

# Crisis in the Proletarian Party

by Herbert Zam

The Proletarian Party convention closed with that party in a severe crisis which may lead to the end of that organization. This crisis, reflecting even in this small and sectarian organization the need for a new orientation in the face of changed objective conditions as an alternative to complete annihilation, expressed itself both politically and organizationally.

## The Crisis In The P. P.

For fourteen years the Proletarian Party had led a sheltered, more or less peaceful existence as a federation of local propaganda groups rather than as a working class political organization. But, with the coming of the crisis, the membership began to demand activity, contact with the masses, organization. "Immediate demands", which had been taboo in the organization all these years, became a debatable issue, with prominent members of the party championing the need for a new policy. Two years ago a split took place on this and related issues but, while the Proletarian Party rid itself of the most prominent advocates of the need for a new course, it could not rid itself of the conditions which drove them to advocate it.

On the eve of this convention, two years later, the party was again rent by discussion of these issues but on a higher and more extensive level and to these was added another basic issue—the issue of Communist unity, which was brought into the party by the initiative of the Communist Party (Opposition) for unity. At the same time, the advocates of a new course for the party also became convinced that a change in the party's policy must also be accompanied by a change in the party's structure, which was not of the generally accepted Communist character and in which a single individual, the secretary, had almost autocratic powers and was even beginning to look upon the organization as his private preserve. The administration clique naturally adopted a stand-pat position, which expressed itself in the pre-convention discussion and particularly in its actions at the convention.

On the eve of the convention (which had already been postponed once), the administration began to lose confidence in its ability to control it. The pre-convention discussion was going badly against it. Detroit, the largest local of the party, in fact its backbone, and the only local which had engaged in any sort of mass work and had contact with workers, thereby earning the enmity of the administration, was in revolt against the national office. The most prominent and active members throughout the country were bringing forth powerful arguments against the standpat policies of the party and for a new course. The administration, therefore, decided upon a coup to assure for itself control of the convention. It decided that the basis for representation to the convention should be changed from one for every ten members, as at the previous convention, to one for every twenty-five members. This measure was obviously aimed at Detroit, whose representation was thereby cut while representation of the small locals of six to fifteen members, upon which the administration was basing itself, would remain the same. At the same time, in order to create the necessary "atmosphere" for the convention, the National Committee, on the day before the election of delegates was to take place in Local Detroit, took disciplinary measures against fourteen members in Detroit, of whom eleven were the leaders of the opposition, and three of whom were members of the N. E. C. Previously, the National Committee had also taken action against the leader of the Boston organization because that comrade had come out in opposition to its policies. The methods used by the administration in these measures are also extremely interesting. Out of fif-

## The Results of the Detroit Convention

September 11, 1933  
To the Proletarian Party of America, Local Detroit.  
Dear Comrades:

We, the undersigned members of the Proletarian Party, Local Detroit, hereby place our resignations from the above party.

First: After observing the convention proceedings and noting the decisions arrived at, we came to the conclusion that the party had failed to project itself as a revolutionary political organization, that it still remains a sectarian group in spite of the sincere efforts to change it and bring it into line with objective and subjective conditions and needs. Instead of building itself on the principle of democratic centralism, the party has been maintained as a bureaucratically controlled and isolated group.

Second: The recent suspensions and expulsions of members of Local Detroit constitute a most flagrant violation of the party constitution which reads, Article 7, Section 6: "No member may be disciplined except upon written charges, a copy of which shall be presented to the accused, who shall

have at least one week's time in which to prepare his defense. The Local to which he or she belongs shall elect a trial committee of three members, which shall hear all evidence, make a complete record of same and transmit it to the Local, together with the committee findings and recommendations, all of which shall be subject to review by the Local, which shall render its decision as to guilt and penalty, said decision on appeal of accused to be subject to revision by the National Executive Committee."

Also Article 3, Section 4, which reads: "The National Executive Committee shall formulate its own rules of procedure not inconsistent with the provisions of the constitution." This was done in order to keep these members out of the convention and allow the steamroller to work smoothly, as some of the members suspended without a trial would have been elected as delegates.

Also the resignations of members thruout the party, the obvious political maneuvering resulting in packed conventions, the apparently predetermined decisions arrived at during the convention just ended

(September 2-8, 1933) and the expulsions and resignations following the convention of June 1931, are sufficient evidence to substantiate our action.

