

The American Road to Socialism

A Special Section Devoted to Discussion of the Past and Perspectives of the Communist Party and the American Left . . . Edited by Discussion Committee, Communist Party

Labor Movement Is Main Area of Activity

By a Group of Chicago Unionists

TWENTY active and representative shop and trade union workers in Chicago have begun a review of our activities in the labor movement. So far, we have had two all day sessions spaced a month apart.

While many shadings of opinions are being expressed, we have reached general agreement on some of the central questions, now being examined by our entire membership.

At the end of our last session we elected a committee of five to prepare a digest of our discussion so far to be recorded into the general pre-convention review of the role of Communists in the American labor movement. This discussion article is the collective product of that committee.

It is our feeling that the published parts of the discussion which includes comrade Dennis' report and the line of the Daily Worker is lopsided. While it is necessary to single out our mistakes and weaknesses in order to correct and overcome them, the impression that is being created is that all is negative.

NO WHIMPERING

This line has nourished the whimpering attitude expressed by some comrades that "the last 10 years have been wasted." If this were true—why has the American ruling class gone to such lengths to intimidate, harass and persecute our movement? Is it simply because they need a whipping boy? We feel that although our mistakes have seriously reduced our effectiveness among the American working people, American monopoly recognized in us a threat to their reactionary plans.

We must also take into account when we review the last period that the McCarthyite lies, the government created hysteria and the "relative prosperity" also contributed to the fact that we find ourselves not as close to the American worker as we should be.

But to conclude from our weaknesses that all is lost, that we voluntarily dissolve ourselves and that we make a fetish out of criticism of the Socialist countries in order to prove our independence from "foreign influence" is to surrender to our difficulties, play into the trap of Big Business and above all it will find us no favor in the eyes of the workers and their labor movement.

Above all we feel that this negative attitude obscures the fact that despite tragic errors and embarrassing boners, many of us in the shops and unions still maintain strong ties with our fellow-workers because we did participate in many positive ways in the daily struggles as well as the overall struggle for unity of the American working class and they do look to us to continue and improve our participation in the struggles.

And this leads us into what we consider to be the worst defect of the discussion so far.

Not in any of the published reports of the National Committee nor in the pages of the Worker is primary consideration given to tackling the problems that face the American working class and its struggling labor movement right now as well as in days to come.

Does their illusory search for

Statement of the Committee

Some weeks ago, this committee announced the opening of a public discussion on the report of Comrades Eugene Dennis, and Claude Lightfoot and Max Weiss to the National Committee of the CPUSA and urged the fullest participation of all Party members and organizations.

We print in this issue the second articles that have been received.

The discussion now being initiated is, of course, not entirely new. For some time now, there has been intense debate in the

"respectability" imply that some comrades now feel there can be an effective Marxist Party in America which is not hewn out of the brain and brawn of the American working people?

Is it not true that our main weaknesses flow from the fact that we have not listened to and concerned ourselves with the real problems of the American workers as they see and feel them not as we tended to imagine they should.

MISTAKE OF DEPARTMENTALIZATION

The tendency of departmentalize our shop and trade union work has proven to be very costly indeed. Concern with the problem of correcting our mistakes in the labor movement must be the heart and essence of any self-critical discussion by our entire party, its leaders and its press.

Are there so few problems immediately facing the American workers, that it is right to concentrate our entire attention on the very important, but not immediately decisive questions of re-defining our attitude toward the Socialist countries and their parties; what kind of transition to Socialism there will be in our country; and what kind of civil liberties the American people will have in a Socialist America?

If some comrades think that these questions, although thought about by many workers, are now the main concern of the average American worker then they are victims of their own imagination and are in truth isolated from the American working class.

If we take a good look at the labor movement right now, we find some interesting things. Whereas some time ago the labor movement was small, split and with little of a program, today there is a large united trade union movement with a program, such as exemplified by the UAW, Amalgamated and Packing and many other which in the main fits the bill.

The problem, today however, is that the trade union membership at large is not sufficiently acquainted with and involved in the fight for winning this program.

MAIN ARTERY OF ACTIVITY

This must be, therefore, the main artery of our activity—to be among the most active, persistent and capable fighters for this program of the labor movement.

Our skill must be reflected in our ability to single out in each industry, local and shop that part of labor's program which affects these workers most intimately. In one place the fight against unemployment, in another against speed-up, in still another around the problems of automation and

ranks of the Party on all phases of our work. A profound process of re-examination is going on. There are differences of opinion within our ranks on a whole host of questions. There is nothing alarming about this. For only an open, frank and vigorous discussion in which every member honestly and frankly states his or her position, can guarantee that we will emerge with a stronger party and one more capable of truly serving and advancing the welfare of

in some places for the 30-hour week.

In most places to find the right form to develop the struggle for greater Negro representation in union leadership, for civil liberties, for greater independent political action before and after the '56 elections.

And in all places to fight for higher wages to find the ways of furthering the drive to organize the unorganized especially in the South, and to encourage the broadening of unity of the labor movement, especially at the grass roots level.

The greatest strength of our party should be its overall correctly generalized experience of the working class. That is why a main direction must be given at all times to the current central struggle facing the working class.

Such a struggle is now being waged in the Great Steel Strike which should be the rallying point for the entire labor movement.

