

THE EXPELLED LENIN

Since 1929 the world Communist movement has been in profound crisis. Organizationally the crisis has manifested itself by a series of splits and expulsions, by the strangling of inner party life, by failure to grow, by loss of membership and influence despite tremendously favorable conditions for communist growth.

In the theory and practice of the Communist International the crisis has shown itself in the abandonment of the Leninist tactical line, in a loss of the sense of revolutionary realism, in the adoption of ultra-leftist tactics that isolate the party from the masses. The various parties have not understood how to use their theory as a sensitive instrument to measure reality, as a lever to set the masses in motion, and thus develop their understanding. They have rather treated it as a collection of cut-and-dried formulae, as quotations for banners and talmudical exegesis, as a creed to be memorized and recited on high holidays, as a universal formula which solves in advance all problems without need of considering their special terms and conditions. The splits, the losses and failures, the blunders and defeats, the rising tide of fascist terror and the darkening clouds of coming war—all serve warning that the Communist movement must reform its ranks with all possible speed, and gird itself for coming battle by a return to a Leninist tactical line.

"An 'Expelled' Pamphlet"

The most important work of Lenin on the question of tactics is the famous pamphlet: "Left" Communism: An Infantile Disorder. It bears the subtitle: An Attempt at a Popular Presentation of Marxist Strategy and Tactics. It is the outstanding work on tactics and practical activity in all the literature of Marxism. Once the cornerstone of the tactical education of every party member, today the official party has permitted it to go "out of print"! Since 1929, the party has maintained a virtual conspiracy of silence against it, as if to dramatize the rejection of the Leninist tactical line and the expulsion of its defenders at that time, by expelling along with them the pamphlet of Lenin which advanced that line.

In preparation for the tenth anniversary of the death of Lenin in January 1934, the party republished every one of Lenin's shorter works—with one notable exception. Other pamphlets still in print were reissued in special anniversary editions, but "Left Communism" was "overlooked" and when there was a demand for it, it was promised for "later". Therefore, the Communist Opposition, as part of its struggle to restore the party to the tactical line of Leninism, has decided to republish this pamphlet. It is to be hoped that our action may shame the Party into republishing it also. It cannot be too widely known nor too widely discussed. In a very fundamental sense it is the tactical program of the International Communist Opposition. (Since this was written the C.P. has published a new edition of the pamphlet.—Editor).

The Need For The Study Of This Work

All the questions that are matters of controversy in the Communist movement today, are thoroughly examined in this little pamphlet: the question of "exceptionalism"; revolutionary realism in the formulation of tactics; sectarianism and opportunism; the question of compromises; the necessity for communist work in the conservative trade unions; the fallacies of dual unionism; the role of the party, the relation of the party to the masses; Communist discipline; the avoidance and correction of mistakes as against the game of "self-criticism"; and certain important questions (such as Communist participation in electoral and parliamentary activities and the role of Soviets) which, while not for the moment subjects of acute controversy, are bound to become so again. That a party pro-

fessing to be "Leninist" should have permitted this pamphlet to become almost unknown to its new members, that is to more than 75% of its membership, is an eloquent commentary on its fear of tactical discussion and its neglect of the fundamental task of party education.

"How Tactics Are Formulated"

"Our theory is not a dogma but a guide to action." This Marx and Engels, and after them Lenin, were never tired of repeating. The problem of tactics is no petty question of a secondary order. It is the problem of giving life to Communist theory, the problem of carrying on the struggle, of actually advancing the working class nearer to its goal. Wrong tactics, untimely or inappropriate slogans, even though adopted with the best of intentions, actually injure the cause they are intended to serve.

Marxism, demands of its adherents that they be able to make the most exact, realistic, objectively verifiable analysis of actual class relations, of concrete historical circumstances, of actual situations as they vary from land to land, and, in a given land, from moment to moment. These are the only solid foundations on which scientific policy can be based.

"The Question Of Exceptionalism"

The most startling evidence that the American Party and the International have abandoned the Marxist and Leninist methods of arriving at and formulating tactical policy, is to be found in the ill-starred speech of Stalin on the American Communist Party, delivered in May 1929 the last speech delivered by him to the International of any of its committees up to the time of this writing (May 1934). It is revealing to compare the dogmatic, anti-Marxian viewpoint there expressed with Lenin's viewpoint in this pamphlet. Said Stalin:

"... Both groups are guilty of the fundamental error of exaggerating the specific features of American capitalism. (This at a time when our party was barely beginning to become conscious of the existence of specific features, barely beginning to outgrow infantile abstraction, just beginning 'to discover America'!—B.D.W.). You know that this exaggeration lies at the root of every opportunist error committed both by the majority and the minority group. It would be wrong to ignore the specific peculiarities of American capitalism. The Communist Party in its work must take them into account. But it would be still more wrong to base the activities of the Communist Party on these specific features, since the foundation of the activities of every Communist Party, including the American Communist Party, on which it must base itself, must be the general features of capitalism, which are the same for all countries and not its specific features in any given country. (emphasis mine.—B.D.W.). It is on this that the internationalism of the Communist Party is founded." (from Stalin's speeches on the American Communist Party, published by the Communist Party, U. S. A., p. 11).