Third: The utter failure of the N. E. C. to examine the matter of the Farm Project (the so-called U. C. L. Farm), with no effort on their part to find the cause of dissension among members, is another reason for our action. Dealing with effects and making decisions obviously biased against particular members, was not the way to remedy this situation but can only result in still further dissension.

We are convinced that further constructive work in the party is impossible and that we can no longer remain members.

(Signed) Fred Schock, Catherine Schock, Joe Schachinger, Elisabeth Schachinger, John Schachinger, Netty Schachinger, Pat Corway, E. Corway, Herman Beck, Carl Pederson, Mary Pederson, Ralph Gale, Eva Tuopin, Walter Tuopin, Joe Prockup, Flora Prockup, Paul Jones, L. Gould, Dave Bennish, E. Field, Morris Field, Anna Kock, Bob Kanter.

teen members of the National Committee, ten were present. The three members involved were not permitted to vote at the meeting; one was chairman and had no vote, according to the committee procedure, while three abstained from voting. Consequently, really three members of the committee decided on such an important measure, including the disciplining of three other members of the committee.

In spite of these measures, however, the administration control at the convention was not too firm and, towards the end of the convention, questions were being decided by a majority of one and two (twenty-three delegates were present) while on one issue, that of Communist unity, there was a 12-12 vote, the tie being broken by the chairman casting the deciding vote. The administration was able to defeat the opposition but in doing so it also dealt a death blow to the Proletarian Party as a Communist organization, from which it cannot recover. This convention found the P.P. at the crossroads. To continue in the old path meant reaction, stagnation and death. A new road was needed.

The convention chose the old path. The decisions of the convention are, therefore, reactionary; they are the first steps in the funeral march of that party.

On every question which came before the convention, only one answer was given: to continue the previous policies, to tread in the footsteps of the forefathers. The question of immediate demands, the Negro question, agrarian work, party organization and structure—all were treated in that manner. A slight concession was made on immediate demands. The convention decided that it was not opposed in principle to immediate demands but that the present was no time for them! The Negro question was declared "non-existent" as a special problem, while the farmers were declared "bourgeois" and therefore of no concern to the revolutionists. The party structure was also perpetuated, the powers of the secretary were carefully respected and the same person reelected.

### The Communist Opposition And The P. P.

The Communist Party (Opposition) had raised the question of

Communist unity both informally and in a formal letter to the N. E. C. before the convention. It had also proposed an exchange of fraternal delegates and had sent a delegation of three to Detroit, which was there for the duration of the convention. The fraternal delegates were not seated; as a matter of fact the credentials were never brought to the attention of the convention but were pocketed by the secretary (in good old A. F. of L. style). Repeated requests were made by the delegates that a representative of the C. P.-O. be invited to present its point of view to the convention for the benefit of the delegates but all such requests went unheeded. Nevertheless, the question of unity could not be evaded by the convention—the fat was in the fire and something had to be done. The secretary, Keracher, shamelessly told the delegates that the proposal of unity must be rejected and there were several ways of doing it. But his own followers could not accept that position. They pleaded that to do so would disarm them and make it impossible to explain the thing away to the membership. Keracher there-

fore yielded and a very "clever" scheme was devised. (The P.P. was to declare its willingness to enter into unity "negotiations" upon certain "conditions" being accepted in advance by (the C. P.-O.—and there is where the run lay. The conditions, as finally worked out, fourteen of them (a sort of "Marxist" fourteen points) were aimed at one thing—to give those at present in control of the P.P. control of any united organization which might result from the negotiations, regardless of anything else. Thus, one of the conditions is for the N. E. C. of the new organization to consist of the fifteen members of the N.E.C. of the P. P., its national secretary, and five members of the C.P.-O., that is the present leadership of the P.P. would have sixteen out of the twenty-one members and also the national secretary, and this would be the sole authority in the new organization for the next two years, when a convention would be called. Another "condition" was that the P.P. was to name three members of the C.P.-O., who were not to hold office in the new organization for five years. The editorial board of the official organ was to consist of three from the P.P. and two from the C.P.-O. The national office was to be in Chicago; These points need no analysis. They are not "conditions" aimed to promote Communist unity but rather to prevent it and the act is so crude as to be transparent even to a political tyro. By the adoption of these fourteen points the convention condemned itself in the eyes of all honest revolutionists.

