

# REJECT THE GATES POLITICAL ACTION ASS'N

(Speech by William Z. Foster, Nov. 11, 1956).

The International Communist movement now confronts serious internal difficulties, dramatized by the developments in Poland and Hungary. It is essentially a crisis of growth. Following the world-shaking victory of the Hitler forces during World War II, the great Chinese People's Revolution, the birth of the European People's Democracies, the wide extension of trade unions and other people's organizations and the defeat of the atomic war drive of American imperialism for world conquest, the world Communist movement is now making elementary adjustments to meet the new world situation. Especially, it is freeing itself from the harmful effects of the Stalin cult of the individual, which grew up during decades of super-centralization and rigid discipline of the respective Communist parties and Socialist countries. That very serious

errors are accompanying this process is all too evident from the tragedy in Hungary, which I shall not attempt to discuss at this time. The changes in the Communist parties involve the development of new international relationships among the Communist parties and Socialist governments, more democracy and less bureaucracy in the respective Communist parties, and a general review of Communist theory so as to eliminate harmful practices of dogmatism and sectarianism that have grown in their ranks, notably during the later years of Stalin's leadership.

The central issue in our own party is whether or not we shall continue to build the Communist Party. Comrade Gates raises this basic question sharply in the November issue of Political Affairs, by calling for the transformation of the Communist Party into a so-called political action organization. The Gates proposal is the descendant

of the Browder Communist Political Association of 1944, which was discarded by the Communist Party as revisionist. The proposed new organization is a threat against the life of the Communist Party, hence in this speech I shall devote myself exclusively to it—my opinions upon other phases of the Party situation I have expressed in my article in the October Political Affairs.

## ACCUSING AVALANCHE

The Gates proposal has not sprung into being overnight—it has been preparing for several months past. One phase of this preparation has been the campaign of accusing the Party of a veritable avalanche of errors during the cold war period, most of them either gross distortions or manufactured outright. The effect of this reckless campaign of wildly exaggerating the Party's errors has been to demoralize the Party membership, to undermine their confidence in the Party, and to prepare them to accept a desperate remedy, namely, the proposed political action association. But this organization would not solve any of the problems that are now plaguing the Party, instead, it would make them all worse, and for many basic reasons:

a) The plan is liquidationist: The main Resolution now before the Party for discussion, written under Gates' pressure, is incorrect in implying that the political association would not be liquidationist. When Browder formed the C.P.A. in 1944



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he formally dissolved the Communist Party, and if the Party were to adopt the Gates proposal it would again go through the liquidation process. And for basically the same reasons—to rid the new organization of the "taint" of its Communist past Browder lost the Party thousands of members by thus dissolving it, and undoubtedly a similar dissolution step now would further seriously weaken our already depleted forces. Moreover, by its shapeless form and limited functions, the proposed political action association could not become a mass organization. All we would be doing would be to add one more to the several left sects already in this country.

b) It would weaken our mass contacts: Comrade Gates maintains that the new organization would improve and extend our mass contacts. But this is political unrealism. In fact, it would be bound to worsen greatly such connections. Among other reasons because it could only be made to loom up in the enemy propaganda as a sin-

ister boring-from-within body, formed for the express purpose of penetrating and dominating people's organizations of various kinds. In this respect it would be far more vulnerable than a regularly constituted Communist Party, as we would soon learn if we were foolish enough to organize it.

c) It would provide the Communists with no additional legal protection. One of Comrade Gates' major arguments is that his proposed political action organization would create effective legal safeguards around our movement. But to believe such an assumption one has to be naive in the extreme. If the Party were so unwise as to liquidate itself in Gates' organization it would soon learn that it was in as exposed a legal position as ever. Because the government, if it were disposed to attack us violently, would do so on the grounds that the new organization was simply the Communist Party under a new name, or that it was a Communist "front." This much we should have learned during the recent period of active government persecution against the Party.

