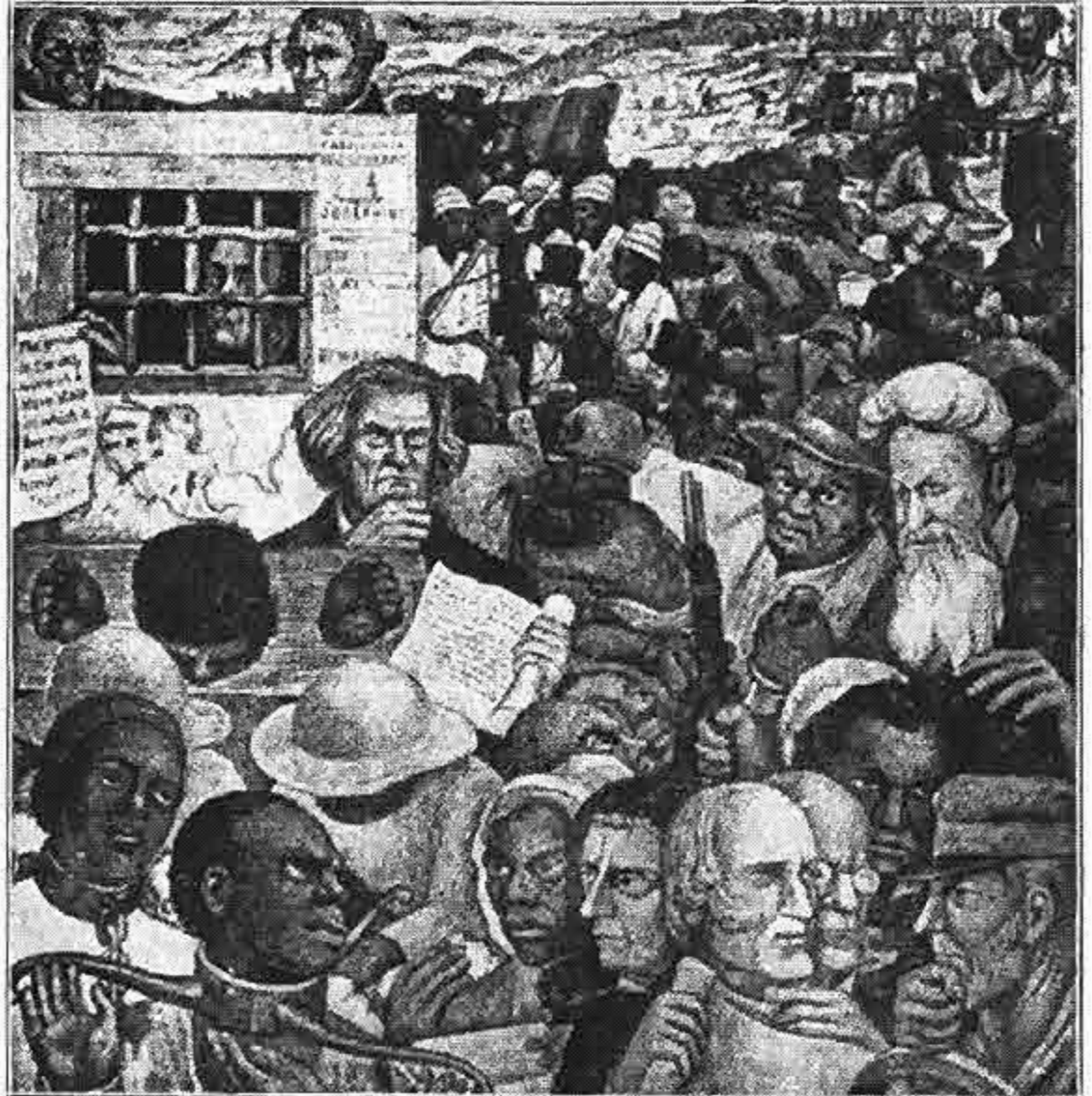
PORTANT TO THE PARTY THAT IT CANNOT STOP EVEN UNDER THREAT OF EXPULSION. "Once a member of the party is convinced of the absolute incorrectness and harm of a certain doctrine, he is duty bound to take a stand against it AT ALL COSTS." So wrote Lenin. And "all costs" includes expulsion and abuse.

It was not easy for us to come to that conclusion. Far from forcing expulsion, we at first offered to accept the false line to avoid expulsion and to wait for a new discussion period and the experience with that line to convince the party. The present leadership dared not permit a discussion for the line will not bear examination. Therefore, they could not wait with expulsion and felt obliged to substitute fantastic personal slanders for examination of our views. Slander has become a substitute for discussion of principles.

I do not ask you and other party members and functionaries who agree with us, or partially agree with us, to step out. Far from it! I ask you to stay in and fight for the health and correct line of the party. If your fight gains volume and you are not expelled, then we will soon be readmitted as well. That would be the best and least painful way, for you, for us, for the party. But bitter experience has taught us that the harder way is forced upon us. Get your own experience. Only fight loyally, honestly on the basis of principle. Even caution is no crime. But a sham fight which is abandoned in the middle or never gets really under way out of fear of personal consequences—loss of functionary post, loss of party card, slander and abuse—such a sham fight would be a crime against the interests of the party and the working class.

(Concluded in the next issue)

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