

# The Party Crisis and the Way Out: Part I

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

During several days in October, the *Daily Worker* in New York City, published a series of articles by the well-known Communist leader, Alexander Bittelman, in which an analysis was offered of the crisis in the American Left and suggestions given as to how this might be overcome. William Z. Foster, finding himself in disagreement with many of the points made by Comrade Bittelman, prepared a reply which was originally intended for the same paper. Meanwhile, however, it became necessary—temporarily it is hoped—to reduce the size of that paper to but four pages; this has made impossible the publication of Comrade Foster's reply in the paper. Knowing there would be widespread interest in the views of William Z. Foster on the central questions discussed by Comrade Bittelman, we bring these to our readers in the following pages.

Shortly after completing the work hereunder published, Comrade Foster, who has been seriously ill for years, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. But with the indomitable fighting will which has characterized his entire career, Comrade Foster has been battling his way back to recovery. We know that all our readers, and additional multitudes throughout the world, wish for him a speedy and complete return to activity.—*Ed.*

## I. HOW THE PARTY WAS BUILT

THE BASIC THING the Communist Party of the United States needs is an active development of mass work and Party building. At the same time, theoretical clarity is necessary; but I did not find Comrade Bittelman's articles in the *Daily Worker* to be serving either purpose. Ranging throughout the Party's theory, history and practice, his articles constitute virtually a new thesis for the Party; one which conflicts at numerous points with the line of the

Party's 16th Convention. Now, therefore, despite any other considerations, the article cannot stand without an adequate answer.

Before analyzing Comrade Bittelman's main thesis, however, it would be well to consider the policies by which the C.P.U.S.A. built itself over the years, as these policies, in the Bittelman articles, are very much the subject of controversy. Let us examine why, in earlier decades, the Party was able to grow strong and to become a real factor in the labor movement, while all other Left

groups remained stagnant and impotent. Manifestly, the reason for this success did not lay in special environmental conditions, for these were essentially identical for all Left groups, varying as they did from economic crisis to boom, to war, and back to boom again. Decisive, instead, were the subjective factors; the policies used by the various groups.

#### SEVEN VITAL PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM-LENINISM IN PRACTICE

The basic reasons why the Communist Party could build itself in numbers and mass influence over this long and varied period were three-fold. First, theoretically, the Party was based upon the sound principles of Marxism-Leninism, which sum up the entire world class struggle experience of the proletariat and the scientific thinking of its great leaders. Second, organizationally, as well as politically, the C.P.U.S.A. was what Lenin called "a Party of a new type"; adapted to all the exigencies of the class struggle in the period of imperialism. And third, the Party applied its Marxist-Leninism in a spirit of active class struggle.

In order to learn just how these three basic Marxist-Leninist theories and practices translated themselves concretely into effective mass work and active Party building for the C.P.U.S.A., it is necessary to examine into their application in the class struggle over the decades in question: Of these policies, at least seven

may be listed for analysis, as having been decisive in the history of the Communist Party, particularly during its successful decades.

*First: Socialist perspective:* Of tremendous importance in strengthening the work of the C.P.U.S.A. was its close sympathy with the first country of Socialism, the U.S.S.R. The struggles, hardships, and successes of the Soviet people were a supreme inspiration to the C.P.U.S.A. and they also attracted to its ranks the best fighters in the working class. A fundamental advantage to our Party also stemming from the Russian Revolution was the theoretical work of its great leader, Lenin, whose writings were the meat and drink of the Party. There were also some important negative sides to the Party's relationship toward the U.S.S.R., but these were far outweighed by the positive influences of the Revolution.

One of the serious negative effects was due to our Party's failure to conduct a comradely criticism of the weaknesses of that country. This "everything-is-all-right" policy antagonized many workers, who rightly believed that criticism was in order. But by far the most serious negative effect upon the Party in this general respect was the Party's long-continued sectarian tendency to apply too literally to the United States the experiences of the Russian Revolution, especially in its agitation and propaganda. This tendency was particularly harmful when the Party undertook to explain how American

Socialism would be brought about, and also how that new system would operate. Here the C.P.U.S.A. (like all other Communist Parties) tended to copy mechanically the Russian experience—Soviets, revolutionary strategy, and all. This error profoundly hindered the growth of the Party and its mass work.