d) It would narrow down our field of political activity: A political action association, such as is proposed by Comrade Gates, would definitely limit and restrict the scope of our political-electoral work, by eliminating the possibility of our placing candidates in the field during elections. Instead of thus hand-  
ing this vital political function, the Party should follow the general policy of the British Communist Party, which is, while mainly supporting the candidates of the Labor Party, it also puts up candidates of its

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## TO ALL STATE COMMITTEES,

Dear Comrades:

The Constitution-Organization Committee named by the National Committee of our Party is working as rapidly as possible to prepare a draft constitution which can be released to the Party for pre-convention discussion some time in December. All Party organizations are urged to submit proposals as the raw material for the first draft.

Proposals can deal with Preamble, purpose of organization, membership—rights and duties, democratic guarantees and disciplinary procedures, structure, dues and any other questions that would normally belong in a Constitution. Address all communications to Constitution-Organization Committee, C.P.U.S.A., 101 West 16th St., New York 11, N.Y.

# Rejection Political Action Association

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own where those of the Labor Party are unsatisfactory or non-existent. This disposes effectively of the Gates argument that we cannot function as a political party because we face a two-party system in this country, for Great Britain also has such a system. That the British Party's policy is effective is attested to by the fact that the Party, although relatively small, has won for itself a large following in the trade unions, Labor Party and cooperative movements. In trade union congresses Left-progressive strength runs to one-third or more of the total vote cast. With a similar policy in this country we can also build up a strong Communist Party and an extensive mass following. We must not abandon our election rights, but fight for them. Some comrades in an attempt to get around this decisive objection, argue that the new organization would also be able to put up independent candidates. This is not so, but even if it were what then would be the sense of the whole change?

e) It would alienate us from other left forces in the United States: Traditionally, American left wing groups follow the practice of organizing independent parties and of putting up candidates outside the scope of the two-party system. Consequently, the proposed political action association, which few if any of them would endorse, could only serve to drive another wedge between us and these groups. It is simply absurd to state, as Comrade Gates does in his article, that such an organization as he proposes would be an important step in the direction of the eventual coming together of the left groups in a general party of Socialism. Just the reverse is the truth.

f) It would weaken our bonds of international solidarity: One of the most striking characteristic of the Gates movement for dissolving the Communist Party into a political action association is its definite weakening of international conceptions of solidarity and its almost complete focussing upon the American

scene. One of the main manifestations of this trend is the development in the recent period of definitely anti-Soviet trends in their ranks.

g) The new organization would be revisionist: In his article Comrade Gates says that "our big mistake under Browder was not the formation of the Communist Political Association, but the wrong content we put into it." But this is untrue. Browder's ideological revisionism and his organized C. P. A. constituted one harmonious whole, both phases of which, the organizational and the political, were opportunist. And the same would also be true of Gates' political action association.

During the past several months there has been strong Right tendency, headed by Comrade Gates, growing in our Party. As expressed in its various writings and speeches, the concept of the general crisis of world capitalism fades away, especially with regard to the United States; the prospect for an eventual economic slump in this country virtually vanishes; the vanguard role of the Communist Party is repudiated as a matter of principle; the non-inevitability of war is largely looked upon as a sort of automatic process, rather than as a result of the world's workers' relentless struggle for peace; the parliamentary road to Socialism is presented incorrectly in a non-struggle sense; our recent proposal that we restate the general interpretation of the Marxist principle of absolute impoverishment of the workers is already being used in an opportunist manner; the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat weakens into an evolving bourgeois democracy; there is a virtual acceptance of the bourgeois theory of American exceptionalism; there is persistent sniping at the USSR and its leaders, which went so far in the Hungarian crisis as to denounce the latter as enemies of Socialism, both within and without the Soviet Union; by open demands for the dissolution of the Communist Party; by tendencies to tail after the conservative trade union

leaders uncritically; to dismiss class collaboration in the labor movement literally as of no serious consequence, instead of the real danger that it is; and the systematic campaign that is being carried on to condemn Marxist-Leninism as Left-sectarianism and to de-Leninize our Party, a process which is already dangerously advanced.

