

World of Labor

.....by George Morris

A Look Backward at Some of Our Union Policy

AN EXAMPLE of the tremendous and deep-going changes now taking place in the working class movement of the world is to be found in a statement by Camille Huysmans, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Belgium and one of the oldest living leaders of the Socialist (Second) International. He recently spoke in Liege of his impressions during a tour of the USSR. He said he regards the division in the working class



movement that developed after the Russian Revolution a mistake and said "I want to do everything in my power to help restore working class unity in Europe" and added "This must be done quickly if we want to save democracy throughout the world. The time has come to again unite all trends in the working class. This is no dream. It can be achieved very quickly."

This statement struck me because Huysmans has been an outstanding right wing Socialist leader for decades, for a period of it secretary of the Socialist international bureau. As one who lived through many years of the bitter strife between right and left and knowing something of the leading role the Belgian socialists have played in the right wing Socialist International. I can appreciate that a man like Huysmans came to his view after a great deal of thinking and rethinking, and it took some courage. Men of his age (he was born in the year of the Paris Commune) don't change their outlook so readily. And yet, what Huysmans says is much like what others of his co-socialists are saying in many other countries. Even Guy Mollet, premier of France and head of its Socialist Party is saying things with respect to relations with the Soviet Union he did not say before.

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THIS TREND is evidence that there is a great deal of re-evaluation going on in this world. It is

not confined to the Marxist left. This re-evaluation is clearing the way for the kind of reunification Huysmans believes is now possible.

It need hardly be added that the development of the Socialist system to a point that it embraces nearly 40 percent of the world, and the strengthening of the peace camp as a whole to the point where a war is no longer fatalistically inevitable, has greatly contributed to the possibility Huysmans now sees. Some of the basic theoretical differences that led to the split in the first place, have diminished in importance.

But the big point that led me to write these lines is a strong conviction that those on the Marxist left need to indulge in a great deal more self re-examination and to let the world know of their conclusion, if the road to the kind of unity Huysmans talks about it is to be cleared and the process speeded.

It appears to me that the Marxists of many other countries are already well advanced in that process and are finding that it "pays off" in unity and a growing influence in the working class movement. I was glad to read Gene Dennis' suggestions last week in *The Worker* that we have many questions to re-examine and some long outdated dogmas to get rid of.

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ONE basic positive by-product of the post-Stalin developments, especially in recent weeks, has been a quickening of the process of Marxist independence in every land and towards a natural and healthy relationship between the Marxists and all countries. No longer will Marxists of any country feel they are doing something bad or that they are aiding the enemy, if they indulge in constructive criticism of some things in the Soviet Union or other socialist countries.

We in *The Worker* and *Daily Worker*, have made a start in that direction by our editorial expressions of indignation over the Rajk case in Hungary and the horrible details, now coming from reliable sources, of the Jewish writers in the USSR and other cultural lead-

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ers. We have opened our columns to letters on a full and free discussion. I am sure will continue along that line. But to my mind, our most important test on self-examination is not with respect to things abroad but on the basis of a look-back and a look-ahead here at home—as Dennis properly suggests.

As I have already suggested in my series on the 20th Congress in the Daily Worker, there are many things to re-evaluate on the trade union field. I hope to do my part in that respect before long.

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I DON'T think it is a question of atoning for sins, although that's part of it. Primarily the problem is to look back to see if we are going on the right road ahead. My own view is that the left, particularly the Marxists within it, has been responsible for some serious mistakes in the trade union field. Most of them can be traced to a lack of independence and clinging to dogmatic formulas and doctrinaire scriptures, when we should have grappled with the problems of REALISTICALLY applying Marxism to American life and problems.

We have often been so fearful of being charged with "American exceptionalism" that we closed our eyes to the plain realities and special features staring us in the face. We have applied the Marxist theory of "absolute impoverishment" so mechanically and dogmatically that at times we deliberately closed our eyes to economic facts because they seemed to contradict the theory; and thereby we often drew wrong conclusions on the bread and but-

ter issues affecting American workers.

A serious examination of the trend in the left, especially since World War II, I am sure, is bound to lead to the conclusion that the split in the CIO, that came to a climax in 1949, might have been avoided. The blame for the split cannot be placed entirely on Philip Murray and the CIO's right wing. For some time before the split it was apparent that the left forces—influenced strongly by the narrowness and a leftism in the ranks of the Marxists—forgot that the key to the success that marked the CIO's first 10 years was left-center unity.

That unity was breached — and the left itself contributed to that breach by its narrowness, over-estimation of its strength, refusal to retreat and compromise some when that was imperative (especially on the presidential race and on the Marshall Plan).

It is precisely the same trend that contributed later to a breach in left ranks, and between left and center, in the Transport Workers Union (sparked by the ten-cent fare); in the Hotel Union of New York, in District 65 in some important locals of the auto and steel union and in 101 other situations.

I am hopeful that much of the discussion will turn to some of those situations. We needn't fear to do so. The more clear the air, the sooner will come the restoration of unity.

I hope our trade unionist readers will avail themselves of the opportunity to write letters to the Worker on their views.