

The Struggle for Unity On a Higher Level

by Herbert Zam

Every serious political organization, whether party or group, must, from time to time, review its course and realign it in accordance with any change which may have taken place necessitating an adjustment in the policies and work of the organization. This is particularly true if any outstanding events have occurred which throw light upon certain problems faced by any political organization which contents itself with a set of formulas and substitutes these formulas for the living realities; is doomed to isolation or death, regardless of the great value these formulas may have had at one time.

At the present time, the Communist Party (Opposition) is faced with the need for a reexamination of its main course. In the four and one-half years of existence, we have valuable experience bearing on our perspective. To these experiences have been added the experience of the Oppositions in other countries and particularly the recent events in Germany, which have climaxed the whole course of ultra-leftism pursued by the Comintern in the last five years. It is not simply the events themselves which necessitate a change in our course in the United States—this would be a type of mechanical transference of policies to which we are opposed. It is the light which the German events shed upon our own experiences which necessitates such a change. The German catastrophe is only a forerunner of similar catastrophes for the Communist movement in other capitalist countries, if the present course is continued, and if the Communist Opposition does not succeed in developing an instrument with which effectively to counteract the catastrophic results of the ultra-leftist policies of the official Communist parties.

It is to this task that the minority resolution directs itself, and comes to the conclusion that our group must now adopt a new perspective that of the development of a new, an opposition Communist party in this country and in other capitalist countries where the conditions are similar. Our role and activities as a group, as an organized tendency, were of great value in the first stages of the struggle but, as these stages passed into history, the value of these tactics passed with them. We believed that we could best influence the Communist parties and the Comintern back to a Leninist line and to a restoration of party democracy by acting as a group and rejecting the proposal of building new Communist parties. This tactic has not brought the necessary results. To continue working for Communist unity along the lines of a group, is accepting the most difficult conditions of work. We must orientate ourselves to utilize every favorable circumstance and development in the next period of time and to be in a condition to do so, in the opinion of the minority, we must work for the building of a new Communist party and declare our willingness to take action for establishing a new Communist party when the circumstances warrant.

This involves a change in the group's perspective. In the past our main perspective was the work as a group; our secondary objective was the growth of the C.P.-U. into a party as the official party disintegrated, became a "shell". The proposal of the minority is not the same as this secondary perspective but the minority proposes what was already indicated by the September, 1932 Conference, when it adopted the following motion:

"The Communist Opposition clearly understands that in any single country only one Communist Party must exist and only one can exist over a long period of time. In the present critical situation in the C. I. it is possible for situations to develop where there will be temporarily two Communist parties, where it would be desirable, provided there are sufficient forces, for launching an opposition

party as well as the recognized party. In such a case our main objective would be the same—to bring about the unification of the Communist movement.

The motion of the September Conference clarifying the question of the launching of an opposition Communist party contains the germ of the present proposals of the minority. The minority, however, advances beyond this position. Whereas, at the September Conference, we were still more or less groping in the dark on this issue, it is now necessary to come out and clearly state that we are working for the launching of such a party when we believe the forces are sufficient and that this is our main orientation in the pursuit of our objective of Communist unity, a correct party line, and internal party democracy.

The majority, in its search for arguments against the need for a new orientation for our group, has developed the theory that party or group is a principle and not a tactical question, placing this matter almost on a level with the proletarian dictatorship. In the Bulletin of the I. C. U., in commenting on the relations with the left wing of the I. L. P., there is this statement: "On the decisive questions, the left wing accepts the position of Communism—in its readiness to join the Communist International, in its struggle against a second party and for a Communist united front tactic." Similarly, an article in the "Neue Welt", Strassburg, June 9, 1933, dealing with the situation in the ranks of Social-democracy, in which is observed "a tendency toward Communism in the ranks of the Social-democratic masses," concludes as follows: "But there are still numerous and big obstacles to real Communism. One of these is the conclusion from the collapse of the S. P. and C. P. that a 'new' party is needed, which should be 'Communist' but 'different' from the C. P." We see in these that to the idea that Communists are distinguished by belief in proletarian dictatorship, soviet power and armed uprising, has been added a new criterion—opposition to a new Communist party. As against this conception we can bring our own experiences in the United States, where for a number of years we had two Communist parties existing simultaneously and the experiences of Communists in other countries, who went thru similar stages. In the letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, written about July 1920, Lenin said:

"If the advocates of soviet power (in England) cannot be united owing to these differences only (parliamentarism—H. Z.) I should consider the immediate formation of two Communist Parties... as a useful step in advance, as a step to complete unity. One such party may reject and the other accept participation in bourgeois parliamentarism. . . ."