The American workers did not believe the assumption that Socialism could not be achieved through regular American democratic channels. For many years this remained the supreme theoretical weakness of the Party; its failure to absorb into its policies what was fundamental in the Russian Revolution and yet to work out more specifically the probable road to Socialism in the United States. It was not until 1949 that this most difficult of all the Party's theoretical problems was essentially solved, by developing the perspective of achieving Socialism in this country along parliamentary channels and relatively peacefully. This was the most important theoretical advance ever made by the C.P.U.S.A. on its own initiative. It opened up a whole new period of possibilities of Party membership and united front connections with masses of workers hitherto repelled by the Party's unacceptable conception of the road to American Socialism.

*Second: Proletarian internationalism:* A tower of strength to the C.P.U.S.A. was its working relations with other fighting working forces all over the world. The Communist International, to which our Party

was affiliated for 20 years, had various weaknesses (such as overcentralization), and these were harmful; but on the whole the Comintern was a big plus for the Party, in maturing its Leninist ideology, educating its cadres, and developing the Party's international proletarian spirit.

*Third: Democratic centralism:* This Leninist form of organization was also a major asset to the Communist Party of the United States. As other Communist Parties, the C.P.U.S.A. made many mistakes in this respect, with bureaucratic practices. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, democratic centralism, even in the limited forms in which we achieved it, gave our Party a fighting capacity, discipline, and working spirit that were the envy of every element in the labor movement. In its ability to move swiftly and resolutely as a unit, our Party had no rival in the labor movement, and this was a fundamental cause of its relative success.

*Fourth: National characteristics:* Almost from its inception, the Communist Party made war against the bourgeois theory of American exceptionalism, which holds that capitalism in this country is not capitalism at all; that American workers are not real proletarians; and that there are no social classes and no class struggle in the United States. Simultaneously, the Party paid relatively close attention to such important specific American national characteristics as the fact that the

United States is the largest of all capitalist countries; the particular qualities of U.S. monopolies; the non-Socialist ideology of the workers; the lack of a big Social-Democratic party; the higher living standards of the workers; the national diversity of the working class; the special American Negro question; and the specific American democratic and revolutionary traditions. Here again, the Party made many errors, both of omission and commission, and of both a Right and "Left" nature, especially in the realm of theory, and despite the good advice of Lenin. Nevertheless, particularly in the every-day class struggle, the Party lived in the world of American political reality, and it based its immediate demands and struggles generally upon the actualities of the situation in the United States. The C.P.U.S.A. was actually more American in its mass work than any other Left group in this country, all assertions to the contrary notwithstanding.

Comrade Bittelman is only partly correct when he says that the Party "went overboard" in a Leftist direction after it defeated Lovestone's opportunism in 1929. Only a year after this, in the vast unemployment movement of the 1930's, the Party conducted some of the biggest mass struggles in its entire history. And Bittelman is largely incorrect when he says that the Party also "went overboard" after defeating Browder's Revisionism in 1945. Here he ignores the fundamental

working class and American national interests in the Party's fight to defeat the war threat and McCarthyism. He also forgets that what has been called the Party's Leftist leadership, in 1948, developed the most important break with sectarianism in the Party's history, namely the formulation of the parliamentary road to Socialism. His charge that the Party also overestimated the war danger and fascism stems from the Right and has no truth in it. Korea, Indo-China, Egypt, the vast military machine of the United States, and the present tense world situation are the most effective answer to this.

*Fifth: The united front:* This was one of the most productive policies in the whole arsenal of the C.P. U.S.A., especially in the form of the Left-Progressive bloc in the trade unions. This Leninist strategy enabled the Communists to unite with other progressive forces in a way that was equaled by no other tendency in the labor movement. As usual, however, gross mistakes were made, mainly, but not always, in a sectarian way, such as our disastrous splits with the Fitzpatrick and La-Follette groups in the big labor party movement of 1922-24. Despite all these weaknesses, however, we built our Party primarily with the great united front policy of a Left-Progressive bloc in the trade unions. Count the united front, therefore, especially in the unions, as one of the most fundamental reasons for the growth of the Communist Party.

