

LETTER FROM GITLOW AND OUR REPLY

The Communist League of Struggle has received the following letter from Benjamin Gitlow who has recently organized another Communist Opposition group the "Workers Communist League". The question raised are important enough to warrant the publication of our reply. Gitlow's letter follows:

April 4, 1933.

Communist League of Struggle,
133 Second Ave.,
New York City.

Dear Comrades:

The recent events in Germany have deepened and intensified the crisis in the International Communist movement. This crisis is characterized by the suppression of the Communist Party of Germany, the largest Communist Party in a capitalist country. It is also characterized by the major defeat suffered by the Communist International in Germany and the destruction of its important base in that country. The Stalin leadership of the Communist International and its policies are directly responsible for the debacle of the Communist movement in Germany. Its splitting and left sectarian line made it impossible for the Communists to develop the necessary united front actions which would have enabled the labor movement to resist and check the Hitler fascist forces.

The extent of the crisis in the International Communist movement is further exemplified by the fact that the policies of the Stalin leadership towards German fascism have, because it facilitated the coming into power of the fascist forces, involved the Soviet Union in a very critical international situation. German fascism in power so strengthens the anti Soviet Union front, so intensifies the war danger, that a war against the Soviet Unions now looms as an immediate possibility.

Furthermore, the Stalin leadership has been busy wreaking and splitting the movement at a time when the greatest efforts should have been made to unify and consolidate the Communist movement. In addition the Stalin policies in the Soviet Union on industrialization, on the collectivization of agriculture, and its inner party regime have demoralized the Party to a very large extent, and greatly undermined and weakened the revolutionary masses. This weakening of the Soviet front outside and inside of the Soviet Union threatens the very security of the Proletarian Dictatorship.

Unless the Communist forces seriously get together to overcome this crisis the Communist movement will suffer a set back in spite of the fact that the objective

conditions are favorable for a Communist advance. To maintain merely a critical attitude towards the Stalin regime is not enough. The Stalin regime must be held accountable for its wrong policies and misdeeds. Furthermore the Stalin leadership cannot be the vehicle for overcoming the crisis in the Communist movement. It lacks the confidence of the communists and the revolutionary masses to become the force for the revivification and unification of the movement. The Stalin leadership and its ruinous policies must be repudiated. No genuine unification, no reconstitution of the Communist International can take place without first removing the Stalin bureaucratic clique from leadership and discarding its policies.

THE WORKERS COMMUNIST LEAGUE realizing this fact, therefore proposes to the various Communist Opposition, namely, The Communist League of America (Opposition), The Communist Party, U.S.A. (Opposition), and the Communist League for Struggle that steps be taken for the formation of a block which shall work for the removal of the Stalin regime from the leadership of the International Communist Movement. The WORKERS COMMUNIST LEAGUE proposes that the block of the Communist Oppositions shall be based upon the following demands:

1. For the unification of the Communist Party of the United States.
2. That the Communist Party shall guarantee full inner Party democracy.
3. That all communists who have been expelled for their political and tactical differences shall be readmitted with full rights and to their former standing in the Party.
4. That wherever possible those expelled who are readmitted to the Party shall also be reinstated to the posts they held at the time they were expelled.
5. There shall be no discrimination against Party members because of their political and tactical positions.
6. That the various Communist Oppositions shall be guaranteed every facility to present their views not only to the Party membership thru the regular Party organizations but also thru the medium of the Party press
7. That the discussion in the Party should be followed by the calling of an emergency convention at which right to submit the opposition viewpoints will be assured and to which convention the various oppositions will be guaranteed representation.

8. That the leadership of the Party which is to be elected at the convention must include representative from all the viewpoints represented at the convention in order to assure a collective Communist leadership.

9. That the block recommends that the same procedure be followed in the other Communist Parties, including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist International

It is expressly understood that participation in the block does not impose upon the communist oppositions which will join the block that they should give up their respective programs.

Comrades, we further recommend that after you have given our proposal consideration that a conference of the communist oppositions agreeing to the formation of a block be called at which the block should be consummated

It is the revolutionary duty of the communist oppositions to unite against Stalinism otherwise the crisis in the communist movement will continue for years to come and the workingclass will be left disorganized and without the necessary communist leadership to combat Fascism and reaction.

Hoping to hear from you soon relative to the decision of your organization so that the necessary organizational steps for calling the conference can be taken, I remain

Comradely yours,
Benj. Gitlow
Secretary Workers Communist League

OUR REPLY TO GITLOW

Secretary, Workers Communist League
Dear Comrade:

We must categorically reject your proposal that the Communist League of Struggle join hands with you to form together with the Lovestone group and the American League a "block which shall work for the removal of the Stalin regime from the leadership of the International Communist movement". Such a proposal we consider unprincipled and opportunist through and through. Because we believe that in breaking with the Lovestone group you have opened the possibility for taking a real step forward, because we realize that in the past you have been the symbol for militant struggle and finally because we wish to leave absolutely no stone unturned to win to

the cause of the Left Opposition every good fighter in the labor movement, we desire to discuss your letter at length.