Our experiences here in Chicago, prove that only around such activities can we build strong coalitions of all types of workers in the shops and locals, especially is this true when we temper our activities with being practical and modest.

Another problem that exists is the tendency in large sections of the labor movement, leadership and rank and file as well—toward having many illusions about the common interest of management and labor or to put it another way to feel that there are "fruits of class collaboration." Is it not the role of Marxists to educate in a popular way the "nature of the enemy—Big Business" which the workers face every day in their struggles. We must skillfully and consistently nurture a class-consciousness among the American workers which helps them and us to learn the broader lessons from the everyday fight to protect and improve our standards of living.

SOCIALIST ADVANTAGES

Together with the participation in the everyday struggles of the working class and introducing a greater degree of class-consciousness in the course of these struggles, we must find the most effective methods of popularizing the advantages that Socialism would bring in America.

This means popularizing the achievements of Socialism in other countries and showing how these lessons could be used in working out our own native forms of Socialism. But even more conclusive for American workers would be to prove dramatically how on the basis of our own industries, farms, natural resources, culture and democratic forms and traditions,

the American people and the cause of Socialism.

We trust that this discussion will mark a new stage; in that it will help further deepen our understanding of the past, both in its positive and negative feature, as well as increasingly bring forth much more thinking with regard to future perspectives.

We urge upon everyone fullest participation in this discussion.

DISCUSSION COMMITTEE
COMMUNIST PARTY

Socialism would make giant steps toward the full realization of the American heritage of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Everyone agrees on the need to build a mass popular Socialist party in America. But we strongly feel that to conceive of such a party being organized overnight is unrealistic. Do comrades who propose this quickie method suggest dissolving the party and reorganizing ourselves as the "new mass party." Do they propose organizing a party with socialist individuals and groupings who today are further away from the American workers than we are? Or if not so then what do they propose? But in making proposals let's face facts as they are. We suggest that any Marxist organization worth its salt must be rooted in the American working class.

It is our feeling that to the extent we correct our mistakes and begin to make ourselves a modest example of how an effective Marxist party should function among American workers, encourage other socialist-minded groups of workers who do not care to join us as we are to set up their own form of organization and develop the most fraternal relations with all socialist-minded people—to that extent will we be laying a realistic groundwork for an effective and popular Socialist party which is rooted in the American working class.

Patience in this instance is surely a virtue. What has not been accomplished in decades will not be accomplished with the wave of an editorial. By realistically weighing every possibility and every avenue we can contribute most practically to reaching as quickly as possible this cherished goal of a great party of Socialism in America.

MEMBERS MUST GRASP THEORY

One comrade especially made a fine contribution to the discussion when he said "there is nothing wrong with our Marxist-Leninist science, what has been wrong is our incorrect use of this great science." And he added, "one of the main reasons for that is the fact that the workers in our party have never been made sufficiently familiar with the basic principles and methods of that science."

Up to now our working class comrades have only been acquainted with the findings of the leadership and were therefore poorly equipped to judge whether the science was being applied correctly. The basis of criticism and correction must become a widespread understanding of our science and its methods by our entire membership
(Continued on Page 7)

Letters from Readers



"Don't Let Segregation Question Drift Along"

AMARILLO, Texas.

Dear Editor:

Regarding the question of Segregation I feel that you are simply butting your head against a stone wall. Right here in Texas they are building separate swimming pools and separate schools for white and colored. In fact the people of Texas has no regard for any decisions of the United States Supreme Court. We have 6 candidates for Governor and all of them are for segregation, some not openly, others openly and they defy the Government to stop segregation. Likewise our Senators. Oh yes, the President is against segregation by his talk but neither of the Old Parties are willing to enforce the Supreme Court's decision regardless of what they say. So what?

I was born in the Michigan woods 81 years ago, worked on a farm later in the Southwest, worked for the railroad. Yes, we had segregation then and do today in Michigan. We whites are segregated ourselves. I have carried a union card for years, believe in organization. But today I feel perfectly at home with a bunch of Laborers or in a railroad beanery. Yet what would I do at a Chamber of Commerce Banquet? I would not know how to act, so I do not go with this class of People. Likewise I do not attend the First Baptist Church at Amarillo with its 6,000 members and that costs \$8,000 to operate per week. I go to some small church around the corner where I feel at home. I believe the Colored People of Texas feel more at home in their own churches, lodges and

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schools. Yet, some of the best players on the Amarillo Class A Ball team are colored. They get as much or more applause for a good play as the whites. But they do not eat or room together. We have one of the best Colored football teams in Texas. They do not play the whites, yet the whites contribute to their support. Same for the colored schools and churches. I am against segregation as much as you are and hope it someday comes to pass but I do not see it in my life time. In politics I am a Life Member of the National Greenback Party. I can remember the election of 1884 and every one since. We too do have a Candidate For President and Vice President. No, we will not elect them yet here in Texas. We cannot even vote for them for the laws in a great many states do not provide for their names on the ballot. Do you think that is right? Do not let the Segregation question drift along, people will forget about it as they do here in Texas.
—A. M.