*Sixth: The vanguard role:* The

Party's realization of this basic Leninist principle of Party work, was also one of the most decisive reasons for its considerable measure of success. To realize this, all we have to do is to think back to the Party's numberless pioneering fights—to organize the unorganized, to defend the rights of the Negro people, to secure relief and insurance for the unemployed during the great economic crisis, to establish democracy and honest leadership in the trade unions, and to win many a hard-fought strike. In such struggles, it was commonplace for the Party to stand at the head of the workers ideologically, and more than once, as among the unemployed, organizationally as well. The Party's vanguard role among the Negro people in struggle was outstanding, especially in contrast with the A. F. of L. and the Socialist Party. Such militant and fearless leadership and political initiative clearly were among the most fundamental reasons, despite the usual crop of shortcomings, why the C.P.U.S.A. was in a class by itself on the Left in its ability to attract members and to win mass influence.

*Seventh: Self-criticism:* This is one of the most dynamic and effective of all the Leninist organizational principles. The analysis and admission of errors gives an enormous advantage to Communist Parties over other political organizations. It facilitates the overcoming of shortcomings and the prevention of others. The C.P.U.S.A. was never distin-

guished for self-criticism, especially when it came to its leaders admitting their personal mistakes; but even in the limited degree that it did practice self-criticism, this gave our Party a big advantage over all other Left groupings.

#### PARTY-BUILDING IN MASS STRUGGLE

The relative success of the Party's mass struggles over the years was based upon the generally correct application of the above seven fundamental Marxist-Leninist principles, especially in trade-union work. Indeed, the Party built itself mainly with its generally sound practical trade-union policy. This policy in its immediate sense, had its roots in the pre-Party work of the Foster-Johnstone group in the Chicago Federation of Labor. By the time the Party was founded, this group had already carried through the national organization of the meat-packing workers (200,000 members) and the national steel workers (367,000) and a 10-year fight against dual unionism, one of the worst sectarian mistakes ever made by the Left—a fight which was brought to a victorious conclusion by the publication in 1920 of Lenin's classical work, "*Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The Foster-Johnstone group were syndicalists and as such held many wrong theories; but, as has often happened in our Party's history, this did not prevent them from carrying through many relatively correct immediate-demand campaigns. They joined the

Party early in 1921, and from then on led its trade-union work.

The development of the Trade Union Educational League after 1921 marked the beginning of effective Communist work in the trade unions. It was based upon a Left-Progressive (Center) united front, with a militant vanguard trend. It was also animated with a keen sense of American reality in labor's struggle for immediate demands. Coming upon the scene, as it did, in the crisis period for the trade unions of the big post-World War I employer offensive against organized labor, the T.U.E.L. made a strong and immediate impression upon the hard-pressed labor movement with its militant campaigns. Consequently, within 18 months some 2,000,000 organized workers—over half of the whole trade-union movement—endorsed the T.U.E.L.'s central slogan for the amalgamation of the trade unions into industrial organizations. Almost as great a success was had with the T.U.E.L.'s other major slogans, "For a Farmer-Labor Party," "Organize the Unorganized," and "Recognize Soviet Russia."

These broad mass movements of the T.U.E.L. quickly broke the previous isolation of the Communist Party and brought it right into the heart of the living class struggle. The Party moved its headquarters from New York to Chicago, developed united front relations with the Fitzpatrick forces, and at once became an important factor in the strong Farmer-Labor party move-