(My emphasis—H. Z.)

This quotation definitely shows that, while Lenin considered as desirable the existence of but one Communist party in each country, he did not consider it contrary to Communist principles to have more than one such party, as a step toward complete unity. Those who now place this issue on a level with proletarian dictatorship should show when Lenin, or any other Communist leader, proposed to compromise on the question of proletarian dictatorship, or soviets, or armed uprising, as a means of smoothing over differences, or as a means of attracting new followers. Such a compromise is unthinkable. Obviously, and this should be clear to even a Pioneer, because principles do not and cannot change with conditions; only tactics do. Lenin was not violating any Communist principles by advocating the formation of two Communist parties but was applying correct tactics to a given situation.

The majority has taken the formula which is absolutely true so long as a normal situation exists in the revolutionary movement, and has converted it into a dogma by holding on to this formula when

DISCUSSION

On this page we publish two articles in the pre-conference discussion of the Communist Opposition. Up until December 25, one and one-half pages of The Workers Age will be devoted to the discussion.—Editor.

the condition has ceased being normal. In an exceptional situation we must look for exceptional tactics. To attempt to apply the formula of one party to a country at the present time, when the situation in the Communist movement is not only exceptional but extremely critical, is to condemn the Communist Opposition movement to impotence and isolation.

These are the issues in our discussion. Unfortunately, the majority resolution fails entirely to meet these issues. It is jousting at windmills, debating with imaginary opponents and answering imaginary arguments. The majority resolution might be of some value (that is also questionable) for a discussion with the Trotskyites. But anyone can see with half an eye the vast gulf which exists between the standpoint of the minority and that of the Trotskyites on this question. We disagree not only as to the reasons for a new party; we disagree also as to what its role would be. Let the majority adopt a document which will meet the arguments and proposals of the minority, so as to make possible a real discussion of the issues in our group. Certainly it should answer the arguments of the Trotskyites—this is a task for the entire group. But it must not confine itself to the Trotskyites and ignore the specific issues in the group.

In discussing the question of a new party, we must naturally also devote some thought to the problem as to how successful we have been in causing a change in the party's line in our direction. That we have had some success now and then, cannot be doubted. The half-turns, quarter-turns and twists, have been sufficient proof of that. But what is the net result? In answering this question, the majority and minority diverge sharply. The minority maintains the Comintern and its respective parties are as far away from a correct line as they have ever been. If anything were needed to prove that, and to the hilt, it is the complete endorsement after the German catastrophe, of all those policies which we all agree led toward catastrophe. In America we have the Open Letter, the expression of the present course of the party, which the Bureau itself unanimously characterized as "a return to third-period lunacy". This same idea is repeated in the resolution of the Bureau on "Labor and the NRA", as follows:

"In the face of the complete practical collapse of its trade union policies, the official C. P. is reviving in the crassest form its old line sectarian theories in their worst third-period form."

It seems that this is a clear position and yet we find a different picture in the present discussion. Comrade Lovestone, in his concluding remarks at the membership meeting, said: "The C. I. today has reached a transition stage on the road to a break with ultra-leftism." Now, if this were true, and if we all believed it, it certainly would affect our orientation. Let the majority bring proof. Let it repudiate its own analysis, which proves just the opposite. There is no proof. The majority's contention is an illusion, not a fact. If the majority can convince us that the C. I. is today in a transition stage away from its ultra-left course, then the minority will gladly withdraw its resolution, and will agree for a continuation of the present course of the group.