You speak of the recent events in Germany which have resulted in the destruction of Stalinist Communist Party. But in all the important steps leading to this destruction you were heartily in accord. When Comrade Trotsky criticized the blunders of the CI in the revolutionary events of 1923 in Germany, did you not support Stalin, Bucharin and others against Trotsky? When, pursuing their policy of finding scapegoats, the Stalin-Bucharin leadership removed Brandler and put in their place the Ruth Fisher-Maslow type of worthies, did you not support the CI against the protests of the Left Opposition? When the Left Opposition pointed out that the German Party was being destroyed by the theory of building socialism in one country, a theory which was changing Leninism to national socialism, did you not give your full aid in the support of Stalin-Bucharin against the Left Opposition?

It was the Left Opposition that first began the fight against the bureaucratic apparatus headed by Stalin and Bucharin. It was the Left Opposition that first exposed the fact that the German Party was being destroyed. It was the Left Opposition that first attacked the theory of social-fascism, the splitting of the German Trade Union movement, the activities of the communists in joining the Fascists in the "Red Referendum" of 1930; that first attacked slogans of the Communists which were aping the slogans of the Fascists such as "volks Revolution", "Gegen Versailles", etc. and pointed out the dangers of the theory of "democratic dictatorship" as leading to these vague and fascist slogans. Against the false theory of "democratic dictatorship" it was the Left Opposition that showed the way out with the theory of Permanent Revolution.

For over two and a half years the Left Opposition pointed out the necessity of a united front with the socialists and the trade unions of Germany against the Fascists. (not a united front the way Brandler formed it in 1923, a disgraceful united front that only aided the Socialists to kill the revolution, but a united front in the streets for battle). For a long time the Left Opposition has hammered home that Soviet Union rests in large part upon the German workingclass and the German Communist Party and called for the mobilization of the Russian Proletariat to support the German Proletariat should they rise in insurrection against the oncoming Nazi power.

Now at last the Comintern is paying for all its crimes and blunders. The Left Opposition has proven itself a hundred times correct in its analysis and prognoses. Now that the blow has fallen, a blow that has shaken the Comintern and the Stalin apparatus to its foundations, you have become aware that you must vigorously fight the Stalinist apparatus. Perhaps this does you credit. But you fail completely to realize that you up to now adhered to the very forces which caused the downfall of the movement in Germany, you still are opposed to the line of the Left Opposition. You

still have not probed the causes for the collapse in Germany to its foundations, the theory of Socialism in one country, of which you are a supporter. Your criticism of Stalin's policies on industrialization and collectivization is that Stalin has capitulated to Trotskyism! So you appear as a pure Bucharinist, standing for the building of Socialism "at a snails pace" or perhaps for the "Kulaks enrich yourselves" of 1926 or thereabouts. To expose the falseness of this position it is necessary to supply several missing theoretical links;

(1) In many cases the Stalin clique adopts to Trotsky's line. But it does so too late...only under pressure from the masses, only when its own false line has gotten it into inextricable difficulties - only when its own false line has got it into inextricable difficulties - only when the objective situation has changed so that the policy can no longer be applied. Thus it is not Trotsky's policies that we see but a contemptible caricature of them.

(2) It is well known that Trotsky was the first to advocate the planned industrialization, meeting with the sneering opposition of the present leading clique. But the 5 year plan as carried out was not the plan proposed by Trotsky (See Trotsky's book the real situation in Russia). The Right Wing period was succeeded by that time by the ultra leftist hence the exaggerated measures against the kulak (later to be followed by dangerous concession), the forced collectivization, the "shock troops" and other systems of forcing the industrialization.

(3) The mere factor of tempo alone is not decisive. In order to understanding the inner weakening of the Soviet regime as well as its precariousness in the world scheme of things it is necessary to see the profound contradictions of its economic regime for which its situation in the capitalist world as well as the manner of carrying out the five year plan are responsible. These contradictions are, first internal;

(a) between socialized industry and agriculture while still to a great extent on a capitalist basis

(b) between branches of industry with the resultant shortage of goods for consumption which heightens the workers discontent.

(c) faulty integration of branches of industry so that parts are missing for completing machinery etc.

(d) defective quality due to forced tempo with resultant break downs etc.

Second external: above all the position of Soviet Russia trying to build a socialized industry and agriculture while still bound up inextricable with the capitalist world. That the capitalist world in a crisis aggravates the situation. But the contradiction would be present in any case as a factor of paramount importance. Failure to take account of the real inter-relation of Soviet and capitalist economic forces is responsible for the disastrous theory of building Socialism in one country, which

basically is accountable for the pacifist capitulatory attitude of the Soviet regime internationally. If we add to this the fool's theory of Social-Fascism, the caricature of the united front policy. and the bureaucratic regime which stifles the Communist parties throughout the world we have a basis for criticism and a positive theory and tactic to counterpoise to the false line of Stalinism. But a group not yet separated ideologically from the Lovestone group, nor from the party, can only criticize the effects of the false line, not the line itself. The very fact of declaring that the Soviet Union is now in a very critical position because of the victory of German fascism is an admission that the Soviet Union cannot build Socialism in one country alone, that is rests not upon its internal strength alone but upon the international working class.