ment of the period. However, the unfortunate splits with the Fitzpatrick and La Follette forces in 1923—Leftist errors which the Party's trade-union leaders, among others, opposed—cost the Party and the T.U.E.L. much of their previous mass gains.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing years up to the great economic crash of October, 1929, the T.U.E.L. led many important trade-union struggles. These included the united front election campaigns in the Carpenters, Machinists, Needle Trades, Miners, and other organizations—in the U.M.W.A., for example, the Left-Progressive bloc, with three district presidents on its national slate, actually polled more votes than did John L. Lewis; but it was counted out of the election. There were also many big strikes, among them those of the New York Fur Workers and Cloakmakers; the several strikes of Textile workers in Passaic, New Bedford, Lawrence, Gastonia, and elsewhere, as well as other important strikes—all conducted in the militant pioneering spirit of the T.U.E.L. industrial unions and, of course, the Party. A basic achievement of the Party in this period of flush prosperity was its persistent and effective struggle against the intense class collaboration of the trade union leaders and against the current "new capitalism" illusions, which were akin to the "people's capitalism" and "welfare state" illusions of the present time. In this key fight the C.P. was clearly the ideological leader of

the American labor movement.

During the early 1920's the Party, with its characteristic vanguard spirit, revolutionary enthusiasm, and grasp of immediate economic and political realities in the United States, began its historical struggle for Negro rights and against every manifestation of Jim Crowism. Here serious theoretical and tactical errors were made, such as Pepper's advocacy of a Negro republic in the South, but the hampering effects of these general errors were at best partly overcome by the splendid fight of the Party for the Negro people's elementary human demands. For example, the Party's gallant struggle for the Scottsboro boys set the pace not only for the trade-union movement, but also for the Negro organizations and the liberal groupings. By its brave and alert fight, the Party, during these years, laid much of the political basis for the present strong political thrust of the Negro people.

When the great economic crisis of 1929 broke, the Communist Party also rose splendidly to the occasion. Its long training in trade-union work now stood it in good stead. It came forward as the ideological and organizational leader of the huge armies of semi-starving workers. Its militant advocacy of unemployment insurance and relief put both the A. F. of L. and the Socialist Party to the blush. Through the Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.), which was the old T.U.E.L. reorganized in 1929, the big unemployed

demonstration of March 6, 1930—which brought 1,250,000 unemployed to the streets—was organized, and during the next three years literally hundreds of local, state, and national hunger marches, many of them splendidly organized, were carried through. The Communists quickly became the recognized leaders among the vast millions of the unemployed. The "secret" of these big successes by the Party was its application of the seven basic Leninist principles above referred to—including the vanguard role, Party discipline, the united front, proletarian internationalism, and an appreciation of the national characteristics of the American class struggle.

When the C.I.O. forces, in 1935, began their historic drive to organize the basic industries, the Communist Party, fully grasping the significance of the issues involved, was ready for the campaign. The T.U.U.L. promptly liquidated itself, its forces joined the A. F. of L. unions, without conditions, and the Left entered into practical united front working arrangements with the C.I.O. leaders. Here, the wide experience, the thousands of local contacts in the open shop industries, the vanguard spirit, and the sense of grass roots realism, if not always theoretical clarity, of the Communists made them the most effective organizers in this historic struggle. Communist pamphlets on the techniques of trade-union organization were used as textbooks in many C.I.O. organizing committees. Hun-

dreds of Communists, trained in the trade-union work of the T.U.E.L. and T.U.U.L., were members of the local and national organizing staffs in steel, auto, rubber, needle, textile, maritime, and other industries. The epoch-making success of the great movement and the growth of the powerful progressive wing of the C.I.O., were testimonials to the correctness of the organizing line followed by the Left-Progressive bloc and the Communist Party.

One of the major associated developments in the establishment of the CIO was the raising of the Negro struggle to new heights by the admission of large numbers of Negro workers into the trade unions, and some into union leadership. It was the successful culmination of years of tireless and devoted pioneer work by the Communists, and this fact was recognized, especially by the Negro people. There was also, in this general period, the development of the enormous youth movement, involving several millions of young people, and in which the militant Young Communist League, headed by Comrade Gil Green, was admittedly a dynamic factor.

The latter 1930's were the period of the developing struggle against Hitler's fascism, and the Communist Party proved itself to be equal also to this basic test. Here again, the Communists' international relations, their customary vanguard spirit, their effective Party discipline, their united front policy, and their realistic appraisal of American needs in the

complex world struggle against fascism, were of inestimable value in the Party's very effective participation in this great life and death struggle. Of course, serious errors were made, but who can doubt the validity and great effectiveness of the Party's general fight in this period?

