

Letters from Readers

Round Top, N. Y.

Regardless of generic causes, the relative weight of objective and subjective factors, the present situation in our Party is currently sustained, I believe, primarily by subjective elements. Chief among the latter seem to me to be on the one hand Right-revisionism and on the other tolerance of this same revisionism. Such a combination, if continued much longer, can completely destroy the Party, making necessary a new beginning.

The history of Communist Parties throughout the world is in large part the history of struggles against revisionism. Mainly through such struggles have the various national Parties, in the first place the CPSU, been able to maintain and deepen theory and shape correct strategic and tactical objectives, plans and policies.

Our Party has been torn but never before decimated by revisionism, due to the fact of sharp and timely struggle against the Lovestones and Browders with the outcome that we emerged clearer and more effective than before. The deadliest danger lies in the failure to carry on such struggles, in attempts to conceal and patch-up and to follow a policy of live-and-let-live co-existence with revisionism. These constitute the fatal combination of revisionism and the tolerance of revisionism.

As the term "revisionism" is used in the Communist movement it has a meaning distinct from the general significance of the term "to revise." The latter means to "look over again in order to correct or improve or bring up to date," while "revisionism" denotes an attempt to annul or transform into their opposite one or more of the fundamental principles or laws of the science of Marxism-Leninism. Naturally revisionism is always disguised as a most sincere effort to revise and strengthen Marxism, to bring it up to date and apply it to national circumstances. No revisionism comes labeled as such.

If we apply the test to the current "attempt to revise," we see that it is as sweeping and gross a form of Right revisionism as has ever been witnessed in the international Communist movement. Far from being an attempt to "improve, bring up to date and adapt," it would annul and transform into their opposite entire sections of Marxist-Leninist science. For example: The principles of the vanguard role and democratic centralism are repudiated and transformed into liquidation of the Party; proletarian internationalism and socialist solidarity in the face of the imperialist onslaught and encirclement are annulled and transformed into nationalism and anti-Soviet attacks; the struggle against American exceptionalism is annulled and is transformed into a doctrine of struggle for an exception in the case of America; criticism and self-criticism are annulled and transformed into breast-beating, grovelling self-abasement, anti-party and anti-socialist broadsides amounting to collective suicide; the dictator-

ship of the proletariat in all forms is repudiated and is transformed into a starry-eyed glorification of bourgeois democracy; an entire section of the science of political economy is annulled and a perspective of a new kind of capitalism espoused.

Any one of these "revisions" would be sufficient to substantiate the characterization of revisionism. Taken together they constitute undeniable evidence of an unparalleled anti-Party, anti-socialist trend that must, for the simple sake of survival, be quickly and effectively eradicated.

We have a history of which to be proud, as well as errors from which to learn. We have a future of not a hundred-thousand member Party, but hundreds of thousands and millions. As Lenin long ago pointed out, the American working class and its allies move forward in great leaps during times of stress, making up for time lost in periods of relative prosperity. We had better be ready, or we will be running at the tail, hard-pressed to catch up. The times are opening wide. The crucial struggles against imperialist war and for peace and against depression and for a land and a world of plenty, a socialist United States, and a socialist planet, are, historically speaking, immediately before us.

Only through elimination of revisionism, can we put ourselves in a position to solve our problems, hammer out correct policies, and take our rightful place in the great events of the coming month and years.

Let's begin by having confidence in our basic membership. I am convinced that leadership today is lagging behind the rank and file temper. A call for an open, uncompromising struggle to expose and eliminate revisionism in high and low places will clear the air, restore confidence and pride and will have an electrifying effect which will revitalize the Party.

HARRY K. WELLS

San Francisco

I must take the strongest exception to Comrade W. Z. Foster's reference, in the December, 1957 issue, to "the tragic fate of . . . the *Daily People's World* . . . which perished under the Right offensive" and "crumbled under the liquidationism of the Revisionists."

