

THE METHODS OF STALINISM

By JOSEPH ZACK

(Ed. Note: This is the first of a series of articles by Joseph Zack, a former leader of the Communist Party who recently resigned and joined the Workers Party. In this article Comrade Zack paints an unforgettable picture of the methods of Stalinism as he saw them in Moscow. Next week he will describe the working of these methods in the American C.P.)

There is a crisis developing in the C. P. Only here and there are these external manifestations of it but its burrowings are deep.

This crisis manifests itself: 1) In the decline of the party's influence particularly in the trade union field, both in independent unions and in the A. F. of L., and in the decline of the unions controlled by the party itself; 2) The increased turnover of party membership. According to Browder's report (Nov. Communist) the C. P. membership declined from 24,000 at the time of the party convention (April 1934) to below 20,000, this in spite of a recruitment of 17,000 new members in that period. According to these figures more than 21,000 members dropped out of the party within six months since the Cleveland convention.

Outwardly, the crisis thus far manifests itself in the withdrawal of groups of independent unions (Building Trades) and A. F. of L. minority groups (Local 3 Electrical Workers) from the party's control, as well as the going over to the opposition or "expulsion" of groups of active party members who are joining the W. P.

Were such a thing as inner democracy in existence in the C. P. this crisis would of course take other forms than disintegration. The background to the present crisis is far more complex, however, than the average party member suspects. Essentially the crisis is due to the fact that while officially Lenin's teachings are supposed to be the official guide of the party, Leninism in fact has been abolished or substituted by the mediocrity of Stalinism. This double bookkeeping is at the root of the present situation in the C. P. and the whole Comintern.

However, in order not to anticipate too much and in order to relate things against the background of American events I will tell my own story, for this is the story of many others still in the party. My own experience brought me to the same conclusions as those stated in the Workers Party Declaration of Principles. I am deeply convinced that many others will take the same road.

Back Stage Methods

Even while Stalin was combined with the Right wing in Russia itself (Bucharin, Rykov and Co.) in order to fight the Left (Trotsky, Zinoviev, etc.) he at the same time was intriguing against his Russian allies (Bucharin was then in charge of the Comintern) in the foreign parties by encouraging the development of "Left" factions against Bucharin. That is, it appeared that way; in reality Stalin was not afraid of Bucharin at all. What he was aiming at was to isolate his main enemy, Trotsky, from the Left in the foreign parties.

This he did by diverting the fight away from Stalin, using Bucharin as the punching bag and bugaboo and thus annexing the Left element to himself, diverting it away from Trotsky.

Against the background of the then declining revolutionary wave in Europe and the tiredness of the Russian masses themselves this strategy worked wonderfully both outside and even to a large extent inside of Russia. This is how I, as well as many others of the Left in the C. P. got hooked to Stalin's kite. Thus the so-called 'fight on two fronts—against Right and Left—really was a fight mainly against the Left as subsequent events have proved amply.

Stalin, initiator or partner in all the policies he blamed Bucharin for, took for his main guiding line the question of possessing himself of the party apparatus in and outside of the Soviet Union. To achieve this end he played both ends against the middle. Thus he became the arbiter, the potentate, of the party apparatus, veering right and left against the background of the opportunist theory and practice of "socialism in one country".

The Game of Make-Believe

It took me a long time to find out the inside track of Stalin's politics in those days. His game of make-believe, of pretending to do one thing in order to do the exact opposite—a method used between enemies and developed into a fine art in the class struggle of the Orient—was now introduced into the Communist movement by Stalin.

I cannot pride myself on having understood it then. But I did smell a rat in 1929 when Stalin in the American Commission to judge the Lovestoneites spoke about principledness, about the Tammany Hall methods of the Lovestoneites. This speech was reprinted in pamphlet form in this country. Stalin pretended not to have favored any of the factions. I, knowing the details, knew he was lying unscrupulously and preparing to cover up his tracks at the same time. This was done by dispersing the leaders of the American Left, sending them to various countries. This was done to "prove" that Stalin did not favor the minority faction. Stalin, then in full power, was preparing to forbid all factions. Not only that, there was to be a "monolithic" party, a party of one thought, the thought of Stalin, and no controversial discussions. It would not do, therefore, to have proofs that Stalin had been organizing factions for years before. Differences were outlawed as "Left Social-Fascist" (Lovestone) or "counter-revolutionary" (Trotsky).

We were then coming into the era of Stalin's fancy theories of Social-Fascism and the united front from below. The stage was being prepared for events in the American party. In the spring of 1928 in Moscow I objected to a resolution calling Trotsky a counter-revolutionist, but in this case I was far from understanding the full implications of the thing. I could even be talked out of my impressions. But the "molecular" processes kept on working down deep in my consciousness. Something set me "at attention". A

few more such things and I could see Stalinism as it is. I never could admire Stalin or boost him with "quotations" and I was feeling less and less sure of myself when talking about Trotsky. Of course ever since I objected to the resolution I was on the blacklist. This I found out later.