In line with its broad Leninist program of uniting with all other progressive forces, the Party in the crucial elections of 1936, gave practical support to the candidacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Very significant was it that Earl Browder, whom the Right in our Party is trying to build up as a super-effective mass leader, vigorously opposed the policy of this support for Roosevelt. He was for launching a Farmer-Labor ticket, and he never gave up this idea until he was completely defeated. Had this grave error been made it would have disastrously isolated the Communist Party. It was on the basis of the informal united front with the Roosevelt forces that the Party very effectively fought side by side with them all through World War II. An example of the Party's vanguard role in this broad united front combination was its tireless and successful fight for the Second Front.

It was through such sound policies, particularly in the trade-union field, that the Communist Party built up its numerical strength and mass influence. With its eventual 85,000 members, the Communist Party had several times more affiliates and a vastly greater mass influ-

ence than all the other Left groups put together, including the Socialist Party. If the Party did not make a better showing in political elections, this was partly due to the strong grip the two party system had upon the workers, but mainly because the masses were repelled by the Party's Leftist conception of the American road to Socialism, which they considered to be for the violent overthrow of the government.

Most of the errors made by the Party over the years in the application of its policies have been in the direction of theoretical dogmatism and Left-sectarian policies in practice. These "Left" errors were very damaging in the Party's work. But while combatting such "Left" shortcomings, let us not forget that the Party also suffered severely from Right mistakes. The Right opportunism of Pepper and Lovestone deeply hurt the Party, and so did the crass Revisionism of Browder. Browder's opportunism, which came to a climax in his notorious Teheran thesis of late 1943, was already definitely damaging the Party from 1936 on. Also, let us note that the Party, in the current Revisionism of Comrade Gates, is experiencing the most serious political error in its entire history.

The basic thing to grasp in all the foregoing analysis is that the main subjective force which made it possible for the Party to grow in numbers and influence was the fact that the Party operated in practice upon the foundation of Marxism-Lenin-

ism, concretized by the seven Leninist principles enumerated above, despite the Party's very imperfect application of them.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY CRISIS

During the period of the Cold War, roughly from 1947 until the present date, the Communist Party lost very heavily in members and mass influence. These losses have not been due to an inherent decline in efficiency of the several Leninist working principles, which, as we have shown, made possible the building of the Party over the years. The Party crisis will be found to be based upon other factors, objective and subjective, which we shall examine.

a) *Prosperity illusions*: First and foremost of the objective factors in creating the Party crisis have been the corroding effects of the long-continued upward swing of American imperialism. Since 1940, the United States, basically as a result of World War II and the aftermath rebuilding, has been passing through an unprecedented industrial boom, and with relatively steady employment. Besides, the bourgeoisie has been compelled to improve economic conditions for large sections of the working class, wage increases were won fairly easily, etc. This situation has created powerful "prosperity illusions" among the workers, expressed by political complacency, "welfare state," "people's capitalism," etc., to the general effects that there will be no more economic

crises, that mass unemployment is now a thing of the past, that capitalism is automatically developing into a progressive regime with a beneficent government, that Socialism is not necessary, and the like.

Such illusions were characteristic also of the upswing periods of imperialism in Great Britain, Germany, Japan, France, and other major capitalist countries—except that the situation is more exaggerated in the United States than it has ever been in any other country. These enervating prosperity illusions, although obviously not strong enough to prevent the growth of trade unionism, nevertheless tend to soften the fighting spirit and Socialist perspectives of the workers. The Communist Party membership and leadership, as we have learned in the Party crisis, is by no means immune to prosperity illusions. These are all the more prevalent and injurious in our Party in view of its weak social composition—too few industrial workers, Negroes, youth, and women—and the relatively low theoretical level of the Party. Capitalist prosperity illusions have been very basic, therefore, in provoking the present crisis in the Party.

