

Communist Movement and Its Defenders

Editor's note: The magazine "The Modern Thinker" in its March issue ran an interview with Earl Browder, General Secretary of the C.P.U.S.A. entitled "Communism and its renegades." For its May issue it carries an interview with Comrade Wolfe on the "renegacy" of the Communist Opposition and its aims and views. The interview reprinted below epitomizes in brief and popular form the program and conceptions of the Communist Opposition.

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1. Do you acknowledge the charge that the Communist Party of America (Opposition) is a renegade Party?

No, we are not. Many of our members are founders and builders of the Party. We founded it when its present leaders were in many instances (William Z. Foster, William F. Dunne, Robert Minor, etc.) still bitter opponents of Communism. We saw it through the Palmer Red raid days, through the Coolidge boom days when it was not so "fashionable" to be a Communist. We are not likely to desert it now, when capitalism is proving its bankruptcy.

We are loyal to our party. Our differences with the official leaders do not touch the fundamental principles of communism—overthrow of capitalism, proletarian dictatorship, soviet power. Both factions, the official and ours, agree on them. Our differences are tactical—how to get there, how to obtain our objectives, how to build the party, how to strengthen its influence and insure its victory.

Our differences should be discussed inside the Party. We did not choose expulsion. The present line of the Party and International will not bear examination. We were expelled to prevent discussion. We are called "renegades" for the same purpose. Abuse is substituted for argument because the present leaders have no valid arguments. Comradely discussion would result in the adoption of our tactical line.

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2. What are your fundamental objections to the Moscow general line?

The present party line, in this country and in all countries outside of the Soviet Union, suffers from the following defects:

a. Marxism is treated as a ritualistic creed, a ready-made solution of all problems by means of a few cut and dried formulae.

b. The official movement sub-

stitutes romantic pseudo-revolutionary phrase-mongering, empty boasting and self-deception for realistic analysis. It isolates the party from the masses by proposals and slogans ill-adapted to real conditions and the actual state of mind of the masses, which two factors are the determinants of any sound tactics. It does not know how to use the splendid theoretical instrument of Marx and Lenin as a lever to set the masses in motion.

c. The official party espouses the fatal tactics of dual unionism, draining out all the revolutionary and progressive workers from the conservative unions into "revolutionary unions." Unions have to have a program broad and elementary enough to include the capitalist-minded, Democratic and Republican-voting workers. Any strike shows that.

Draining out the radicals and progressives plays into the hands of the bureaucrats, surrenders the backward workers to them, and abandons the long, hard task of defeating those bureaucrats and winning the conservative unions for a fighting policy and an industrial structure. It sows division in the labor movement, puts upon the Communists the onus of union-splitting and benefits only the bureaucrats and bosses.

d. The party has abandoned the struggle for working class unity and united action of a split and divided proletariat. It has given up the united front. They speak of "united front from below" to confuse this abandonment, but "united front from below" is only an invitation to non-party workers to support the party program, and has nothing to do with the united front.

e. They have violated the Communist principle of democratic centralism by wiping out inner party democracy. Inner party life is stifled, discussion of basic tactics prevented, leaders and officials appointed from above, questioners expelled and a real correction of mistakes and development of flexible, realistic, revolutionary policy rendered impossible. There is a sycophantic, hero-cult. Stalin in the Soviet Union, and little Stalins like Browder in other countries. There is no collective leadership in the International. The Russian Party has a monopoly of leadership in place of being the first among equals. The parties are led by puppet leadership, kept in leading

An Answer to Earl Browder

by Bertram D. Wolfe

strings, their initiative destroyed, and worst of all—

f. Tactics appropriate to the Soviet Union are mechanically transferred to all countries, overlooking the fact that all other countries have basically different conditions and problems. Tactics are transferred like blue prints, the varied nature of objective conditions in each country, the different mood of the masses, the differences in its degree of development, and the relation of class forces, are simply ignored. Yet that is exactly the problem of the revolutionist to adapt his general aims to the concrete peculiarities of the land in which he works and fights, to discover the concrete methods in each land for solving the international task which is identical for all lands, the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers' rule and socialist society.

