

THE CRISIS GROWS DEEPER

in the

AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY

By GEORGE POST

Despite the trials of the Old Bolsheviks, the Hitler-Stalin pact, opportunism and worse in the American trade-union movement, "Browderism" and the expulsion of Browder, the destruction of the CP's base in the trade-union movement, the hysteria of the mass expulsions of 1949-50 on "white chauvinism" charges, and the Foster-Dennis ironclad bureaucracy, the Communist Party has been able to impose a totalitarian structure upon its membership because they accepted the moral authority of the Stalinist state. It was only due to this that the thousands of sincere trade-unionists and radicals who moved through the CP gave up the right to democratic discussion. With the fast mooring of the Soviet Union to cling to, a fact which could justify every swivel-chair turn in the line as being due to the necessity of preserving "socialism" in Russia, it could be made to appear that the demand for democratic discussion within the Party was "objectively" anti-Party.

U.S. CP HARDEST HIT

The "revelations" (revelations which have appeared for twenty-five years in the socialist press) of the Twentieth Party Congress and the events in the Stalinist world following upon it have left the Communist Parties of the world in a permanent crisis. The CPUSA, not having the mass base of the European Communist Parties, has been the hardest hit, and will be the first to disintegrate. The signs of the disintegration increase in number and intensity with each day.

It does not take a savant to recognize that the CP was weak and sickly in comparison with its former strength even before the permanent crisis began. In the July *Party Voice*, the discussion bulletin of the New York Party, the New York State organizational secretary of the CP cites the following facts about the New York Communist Party, the healthiest CP organization in the country: (1) Over the last 10 years the CP lost over two-thirds of its membership. (2) Of its present membership, one-third are workers. (3) No more than 30-35 per cent attend meetings even on an irregular basis, the rest being paper members. (4) No more than 20-30 per cent engage in sustained activities. (5) Two-thirds of the present membership are over 40 years old "with no recruiting taking place." (6) Only 62 per cent of the Party made its dues payments in the first five months of 1956.

Combine this situation with the crisis of the post-Twentieth Party Congress period and the foundations of the Party are crumbling. As the New York State or-

ganizational secretary of the CP declared, there is "a moral crisis in the Party," "a crisis not like anything we have ever experienced in the Party's past history."

The entire situation has led to the most open discussion ever held in the CP since the complete Stalinization of that Party, with the appearance of clearly-defined factions and sub-factions, factions which it is safe to predict will appear at the CP convention armed with mimeographed factional documents and factional programs.

In the first place, there is the Old Guard, led by William Z. Foster and based on the older party-fundamentalists. Foster and company, while accepting in dutiful fashion the bulk of Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin, nevertheless still attempt to defend Stalin in one manner or another. Recognizing that the attack on Stalin can and is being turned against his own bureaucratic, anti-democratic manipulation of the CP, Foster can only fight back by defending Stalin. This faction while probably not the largest of the factions, is certainly of considerable strength numerically, having within it the bulk of the older party members who have long since ceased being anything but members of a cult for the adoration of Stalin's Russia. Despite this numerical strength, it is not of great strength apparently within the current active membership and secondary-leadership of the CP.

In the second instance, there is the Dennis faction, which Joseph Lash writing in the *New York Post* of July 22 dubbed the "conciliationists." This group, while attacking the Foster leadership of the Party for having been "left-sectarian," particularly during the "left" period of 1946-52, is doing little more than parroting in typical Stalinist fashion, the current "popular frontish" line of the Russian Party, a line which demands public apologies for the previous line. Dennis is attempting to make Foster the scapegoat for this period, in the way that Foster made Browder the fall-guy for the wartime line, even though both the "right" line of Browder and the "left" line of Foster were determined in Moscow. Dennis is the new leader of a Stalinist Party who has attempted to crack down upon the

free-wheeling discussion going on in the CP press.

The third group, a group of "Young Turks," is led by John Gates, editor of the *Daily Worker*, and has within it much of the secondary and local leadership of the CP, a group largely recruited into the Young Communist League in the early Thirties. This group has demanded of the leaders of the Russian Party "a basic analysis of how such perversion of Socialist democracy [as revealed in Khrushchev's approach], justice and internationalism were permitted to develop and continue unchecked for twenty years." They put forth and had adopted by the National Committee meeting of June 24 a resolution which declared: "We have begun to re-examine our previously oversimplified and wrong concept of the relations which should exist between Marxists of various countries including the Socialist countries."

Reflecting this point of view, "Food Worker" writing in the July *Party Voice* declares: "I'm an American Communist. I don't want to be a Russian Communist. And, not only that—I'm an American working-class Communist." The party, he continued, was wrong more often than not in the positions it took, "in great part because we thought the Russian Communists had all the answers and all we had to do was to get it from them." He concludes: "The main lesson of [the] Congress, it seems to me, is that we must think for ourselves. We must look first, hard and squarely, at all the realities of our country. We cannot do that unless we begin to learn how to listen to the people with respect, and to learn from them. Without this we will not be able even to make the necessary changes in our party. We must start by listening to the rank and file members of the party."