Comrade Bittelman is profoundly incorrect when he brushes aside prosperity illusions as unimportant in causing the Party's crisis, saying: ". . . the economic situation by itself could not and did not influence the development of the Party crisis." The Party's national convention, correctly, held quite a different viewpoint,

warning sharply of the need to combat prosperity illusions, both within and without the Party.

b) *The Stalin revelations*: Fundamental, too, as a subjective factor in developing the Party crisis were the revelations of the Stalin "cult of the individual" in the U.S.S.R., exposed by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956. The shocking story of bureaucracy and brutality there unfolded undoubtedly shook the Socialist faith of numbers of Communists in the capitalist countries, not the least in the United States. This shock was deepened by the developments in Hungary in November, 1956, when the Soviet Army was called upon, as a "grim necessity," to stamp out the counter-revolution, basically organized by agents of American imperialism. The negative results of the Stalin revelations were all the more marked in the United States because of the already prevailing crisis conditions in the Communist Party.

c) *The Government persecution*: A basic factor, objective in nature, in creating the crisis in the C.P.U.S.A. was the prolonged and bitter persecution of the Communist Party by the government, local, state, and national from 1948 to 1955: with wholesale arrests of leaders, jailings, deportations, discriminations in industry, the formal outlawing of the Party, etc., directed against Communist Party members and sympathizers—all of which was carried

out under conditions of pro-war hysteria and malignant fascist-like McCarthyism. Not surprisingly, under these terror conditions large numbers of members dropped out of the Party, mass contacts were weakened, the Party organization was disrupted, and the whole work of the Party was made vastly more difficult.

d) *Leftist errors*: The increasingly difficult position of the Party was also considerably worsened by several serious errors made by the Party leadership during the cold war period. Under the terror situation, these errors tended, in the main, to be Left-sectarian in character, even though the Party was by no means led by those who are now called Leftists and who are being blamed for the errors. During such a long period and under such extremely difficult conditions, it was not surprising that serious errors were made. The three most important errors of the cold war period were: a) The organization of the Progressive Party during the 1948 election campaign, a step which the Communist Party supported. To have the Wallace peace ticket in the field was correct, but for that Party to be launched without the necessary labor backing was wrong. This incorrect move tended greatly to isolate the Left forces in the trade unions. b) The failure of the Party actively to adopt and support the proposition of presenting to the masses the perspective of a parliamentary and relatively peaceful road to Socialism in

the United States—a matter which had been raised in the Party. This serious political Leftist error greatly worsened the position of the Party before the masses and in the courts, especially as it was being specifically charged with conspiring to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States Government. c) The excessive security regulations adopted by the National Board in 1950. This wrong move further cut into the Party's gradually declining membership and it also weakened its mass contacts. Further errors can be cited in specific fields of Party work, as among the Negro people, etc. Doubly difficult was the work of applying the Party's peace policy, because the overwhelming mass of the American people believed the Soviet Union (and Communists generally) to be responsible for the threatening war danger.

Errors were also made in the vital trade-union field, usually, but not always, of a Left-sectarian character. Totally unjustified, however, were the reckless efforts of the Right to fasten the blame upon the Party for the great C.I.O. split in 1949, with the expulsion of eleven progressive unions with almost 1,000,000 members. This split, which developed in almost every capitalist country and which ruptured the great World Federation of Trade Unions, was organized by the State Department and its labor allies as a basic phase of monopoly capitalism's pro-war program. The progressive forces in the C.I.O., as in all other affected

countries, did everything possible to avert the split, if not always skilfully.

The combined effect of these various errors and shortcomings of the Party, and of the other crisis factors, was seriously to weaken the Party in its membership and mass contacts. But when the terror period came virtually to a close after the Geneva conference of 1955 and it became possible for the Party to function in a more normal manner, the Party was by no means yet in crisis. Although greatly reduced in size and mass influence, the Party's morale remained high. This was because, in fighting valiantly, as it did, against malignant McCarthyism and the threatening danger of an atomic world war, a fight which was praised all over the world, the Party felt that it was acting both in the interest of the American people and in accordance with the best traditions of Marxism-Leninism—as indeed it was—and it was inspired and strengthened thereby. Its unity remained strong, its outlook clear, and its fighting spirit undaunted. But a new factor was soon to develop, one that, within the framework of the other crisis factors, was to demoralize the Party and to throw it into deep crisis. This was the swift growth of a powerful Right-Revisionist trend in the Party.

#### THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS OF RIGHT REVISIONISM

Revisionism in the C.P.U.S.A. was generated, basically, as remarked

above, by the upswing of American imperialism and the long-continued industrial boom, with ensuing "prosperity illusions," plus the low theoretical level in the Party. It expressed itself in moods and theories to the effect that capitalism, particularly in the United States, has substantially overcome its inner and outer contradictions and was evolving more or less spontaneously in a progressive direction. The United States and other big capitalist countries were assumed to be in a new period in which monopoly capital had lost most of its malignancy, power, and political control; its erstwhile drive for world conquest did not exist; the war danger, as a serious menace, had disappeared; the class struggle was greatly softened, and the political road to "Socialism" was to be an easy advance for the workers. This was the "new capitalism" of the 1920's and the "progressive capitalism" of the Roosevelt period brought up to date; the opportunism of Lovestone and Browder adapted to the cold war period. The first general current expression of this latest edition of Revisionism was contained in the article in *POLITICAL AFFAIRS* of November, 1956, written by Comrade John Gates, and entitled, "Time For a Change."

The Revisionists drew many sweeping conclusions from their main political position. The Communist Party was declared obsolete and in need of being replaced, either by a "political action association" or by a "new mass party of

Socialism." Marxism-Leninism was dubbed "Left-sectarian" in the United States and was to be abandoned for a colorless Social Democratic "Marxism," without Lenin. All policies based upon the perspective of an active class struggle were declared out of place, and they had to be supplanted by policies essentially class collaborationist in nature. This Revisionism grew quickly and soon it came to dominate most of the staff of the *Daily Worker*, a majority of 27 to 1 on the New York State Committee, and it had a strong following in various other state committees of the Party.

In order to put through their obvious program of liquidationism, the Revisionists carried on a very active campaign to discredit the past, present, and future of the Communist Party. The general idea seemed to be that if they could make the Party members lose faith in the Party, they would be disposed to give up the Party and Marxism-Leninism and accept the substitute organizations and policies of the Right. To this end, in estimating the policies of the cold war period, the Right multiplied "errors" in every direction. Violating the principle of self-criticism, every conceivable real and imaginary mistake was distorted or manufactured and then paraded to the disadvantage of the Party's reputation. Party achievements were belittled or ignored outright. The Party was thrown into a fever of exaggeration of Left-sectarian errors, with the Right danger carefully

shielded from all criticism. The central theme of this organized defeatism and liquidationism was that the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism had to be abandoned in favor of opportunistic substitutes.

Concretely, the Right attacked Marxism-Leninism, not only in general, but specifically in all its various aspects, as indicated above. That is: (a) the Socialist perspective of the Party was blasted by sniping attacks against the U.S.S.R., especially with regard to Hungary; (b) Proletarian internationalism was belittled in favor of a lop-sided and opportunistic presentation of national interests; (c) Democratic centralism was rigorously condemned as fatal to Socialist democracy; (d) The Party's essentially healthy struggle against American exceptionalism was condemned and undermined; (e) The vanguard role of the Party was discarded and declared without further validity in the face of the "ideological maturity" of the trade unions and other mass organizations, about the only vanguard function left to the Party being that of advocating Socialism; (f) The united front, especially the Left-Progressive bloc in the trade unions, was discredited and abandoned, upon the theory that there were no longer broad Right, Center, and Left currents in the labor movement; (g) Self-criticism was made a mockery of by being used as a basis for a full-scale ideological attack upon the Party.

During the Revisionist offensive

the Labor-Farmer Party slogan was also virtually discarded. The thinking behind this action was : (a) an opportunistic acceptance of the Democratic Party as the Party of the working class, and (b) a consideration of the correct Labor-Farmer Party slogan as a rival to the liquidatory slogans for the political action association and for the new mass party of Socialism. It is on the basis of a common fight for a Labor-Farmer Party and for labor's immediate demands, that the C.P.U.S.A. should be cooperating with other Left groups, and not simply to advocate Socialism or to try to organize a new Social-Democratic party.