First of all, the statement is factually misleading. The *People's World* exists and fights. It was compelled last February to convert from daily to weekly publication, but no one here on the Pacific Coast would say that it either crumbled or perished.

Second, I have been unable to find any responsible member of the paper's staff or any responsible Communist Party leader in California with whom Comrade Foster discussed the circumstances attending the transition of the *People's World* from a daily to a weekly. There is no evidence of any serious investigation by him of the problem that faced the paper. Off the cuff judgments, based on an apothecary's weight of concrete fact and a ton of preconceived notion, have too often been a curse of our Party, and under the present difficult circumstances they do more mischief than ever.

Third, and most important of all, "the tragic fate" about which Comrade

Foster speaks has not overtaken the *People's World*, but his characterization is designed objectively to hasten it. The fight to maintain the *People's World* on the Pacific Coast has been a valiant one, and it has succeeded thus far through the joint effort of Communists and non-Communists. It is a poor service to disparage those efforts, or to undermine them by the promiscuous use of labels as a substitute for "the concrete analysis of concrete conditions," which Lenin defined as "the living soul of Marxism."

AL RICHMOND

Lansing, Mich.

I am happy to renew my sub. I enjoyed Foster's article in the December issue and am looking forward to its conclusion in the January number. I believe his thoughts merit very serious attention.

I think if Foster's suggestions were honored in practice, we would be back on the road to effective work as a real vanguard Party. No storm can blow forever; this one also will subside. I hope our boat can be set again on a true Marxist-Leninist course to show the way to the workers towards the socialist shores.

I think P. A. is a good magazine; may its reading public be enlarged.

E. S.

Philadelphia

We are writing in order to register our strong exception to a number of statements by W. Z. Foster in his article on Djilas in the November issue.

We refer particularly to the following statement: "The Djilas book is already widely popular among the Right-revisionist trend that has sprung up recently in a number of Communist Parties. It is just what the Doctor ordered for such ex-Communists as Howard Fast, Joseph Starobin, and Joseph Clark. These people still talk about being Marxists and favoring a socialist perspective, but consciously or unconsciously they are supporters of People's Capitalism which is alien to Socialism. This is the substance of what they have been advocating in and around the Party for the past two years."

We find this view unsound and unwise on several grounds:

1) We know of no evidence that this book is popular among any trend in the American Communist Party, not to mention any other CP, and Foster cites no such evidence.

2) We are unaware that this book has been endorsed by Fast, Starobin, or Clark. It is completely unlikely that it will be endorsed by them,* in our opinion, and Clark's article in the November *Monthly Review* on the Soviet Union indicates clearly a position different from and antagonistic to the main thesis of the Djilas book.

3) We feel it is inaccurate to group Fast with Starobin and Clark, the latter two having been active in the American Forum for Socialist Education, a political development we view very favorably.

* Howard Fast has publicly endorsed the Djilas volume, via radio and TV appearances.—Ed.

4) We feel it is inexcusable to say of Starobin and Clark that "consciously or unconsciously they are supporters of People's Capitalism which is alien to Socialism." Foster presents no evidence to support his view. . . .

5) We also object to the cavalier manner in which Foster dismisses the slogan of the "Welfare State."

It is our opinion that despite these serious weaknesses this article does have value by virtue of its refutation of Dijlas' reactionary views of Socialism. . . .

FIVE CP MEMBERS

New York City

W. Z. Foster, in his December article on the Party crisis touches on one thing that no one else has touched upon and which, I think, is the main cause of our recent losses. He writes: "In the Party's difficult situation, the Revisionist campaign of liquidation 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." That is a most vital point.

At the time of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Khrushchev speech, I was a member of the "Marxist Institute" at the Jefferson School. The class was composed of both Party and non-Party people, and 12 out of its 13 members were young people. When the speech first came out we discussed it for several sessions and though we were shocked at some of the things revealed, no one became dispirited.