Letters from Readers

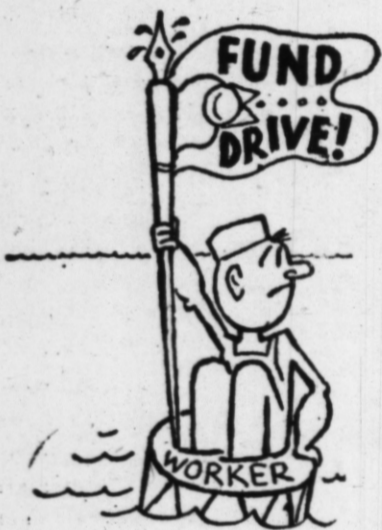
Union Man Says "Help the Wife"

Dear Editor:

Our re-evaluation of our work has been long overdue. I would like to comment on a letter in your paper. E. M. says a wife should not expect her husband to give up a union meeting so that she can do some kind of activity.

Of course industrial work is a field that more and more people ought to participate in. Let me hasten to add that I am concerned as to whether the above individual is working effectively in the shop. Can the above individual begin to appreciate the many problems women workers have if he has a very poor relationship with his wife? Are we to tell the women workers that they must wait until socialism before they can expect any progress on the question. Surely a little housework on the part of some men is not a real solution to the problem. But until we come up with a better solution to the problem what else can we do?

—A UNION MAN.



More Leaders Should Write Their Views

NEW YORK.

Dear Editor:

The supplement you have published for the last two weeks, with material contributed by Communist leaders, is a very useful forum. The level of contributions so far, however, is decidedly spotty.

The main criticism, as expressed by Fred Fine, is that the national leaders are lagging in offering leadership. We have heard important words from Steve Nelson and Max Weiss; but where are the others?

Is it right to assume that we have national cadres with close ties with basic workers? Is it right to assume that these comrades are thinking? Where is the voice of the working class—to the extent that we have access to it?

Are they all satisfied with what has so far been published? Where are the minority views?

Did they all think Gene Dennis' sketchy notes, mistitled a Report, was a good basis for organizing discussion? It is, only insofar as we rely on our own devices to criticize its manifold weaknesses.

Manny Blum, Nat Charley, Tony Krchmarek, and the rest who know the workers—what do they think?

—STANLEY ARCHER.



The American Road to Socialism

For a New Look at Democratic Centralism

By A. B. MAGIL

REVELATIONS OF ABUSES AND CRIMES THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE SOVIET UNION UNDER STALIN'S ONE-MAN RULE HAVE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY UNDER SOCIALISM AND WITHIN THE COMMUNIST PARTIES. In the case of the Communist Party of the United States the shocking disclosures concerning the Soviet Union and other socialist countries have only lent impact, depth and urgency to the discussion of inner-Party democracy that had begun informally even before the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party.

As our discussion has developed, the question has occasionally been raised whether the chief structural principle of Communist Parties in all countries, democratic centralism, is valid for the United States. To some, democratic centralism is the villain of the piece, responsible for bureaucracy and inadequate democracy in the American Party and bearing much of the blame for errors in political estimates and tactics.

DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER OF C. P.

First, let us get our bearings a bit. Some Communists write and speak as if our Party were the most undemocratic organization in the United States and as if virtually all other organizations were models of democracy. The fact is that a political party which represents the working class and the interests of the majority of the people is by its very nature immeasurably more democratic than the parties of big business or other organizations not based on the popular interest, irrespective of the practices and procedures that prevail in them.

In addition, even people's organizations, like the trade unions, the National Farmers Union, Americans for Democratic Action, NAACP, American Jewish Congress, etc., leave much to be desired from the standpoint of internal democracy. Nevertheless, we cannot be content with the democratic social core of the Communist Party and assume that nothing needs to be done to assure that it functions in a democratic way.

However, this question cannot be considered in the abstract. We would ignore the facts of life if we did not recognize that the absence of real legality for Communists in American life—a situation which did not begin with the Smith Act arrests but has been greatly intensified since then—necessarily restricts democracy within the Party.

In saying this, let me add that in my opinion bureaucratic and anti-democratic practices have grown up in our Party—partly in imitation of other Communist Parties, partly as a result of American capitalist influences—which far exceed what is required by security considerations. These practices, which stifle free discussion and stunt the initiative of the membership, need to be drastically changed.

WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

It is legitimate to inquire whether and to what degree democratic centralism has been responsible for this situation. What do we mean by democratic centralism? It is surprising that in the Constitution of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., which states that "In accord with the principles of democratic centralism . . . Communist Party members shall be involved in the formulation of major policies and shall have the right and duty to examine the execution of policies," no definition is given

of democratic centralism.

Turning to another authoritative source, the Constitution of the Soviet Party, as adopted at its 19th congress in 1952, we learn that democratic centralism signifies:

"(a) Election of all leading Party bodies from the highest to the lowest; (b) periodical reports of the Party bodies to their Party organizations; (c) strict Party discipline and subordination of the minority to the majority; (d) absolutely binding character of the decisions of higher bodies upon lower bodies."

Every people's organization of national scope faces in some form the problem of combining internal democracy with centralized leadership. This problem is especially acute for a workers' party which aims to organize the struggles of the working class and its allies and eventually to lead them to socialism in a country ruled by a minority of monopoly capitalists, who have at their disposal powerful instruments of repression as well as nearly all the media for molding the public mind.