In the Party's difficult situation, the Revisionist campaign of liquidationism did very great harm. This in fact, is what immediately precipitated the Party into crisis. The most profound confusion and pessimism penetrated the ranks of the Party. All told, several thousand members quit it in frustration and despair. Never before has any Communist Party so suicidally torn itself apart. Veteran Party members, who had bravely withstood the violent persecution by the government, and who had kept their political balance in the face of the Stalin revelations, collapsed under the destructive ideological offensive from the Right. Various Party and other Left institutions, which had remained unshaken under the worse blasts of the McCarthy terrorism, crumbled under the liquidationism of the Revisionists, even though, in the meantime,

political conditions had greatly improved. This was the tragic fate of the splendid Jefferson School, the California Labor School, the *Daily People's World* and the Labor Youth League—all of which perished under the Right offensive. Key journals and other vital institutions are also imperiled by it. The substance of the present crisis is that the Party is deeply sick with a heavy attack of Right Revisionism. It is an untenable excuse for the Right to claim, as Comrade Bittelman does, that the Party crisis was inevitable—which it was not.

Comrade Bittelman, in his articles, greatly understates the danger of Revisionism in the Party. In fact, he brushes it aside with the comment that its proposal, from which he mildly demurs, was "to leave Marxist-Leninist theory alone for the moment and let life speak for itself." Of course, there was no such proposal whatever made in the Party. Instead, there were definite attempts backed with great energy, to liquidate the Party as such and to cut the heart out of its Marxist-Leninist theory. If the Right could have had its way—which fortunately the Party membership prevented—our Party and its theory would have been destroyed. In this sharp struggle, the Left was the real spokesman for the Party members in their determination to keep our Party intact upon a Marxist-Leninist basis. Comrade Bittelman makes a serious error in so slightly passing over this fundamental situation. If he goes easy

on the Right, however, he takes many sharp and unjustified cuts at the Left.

The uncertain line followed by Comrade Dennis has also done much to deepen and prolong the Party crisis. While he has opposed in writing some of the worst crudities of Comrade Gates—the political action association, the incorrect stand on Hungary, and the coddling of the anti-Communist, Clark—Dennis has never taken a firm stand against Revisionism, a course which has tended to appease and conciliate it.

The 16th national convention of the C.P.U.S.A., held in February, 1957, gave a sharp rebuff to the Revisionist agitation going on in the Party. It adopted a ringing declaration for the continuation and the vigorous rebuilding of the Communist Party; it reiterated its support of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism as "universally valid"; it portrayed American imperialism as seeking to dominate the world, and it warned against the continuing war danger. The convention also took a correct position on such important theoretical and practical questions as, the comradely criticism of other Communist Parties and the countries of Socialism, the practice of more political initiative by the C.P.U.S.A., and the development of friendly and cooperative relations with other Left

forces in the United States—all of which questions had been distorted by the Right. Some elements of Revisionism did, however, manage to cling to the main resolution of the convention, such as a poor sum-up of Social-Democracy, a faulty statement of the vanguard role of the Communist Party, a dubious outline of trade-union policy, and a seriously deficient analysis of the shortcomings and achievements of the Party during the cold war period.

In its 16th national convention the Party gave a strong political setback to Right Revisionism; nevertheless, the Right has remained entrenched organizationally throughout the Party. Together with its conciliators, it is now very strong in all the leading committees of the Party, and this is also true in various state committees. Its main strength is that it controls and uses the *Daily Worker* as its special mouthpiece. This continuing Right strength organizationally is a basic reason why the Party has not been making a more rapid recovery from its serious crisis, as it operates to block the application of the sound policies of the 16th national convention. The whole Communist world remarks this Revisionism in our Party, but our leadership tries to deny it or to hide it.

*The concluding section of Comrade Foster's article, entitled "The Road Ahead," will be published in the next issue.—Ed.*