LEADERS BLAMED

Irv Becker concluding a long analysis of the crisis of the party in the *Party Voice* writes, "... the history of our party contains right as well as left errors, and in each instance there are two interlocking causes: the persistence of bureaucracy coupled with shallowness as regards understanding and application of Marxism." The party's leadership, he argues, made the CP the sick thing that it is. He writes: "Our leadership would be doing a real service—and in fact his is what is incumbent on it—were it openly, in the face of the whole party, to admit that it has trained the party to be what it is; to work as it does, and to think as it does; that it is responsible for the kind of cadre the party contains; and if it were to examine openly this cadre and these methods of work, and to pinpoint these matters, including the pinpointing of people. If we are to make real changes, the discussion must be taken out of the realm of generalities, and concrete measures taken and abided by for the creation and growth of party democracy."

Lester concludes with an attack on any attempt to blur the differences within the Party. He writes: "... in the name of a fictitious 'unity' the line and policy of our Party becomes more and more one of a compromise character. At this critical stage in the history of our Party, compromise will serve no useful purpose. Comrade Foster charged in 1945 that Browder used the 'fear of factionalism' to stifle opposition. We need equally to fight the 'unity of the Party' slogan being used to force compromise and the capitulation of the majority to the minority."

This attack on the party bureaucracy, this open criticism of the Russian CP, this reevaluation of the entire past of the CPUSA, even though it is being led by a secondary leadership which has yet to indicate the sincerity of its protesta-

tions of democracy, which itself certainly is implicated in the past of the CP, and which still continues to think of itself as the critical defender of the Soviet Union has opened a host of problems for the CP—and like the consequences of the opening of Pandora's box, there is now only the prospect of permanent crisis before the CP.

FOR DISSOLUTION

The real depth of this crisis is indicated by the fact that the party has been forced to open up its press to voices which go far beyond the proposals of the Gates-led group. There is a considerable group within the party which has been drifting away, have been, as Joseph Starobin indicates in a letter to a recent issue of the *Nation*, clearly no longer accepting the leadership of the CP in their trade-union and community activities. Some in this group have begun to cast about looking for a home, and following the lead of Clifford McAvoy, the fellow-traveling head of the American Labor Party, have come out in support of the candidates of the Socialist Workers Party in the forthcoming presidential elections. Starobin indicates that this group contains "several thousands," which if true, represents at least a fourth of the active membership of the CP.

Part of this group has already openly called for the dissolution of the Communist Party—and the *Party Voice* has had to print articles of this nature. The July *Party Voice* contains a letter from one "D. V." which calls in the first place, "to return to the people, where they will receive us, and to work humbly within the existing mass organizations. Perhaps in a return to the people we will learn the humility which is the basic ingredient of all leadership." And he concludes: "That this positions calls for the dissolution of the American CP should be obvious. What excuse can we have for its continued existence when it no longer has roots either in life or in theory. Possibly in return to earth we will sink new roots and produce new healthy flowers, not the poisonous fruit of Stalinism. For this kind of an approach to the reforming of the progressive ranks of America, the rigidities of the CP would be only an obstacle. We need an organization free of doctrinarianism and devoted to a democratic approach to the solution of American political problems."

The crisis of these people is well indicated by Joseph Starobin's letter to the *Nation* alluded to above, a letter filled with contradictions and half-apologetics for the CP, but still one which recognizes that the time for the death of the CP has come. Starobin, in a curious tone, in which he suggests that the non-Communist "Left" "social-work" the CP, writes: "They [the CP] need to be replaced and absorbed, a process that requires, if not mutual aid, then at least the interaction of many sectors of the Left. Where are men and women of vision, far-sighted and big enough to take the initiative for that?" Starobin clearly indicates that what he has in mind is not another front for the CP, but rather a grouping which would not initially have Communists in it, but would rather absorb those healthy elements from the CP as they left it and looked for a new political home.

CAN CP SURVIVE?

Whether or not the CPUSA will be able to survive in its present form the current crisis is problematical. However, even if it does manage to pull together its currently openly warring elements there is little question that the permanent crisis will see large sections of the CP drift away from it, and will prevent any serious new recruiting to its ranks.

But this does not mean that those who leave the CP will automatically become intransigent opponents of the Russian regime. For that matter, we probably are entering a period in which Stalinoidism and new illusions about Russia will become increasingly strong. The position of the Stalinoids has been changed—they have become instead of the satellite of the CP, the rallying points around which ex-CPers will congregate. Stalinoidism, in one form or another, will be on the rise in this period, its ranks being swelled by those former CPers who upon leaving the party will not simply drop out of politics altogether. Thus the current crisis within the CP produces new opportunities and new problems for the independent democratic socialist movement.

New Bound Volumes Now Available for 1953-54

Labor Action (per yr.)\$3.00

New International (1953-54 in one handsomely bound vol.).....\$6.00

COMBINATION OFFERS

LA and NI both, 1953-54.....\$10.00 (Reg. price \$12.00)

Labor Action, 1953 & 1954.....\$5.00 (Reg. price \$6.00)

NEW INTERNATIONAL 1953-54

Two years, fully indexed, bound together in one volume in heavy red buckram.

589 pages of concentrated Marxist analysis, including the whole of Max Shachtman's series on Isaac Deutscher, "The End of Socialism," and Hal Draper's definitive study on "The Myth of Lenin's 'Revolutionary Defeatism.'" And much besides. In a special-quality binding for only

\$6.00

Order from: Labor Action Book Service, 114 West 14 Street, N. Y. C.