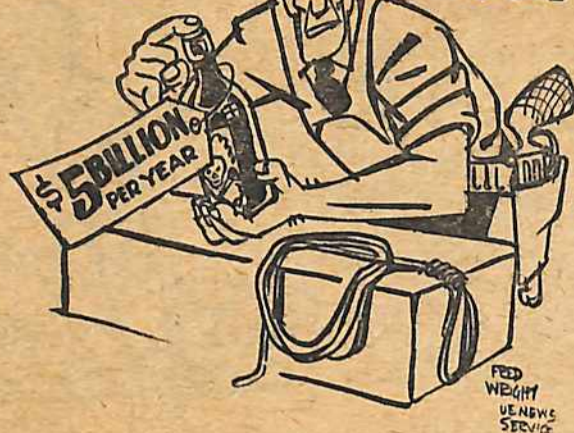
These are Right wing trends and policies, and beyond doubt they are the ones that, in substance, would be written into the proposed political action association. From whichever angle it is looked at, the new organization would be a big step backward for our Party, and it would be hailed by all enemy forces. If in the Party's eagerness to find a way out of its present serious difficulties, it should be so unwary as to grasp at the straw of the suggested political action association, it would do itself irreparable harm. This time there will be no Duclos article to bail us out of our folly. To make the same basic mistake twice would be unthinkable. The Party's life is now at stake.

What, then, should the Party do to meet its difficulties? The answer to this pertinent question can only be that we must go ahead building the Communist Party, essentially as the workers in every other important country in the world are doing. But we must do this in a new way, as has been made very clear in the current long and stormy Party discussion. Among the basic lessons we must learn and apply are that, imperatively, we must have more democracy and less bureaucracy in the Party; we must display more theoretical initiative and fight against every form of dogmatism and doctrinairism in this vital field; we must develop more comradely critical relations with other Communist parties and with the Socialist countries; we must, while concentrating fundamentally upon American conditions, not neglect our basic international tasks; we must war relentlessly against our traditional weakness, left-sectarianism, while at the same time combatting the Right danger which has suddenly sprung up and which is now threatening the life of our Party; and we must systematically eradicate every trace of the Stalin cult of the individual from our ranks.

Above all, we must realize that the workers' great science of Marxism-Leninism is far more flexible and generally more capable of meeting our present problems than the makeshift Right theories of revisionism now running rife in our Party. We must defeat the naive idea that we can solve our problems by throwing our Party out of the window and Marxism-Leninism with it and by adopting a crudely improvised political action association. We must repel all the current attacks against Marxism-Leninism and also correct the serious errors in the Resolution in this respect, particularly its making conditional the Party's endorsement of Marxism-Leninism.

World Socialism is now rapidly overtaking and surpassing world capitalism in every vital field. This reality enormously favors the struggle of the work-

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ers in all countries, including ours. It also calls for greater flexibility in their class struggle strategies and tactics. We must not conclude, however, that because in recent years world Socialism has become so powerful that, therefore, the world battle for Socialism is virtually won. International capitalism is still very strong and there is yet much fight left in it, especially in the powerful section of it located in the United States. Consequently, we must orientate upon the perspective of sharp national and international class struggles ahead of us, even within the framework of international peaceful co-existence. The period before us will be one of intense struggle—among other things, the current serious crisis in the Middle East should teach us this. Hence, in order to play our part in the national and international class and anti-imperialist struggle, we imperatively need a strong Communist Party, firmly based upon the principles of Marxism-Leninism. This is the basic reason, too, why we should categorically reject the Gates proposal for a shapeless political action association, with an essentially opportunist political program.