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3. Do you think the newly created American Workers Party will help clarify the situation?

No, confuse it, but not much. Its elements are diverse and contradictory; it has many of the defects of the official party without the virtue of being communist; its program is confused in content and fuzzy in language—an eclectic hodge-podge of unintelligent borrowings from the Trotskyites, from us, from the official party, from the Socialists. The parts of the program cancel each other out. The elements gathered together likewise. It will likely be a still birth.

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4. What is your reaction to the Fourth International?

Another still birth. It is made up of leftward moving elements who have left the Socialist International but are repulsed by the false tactics and abuse of the Communist International, and of rightward moving elements who, expelled from or deserting the Communist International, have failed to keep a Communist position and are really travelling the path of renegacy. The fate of a Centrist International is inevitable disintegration. Some will go left, some right.

We stand with the Communist International. We want to unify it

and strengthen and correct its line. We regard the Fourth International tendency as an obstacle.

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5. Do you think that Trotsky is unsuited as a leader because of his personal theatricality?

He has personal attributes that are not altogether desirable in a leader, but that is secondary. His political line is wrong, his tactical conceptions, his attitude towards the Soviet State, his efforts towards a Fourth International, his attitude towards the building of socialism in the Soviet Union.

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6. What is your reaction to the luxurious standard of living displayed at the Soviet Embassy at Washington while millions of American workers are starving?

While the Soviet Union maintains, and it correctly tries to maintain, diplomatic relations with the capitalist countries, it should preserve the general forms of diplomacy in so far as they do not vitiate its working class policy. Litvinov has scored some swell victories for working class diplomacy while dressed in a stove pipe hat and a cutaway coat. Overalls wouldn't have helped, would they? Do you think that if Trotsky dressed in overalls that would feed American workers or help him in the fulfillment of his tasks?

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7. How can you explain the friendly relations the Soviet Union keeps with Fascist governments such as Italy and Turkey?

The Soviet Union correctly seeks during the present period to avoid war and preserve peace with all countries, and to trade with them. This is to the advantage of the Soviet Union and furthers the construction of socialism there. It helps to prolong peace as long as possible. The diplomatic and commercial relationships between the Soviet Union and capitalist lands, Fascist or otherwise, do not injure the working class movements of those lands. Both the maintenance of peace and the building of Socialism help the workers in all lands.

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8. What are your aims?

To reunite the Communist Party and International, to restore inner party democracy, and to restore the movement to a healthy, Marxist-Leninist tactical line, so that it can grow and go forward to victory.

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9. Can you give specific examples of tactics that are correct for Russia and wrong for America?

Surely. Here are two: "revolutionary unions" and the "united front from below." Both ideas are derived from tactical practices that are perfectly correct for the Soviet Union and wrong for every capitalist country.

In the Soviet Union where there has been a proletarian dictatorship for over 16 years, there are no unions except revolutionary unions. Any organization which would not have support of proletarian dictatorship in its program, would be neither a union nor a workers' organization. But here the workers do not rule. The bulk of them are still capitalist minded. To have a revolutionary program for a union is to exclude the bulk of the workers.

As to the "united front from below" in Russia there can be no other kind. There is only one party, the Communist. It has the support of the entire working class. The working class is not split. There is neither need nor possibility of united fronts such as Lenin conceived them for the capitalist world—only "united front from below" around the Communist Party.

Yet our party acts here as if it were the only party, as if the workers ruled, as if the entire class supported our party. Our leaders have only their feet in America, their heads are in Russia.

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10. But didn't the Russian approach succeed in Russia? Why shouldn't it succeed in America?

The Russian working class was led by the most realistic party in the world. We propose to employ the methods of Lenin, not ape the gestures and parrot the slogans that grew out of a careful study and realistic analysis of conditions in Russia from day to day, even moment to moment. Our party must analyze American realities and become what it was on the road to becoming prior to our expulsion and the change of line in 1929—an American Communist Party speaking to the American working class in its own language, of its own problems, and proposing such tactics in this country as will lead the working class of the United States forward on the road to the achievement of its own historic destiny, the conquest of America by the American workers for themselves and for the workers of the world.