LENIN'S ROLE

It was to cope with this problem that Lenin in the early years of this century developed the principles of democratic centralism and sharply combated those who advocated a looser form of organization. He also pointed out that in essence this struggle was also developing in other Socialist parties—the German, French, Italian—and that everywhere the opportunist anti-Marxist wing sought to undermine centralized leadership and discipline by demanding greater local autonomy in the name of "democracy."

While the general aspect of this problem was international, the democratic centralism evolved by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party was a product of specifically Russian conditions. These conditions were characterized by great economic backwardness, semi-feudal social relations, absolutist dictatorship and the absence of democracy. This situation necessitated extreme centralization in the Marxist party, sometimes at the expense of internal democracy, and strong discipline, often akin to military discipline.

After the Soviet Revolution democratic centralism evolved during the first few years in conditions of civil war and foreign intervention. In this period the struggle between Marxist and anti-Marxist trends in the Socialist parties of other countries also came to a head and led to the split in world socialism and the birth of Communist Parties.

INFLUENCED BY RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE

It was natural and inevitable that under these circumstances the immature Communist Parties in the capitalist countries, struggling to rid themselves of opportunist barnacles still clinging to them as well as of ultra-left tendencies, should have been strongly influenced by the much more experienced Communist Party of the world's first socialist state.

Thus the "Conditions of Affiliation to the Communist International," written by Lenin and adopted by its second congress (1920) stated:

"The parties affiliated to the Communist International must be built up on the principle of democratic centralism. In the present epoch of acute civil war the Communist Party will be able to perform its duty only if it is organized in the most centralized manner, only if iron discipline bordering on military discipline prevails in it, and if its party center is a powerful organ of authority, enjoying wide powers and the general confidence of the

members of the party."

(Selected Works Vol. 10, p. 204).

It is obvious that this type of democratic centralism did not conform then or at any time since to American conditions.

THE THIRD congress of the Comintern adopted a lengthy resolution on organizational structure and methods of work which spelled out in great detail exactly how the individual Communist Parties should conduct their activity. By the fourth congress in 1922 Lenin recognized this was wrong. "The resolution is an excellent one," he said in a report to the congress, "but it is almost thoroughly Russian, that is to say, almost everything is taken from Russian conditions . . . I have the impression that we made a big mistake with this resolution, namely, that we ourselves have blocked our own road to further success." (Selected Works, vol. 10, p. 332).

Nevertheless, the Russian type of democratic centralism undoubtedly made an important historic contribution to the evolution of the Communist Party of the United States and the world Communist movement. It served as an antidote to the Socialist Party setup under which every member could do pretty much as he pleased (provided he didn't please to behave too much like a Marxist), and party decisions were violated with impunity. Democratic centralism was also an antidote to anarchist and IWW conceptions, which denied the role of organization and leadership in the working-class struggle.

MODIFIED OVER YEARS

In practice democratic centralism was modified over the years by our Party and other Communist Parties. Not all the modifications can be said to have been for the better. Here again the practices of the Soviet party, which for so long was engaged in bitter struggles against internal and external enemies under the increasingly dictatorial leadership of Stalin, adversely affected the parties in other countries.

Almost completely lost in the shuffle was another aspect of Lenin's views on democratic centralism. In an article, "The St. Petersburg Split in 1907," which unfortunately is not included in Lenin's Selected Works, he wrote:

"The Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (the original name of the Communist Party) is organized democratically. This means that the business of the Party is conducted by its members, directly or through representatives, and that all members are equal without exception. All the officials, all the leading bodies, all the institutions of the party are elected, responsible and may be recalled. In order to make sure that a decision shall be really democratic, it is not sufficient to gather together delegates of the organization. It is necessary that all the members of the organiza-

tion, in electing the delegates, shall independently and each one for himself express their opinion on all controversial questions which interest the whole of the organization. Democratically organized parties and leagues cannot on principle avoid taking the opinion of the whole of the membership without exception, particularly in important cases, when the question under consideration is of some political action in which the mass is to act independently, as for example, a strike elections, the boycott of some local establishment, etc.

" . . . Not all political questions can be decided by a referendum of the whole Party membership. This would entail continuous, wearying and fruitless voting. But the important questions, especially those which are directly connected with definite action by the masses themselves, must be decided democratically, not only by a gathering of delegates, but by a referendum of the whole membership." (Lenin on Organization, pp. 19-20, Emphasis in original).

PROBLEM OF CO-OPTION

Though conditions in our country are certainly much freer than they were in czarist Russia, how many members of Party committees—section, region, state committees and the National Committee—owe their posts to appointment rather than election, or, as it is sometimes euphemistically called, "co-option?" And can any Party member recall when he participated in a referendum?

It is usually forgotten that the issue of Trotskyism in the Soviet Communist Party was decided in 1927 by a referendum. The Trotskyites were badly beaten, receiving only 4,000 votes, about one-half percent of the total. If any referendum has since been held in the Soviet Party, no one has heard of it. In general, submission of important questions to a vote of the membership has not, as far as I know, been practiced by Communist Parties for many years. This reflects the one-sided development of democratic centralism, in which, regardless of objective conditions, centralization has been exaggerated and democracy unduly restricted.

CLEARLY, before we conclude that democratic centralism, which is not a rigid formula and can be adapted to changing conditions, is "un-American," we ought to try practicing it. However, in saying this, I would also caution against treating democratic centralism as a holy of holies.

