

PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION

A Few Thoughts on Our Perspectives

By GIL GREEN

OUR PARTY can well be proud of its record of struggle since the emergency convention at which it was reconstituted on Marxist-Leninist principles.

The period of the past three years has been one of incessant reactionary attack in which American imperialism emerged arrogantly as the chief enemy of peace and democracy throughout the world.

As was to be expected, the main fire of the foe has been concentrated upon our Party. It has withstood these attacks with honor and delivered important counterblows.

There can be no doubt that the main line of our Party during this period has been basically correct and that the line of the national resolution submitted for our Convention is likewise sound. The most valid criticism of the present draft, and we of the national committee should take note of this, is that it is excessively long and repetitious in style—so that much of the *fauna* of basic analysis is lost in the *flora* of words. Once this weakness is corrected, the resolution can provide our Party with the necessary Marxist-Leninist compass by which to sail the uncharted seas of the even more turbulent period ahead.

At the same time it must be noted that our Party does suffer from many grave weaknesses. In this period of pre-convention discussions we must focus sharper attention on these weaknesses so as to be able more consciously and effectively to eradicate them.

LACK OF PERSPECTIVE

One of our main weaknesses is ideological. Ofttimes one has occasion to note that our *whole* Party does not yet grasp *all* the main features of the present period, but tends to see things in an oversimplified and one-sided fashion which distorts perspective. There is not everywhere that understanding of the relationship of class forces—not only as it manifests itself today, but as it is developing for tomorrow—that can imbue our whole party with a firm, unshakeable confidence in itself, in the American working class, and in ultimate victory. And supreme confidence in victory is essential for every army, political no less than military, particularly at times of enemy onslaught.

I do not say that there is a questioning anywhere in our ranks of the inevitable victory of our socialist cause. But some comrades see this as

something in the far distant future, while for the foreseeable future they perceive either darkness or a rather hazy fog.

In the Illinois district we have come across isolated expressions of this tendency. In one section, for example, a comrade saw no chance of defeating the recent Mundt Bill and felt that the funds used in the fight against it were being wasted. Events have proved him wrong about the Mundt Bill, but this comrade also betrayed a rather strange concept of struggle—for even if the bill had been passed, only the prior mass fight to defeat it could have laid the base for continuing the struggle under the new conditions. And the struggle must continue regardless of the conditions.

Among our foreign-born comrades there is a justifiable pride in the great achievements of the peoples of their lands of birth. But among some of them this is also coupled with a pessimism and unconcealed contempt for the American working class and its progressive and revolutionary potentials. While one can understand the feelings of impatience with the slowness of awakening in this country, the attitude of these comrades is harmful and wrong. It will not help improve our mass work. It can only lead to a negative, sectarian withdrawing from the patient, painstaking task of enlightenment and struggle.

A few comrades have also expressed their beliefs that fascism is already here, or that the trend in this direction is so far gone that it

is inevitable. These comrades view every reactionary blow as being synonymous with fascism. Hence they fail to see the process by which fascism is being prepared and they underestimate the possibilities for arousing and uniting large masses to arrest this process. In fact, they unwittingly underestimate the meaning and danger of fascism, for if fascism is already here, there is nothing worse to fear—which on the very face of it is absurd.

In the trade union movement we have also noted expressions of despair and panic at moments of temporary setbacks and defeats. This arises from a failure to see the war for the battle, from a tendency to view the battle as an end in itself and not as part of a war of many battles.

I do not want to leave the impression that the above tendencies are either numerous or widespread, but that they do exist at all, in any form, can only be traced to a lack of ideological clarity on our perspectives, flowing from a poor grounding in Marxism-Leninism.

EXAGGERATE STRENGTH OF ENEMY

What is the root cause for moods of this kind? In my opinion they stem in the main from an exaggerated estimate of the strength of American imperialism and an underestimation of the latent power and strength of the working class.

True, American imperialism is the strongest power in the capitalist world. True, also, that the present course of the ruling class to subj-

gate the rest of the world by a combination of economic, political, and military means, is not a temporary or transitory development. It represents a fixed course, for there is no other that American imperialism can pursue in the world of today.

But this very truism is more an indication of the inherent weakness of monopoly capital than of its strength. In fact, the source of its greatest strength — a productive power greater than the rest of the capitalist world combined — is the very source of its greatest weakness. For American capitalism is plagued by an insoluble contradiction, in the long run more acute for it than for any other capitalist power. This is the contradiction between its immensely expanded productive capacity and its constantly narrowing market possibilities. Thus it can be said that the iron heel of American imperialism is also an Achilles heel.

American imperialism cannot resolve this basic contradiction by its effort at world expansion. All it can do is temporarily postpone the ultimate day of reckoning, and this at the price of sharpening all world contradictions. As our national resolution correctly indicates, the forces of the working class and of peace and democracy on a world scale are stronger than those of American imperialism and its reactionary satellites. And as the struggle for world markets, for investment outlets, and for sources of raw materials sharpens, we are going to witness a sharpening also of the contradictions within the imperialist camp itself,

especially the Anglo-American contradiction.