Can Stalinism be fought negatively, without a clear cut thoroughly worked out political line which will enable us to expose the source of its errors and by means of which we can replace the Stalin leadership? It is very obvious that it cannot. The Left Opposition internationally has worked out a body of theory through the writings of Comrade Trotsky and it is about to adopt a set of theses opposed to Stalinism. You do not even take a stand on the views of the Left Opposition. You are willing it seems to demand the restoration of Trotsky to the Party but apparently upon the same terms as you would fight for the restoration of Lovestone or not matter which expelled comrade.

You want a block "for the unification of the Communist Party of the United States". But is not the question of a program more important even than the question of unity? For what do you want unity? If you are convinced that the Left Opposition is wrong it is not your duty to fight for our "right" and our "Freedom" but for your freedom. Similarly it is your duty to raise as the main point not the question of "unity" and of "freedom to criticize" but the question of your program. It is the opportunists, the reformists, the conciliators of all shapes and forms who constantly prattle "unity" "freedom" of criticism" "democracy" in order to put over their own program of reformism.

Let us remind you what Lenin wrote in his famous pamphlet "What is to be done". First he quotes Marx"... Party struggles... give a party strength and life....The best proof of the weakness of a party is its diffuseness and its blurring of clear cut differences.... A Party becomes stronger by purging itself." Then Lenin goes on to declare that Communists must raise the cry not of "freedom" but if they are convinced they are right, they must demand the substitution of their program for that of the others.

What then are you fighting for? We see this naively revealed in points 3, 4, and 8, of the proposals of the Workers Communist League: calling for restitution of expelled comrades to their former posts in the Party and for collective leadership including

representatives of all viewpoints. They want a return to the good old days when Gitlow with Lovestone was in control of the Party' Not an intrasigent fight for a correct line in the future, but a sigh for the past is what this document represents. The collective leadership as called for could only turn the party into a perpetual debating society, a fertile field for continuous unprincipled factional fights as indeed it was in the good old days when Gitlow, Lovestone, Foster and others were in power.

Let us summarize your mistakes in this connection: Instead of fighting for a program you fight for "unity". Instead of fighting the particular program of Stalin you fight against "Stalin". Instead of seeing the program as the source of all errors you see "Stalin". Instead of building a principled united front you want to build an unprincipled grouping of the most heterogeneous elements, a grouping in no way superior to the Party. Here it is you show opportunism not only on questions of program but on questions of organization as well.

You are willing to fight for the return of Trotsky into the leadership. Good. But why? Because he is correct? Then you must see the program of the left opposition. Because he is incorrect but still a Communist? Then how can you unite yourself with the Lovestone clique which still declares Trotsky is a counter-revolutionist and endorses his expulsion?

You ask us to fight for your return into the leadership of the Party. On what basis? Certainly if the left opposition were in control of the party it would know how to utilize all the tested leaders in the party no matter how opportunist their inclinations might be so long as on the whole they were adaptable to the policy of the party and carried out the line of the party. We would know how to utilize a Bucharin or a Zinoviev. But that can be done, as Lenin did it, only on the basis of a thorough appreciation of the defects and limitations of these people and a thoroughly correct policy of the Party which only the Left Opposition could guarantee.

The Communist League of Struggle has more than once proposed united front activities taking in all the Communist groups on different working class issues. This is a very different matter from forming a political block that is a more or less solid, permanent grouping with groups with which it has nothing in common (except the very broad indisputable fundamentals of Communism). The necessity to oust Stalin we heartily concord in, but for this negative purpose we cannot unite with groups which agree with the theory of building Socialism in one country which tolerate the betrayal of the Chinese revolution through blocks with Chiang Kai Shek, which say nothing against the disgraceful affair of the Anglo-Russian Committee, which repudiate the Left Opposition under cover of its theory of "Thermidore" (and this stand of the Lovestone group Gitlow has not repudiated) which capitulate to the AFL in America and abandon the organization of the unorganized. By such a block the Left

Opposition would lose its identity in the eyes of the masses in America and hence lose the possibility of struggle for the vital principles in which the issues of our day are embodied. Our task is rather to unify the ranks of the Left Opposition so that it will be equal to its theoretical and practical duty of winning the ranks of the Party and of the working class for its line.

The Communist League of Struggle was always in favor of a united front of all Communist and labor organizations for the purpose of doing this or that specific task. But not for a block with the right against the Party. Particularly is this the case with you and with comrades around you. You have broken with the Lovestone group. You are willing to fight for the reinstatement of the Left Opposition into the Party. You are willing to work out a positive program to struggle against the terrific crisis which has struck the Communist International. All that is to the good. In all this we are willing to go more than half way to meet you. But consider the situation. Your group is in a hopeless position, in some respects having good instincts but absolutely without a rudder, without a principled theoretical base. You have no masses. You must be ground to pieces in the course of the struggle. You must either move more and more to the right or your group must solve the contradictions of your position by moving towards the Left Opposition.

We offer you not an unprincipled block against Stalin but a series of open discussion before our joint membership so that all the fundamental propositions can be discussed anew to the end that a real working agreement can be reached.