WHY THEY MISUNDERSTOOD THE COMMUNIST PARTY CONVENTION

By H. W. BENSON

Not many commentators understood what was happening in the American Communist Party last year. It had been plunged into a deep crisis first by the 20th Congress and then by the Hungarian events; a bitter internal dispute showed that the party was split into irreconcilable sections. The question of how to maintain the party away from Stalinism. It might seem odd that so few were willing to notice it.

Now we have the abridged, but comprehensive, text of the proceedings of the Communist Party Convention of the CP held February 9-12. It was here that the fight was mounted, in which the question of how to maintain the party away from Stalinism was decided.

The Communist world, still dominated by Stalinism without Stalin, has its own reasons for not wanting to have publicized the whole situation. Everywhere, the Communist Parties are eager to restore the old Stalinist style of doing things, to use the Cuban crisis without making fundamental changes; in fact, to pretend that there never really was a crisis at all.

But in the United States, Stalinism was shaken, and the national CP was forced to consider the myth of world Communism unanimité and unity, it is necessary to examine the nature of the fight in the CPUSA and the results of its recent convention.

What made it possible for world Stalinism on the one hand and many of our own anti-Stalinists on the other tounderstand the significance of the fight in the CP was the fact that the basic differences were highlighted, but were shrouded over at the convention.

In the Daily Worker on June 4, Alan Max said that the necessary decision had been made.

Accounts of the CP convention in the United States that had been published in Proletarian, the magazine of the British Communist press, and in various Latin American newspapers, all contained one curious common element in all these reports: "All the discussions have been carried on in complete confidence," they wrote, "without a lack of familiarity with the proceedings in any sense of the term."

In the March issue of International Affairs, our correspondent in Moscow, Moscow, he reported that a new approach and broader understanding of the CP and its movement was adopted by the convention. As the Daily Worker put it, "the atmosphere of unity, the Stalinoist clouded silence, the move towards the Moscow version." Timofeyev's conception of the convention was a simple one. He reports the rise of a "revisionist" and opportunist "right wing" in the party and he reports with satisfaction that it was completely defeated. His "revisionism," of course, refers precisely to the Moscow tendency.

The convention victory, in his view, was no less than the defenders of the Moscow tendency for Stalinism.

The text of the debates, the speeches, the minutes, the reports, the resolutions, the decisions of the convention, are all available.

In short, the mood of his report:

"In recent months, the situation was again worsening. A series of right-opportunist elements who tried to utilize the Hawaiian incident to put forward the left-Stalinist viewpoint into the party is an amorphous political association. There was also a proposal to organize a new, theoretically and practically, to which the Communist Party would dissolve. The revisionists urged the adoption of a number of basic Marxist-Leninist principles. They also put forward a policy implying departure from the principles of totalitarian internationalism.

We remind the too trusting reader that "proletarian internationalism" is a slogan of an affiliate of the Moscow line.

The Moscow-Zinovievists in the U.S. Communist Party resented the revisionist and liquidationist moves," says Timofeyev, adding later: "...the hope of rescue, which on the eve of the convention characterized the CP was facing a split with most of its members advocating the 'revision' of the principles of Marxist-Leninism and their departure from the internationalist tendencies . . . Differences which had earlier come to the fore were resolved. Party solidarity was strengthened on the lines of the Marxist-Leninist principles."

And the Russian writer looks at his world move in the same way, even as one of the United States, the Communists are repudiating the attempts of the reactionaries. While the American left-Stalinist and left-Soviet sections, the Communist Party, and the Western communist parties have the same time vigorously opposing revisionist and liquidationist tendencies.

HITS BACK

Alan Max, of course, objects to all this: he feels the convention quite different. He insists that the convention endorsed a new approach and claimed Timofeyev for not mentioning it: he quotes from a resolution unanimously adopted by the new National Administrative Committee of the CP of August 1957.

"But where is Timofeyev's article, and why is there a wing which wants "the extremely sharp turn which the Party is now making? Where is there anything to indicate an attempt to make a case of what the Political Affairs section of the CP called "this new, correct, approach to broader and deeper understanding of the Moscow political line."

Here, in the new approach of the party, that is to say, in abandoning the earlier ideologically unconvincing and ideological attitude towards the lands of socialism while recognizing their historic role and achievements and their importance to the world Communist movement, there is the clearest hint of the party's new approach to Social Democracy, or of the convention reply to Jacques Duval of France."

Max hopes, finally, that when the printed proceedings reach International Affairs, it will correct its estimate. "Such an account, especially if it remained uncorrected, is something that could only tend to shake the confidence of your readers in the quality of your journal's sound political estimates."

One understands Max's dissatisfaction and sympathy with his shortcomings. But he must face one question: How is he going to explain the meaning of his "Open Letter."

For the distinctive Stalinist slant, the "wrong estimate" of International Affairs is shared by virtually every important international Trotskyist tendency. In most national tendencies in the U.S., with the exception of a few radical sects, Why?

The common conception, or misconception, if you like, is that the CP represents not only the social and political aspirations of the party's bulk, but also for the sources of the misunderstandings.

SLURRING OVER

(1) The Main Political Resolution

- Reprinted in a lengthy appendix, the Main Political Resolution was adopted at the convention almost unanimously, with the votes of the leaders being the only ones not recorded. The convention views Foster referred to all the main points of the resolution.

"And I must say that I have voted for every single one of the decisions which have been present when they were adopted, and as far as I know, there were no others that I would vote against."

"One may dig deep into the resolutions and question the validity of any opinion that Foster should reject, but the fact is that it becomes the basis for unity of the convention. A collection of arguments that the proceedings show, too, that it was based on the real differences among the tendencies, that was underlined."

This stands in sharp contrast to the pre-convention discussion. In the months before the convention, the Draft Resolution and the Pre-convention Report of the Moscow Convention was to be a public debate, for a presentation of all the arguments to cut down split-Stalinist and split-Western, the same time vigorously opposing revisionist and liquidationist tendencies.

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