In the United States, the relationship of forces is not the same as on a world scale. Here reaction does at present have the upper hand. *But*—and this is of decisive importance—given the necessary fortitude and struggle on the part of our Party, and its ability to link itself together with, and give leadership to, ever wider masses, the relationship of forces within this country can also be changed. It will take some time to accomplish this, but there should be no doubt in our minds but that it can be done.

EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC BOOM

It must be seen that some of the difficulties of struggle in this country today arise from certain factors that have temporarily operated in favor of the ruling class. First and foremost of these has been the existence of an economic boom. The wartime and postwar economic booms have created many illusions. Despite the growing inflation and huge profiteering which have reduced living standards, the bourgeoisie has been able to maintain relatively full employment and to use its gluttonous super-profits to bribe and corrupt strata of the population. It is precisely this subtle combination of outright assault coupled with economic bribery that makes the present moment so complicated and creates confusion and illusions on a wide scale. It is this which has made possible a temporary mass base for the opportunist lackeys of Wall

Street in the ranks of organized labor.

Some sections of the working class, large sections of the middle class and the farming population are affected by this. Certainly, the boom in agriculture of the past ten years is a far cry from the chronic agricultural crisis that hung its pall over the countryside from 1920 all the way to World War II. While many farmers have been hard hit by the rising prices of manufactured goods, while many eke out but a bare existence from their own sweat and toil, there can be no doubt that the agricultural boom has been a deterrent to their being drawn into the struggle on a scale such as will be possible tomorrow.

But every passing month will bring a sharpening of the inherent contradictions of American capitalism. As world agricultural production returns to "normal," the crisis in American agriculture will become more imminent, and this agrarian crisis may break even before the economic crisis itself. And when the horrors of an economic crisis descend upon the land, the ruling class will no longer be able to maneuver in the same way, nor have the same material reserves with which to bribe and corrupt.

THE COMING CRASH

Because the bourgeoisie has been able to ward off temporarily the outbreak of the economic crisis through its much more than tenfold increase in military expenditures and through the Marshall Plan, it would be fallacious

to believe that it has succeeded in indefinitely postponing this crisis.

Had the program which our Party advanced to meet the oncoming crisis been put into effect, the crisis could have been postponed for a longer period of time and its depth and extent somewhat diminished. But the licentious profiteering, the uncontrolled inflation, the irresponsible speculation, the rejection of every demand for increased social security, the refusal to raise real wages and to adopt a slum clearance and housing program, are all factors that hasten the crisis and indicate that when it breaks it will be with unprecedented violence. The very means of artificial respiration by which the bourgeoisie has undertaken to postpone the crisis, only guarantee that when it does come the patient will be very sick indeed. And because the rest of world capitalist economy has never been so dependent upon Wall Street as it is today, the crash in America will have wide reverberations throughout the capitalist world.

The coming economic crisis must therefore be part of the thinking of our Party if it is to have a clear perspective for the period ahead. This crisis will bring untold suffering to tens of millions. And the ruling class, having less maneuvering room, will even more unabashedly remove its democratic mask and attempt to carry out its plunderous objectives by brute force—at home and abroad—if it can get away with it.

Thus the approach of an economic crisis will not remove the danger

of war and fascism. In a certain sense it will increase it. For the ruling class has learned something from world history and from the last economic crisis. That is why it is trying to meet this crisis *in advance* with fascism and war—the only ways by which it believes it can cheat history from paying the full penalty for its crimes. But this is not entirely up to it, for it will still have to reckon with the people.

One thing is certain. The outbreak of the economic crisis will unleash forces on an unprecedented magnitude and scale. Whether under such circumstances the American people, under the leadership of the working class, will be able to establish the necessary understanding and unity to take a leap forward in the fight for democracy, peace, and socialism, will depend in no small part on our Party and on how it fights and works today.

That is why every battle is so important, why the enemy is so fearful of our Party, even though it is still far from being a mass Party, and why the enemy is consciously trying to build up a mass base for an American form of Social-Democracy which can mislead militant masses. And the possibilities for struggle today are truly enormous.

EFFECTS OF DEEPENING GENERAL CRISIS

If this is a period of economic boom, it is no normal such period. It operates within the framework of the deepening general crisis of the world capitalist system. And this is

instinctively sensed by large masses who may never have heard of the general crisis of capitalism and who may even be conscious defenders of the capitalist system. But unconsciously there is a growing questioning, a growing uncertainty, skepticism, and doubt.

In contrast with the period of economic boom which preceded the 1929 tailspin, when large masses believed that the Kellogg Peace Pact had outlawed war for all time and that American capitalism had found the secret of perpetual economic motion and permanent prosperity, the present period is one of ever gnawing fear of impending disaster, whether of a new war or an economic crash. Even the conservative middle-western farmer who may tell you he is earning more today than previously, will also, with a worried look in his eyes, tell you that it can't last, that we're sitting on an economic volcano which is sure to erupt.