The Communist Party, USA, has a fighting record of which it may well be proud. For almost four decades it has stood in the very forefront of the American class struggle, truly a vanguard party, and it has made innumerable contributions to the struggle of the working class and the Negro people. Not the least of this splendid record was the Party's recent heroic and essentially correct fight against the grave danger of war as a result of the aggressive, world-conquest policies of Wall Street imperialism. It is a shame and disgrace the way the Party has been unmercifully slandered, abused and misrepresented during recent months right in our own Party. Such a campaign of systematic belittlement and attack against the very existence of the Party can only be understood in the sense of so much preparation to shove our Party far to the Right and eventually to liquidate it into such an organization as the political action association. The membership must not allow this disgraceful and deadly campaign to succeed. We must rally to save the Communist Party.

Our Party is now seriously weakened, and its legal status damaged, from a combination of negative circumstances. First and foremost was the long and bitter attack upon our Party by the government, with its jailing of leaders, deportation of left workers, denial of civil rights, and all the rest of the terrorist pro-fascist, pro-war campaign. Serious leftist errors by our leaders, basically caused by the hard situation, also played an important part. Then there has been the great shock of the Stalin revelations and the tragic events in Hungary. A basic factor, too, in causing our relative isolation are the prosperity conditions and illusions among the workers, bred of 15 years of capitalist boom. And not the least of these negative factors has been the bitter campaigns of liquidationism

carried on within the Party under the alleged pretense of frank self-criticism. But we must not be dismayed and demoralized by these difficulties and be stampeded into the false hope of a political action association. Other Communist parties have suffered far greater losses than we have in their struggle in other years; but by standing firmly on their Marxist-Leninist principles, they have overcome their losses and marched on to great successes. In fact, this is true of all major Communist parties, without exception. We, too, must stand true to these great principles and traditions and not flee in confusion, as we would do were we to accept the proposed political action association. This would be an impermissible ideological and organizational surrender to American imperialism. We would be saying that there is no place for a Communist Party in the United States, the greatest country of world capitalism.

Despite the present sharpening of conditions internationally the fighting situation of the workers on a world scale is highly favorable, and getting more so constantly. The same is true within the United States, with the working class and the Negro people displaying more and more political activity. The signal, therefore, is for us to build our Communist Party and to plunge it into mass activity on every front. If we will do this, the way we will recover lost ground will surprise the pessimists. This is a great testing time for American Communists, when the Marxists-Leninists must stand up and be counted. As for myself, I have no doubts as to how our Party will respond in this crisis. Our convention will show that we have not studied and experienced Marxism-Leninism for almost 40 years for nothing.

## Resolution by Auto Workers in Detroit

WHEREAS this conference of all the auto worker sections of Detroit, held at the end of September, reflects the thinking and experience gained through long years of leadership and struggle in this basic industry, and

WHEREAS we feel that the thinking and opinions of this conference should be recorded and made known because of the special importance and role of the industrial worker in the party and in the present discussion, and

WHEREAS this conference showed a complete agreement on the following points:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That there can be no question as to the continued existence of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. as a political party, basing itself on Marxism-Leninism as applied to the American scene, and it be emphasized that our mistakes stem from a superficial understanding and application of these principles, rather than from a weakness in the principles themselves;

2. That we reaffirm democratic centralism as the basic rule of our Party, that in supporting democratic centralism we emphasize (a) That all our experience as militant class-conscious workers convinces us that without democratic centralism we could not continue to exist as a fighting organization; (b) that the present breakdown of democratic centralism had its beginnings in Party practices that existed long before the recent anti-Party persecution; (c) that the relationship between industrial workers and leadership must be completely overhauled so that the knowledge, experience and thinking of the industrial clubs actually go into the making of party policy; (d) that the problem of bureaucracy in our Party be studied in the light of the above, and that we use the CP of China as an example in developing organizational measures to combat this bureaucracy, and strengthening inner party democracy;

3. That the industrial clubs and sections in our Party be continued and strengthened; that while this form of organization poses many problems requiring solution, yet all our experience proves that it is the only form through which the Party can carry out its role among industrial workers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be sent through our District to the National Committee for their consideration;