Is democratic centralism one of the fundamental principles of Marxist-Leninist science of the same order as historical materialism, the theory of surplus value and the theory of imperialism? In my opinion it is not. Democratic centralism is a means to an end. If a better means can be found, let's not hesitate to adopt it. But let's make certain it's real. (Continued on Page 10)

The Main Arena of Activity

(Continued from Page 6) and especially our working class members.

We feel, therefore, that it must be a prime responsibility of leadership to itself master the science of Marxism-Leninism and to find the ways of making this science the property of the entire membership and in turn the strongest weapon of the working class in its struggle against monopoly capitalism.

Many of the opinions expressed in this article are also a result of numerous discussions we have had with former party

members and progressive friends in our shops and locals. Some were held individually and quite a few in organized groups. Many of the suggestions made are already in the process of being tested in life which in the final analysis will give us the most effective answers.

We plan to continue our discussions through many forms but we feel it is now necessary to simultaneously begin to accelerate our activities among our fellow workers on the basis of applying our opinions for improving our work.

Letters from Readers

Less Recipes, Please, And More Guidance

TOM'S RIVER, N. J.

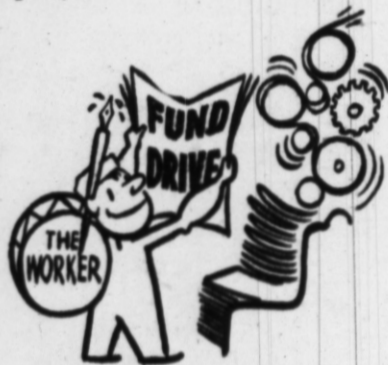
Dear Editor:

Being a steady reader of The Worker I will take the liberty in expressing my opinion of what the women's page should be. The valuable space in The Worker should deal with women's problems in the shop and factory on the farm and in the home.

Progressive mothers have problems with their schoolchildren and don't know how to solve them. The Worker should give them guidance. Instead The Worker gives recipes to its women readers. This we can find on all the food cans we buy and in recipe books.

I also like to express my opinion on the discussion carried on in The Worker. Comrades let's not go from one extreme to the next. True that we made mistakes in the past. It is wrong to say as the Philadelphian puts it that his twenty-five years with the Party was wasted. I don't feel that my thirty years in the party was wasted. With all the mistakes the party played an important role in all the struggles of the working class. I am confident with a new orientation on today's problems we will come out a stronger and better party.

-F. S.



Says "Philadelphian" "Scolded" too Much

Dear Editor:

This letter is provoked by the discussion article of the "Philadelphian" in the Sunday worker of June 24.

First, I want to reply, not to the specific content of the article, but to the impatiently alarmed tone it uses. The Philadelphian expresses himself against the "cult of the individual," which he describes as the practice of overemphasizing the role and importance of leaders.

Why, then, must he scold Dennis and the National Committee on shortcomings in their report? Does he expect them to come up with the last word on all our problems the first crack out of the bag? If so, he is overemphasizing their role and importance.

The purpose of the report is not to solve our problems, but to state them, and give enough indication of the committee's thinking so that those with ideas of their own will have concrete toward which to direct their remarks. I think the report is fully adequate to this purpose.

The Philadelphian's article would have been more useful if he had spent less space on worry and more on supplying the deficiencies which worry him. For example, he is concerned about the causes of our leftism. Both he and Dennis deal much too briefly with this major question. The Philadelphian surely has more to say on this than he has already said. Even if he feels that his own thinking is not complete, let him start "thinking out loud" about it, so that the rest of us can help his thinking along.

For another example, he states categorically that "we were completely isolated from the movements which stopped McCarthy." I want this documented and gone into in detail. What movements? When? Where? I think he may be right, but the bald statement is not enough, if only because Walters is not stopped yet.

-E. T.

The American Road to Socialism

A New, Broader Mass Party of Socialism

By ALBERT BLUMBERG

(Second of two articles)

IT IS a good augury that our party discussion is giving increased attention to the question raised in Comrade Dennis' report of "the possibility of organizing a new and broader mass party of socialism." For this question, I believe, lies at the heart of any realistic consideration of future perspectives both for American Communists and for other socialist-minded groups and individuals.

In a sense, we Communists are now entering a more or less protracted period of transition. The central problem in this period, it seems to me, will be how best to contribute to the realization of the perspective of a new party of socialism. What I want to discuss here briefly are two things: certain wrong approaches to this perspective, and the relationship of this perspective to our main immediate tasks.

To begin with, certain ideas have been cropping up here and there in our discussion that distort both the concept of a new party and the role of the Communists in relation to such a party.

First, there is a tendency to talk of a new party of socialism as if it lay exclusively with us to organize it. This, of course, is not and cannot be the case. The possibility of such a party rests on the existence and growth of varied currents independent of ourselves. Its organization, obviously, can come about only through the action and interaction of different groupings. What does lie with us Communists to determine is the extent of the contribution—modest but indispensable—which we can make towards creating the conditions for a new party. And this will depend in the first instance upon how we correct, re-shape and strengthen our own policies, methods and organization.