Then slowly from the top confusion began to spread. One of the students who had some contact with the State leadership began to bring back reports of utter confusion and of the rejection of vital Marxist concepts which we, after long and careful discussion, had agreed to.

Though we had discussed at length all the implications of the speech, a special teacher was sent into our class to lead us in a new discussion of the speech. This teacher also injected into the class the idea that the School had been rigid and dogmatic, and after his discussion when no one spoke up to agree with his remarks, he proceeded to tongue-lash us for "not thinking."

We young people, who had all come to our Marxist-Leninist views out of experience, study and life itself, were all told that what we felt sure was true was in fact false. This coupled with the three major revisionistic lectures held in the School (at one of which Comrade Gates spoke) began to tell. One after another the young people began to announce their doubts concerning the Party and Marxism and to stop coming to our class. Then another member of the class said to me: "Look, everybody is saying the last ten years were wasted, so I'm not going to waste my time in this movement."

By the end of the term this group of people who had been firm and well-knit and who had a goal, became confused, disturbed and apathetic. Since that time I have lost contact with several of them; very few are active in any way in the Left and most have lost a Marxist perspective.

Three weeks ago I called up one of these people and asked him to sign the Friends' anti-H-Bomb petition. He, who once was in the Party, said: "I

don't sign anything anymore. Furthermore, I don't think there is any danger in H-Bomb tests."

This is a real memorial for the revisionist-defectors, who educated this once sterling fighter for progress by convincing him not only that Marxism was not valid, but that humanism was a fake, and that politics should be avoided.

A Youth Struggling to be a Marxist-Leninist

Indianapolis, Ind.

Committees all around here are going from door to door begging for money for the Community Chest (to help needy neighbors). . . . Things are getting more and more tough here, and increasingly people are seeking for an effective economic program. The need for an aggressive Left is growing all the time; we must come out of our shell and offer real leadership. I know increasing numbers of people are seeking it, and asking new and real questions.

C. D.

New York City

Eugene Dennis in the November issue of *P. A.* speaks of "The necessity and inevitability of establishing the political power and rule of the working class and the leading role of its vanguard, the Communist Party."

Did not the 16th National Convention vote overwhelmingly to break away from the old concept that the American path to socialism would of necessity be the same as that of the Soviet Union, with the Communist Party in the "inevitable" leading role? It seems to me if the convention did not do this, it did nothing.

This is in no way to run down the great contribution of the American Communist Party of our land in the past, and the possibilities of further major contributions along the road to a socialist democracy. But the convention went on record against the rigid, automatic, inevitable concept of a predetermined leading role.

Dennis' words appear in direct contradiction to these sections from the main political resolution:

"The new developments point to a certain revitalization and growth of socialist-oriented and pro-Marxist currents and groupings. In the past we tended to assume that all that was worth while in other socialist currents and groupings would inevitably flow into our own organization. This assumption was always incorrect and should be replaced by serious and painstaking efforts to assist in the eventual development of the broadest possible unity of all socialist-minded elements."

And

"Our position on the possibility of socialism being achieved through the cooperation of a number of workers' and other democratic peoples parties, as well as the continuance of a multi-party system under socialism, so long as the people desire this, is another major step in the direction of cooperation of all Marxist and socialist-oriented forces NOW and towards the ultimate creation of a broader united Marxist party."

It goes without saying that Dennis has every right to state his own opinion on this question of our country's path to socialism. But should he not state that he has changed his mind about a key section of the main political resolution of the convention, and now opposes it?

I submit that it is exactly this attempt to hold back the unfolding of the line voted by the convention, or, more exactly, the attempt to reverse that line, which is sill paralyzing the Party and still driving disheartened members from its ranks.

LESTER RODNEY

A REPLY

I wish to make the following comments on Lester Rodney's letter.

Most assuredly, the 16th national convention did *not* contend that "the American path to socialism would of necessity be the same as that of the Soviet Union. . . ." Our convention emphasized, for instance, that in the USA the possibility exists for a "peaceful and constitutional transition to socialism."

