

CHAPTER XIII

THE QUESTION OF TACTICS

AMONG the bromides that are used constantly by bureaucrats in the American Federation of Labor, by the Old Guard in the Socialist Party, and by Hearst himself, is the one which says that it is the Communists who provoke the capitalists into reactionary deeds. In fact, these "friends" of labor claim that it is the ideas and activities of the Communist Party which are responsible for both fascism and war.

This is like saying that a man who has to have his head bandaged after resisting a stick-up should be rebuked for having *provoked* his assailant to violence. Of course, this actually happens in our society, but that does not prove the truth of the accusation. We know that a group of miners at Gallup, New Mexico, were convicted of murder because the murderers of their fellow miners also killed the sheriff. And when Robert Minor and David Levinson, who had gone to the aid of these framed-up workers, were brutally beaten and kidnapped, they were accused by Government officials of having kidnapped and slugged themselves.

Capitalists and their agents do not take the road to fascism because they are provoked to do so by the Communist Party, any more than they adopt fascist policies because of some inherited predisposition in that direction. Nor are they preparing another world slaughter from love of blood and battle. This is too over-simplified an analysis. It is true that there are plenty of sadistic types, natural products of a decaying

social order, who fit into the fascist scheme of things. But those capitalists who rule, those who hold power, those who maneuver the fascist storm troopers and militarists, are motivated by a coldly considered policy directed toward a definite goal. That goal is the restoration of profits by beating down wages and living standards at home and taking away foreign markets from rival powers.

If our capitalist rulers could recoup their super-profits by continuing the old traditional "freedoms" of bourgeois democracy, they would not turn to "new methods", to fascism. What "provokes" them to fascism? Obviously, the inevitable resistance of the masses to the increasing degradation of their living standards. When this resistance becomes too strong to be overcome successfully in the old style, they turn from the concealed dictatorship of bourgeois democracy to the open terror of the fascist dictatorship.

What is the basis of the notion that it is "provocation" on the part of Communists which is the cause of fascism? It arises from the viewpoint of the "liberal" capitalists who would like to carry on their intensified robbery of the workers in a peaceful and smooth manner. They are pained and surprised that "their" workers should resist this process. Hence, the "humane" capitalists are "provoked" by this resistance, against their own "good wishes", to rally their demagogues and unleash their thugs and storm troopers against the workers who are "really" responsible for everything.

Every person who brings forward this argument of "provocation" has, consciously or unconsciously, adopted the viewpoint of the exploiting class. Is it provocation for the Communists to organize and make more effective the resistance of the working class and the other exploited sections of the population against the capitalist policies of enriching big wealth still more, and more deeply impoverishing the

poor? Is it provocation for the Communists to warn the toilers of the hell that is fascism? Is it provocation for the Communists to tell the masses that if they use their organized might they can prevent both war and fascism? If this is provocation, then let the capitalists make the most of it.

If the workers would not resist, if the capitalists could get the masses to accept lower wages and worse conditions as easily as William Green or Matthew Woll accept them, then obviously the capitalists would have no need for fascism. But this does not mean that we should try to "defeat" fascism by making it "unnecessary" for the capitalists to have to use concentration camps to protect their super-profits. In other words, the theory of "provocation" argues that the workers should let the capitalists do just as they please, no matter what the cost is in terms of human misery. This kind of argument in a sense calls the workers to scab on potential storm troops of fascism by giving in to the capitalists in advance.

There is thus a kind of "truth" in the charge made against Communists that they provoke our "well-intentioned" capitalists to resort to fascism. But it is a half-truth, a capitalist truth. It is accepted only by those people who accept the eternal sacredness of capitalist profits, and justify every means used to maintain the profit system. But it is clear that from the standpoint of the workers' struggle for the sheer right to live, it is a damnable falsehood. Only by a ceaseless fight against such "truths" peddled by the Hearsts and their ilk, can the working class free itself from the dope of capitalist ballyhoo and the slavery of the capitalist system.