BY THE SAME token, we have to reject any idea that a "quickie" solution to our situation can be found in the immediate organization of such a party. A broad new party cannot come into being in a matter of months. To entertain such a notion would only narrow our whole approach, and would hang us up on the unreal question—"whom can we unite with now?" Nor does our Party situation—serious though it is—require any such thing. What it does require is that we further develop our own thinking on the perspective for a new party and take immediate steps to engage in all manner of exchanges, nationally and locally, with other bona fide socialist-minded groups and individuals.

Finally, I think we should avoid setting up pre-fabricated, inflexible conditions and programs for a new party. In particular, we should not confuse the question of what we expect as a minimum of a new party of

socialism with that of working out our own immediate theoretical and organizational reorientation.

Now, as to the relationship between the perspective of a new party and our immediate tasks:

Our discussion and re-examination, it seems to me, will miss the mark unless we focus at all times on three inter-related tasks which condition the realization of this perspective.

The first is to contribute to the building of a labor and people's anti-monopoly coalition in the course of the coming election; to participate in the struggles for the most pressing needs of the people in the shops and communities and for the key national issues (civil rights economic; peace etc.) in Congress, the party conventions and the election campaigns; to be active in the mainstream unions and other people's organizations and to encourage the independent political action and organization of labor, the Negro people, the farmers, the youth, women, nationality groups, etc. — looking towards the next stage in a mass political realignment led by labor.

THE SECOND is to help further the specific conditions for a broad new party of socialism, as outlined in the Dennis Report—seeing this new party in particular as a key to strengthening the labor and people's anti-monopoly coalition by strengthening its socialist component. Viewed in this light, the concept of a new party emerges not as something divorced from the perspectives of the mass movement, but as integrally related to it.

This becomes more apparent if we ask where are the forces who eventually might make up such a party. They would come, it seems to me, from varied groupings. Among these would be:

a) The many socialist-minded rank-and-file trade unionists who in any event are the necessary base for such a party—as well as other forces active in the mainstream. At the same time, it is noteworthy that certain socialist-minded leaders in the labor, Negro and liberal organizations are playing an increasingly advanced and prominent role in the whole labor and people's movement.

Thus, these leaders, together with the rank-and-file unionists, comprise a socialist-minded current which is an accepted part of the mainstream, and which exerts a growing influence in the emerging anti-monopoly coalition. These leaders, for the most part, are by tradition strongly anti-Communist. They are, however, beginning to move away from extreme red-baiting, and to re-think their position on many questions.

b) The bona fide left-socialist forces, largely but not exclusively middle-class, many of whom have worked with Communists in one or another left-led movement in the past. These forces constitute a significant non-Com-

munist socialist trend. Although they are today largely isolated from the main mass movements because of their sectarian outlook, they too are no doubt giving new thought to their participation as socialists in the labor-people's coalition.

IT SHOULD be added that these forces are extremely critical of past Communist methods and are frankly skeptical of our ability to change. The burden of proof in this instance is certainly ours.

c) The Communists, who combine advocacy of socialism with full support to the labor coalition. Although we Communists contribute to the coalition to a small but growing extent, we are not yet accepted as an acknowledged part.

Besides these more or less well-defined groupings, there are the large numbers of former members and supporters of the Socialist and the Communist Party.

Manifestly, no one can predict any set pattern for the eventual collaboration of such diverse groupings. It seems to me that the growing socialist currents will find expression in a number of ways in the immediate future, both nationally and locally. Not

the least important will be public forums like the Carnegie Hall meeting, as well as informal exchanges.

Our third task as Communists is to take prompt steps in the next months to re-shape and strengthen our own Party so as to facilitate our contribution to the anti-monopoly coalition and to the realization of the perspective of a new party.

In my opinion, we must continue the struggle to achieve a valid Marxist approach to all questions—taking as our point of departure at all times the interests of the American working-class and people, and maintaining a friendly, but independent and critical approach to other Communist parties and to the lands of socialism.

We must be conscious of our past errors and not hesitate to acknowledge them as an earnest of our determination to correct ourselves.

We must be prepared, in an atmosphere of free discussion, to strengthen the fight against left-sectarianism, to probe more deeply into the sources of our errors, and to review our application to the U.S.A. of the fundamental Marxist concepts and principles of organization.

Proposals on Party Democracy

Proposals submitted on party democracy and party structure to California State Board by various members for discussion:

1.—Delegated conferences should be convened on a section, regional, city, or county level, to which the clubs elect representatives, to discuss immediate questions facing us in the mass work of the party, even while the general discussion on the errors of the past period is still going on.

2.—The principle of regular conventions, and frequent elected conferences in between, must be established and adhered to.

3.—There must be a frequent review of policy, once established after widest discussion, to determine if it has met the test of experience.

4.—The party membership must be informed of differing points of view before a policy is decided upon, not just the final conclusion.

5.—Leading bodies, at least up to the county level, should be selected by direct representation, not indirect. They should consist of delegated bodies and function as a political assembly, to which the leadership is responsible, to which reports are made to verify policy, rather than to be used to mobilize for carrying out the line.

6.—There should be a "Bill of Rights" for the members in the Constitution; guaranteeing the right of dissent; no expulsion except for acts against the party and the working class; containing not just the right of appeal, but automatic appeal; including the right of recall of any leader;

co-options to leadership should be eliminated; make it obligatory to hear opinions of lower bodies and members and act on their proposals.