But from this it is wrong and dangerous to negate the historic mission and liberating role of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist vanguard, as Rodney implies. How socialism can now be attained and the forms it may take will vary from country to country; yet everywhere the victory of socialism is impossible without the working class and its Marxist vanguard exercising *the leading role*.

Apropos of this, the main resolution of the 16th convention states, as does my keynote address to that convention:

"This concept of our advocacy of, and endeavor to, chart a peaceful, democratic and constitutional road to socialism in America expresses what we Communists strive for. It is a further development of our established position. It embodies our basic view that socialism can be established only through a radical and fundamental extension of American democracy and a revolutionary transformation of all property relations. It emphasizes that *all* roads to socialism are roads of mass struggle, *waged under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist vanguard* [emphasis mine—E. D.]. But now this concept takes on a new meaning in light of the profoundly new and favorable changes in our own country and in world relationships." (Page 305, Convention Proceedings)

In respect to the two isolated quotations from the convention resolutions which Rodney relies on to justify his allegations: the first appears on page 308 of the convention proceedings. But in the interests of Marxist clarity it would have been better if Rodney had seen fit to add the very next paragraph from the resolution, namely:

"The perspective of an eventual united socialist movement or party must be viewed as *the climax of a series of struggles and developments* [emphasis mine—E. D.]. It is not a quick and easy solution to the common problems of all socialist groupings, or to the specific problems of our own Party. Such an approach would both weaken our party and distort this perspective. Least of all could this objective be advanced by any tendency to weaken or

dissolve the Communist Party. On the contrary, it is essential that the Communist Party strengthen in every way its organizations, mass work and influence."

It is true that our convention corrected certain mistaken views of the past which equate the vanguard role of the party with the assumption that the party is already the leader of the working class. However, in referring to this, Rodney glosses over that section of the main resolution which clarifies and underscores the *indispensable vanguard role* that our party strives to fulfill:

"Our efforts to advance these objectives [immediate and ultimate aims of the party—E. D.] require that we retain the fundamental concept of our organization as a vanguard organization. . . . Socialist consciousness must be brought into the working class movement by a party which is based on an advanced theory, scientific socialism. Only such a party can help make the working class conscious of itself as a class. . . . The Party of Communists always places uppermost the interests of the entire working class and all the oppressed people. It dedicates itself to helping the working class and its allies gain, step by step, ever greater victories leading towards their historical goal of ending class exploitation. This is the essence of the concept 'vanguard role' which we seek to fulfill." (Page 323—Convention Proceedings)

As to Rodney's second quotation (which is excerpted from the resolution on Social Democracy, page 332 of the convention proceedings), it would have been more illuminating if he had included the fact that this resolution—on the same and on the following page—also points out:

"The ideological differences that divide the Social Democrats from the Communists remain fundamental and numerous. . . . These differences include . . . [among other things—E. D.] role of the working class, role of the Marxist party of the working class and the allies of the working class . . . our conception of the peaceful and constitutional road to socialism is not identical with the classic 'parliamentary road' put forward by the Social Democrats and which has as yet nowhere led to the establishment of socialism."

The resolution emphasizes further:

"Our new approach [to Social Democracy—E. D.] is dictated by new possibilities and paramount needs, despite these differences. . . . It is on the basis of the vital issues now confronting the workers and their allies that we must strive to find the basis for unity. . . . Such cooperation will be beneficial to all who participate and to the working class as a whole."

What is really involved here is not an academic battle over quotations from resolutions. The real issue is whether our Party shall apply the generally sound political orientation of the 16th convention scientifically, not dogmatically, in a rounded-out and not in a one-sided way. It is whether our party shall be converted into an impotent, debating society embracing Marxists, non-Marxists, and anti-Marxists, as Gates advocates—or whether our party shall be revitalized and strengthened as a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party of the American working class.

EUGENE DENNIS