It is this highly charged atmosphere—constantly recharged by war-hysteria and war preparations, by rising prices, by reactionary attacks upon labor, the Negro people, and civil rights—which has made possible the emergence of something qualitatively new in American political life—a new political party. The birth of this third party, based on a new coalition of class groupings directed against the parties of monopoly capital, is something profoundly significant not only for the 1948 elections, but for the whole future of this country. In this year 1948, it is possible to lay the steel

and granite foundations for a giant political skyscraper that can in a relatively short period of time dominate the American scene—just as the Republican Party, born in 1854, took over the reigns of government in 1860.

The great opportunities for unfolding mass struggles, for delivering blows against reaction and also winning partial victories, can be seen in two recent developments. First of these was the defeat of the Mundt Bill, which, as Comrade Foster has already pointed out, constitutes an important victory, even if not a decisive one. The second example is the wage movement. Big Business had made up its mind ruthlessly to block any attempts at a third round of wage increases. Reactionary labor leaders were ready to go along with this, while liberals were ready to throw in the sponge. The New York *PM*, in one of its week-end editions, carried the following front page headline: "CIO'S 3RD ROUND WAGE DRIVE FACES DISASTER." But it was *PM* that faced disaster, not the wage fight, for due to the correct policy of our Party, due to the superb militancy of workers in such industries as packing, printing, auto and farm equipment, a third round of wage increases is taking place.

THE GROWING AWAKENING

In viewing the American scene today, it is therefore incumbent upon us to see the difficulties and not to underestimate them, but also to see the growing signs of awakening, the

immense and expanding opportunities, and the inevitable trend ahead. We must constantly remember what Engels emphasized a number of times for America—that when the mass awakening begins here, it will move with a specific American tempo, with seven league boots, and rush rapidly toward a climax. Engels drew this conclusion from watching the struggle in America in the period of still ascendant capitalism. How much more true is this for the period of the general crisis of capitalism.

Bearing this perspective in mind, it is our great historic responsibility today, so to build and strengthen our party, ideologically and organizationally; so to steel our Party in struggle and prepare it for rapid shifts in the forms of struggle; so to utilize every opportunity to undermine the lackeys of imperialism in the ranks of labor and the people, as to prepare ourselves and great mass reserves for the even more decisive battles ahead.

This means that we cannot operate on a hand-to-mouth basis, from campaign to campaign and from issue to issue. Through every campaign and every struggle must run a red thread which links all these together in an over-all strategy aiming at the solution of our most fundamental problems. This is too often lacking in our work today. Frequently, we are so intent on making the next move on the chess board, that the move is not sufficiently related to the strategy needed for winning the game itself.

THE PARTY MUST LEARN TO CONCENTRATE

Our Party must co-ordinate and plan its work far better than it has to date. We must guarantee a better distribution of our human and material resources to the decisive tasks and the key fronts of struggle. We must give far more attention to the training and promotion of new cadres, coming from struggle and especially from the ranks of the workers, the Negro people, and the youth. And above all else, we must learn how to *CONCENTRATE* on that which is decisive, even at the expense of temporarily weakening other things.*

Key to everything is the strengthening of our Party's work in industry and, in the first place, the basic industries. Let us admit quite frankly that our work is not yet concentrated upon winning the working class. Let us also admit that the class composition of our Party is poor for a working-class party and that we have not made much headway in improving it. But the winning of the working class *MUST* be the central orientation of our Party, whether in the building of the third-party movement or in anything else we do. This understanding must permeate our entire organization, every section and branch of it.

BUILD THE PARTY ON NATIONAL SCOPE

Our party, too, must more aggressively break through and become a party on a national scale. We have

talked much of this, but there are whole states and hundreds of important industrial communities in which we have no organization whatsoever. The whole area from the Mississippi River to California is still largely undiscovered territory for our Party, its soil rich with militant tradition, but lying fallow.

It may appear that to raise the question of building our Party on a national scale is to violate the precept of concentration. But this is not so. Many of the basic industries of this country are located in states and areas of states in which we are exceedingly weak.

We must rekindle a crusading, pioneering spirit in our ranks and particularly among our youth. More comrades must be ready to volunteer to meet the rigors and trial of going where they are most needed.

Our Party must grow in strength and influence everywhere, but we cannot merely permit this growth to take place spontaneously. If we do, we shall not build either a Party rooted deeply in the basic working class or one national in scope. And we of the larger centers such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, etc., must be ready to see this problem and give up some of the narrow provincialism that characterizes our approach today. To distribute our forces and resources correctly, at each level of Party organization, and in accord with a plan of concentration, is one of the chief tasks before us.

These are but two of the larger problems we must give thought to when we begin to approach our

work with greater perspective, not just for the moment but for a longer period of time. Our Party is today immersed in many battles and these are of great importance, but we must also foresee the even more crucial

ones to come and prepare for them in time. Only in this way can we build the kind of Party that can fulfill its historic responsibilities with honor as a true vanguard of the American working class and people.