It is instructive to note that in this country Hearst—the well-known pal of Hitler and Rosenberg—launched his fascist campaign against everything that is decent and progressive, with a manifesto proclaiming that fascism would come if the United States continued to tolerate the Communist move-

ment. Like the Liberty League, he hypocritically says that the way to avoid fascism is to destroy Communists and even liberals who question the dominance of property rights over human rights. To blame Communists for bringing on fascism helps Hearst and his kind establish a fascist dictatorship.

In similar fashion, one group of critics reproach Communists for endangering the fight of the workers for their immediate demands by their revolutionary propaganda. And conversely, another group, of "super-revolutionists", attack Communists for advocating unemployment insurance, for participating in strikes, etc., maintaining that only the whip of starvation will drive the "ignorant" masses to revolt.

Both of these viewpoints are 100 percent wrong. From opposite premises they arrive at a common program of sectarian isolation from the masses and their struggle. We Communists have always had to hammer out our policies by means of an uncompromising struggle against such misleading points of view. That is what we mean when we talk about the struggle on two fronts among the ranks of the workers; this has to be done if the working class is not to be paralyzed by dogmas that lead to defeat.

The first of these wrong viewpoints which we attack insists that what is necessary is a "pure and simple" trade-union fight for immediate demands. It thinks this will make success easier to achieve, and that the injection of Communist ideas will only lead to defeat. To test this idea, let us examine two great labor struggles which took place in 1934. In the first it was the pure and simple trade union policies which prevailed over Communist policy; in the second it was Communist advice which was adopted and acted upon by the great majority of workers.

In the first situation, William Green and the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor made a "pure

and simple" settlement of the threatened strike of the auto workers in collaboration with President Roosevelt. To avoid the consequences of a general strike in auto which might have spread to the steel and other industries, Green and his associates signed the Roosevelt peace pact which legalized the infamous "merit clause" and the company unions. The result was the near destruction of the trade unions, the strengthening of company unions under the guidance of the Roosevelt-appointed automobile labor board, and the deterioration of the working conditions in the industry. Things became so bad that when the auto code was renewed Green had to denounce that document, which he himself had approved, as viciously anti-labor and tending toward fascism.

Contrast these results with the results of the strike of the maritime workers on the Pacific Coast which culminated in the San Francisco general strike. Here the militants and the Communists kept the national officials of the American Federation from settling the strike along the lines of the auto truce. The struggle was denounced as "revolutionary" from one end of the country to the other, and was repudiated by Green at the most critical period. Martial law was declared against the strikers and a reign of terror was launched by vigilante bands against Communists and other militants, who played the leading role in the situation. But in the end, because of class solidarity and strong organization, the marine workers were victorious and won most of their demands. They built a strong union which has eliminated the company unions in their section of the industry, and has enabled them to protect their rights against every pressure brought to bear by the ship-owners and the government.

Even the San Francisco general strike, which was betrayed by the labor bureaucracy (they boasted that they placed themselves at the head of the strike movement in order to

be able to break it), greatly strengthened the whole trade union movement. It demonstrated to the entire working class the great force that lies in unity and organization. The general strike heightened the class consciousness of the American working class and helped develop a whole series of new militant struggles in its wake. Thus, from the narrow but practical viewpoint of getting immediate results, it is the class struggle policy of the Communists which "brings home the bacon".

The policies of the "super-revolutionary", who brings forward the second argument, would produce the same barren results as those of pure and simple trade unionism. Such doctrines, if they influence the workers, lead to the passive acceptance of every capitalist aggression, and would leave the workers at the tender mercy of the fascists. If they are rejected by the workers, this isolates the party which advocates them. In its purest form, this doctrine is represented by the Socialist-Labor Party, a small sect which has kept itself so uncontaminated by the daily struggles of the workers that its "splendid isolation" rivals that of an Egyptian mummy.

We Communists declare, and we have proven it by experience, that only class struggle policies can bring victories for the workers in the day-to-day battles for immediate needs. We reject the idea that collaboration with the bosses will enable the workers to steal a few crumbs. We reject just as completely the idea that the workers must suffer, their conditions must become intolerable, before they are willing to go along the path of class struggle. History has shown that it is upon the basis of these daily struggles for bread that the revolutionary movement is made strong and prepared for the giant task of overthrowing capitalism. Our experiences here in the United States have verified these historic lessons. This is the central lesson in the problem of tactics.