7.—The clubs should have greater autonomy in organizing their own agenda; the agenda should be simplified, and contain a "good and welfare" point, where members can raise any question or grievance.

8.—Leadership must not be narrowed down to full-timers, but must be broadened to include primarily comrades from industry, trade union and other mass work and experience.

9.—The question of leadership should not wait for conventions, which usually do not have the time to discuss and assess proposals for leadership; the discussions on leadership proposals should be opened up in the clubs, etc., in advance of the conventions.

10.—The standard of leadership should not just be based on how to bring the line down, but how to bring it up; that is, how to bring up experience from below and properly evaluate it for the formulation of policy.

11.—There must not only be a testing of policies based on the experience of the membership, in between conventions, but there must also be some provision by which the members can initiate discussion on possible changes of policy between conventions.

12.—In addition to constitutional provisions providing for the election of leadership, there should be local or state by-laws establishing how officers and leading committees should be elected.

Urges New Look at Democratic Centralism

(Continued from Page 7)

ly better.

UNDOUBTEDLY many changes are required in the American application of democratic centralism. Among them in my opinion, is that the "subordination of the minority to the majority" should also provide for the right of the minority to express itself even after a decision has been taken. In other words, the right to dissent, so deeply embedded in the American democratic tradition, needs to be incorporated into the practice of

our Party. Of course, a balance must be struck: the expression of a minority view cannot be allowed to assume forms that impede the execution of the majority decision. Yet even at the risk of opening the way to factional activity we must strive to provide channels within the Party and its press for dissenting views.

I think we ought to recognize both the urgent need to expand Party democracy in order to make it a more effective fighter for the peoples interests, as well

as the limits of that expansion. This internal process cannot take place under a glass, but joined to the external mass activity around the main issues that confront the people and around the 1956 election campaign. The discussion of the next few months and the Party convention should make it possible to agree on the specific internal changes required to help make our Party a much more significant force in American life and lay the basis for an eventual new mass party of socialism.



More Discussion Material on P. 14

The American Road to Socialism

We Substituted Our Desire for Reality

By MARTIN CHANCEY

WHY HAVE we lost so much ground in the post-war period? In answer to this question the Dennis report and the discussion which preceded and followed it in the main seems to be in accord on the following propositions: That our Party has made more than its share of costly errors; that most of these have been of a left-sectarian character and that we have repeated the same type of errors time and again.

I don't think we will get to the heart of the problem by merely cataloguing our errors as right or left opportunism. I feel that the discussion now has to advance to a deeper probing as to the nature and source of our left-sectarian errors which have plagued the American Marxist movement over the years.

The nature of most of these errors consists in mistaken estimates as to the course of economic development, wrong judgments as to the alignment of class forces and the direction in which the working class and other groups are moving at a particular time. How are we to account for our persistent misjudgment on these matters

(which are the basis for our wrong policies)? Is it to be explained by saying that the American Communist leadership is subject to a much higher percentage of error than that of other countries? I don't think that this will lead us to the answer.

If Marxist theory is supposed to provide us with the power of orientation, with an understanding of the inner connection between events and with the ability to discern the direction in which classes are moving now and in the future—then there is something wrong either with our theory, or our understanding and use of this theory—or both.

ROOT OF ERRORS

I think that the root cause of our errors lies with 1. The failure of our theoretical concepts to keep pace with the profound changes of the past decade. 2. A non-scientific, non-dialectical application of our theory. Wrong methods of thinking and analyses—characterized by one-sidedness and superficiality. Certain wrong premises with which we approach problems and their solution.

How do these non-scientific methods of thinking and application of theory express themselves?

1. In a tendency to substitute subjective desire for objective reality, as the basis for our policy. A case in point is the launching of the Progressive Party in 1948, which was neither warranted by the degree of labor support or a weakening of either of the major parties. Nevertheless, our resolutions proclaimed with great fanfare that the advent of the P.P. "marks the beginning of the end of the two Party system." Even tho a few short months later the electorate informed us in no uncertain terms that our obituary notice was premature, we still refused to look reality in the face until several years later.

Why is it that time and again we decide that the workers will move in one direction only to see them march off in another? Because we repeatedly make policy decisions on the basis of how we would react to events rather than how these events reflect themselves in the minds of the workers, who lack our Marxist outlook and training. On this basis we decide that certain institutions have become obsolete, forgetting Lenin's warnings to the left-sectarians of his day, that the fact that some institutions have become historically obsolete for us is no reason to expect that the masses are ready to ditch them.

CONFUSION OF TREND AND REALITY

2. We have persistently confused long-term historic processes with current trends and present day realities. In many of our theoretical writings we find such statements: "Capitalism in the U.S. as an organic part of the world capitalist system, is involved in the developing breakdown of that system. The world capitalist system is thoroughly sick and constantly getting sicker." (P.A. February, 1955). From which one might gather that all that's left to do in the U.S. is to pick up the pieces.

Such conclusions lead to serious policy mistakes. It is one thing to point to the basic contradiction between capitalism's over expanding capacity to produce and the limited market, as inevitably leading to crisis.

It is quite another to conclude that therefore, there will be an economic crisis in the U.S. in the next two or four months—as we have repeatedly done. In stressing the long-term factors making for crisis, we have given altogether insufficient study to the means at the disposal of the monopolists for counter-acting and delaying its outbreak.