This is the only political remark of a theoretical nature in Stalin's three speeches which, for the rest, descend to an incredibly low level of boudoir gossip, and this one remark is dangerously unclear and wrong! It goes far to explain the mechanical transference of tactics from land to land, and the consequent inappropriateness in recent years of Communist tactical policy everywhere but in Russia. Compare the above passage with the theoretical clarity and living breath of Marxism that permeates Lenin's analysis of the same problem in the present pamphlet. Writes Lenin:

"We must clearly understand that such a leading center (as the Communist International—B.D.W.) cannot under any circumstances, prescribe the tactical rules of the struggle after the

by Bertram D. Wolfe

fashion of a blue print, nor mechanically level them out, nor make them mechanically identical. As long as national and political differences exist between peoples and countries—and these differences will exist a very long time, even after the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the entire world—the essential unity of the international tactics of the world communist movement demands, not the elimination of the varied nature, not the wiping out of the national differences (that would be at present a senseless dream) but it requires such an application of the fundamental principles of Communism (soviet power and dictatorship of the proletariat) as will correctly modify the specific details in applying these principles, and will adapt them correctly to the national and governmental differences. The most important task of all advanced (and not only advanced) countries at the present moment is to examine, to study, to find out, to sense, and to grasp the specifically national features of the concrete methods of each country in solving the identical international task: the victory over opportunism and 'left' doctrinarism in the labor movement, the defeat of the bourgeoisie, the setting up of a soviet republic and proletarian dictatorship." (All emphasis Lenin's—B.D.W.).

"The Trade Union Question"

Another badly needed lesson from this pamphlet is the one contained in the chapter: "Should Revolutionaries Work in the Reactionary Trade Unions." Chapter VI warns against the ruinous "get-rich-quick" policy of leaving the craft unions "to create in their stead quite new and quite pure 'workers unions' invented by exceedingly nice—and for the most part, probably very youthful—Communists."

Lenin analyzes the roots of trade union conservatism and reactionary leadership and points out that the attempt to form rival unions of the Communists and their sympathizers is a method of running away from the struggle with the bureaucrats, of abandoning the difficult and necessary task of developing the conservative craft unions into militant industrial organizations, and that it actually helps the reactionary bureaucracy. He warns against setting up "revolutionary unions" with such "minor" requirements as acceptance of the Soviet system:

"A greater lack of sense and more harm to the revolution than this attitude of the 'left' revolutionaries cannot be imagined. Why, if we in Russia, after two and a half years of incredible victories over the Russian bourgeoisie... had demanded that entrance into the Trade Unions must be conditional upon the 'acceptance of the dictatorship' we would have committed a stupid act, impaired our influence over the masses... For the whole of the Communist problem is to be able to convince the backward, to work in their midst, and not to set up a barrier between us and them, a barrier of artificial childish 'left' slogans. There can be no doubt that Messrs. Gompers (read today 'Green' and 'Woll'—B.D.W.)... etc. are very grateful to such 'Left' revolutionaries..."

After five years of violation of the elementary principles of Leninist tactics with their "quite new and pure unions" of the T.U.U.L. (Trade Union Unity League), the Party under pressure of the Communist Opposition and the failure of its "unions" to achieve any more than a paper "existence", pretends to change its line and "work in the A. F. of L." But what does it mean by "work in the reactionary unions"? The answer is given in *The Communist*, official organ of the Party:

"The fact that the class-conscious American workers, under the leadership of the Communist Party and the Trade Union Unity League, are building revolutionary industrial unions does not exclude the need for working in the reactionary craft unions of the American Federation of Labor, but on the contrary, makes such work even more necessary. Why? Because in certain industries (having mass American Federation of Labor unions)... our work in the reactionary unions, with the policy of independent revolutionary leadership of the economic struggles of the workers, is proving to be a highly effective weapon for winning the masses away from the reformists and for organizing them into the industrial unions of the Trade Union Unity League. (The Communist, January, 1932, p. 7—emphasis in the original—B.D.W.)

