

On Our "Critical Review"

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I WILL DISCUSS that section of Dennis' Report to the National Committee dealing with a Critical Review of the Party's Work. I was disappointed with this Review for a number of reasons:

The Critical Review adds up a considerable number of mistakes and errors both as regards political estimates and judgment, and as regards tactics in organizational activity. It is my opinion that a listing of mistakes and errors is not what our Party now needs most in the way of critical review. What we need is an analysis of the role of our Party in our country today, and in the future, and what is required of our Party—what kind of a Party it must be—to enable it to play its historical role towards the achievement of Socialism.

For instance, I would have preferred a discussion by Comrade Dennis on such basic questions as: (a) Why has our American Party not become yet "the Party of a Class"?—reflecting our class connections through a strong working-class composition? (b) Why isn't our Party more solidly integrated with the Negro people and their movement for

full equality—and also with the struggling sections of the farmers? (c) What part of our activity should be taken up with sowing and spreading the "liberating ideas of Socialism"? Such questions as these would, I believe, help to clarify how to overcome organizational losses, lessening of political influence and growing isolation.

I would rather that Dennis had dealt with what he refers to as "basic, deep-seated and long-standing weaknesses and shortcomings of the Party" instead of deciding as he did to "limit his review to the last decade" in the form of compiling errors dealing with—(a) Errors of judgment (political estimate); (b) Tactical Errors (in Party activity). I cannot understand nor agree with the following proposition stated by Dennis: "We cannot ascribe negative aspects of Party work merely or chiefly to general shortcomings which we inherited from the past, or to mistakes of previous periods."

At the present moment our whole Party is aroused more than ever before that we abolish—not just mistakes and errors a decade old, but especially the "basic, deep-seated and

long-standing weaknesses." Especially in the last section of his report, Dennis does not overlook these main obstacles; but they are not placed correctly in the Review of Party work. I refer to the points in Section Three of the Report, on United Front Relations and Alliances; Putting an End to Dogmatism; Building a Mass Party of Socialism; Finding the American, Peaceful and Democratic Road to Socialism.

No one to my knowledge has disputed the fact that for a long time the relation between our Party and the American working class and people has been damaged by conceit and arrogance in our Party. "We had all the answers." We were people of a "special mould." We were "leaders." The basis for this conceit was, of course, that we possessed "open Sesame" to the "Science of Marxism-Leninism." We did not give equal weight to having "open Sesame" in the direction of our fellow countrymen! Now we are determined that this situation must be changed.

How can the bad situation regarding our Party's relation with the American people be changed radically for the better? One might infer from the Critical Review by Dennis that what is needed is that we—(a) correct our wrong political estimates about the imminence of war, fascism, and economic crisis; (b) that we strive diligently to master united front and coalition methods of work and overcome sectarian-

ism. Dennis showed how faulty political analysis fed and strengthened sectarian practices in our Party in the recent period. I believe the point is well made but it is not the whole truth as regards sectarian isolation. There are many other aspects about the theory and practice of our movement in addition to the question of political analysis and political estimate of social-economic conditions.

There is the question of the proper understanding and use of dialectics. There is the question of real and factual economic analysis; there is the question of finding the correct forms and methods of Party organization. For instance:

1. Marx criticized "doctrinairism" of the German Socialists as early as the period of the Civil War.

2. Class composition in our movement has been a matter of concern to the membership and leadership for a long time, and is related to the question of where and how we should concentrate our efforts.

3. For a long time it has been noted that our use of theory was lacking in some way or other. It was suggested that "pragmatism" (practicalism) plagued our theoretical work. Now it is apparent we haven't been practical enough. We had theory, but the wrong kind. It was too much bookish and foreign—not sufficiently related to American history, traditions, conditions, and facts. By using theory to justify wrong tactics we probably caused many people to develop a contempt for theory in general. Our

theory has obviously been plagued with "cultism" in various forms—cult of the great individual; of the great socialist country; cult of the "professional revolutionaries," etc.

All these political afflictions, and probably many others, contribute to isolating us from our class and our popular allies—and obviously correction of "faulty political estimates of current public dangers" alone would not result in overcoming isolation, though such correction is constantly required.

To sum up—I believe that the main problem connected with a Review of Party work is how to make a qualitative jump forward in cementing our relations with the working class—trade unionists first of all—with the Negro people and the crisis-beset farmers. Our object is to remove all obstacles, major and minor, and get on with our aim,

which we know to be in the interest of the majority of Americans—Socialism as quickly as possible!

Our first concern needs to be that of adapting our Party to the peculiarities of America—especially the American Labor Movement. That means adapting our Party to the American traditions, forms of organization and struggle, American beliefs, attitudes, including those that need to be changed. Great changes are taking place. Movement is in process. We must first of all be a part of this, then we can fulfill our role of adding to the process a special ingredient essential for the achievement of Socialism—the viewpoint of working-class emancipation.

We need to educate ourselves and everyone—away from dogmatism, doctrinaire thinking, and avoid action which is not thought through in American terms.