

# Why Foster Confronts a Deeper Crisis Than Thorez or Togliatti

By Morris Stein and Harry Ring

The international crisis of Stalinism has assumed especially sharp form in the United States. Suspicion, distrust and even contempt for the Communist Party's

national leadership is apparently widespread in the ranks. It permeates the discussion, which has been raging for six months. The leadership itself is split into cliques warring among themselves but united on one point: fear of divulging their differences to the ranks and letting them act as the final court of decision.

The refusal of the leadership thus far to divulge its differences feeds rank and file discontent and serves to further aggregate the crisis. A typical reaction to the conduct of the leadership is expressed in a resolution of the East Harlem club published in the July issue of the New York State CP bulletin, Party Voice. The resolution declares: "Our club feels that in order for us, the membership, to fully participate in the pre-convention discussion, it is essential that we know all the divergent opinions of the leading bodies of our Party. We believe that it is the responsibility of the respective committees to make their opinions available to the membership."

The same view is sharply expressed in a letter to the Aug. 27 Daily Worker from a CP unit in Los Angeles, the 24th Congressional District Zetkin group. In a unanimously adopted resolution the group declares: "We voice our indignation and protest against the National Committee's failure to make public the nature and content of various views and positions taken by the individual members of the committee in its last several sessions.

"This failure, in our judgment, constitutes disdain and contempt for the Party membership"

## A MORAL CRISIS

This sentiment has reached the stage where the Daily Worker must publicly state that its current fund drive is "far from its goal because of dissatisfaction and doubts among our readers regarding the present course of the Communist leadership in our country." Earlier in the July Party Voice, the N.Y. State Organizational Secretary reported the party to be in a "moral crisis."

With the membership reduced

to guessing about the views and differences in the leadership and left to their own resources in the discussion, a state of complete confusion exists as to what is the party program today, what was right or wrong yesterday, and indeed if the party was not based on a false program from the time of its inception. Every major question of party policy and the nature of the internal regime itself is up for re-evaluation.

This ferment has pushed the leadership into a posture of independence from the Kremlin. The June 29 statement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was supposed to "satisfy" all doubts and queries about present Soviet leadership (as it did with Thorez in France and, to a somewhat lesser degree, with Togliatti in Italy). But the CPSU statement evoked only formal acceptance from the hard-pressed leadership in America. In its resolution on this document, the National Committee was compelled to "take exception" on two key questions, that "of bureaucratic distortions of socialist society, as well as the happenings in the sphere of Jewish cultural institutions and their leadership."

That the crisis is much deeper in the American CP than it is in the French or Italian parties is explained mainly by the different nature of these parties. The American CP, unlike the French and Italian, has never been a mass organization. (At its peak it claimed 75,000 members.) In the past decade it has lost heavily in numbers, in union positions, in influence in intellectual circles and among oppressed minorities. In New York, the party's stronghold, two-thirds of the membership has been lost in the past ten years and of those remaining only 20 to 30% are consistently active. (N.Y. Organizer's Report, July Party Voice.)

## STALIN CULT WAS CEMENT

The CP leadership under the conditions of isolation relied more and more for political sustenance on the prestige of the

Soviet Union or, more precisely, on the myth of Stalin's "infallibility." The explosion of this myth with Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's hideous crimes, turned this chief asset of the CP leadership into a terrible liability and, leaves them without a solid base of operations. They have no record of success in the mass movement to draw on as does a Togliatti or a Thorez. The only period of such "success" enjoyed by the American Party is associated not with the present leadership but with the era of Earl Browder.

It is not surprising therefore that a nostalgia for the "good old days" of the Browder period seeps through all the pores of the discussion, particularly among the members of the apparatus such as those who compose the New York State Committee.

These people, including those in the central leadership, turned against Browder in 1946, not voluntarily or out of principled considerations, but solely on order from Stalin as transmitted in the celebrated letter from Duclos. They nurse a special grievance against Stalin and against Foster who regained power with Browder's expulsion.

When Browder fell from grace, Foster openly boasted that he had maintained an opposition to him. The struggle between Foster and Browder actually dates back to the late Twenties when the Trotskyists were expelled and, after them, the Lovestoneites. Throughout the period in which Browder held the leadership, Foster was compelled to grudgingly carry out orders and wait sullenly for the inevitable day when Browder's head would roll.

## CONCEALED RIVALRIES

In 1946 Foster became the head of the party but the victory was nominal. He had to work with a machine that had been fashioned by Browder. The distrust and conflict between this machine and the Foster clique continued throughout. But the differences, of course, were kept from the membership which always met a solid front of the bureaucracy and its stifling "unanimous" declarations.

Today, Dennis in his pamphlet, The Communists Take a New Look, confirms that "sharp po-

litical differences which arose in the leadership were often temporized and left unresolved for long periods."

The 20th Congress repudiation of Stalin has been seized upon by Foster's adversaries as the means to repudiate not only Stalin but primarily Foster and his course. The opposition to Foster is strongest on the staff of the Daily Worker and in the leadership, of the New York State party and they are making him the scapegoat for all the failures of the past decade. To the extent that the differences are expressed in such organs as Party Voice, it is invariably Foster who is singled out for criticism. His record in the struggle against "Browderite right opportunism" now becomes the target in the present war against "left sectarianism."

Hitting back at his critics, Foster cites the difficulties of the objective situation, the cold war, the witch hunt and the extended period of prosperity. He argues in the Aug. 26 Worker that "It seems to be high time that our Party makes a more systematic and Marxist analysis of its experiences during the cold war. As things now stand little attention is paid to anything but our mistakes, many of which as stated, are more imaginary than real." But the ranks obviously do not consider the mistakes to be imaginary.

The insistent demand that the differences be placed before them is something that the bureaucracy is not accustomed to. Until now, Stalin, not the Party membership, was the arbiter of all major differences. It is not the habit of this leadership to write resolutions delineating its differences and defending their respective positions before the ranks. They are trained only to close ranks and unitedly bludgeon the membership into conformity with the latest "line."

Such a procedure cannot work this time. Even if the leadership succeeds in patching its differences, it no longer has the ability to silence a deeply suspicious rank and file. The demand for a full, democratic discussion will inevitably grow even stronger.