Still more clearly and more authoritatively, the question is answered by Comrade Lozovsky, chairman of the Red Trade Union International in his speech to the 8th Plenum of that organization, held in Moscow in February 1932. Said Lozovsky:

"There is no need to shout from the house-tops 'destroy the unions' as was done in Germany. But that we want to break up the reformist trade unions, that we want to weaken them, that we want to explode their discipline, that we want to wrest from them the workers, that we want to explode the trade union apparatus and to destroy it—of that there cannot be the slightest doubt." (R.I.L.U. Magazine, Feb. 15, 1932, p. 245).

The resolution of the 8th Convention of the Communist Party (held in Cleveland in April 1934), while it talked more than ever of "working" in the reactionary unions, refused to dissolve the T.U.U.L. and actually proposed to extend dual union activities still further by making the T.U.U.L. an organizing center for a new "Independent Federation of Labor."

"How It Came To Be Written"

It almost seems as if Lenin had written "Left" Communism with the present line of the Communist International and of the American Party in his mind.

When he wrote this pamphlet the Communist International was only a few years old. Into it had come a series of very young groups and parties, full of revolutionary enthusiasm but handicapped by youthful impatience and inexperience. Against the conservative and treacherous activities of the trade union leaders and socialist parliamentary representatives, and the nationalism that corrupted the Socialist parties, the immature left wings which formed the Communist International reacted negatively. They wanted to "throw out the baby with the dirty bathwater" to split the trade unions

and form "pure, revolutionary unions", to reject all maneuvers and considerations of strategy, to cease all participation in parliamentary elections, to forget all about the specific peculiarities of each country and to adopt an abstract "internationalism" which would imitate mechanically the tactics being employed at the moment in Russia.

Against this "Infantile Left" faction in the young Communist International Lenin directed this pamphlet. It was written in May 1920 as a polemical document aimed to defeat the "Left" faction ideologically at the Second Congress of the Communist International to be held in July the same year. Some of the specific details treated by Lenin are today a little out of date: for instance the withdrawal of the Independent Labor Party of Great Britain from the British Labor Party, has created a changed situation there. But in all its essentials the pamphlet is as fresh and timely as if it were being written today.

When we watch the present tactics of official Communism, it almost seems as if Lenin had never written as if this battle had never been fought, and won, before today. "It is not so bad," Lenin wrote, "if one can ascribe that (their sectarianism) to their youthfulness—it is to a certain extent the privilege of youth to utter such stupidities for a certain length of time." But today, alas, the stupidities cannot be attributed to youthfulness and inexperience. The movement has gotten off the right track, unlearned what was already learned, taken a step backward, done itself untold damage at a critical time.

Yet the tactical teachings of Marx and Lenin have not been lost. They have been preserved, fought for and utilized by one of the two main currents into which the Communist movement has been divided. They are the "platform" of the Communist Opposition. We republish this pamphlet in the hope that we can thereby bring nearer the day when the Communist movement is reunited on the tactical line of Leninism. Every Communist devoted to his party, every worker conscious of the needs of his class, will help circulate this pamphlet as a means of hastening that day.

BERTRAM D. WOLFE
May, 1934.

* * *

This article by Comrade Wolfe appears as the Introduction to a new edition of Lenin's "Left Communism: An Infantile Disorder" now being published by the Communist Party (Opposition).

The publication date of this communist classic is set for September 15 and will retail for 25c a copy. Advance orders are now being taken for single copies as well as for bundle orders. Special rates for bundle orders are, of course, provided for. Write for further information to Literature Department C.P.O. 51 West 14th Street, New York, N. Y.

Strong Opposition at U.T.W. Meet

(Continued from Page 1)

silence is broken by a few boos! The same frozen silence met McMahon when he began and when he ended his report.

Some Burning Issues

Pressure for the general strike is extremely strong, especially from the cotton, silk and rayon areas, but all McMahon has to boast of is his throttling of "many serious industrial flare-ups".

Great is the demand for separate departments or federations, (cotton, silk, dyers, etc.) and for the industrial form within them but McMahon threatens that this will "lead to destruction and chaos".

And the NRA, which, to the cotton workers has meant a 25% cut and a \$9.00 minimum wage (they don't get even that) and to the

silk workers periodic wage cuts, is something holy to McMahon. NRA is to him "a real protector of the workers against the entrenched forces of capital." That is why, he insisted in his report, the manufacturers are conspiring to destroy NRA and why the workers must fight for its extended life.

Bureaucracy In For A Fight

No matter what may develop during the further course of the convention, it is clear even now that the bureaucracy is in for a sharp fight. There are sufficient progressive forces for a continued effective struggle for a militant program of action.

* * *

Don't fail to read, in the next issue, the estimate of the U.T.W. convention and its decisions.