If we orientate toward the establishment of new Communist parties in a whole series of capitalist countries and if these new Communist parties stand on a common basis, then they must necessarily unite for international cooperation, unite into something which will be a kind of new Communist International—a kind because it will not be an all-inclusive international; it

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will have no representation in the country where the proletariat is in power. Should this be proposed as a permanent condition for the international Communist movement, it would obviously be untenable. But when it is proposed as a temporary measure, forced upon the International Communist Opposition by conditions, by the incorrect role played by the C.P.S.U. in the international movement, as a means for continuing on a higher plane and on a more effective scale the struggle for Communist unity, the struggle for correcting the role of the C.P.S.U. in the international movement, it is quite another matter. The minority resolution categorically rejects the position of the Trotskyites that a new International is needed in order to eliminate the existing one, in order to obviate the necessity for unity. A new International is needed in order to promote and extend the struggle for unity, in order to develop effective pressure against the C. I. and the C.P.S.U., in order to give the Communist Opposition struggle a broader base.

The International Communist Opposition should throw itself into the struggle for the formation of new parties and an eventual new International, regardless of what other Communist, or non-Communist groups are also in that struggle. To the extent that other groups want a centrist rather than Communist organization, to the extent that they wish to build an organization which will or might be anti-Soviet in character, the International Communist Opposition must vigorously and uncompromisingly battle against such tendencies. The Trotskyites, who have considerably increased their influence recently because they have become the outstanding champions of a new party and a new International, cannot serve as a basis for such a movement, nor as its nucleus. Already they are attempting to base the new party on their ancient dogmas and to give it a Thermidorian orientation on Russia. In the absence of the International Communist Opposition from the field, the Trotskyites may temporarily increase their forces and have hegemony in this movement but in the end it is bound to collapse, as the Trotskyite movement itself had collapsed. The Trotskyites attempt to convert the new party and new International into extended Trotskyite factions. For this reason it will collapse but, in the process, the entire movement will be demoralized and valuable elements will be lost for Communism. Only the International Communist Opposition can influence this movement into the proper channels, both in the struggle against centrism and against Trotskyite dogmatism. The new Communist party can come into existence only if it is based on Communist fundamentals and internal party democracy and not on the tactical and strategical platform of one of the groups or tendencies

of Communism. The struggle over tactical and strategical differences belongs inside the Communist party, old or new, with all individuals and groups obligated to carry out the decisions of the party. That is the position of the International Communist Opposition with regard to the proper functioning of the existing Communist party; that has been its position with regard to the functioning of those Communist parties which adhered to the I.C.O., that must be its position with regard to any new Communist parties which are formed. It is certain that the strategical and tactical course of the I. C. O., which, in the course of time has shown itself to be correct as against all others in the Communist movement, will become the basis for the strategical and tactical course of any new Communist parties if the International Communist Opposition plays a positive and constructive role in their formation and development.

AGAINST THE "NEW" PARTY VIEWS

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party if, by any miracle, it ever came to acquire a bodily existence? Such a party would be "based on Communist fundamentals and internal party democracy and not on the tactical and strategical platform of one of the groups or tendencies of Communism." But obviously the official party (Stalin) tendency would not adhere to Comrade Zam's party. It would then become a mere anti-Stalinite block, the various elements having nothing in common except their opposition to Stalin, each for its own reasons. It would become a veritable sewer for all the disreputable odds and ends in the left wing of the American labor movement, bound together by a tie of a very questionable political character, a tie which will often be hard enough to distinguish from plain anti-Sovietism!

At the slightest provocation Comrade Zam waxes indignant about the "Red herring of Trotskyism". "Is this a discussion with the minority or is it a debate with the Trotskyites?" Comrade Zam asks rhetorically. Neither, Comrade Zam! It is a discussion of the international situation and the tasks of the Communist Opposition. And in this discussion the new aspect of Trotskyism and the plans and partly accomplished deeds of the Trotskyites in the direction of a "new international labor movement" in partnership with the centrists, are perhaps at least as important as Comrade Zam's ill-digested outbursts. Is it not monumental conceit to insist that the discussion be limited exclusively to Comrade Zam's alleged "arguments"?

But there is a deeper reason why Trotskyism must inevitably come to the fore in any discussion of the present situation in the interna-