The Moscow Rumor Factory

While in Moscow in 1927 many rumors kept on percolating through to us foreigners about the internal situation in the Russian party. One of them was about Lenin's testament. It was said that this testament was very bad for Stalin and good for Trotsky, but the informers would add: "Lenin in his last days was losing his senses, hence the Central Committee decided to disregard his testament". Stalin's caucus in those days was a regular rumor factory. Anyone slated for disfavor or elimination would first be subjected to this form of blackmail. As to Trotsky, the rumors were: 1. That he was breaking discipline and organizing a new party. 2. That the Trotskyists were hooking up with counter-revolutionary elements (White Guards). 3. That they were organizing a separate demonstration for May Day and that Trotsky attempted individually to address the demonstration and incite the masses against the party.

When Trotsky was being exiled to Alma Ata it was said that he took along with him a dozen pedigree hunting dogs, hunting rifles, servants, lots of furniture, fine clothes and a whole library, all the comforts of a big bourgeois intellectual. The vilification of the opposition in the official Russian press must have been colossal, but we foreigners could not read it. We were supplied, however, with "quotations" from Trotsky's and Zinoviev's writings and plenty of analyses of these quotations, but we never saw an actual textual exposition of the opposition leaders' position written by themselves!

"Explaining" the Opposition

Trotsky's position, according to these "quotations" and commentaries which purported to "explain" the opposition's point of view, was as follows: 1) A split with the peasantry. 2) Preparation of a war against capitalist nations. 3) Loosening of the foreign trade monopoly. 4) Building up a war industry but neglect of the rest of economy. 5) Socialism cannot be built in a peasant country, hence the proletariat has to exploit the peasantry to prepare for the International Revolution, war, etc.

Such was the peppery dish prepared against the opposition. Neediness to say we foreigners were thus finally convinced that Trotsky's position was all wrong, condemned it as "left" phrase-mongering, "objectively" leading to a counter-revolutionary position. Later this was further simplified to read: "The counter-revolutionary platform of Trotskyism," or "Trotskyism, the Vanguard of International Counter-Revolution."

Just about the time that we were pretty well convinced of the counter-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism, occurred the Chinese debacle. Those who follow events in the movement will remember that, contrary to the fundamental teachings of Lenin, Stalin caused

the affiliation of the Chinese C. P. to the Kuomintang, the Chinese bourgeois party of Chiang-Kai-Chek. The C. P. submitted to the discipline of the Kuomintang and did not even have its own press. In order to keep up this reactionary stew all kinds of fancy but completely deceitful and anti-Leninist theories were invented by Stalin and his clique. The peasant masses of China, who were already then in a rising mood, were not only not encouraged but restrained from revolutionary action by the C. P. in order, as the thesis read, to maintain the alliance with the Chinese national bourgeoisie against imperialism.

The Chinese Debacle

Then one nice day, like thunder from a clear sky, came the news—circulated by rumors—that Chiang-Kai-Chek, head of the Kuomintang and commander of the Nationalist armies, had ordered a pogrom on the Communists only a few days after Stalin had made a speech praising Chiang-Kai-Chek as a "loyal ally". Through a Chinese comrade, whom I happened to know personally, I found out the facts, and also that Trotsky was opposed to the whole line of Stalin in China. The apparatus control of the C.I. by Stalin, however, was so strong even then, that in spite of all these facts and the disastrous defeat of the proletariat in China resulting from Stalin's policies, the C.I. then assembled in a Plenum stated: "Events have verified the correctness of the line", etc., etc. This thing dumbfounded me. Although unable to properly assemble all these things in my mind a sort of uncanny distrust took hold of me. Somehow Stalin appeared in my consciousness as a dark force and I could hardly get rid of that feeling ever after.

How the Lefts Were Fooled

The fact, however, that Stalin supported the Left in the American and other parties as against Brandler, Lovestone and Bucharin threw me off the track and prevented me from drawing any further conclusions then and thinking the matter out subsequently. The audacity of the slander against the Trotsky opposition as counter-revolutionary was another factor, for none of us could fathom that the responsible leaders of the Russian C. P. could have possibly sunk so low as to commit such a falsification. Hence I and many others did not bother to find out the actual facts even after we were out of Russia. We took it more or less for granted that Trotsky had become what the C. I. said.

The present new turn to the right, this time executed officially by Stalin himself, had to occur in order to stir up the memory of things of the past against the background of present events. Now I know, of course, that all and severally the alleged deeds and views of the opposition led by Trotsky, as stated by Stalin and his clique, are outright fabrications. I know now that the whole thing is a tissue of lies. The whole Stalinist system is an unscrupulous system of slander and blackmail that will condemn its authors forever.

In the next issue I will point out how things proceeded in the American C. P. on the basis of these methods and policies.