### And What Now?

The convention decisions make it impossible for a revolutionist interested in the forward march of the movement to remain any longer in the P.P. No other deduction can be drawn and this logical consequence was indeed drawn by a large section of the pre-convention opposition. At the convention itself, Ed Anderson, member of the N.E.C., and Serreine Lowe, one of the founders of the party, tendered their resignations. Both were prominent members in the party of long standing. Since the convention, approximately thirty members in Detroit have resigned and also the delegate from Dayton, Ohio. Undoubtedly, other resignations will follow as they are unavoidable consequences of the convention decisions. The opposition members, both those still in the P.P., as well as those already out, cannot, however, be satisfied with leaving the almost-defunct P.P. If they are to continue revolutionary activity, they must align themselves with the organization which expresses their new outlook and which can provide them with the forms of activity in accord with the actual needs of the working class. The pre-convention discussion has already shown the political direction of the viewpoint of the opposition comrades. It is true that there is still a great deal of confusion among the comrades themselves and many are, naturally enough, still suffering from some of the "education" they received in the Proletarian Party. Clarity, however, can never be brought about thru inactivity and contemplation. Action itself is the best demonstrator of the correctness of policies. The comrades of the opposition must, if they are to move at all, move forward—and this can only be in one direction, already indicated by themselves—toward the Communist Party (Opposition). Any other step taken by the opposition comrades would not only be a contradiction of their pre-convention course but would simply result in a repetition of their experiences inside of the P.P. The Communist Party (Opposition) calls upon the Proletarian Party to line up in the struggle for a united, powerful Communist movement and declares its willingness to do everything in its power to help them to find their rightful places in the movement.

## An Open Letter to P. P. Members

To All Locals and Members of the Proletarian Party of America..

Dear Comrades:

Only July 1, 1933, the Communist Party (Opposition) published in its official organ, The Workers Age, an article by Herbert Zam, in which the problem of the unity of the Communist movement in this country and, in particular, of the unity between the Proletarian Party and the Communist Party (Opposition), was raised. A little later, the National Committee of the Communist Party (Opposition) sent a formal letter to the National Committee of the Proletarian Party raising the same questions and proposing that each organization select a committee for mutual discussion of these matters to see whether better relations between the two organizations could not be achieved. Our approach on this matter in the words of the Rochester local of the P.P., was "objective" and "comradely". In connection with the recently concluded convention of the P.P., we proposed an exchange of fraternal delegates and had our representatives in Detroit during the entire period of the convention in the hope that the credentials presented by them as

fraternal delegates would come before the convention for favorable action. We have since learned that these credentials were never presented to the convention itself. Nor was a request of the committee to be permitted to be present to state the position of the Communist Party (Opposition) to the convention on the question of unity granted. Under these circumstances, it is clear that the convention and particularly the officers of the P.P. did not have in mind any real desire for unity but, on the contrary, were concerned only with maneuvers to avoid unity, to prevent better relations between the Communist forces in this country and to perpetuate the sad split-up character of our movement. We have since received the answer adopted by the convention to our unity proposals and the answer itself bears out this contention. We are, therefore, compelled to appeal from the convention to the locals and members of the Proletarian Party. Any support given to the decision of the convention would be a crime against the Communist movement in this country, a betrayal of the aims for which the rank and file membership of the Proletarian Party, as well as of other Communist or-

ganizations, are now struggling. We state frankly that we do not hold the membership responsible for the reactionary decisions of the convention, which itself was in the stranglehold of Keracher and his clique. This clique resisted all the efforts of the membership for a more progressive line of policy by the P.P. In the present situation, when the entire labor movement is in turmoil, when every honest working class organization is overhauling its policies and machinery to be in accord with new conditions, to be better able to operate in the interests of the working class, the convention of the P.P. decided to stand pat, exactly as it has stood for the last fourteen years. This decision is a reactionary one; it is a betrayal of the working class, on whose behalf the P.P. pretends to work; it is a betrayal of the membership who want to build up a united revolutionary organization, capable of leading the American workers in the struggle against capitalism, capable of becoming a part of the international revolutionary army in the war against world imperialism. For every honest revolutionist in the P.P. there is, therefore, only one path to chose—repudiate

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