3. Lack of correct synthesis and proper balance between the general features of capitalism and the specific characteristics of American capitalism. A tendency to overplay the former and minimize the latter. While correctly stressing the fact that the basic contradictions of capitalism operate in the U.S. as in all other capitalist states, we have given altogether little weight to the fact that the working out of these contradictions differs in each country. That these contradictions unfold within the frame-work of differing sets of conditions and in their development are influenced by a host of circumstances such as the scope



and rate of economic growth, levels of working class consciousness etc.

It is one thing to assert that the U.S. is not immune from the laws of capitalist development and decay. It is quite another to maintain that this process will take place in the country in the same form and at the same tempo as in other countries. Yet we have continually swung from one extreme—saying that the U.S. is immune from the general laws of capitalist development—to the other extreme of saying that these laws will assert themselves in an identical pattern in each country. It is the latter distortion which has plagued us most.

STALIN'S ONE-SIDEDNESS

This wrong synthesis between the general and specific features has its roots in the manner in which the factional struggles of the late 20's were resolved. This improper balance is contained in Stalin's speech on the American question where he stated that: while we must not ignore the specific features of American capitalism yet "the foundation of the activities of every Communist Party including the American C.P., on which it must base itself must be the general features of capitalism, which are the same for all countries and not its specific features of any given country."

It is the fear of challenging

this one-sided approach, fear of the bogey of 'American exceptionalism,' which has greatly inhibited us in our efforts to find a correct balance between the general and specific and boldly strike out in the direction of studying what is specifically, peculiarly, characteristically American.

It is this line of thinking which leads to stress the concept of the General Crisis of the Capitalist system and the elements of decay and decline, but to minimize the law of the Uneven Development of Capitalism as it relates to the U.S. in the post-war period. The decay of the capitalist system as a whole does not preclude the rapid growth of certain industries and even countries. Without proper assessment of the dominant position our country occupies in the post-war capitalist world, we can't formulate correct policy.

We could profit immensely from a restudy of Lenin's method. His emphasis on the need to apply fundamental principles in such a manner as will correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adopt them to national differences. His constant prodding as to the need to "investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp, that which is specifically, peculiarly national in formulating policy and tactics.

DOGMATISM

5. In our economic analyses we tend towards abstraction and dogmatism rather than concreteness and creativeness. We try to apply economic laws with the fixity of geometric equations. For years we have been torturing statistics and going off the deep end in trade union policy in order to 'prove' the law of relative and absolute impoverishment of the American working class. Our methods are strongly reminiscent of Procrustes who made his victims fit the size of his bed by stretching them or cutting off their legs. We have tenaciously held to the concept of absolute impoverishment even tho belied by the facts of life. We even ignored Marx himself, who after stating the above law, added in the very next sentence: "Like all other laws it is modified by many circumstances."

Our treatment of other economic propositions, is strikingly similar.

Perhaps our biggest problem in relation to political economy, is not so much application, as the abysmal ignorance of this subject in our ranks.

6. We have approached the class struggle in our country with a set of generalizations largely drawn from the experience of other lands. We have attempted to apply them without sufficiently studying the forms of motion,

the ebb and flow, characteristic of the class struggle in the U.S. Yet without such study we are unable to answer such questions as:

Why is it that in certain periods our Party has been highly effective in initiating in succeeding periods? Why do we lack staying power? Why is it that the American people have accepted virtually our entire immediate program (in the trade union field, Negro rights, social legislation), but at the same time rejected us?

FEATURES OF U.S. LABOR

To answer these questions we will have to study much more thoroughly certain features of the American labor movement: The short periods of intense class battles, marked by a sharp rise in militancy, in which important gains are often made in organization and working conditions. — 1919-1923, 1930-1938. These are followed by longer periods where the struggle takes on a more subdued form, marked by a decline in militancy—1923-1930, 1939-1956. Our Party has made its greatest advances in the shorter periods of intense struggle, gains which are largely wiped out in the more quiescent period.

Is it inevitable that the ground won during one period must be lost in the other? Some will point to the objective conditions. To the great resources possessed by American capitalism, to its capacity to maneuver, to grant concessions, to the fact that the very gains wrested in periods of struggle cause a decline in working class militancy.

Granted that objective conditions play a big part. But is this the whole story? Don't we all too often lay exclusive blame on objective conditions to escape from our own responsibility? Are we not in business as a Marxist-Leninist Party because we possess a theory which enables us to understand the workings of these objective forces, enables us to anticipate their course, to cope with them and to turn them to our advantage?

Have we not greatly contributed to our isolation by the slowness with which we recognize changed conditions and by our dogged resistance to modify policies to meet new situations? How often, when conditions call for a change of pace, for strategic retreat, have we gone over into headlong attack? How often, when conditions called for major concessions on our part so as to remain in the mainstream of labor, have we pressed all sorts of conditions and demands on general issues which only facilitated our being dislodged?

The answer to these questions cannot be found in the stock reply 'rigid tactics' with which our resolutions have attempted to explain our past errors. These wrong tactics in the main flow from wrong policies which have their source in stagnant theory and unscientific methods which must be more fully explored in the course of this discussion.

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