

The Struggle for a Mass Policy

By John Swift

AS COMMUNISTS, we know that the reactionary ruling class has been trying to destroy our Party. What we have not always been so aware of is, that this objective includes far more than the imprisonment of Party leaders, or even the outright illegalization of the Party itself. Central to this objective is the drive to bring about the *complete isolation* of the Party from the masses, to break its ties with the popular movements of the people, and, in the first place, the organized labor movement. If the reactionaries achieve this, then they believe they can achieve their objective of destroying our Party. For they know, as do we, that while a Communist Party can live and even flourish without legal rights, it cannot live if its roots in the working-class and people's movements are severed.

If what we have just noted is true, and it certainly is, then there can be no real defense of the Party without the most painstaking attention to the problems of mass work, of the relations between the Party and the working class, between the Party and the Negro people, between the Party and the poor farmers, etc. There can be no defeat of the at-

tempts of the enemy to destroy our Party without finding the way to daily establish and re-establish anew, and on an ever widening scale, close ties with the masses.

In fact, the strategy of reaction is to deliver repeated body-blows at our Party in order to keep it off balance, to disrupt "normalcy" in its work, to keep it constantly engaged within the narrow confines of "defense" tasks, and, thereby, to force it to neglect the prime task of guarding its ties with the masses, of leading mass struggles around the people's daily needs.

The task of *consciously* combating isolation, of daily *fighting* for closer links with the masses, is not a task flowing from any narrow interests. It has never been more true than today, that the interests of the Party and the interests of the working class and the American nation are one and inseparable. For if the reactionaries are out to destroy our Party, this is not merely because they dislike the word "Communist." It is because they fear the inevitable awakening of the American people to how this great land is being taken down the path to war, fascism and economic

disaster. It is because they fear, and justifiably so, the *potential* strength of our Party as the single force giving voice, courage and leadership to this awakening.

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The Republican election victory of last November places even greater emphasis on the all-importance of strengthening the Party's ties with the masses. The Draft Resolution of the National Committee of our Party (printed in *Political Affairs*, December 1952) correctly places both the new dangers and the new opportunities arising from the election. The new dangers are inherent in the fact that "the Republican election victory has strengthened and emboldened the forces of extreme reaction." The new opportunities stem from the fact that the masses, particularly the organized working class, the Negro people, the poor farmers, will *inevitably* counter the attacks of extreme reaction with a growing resistance. From this "opens the perspective of broader and sharper class struggles."

But, warns the Resolution, this perspective of broader mass struggles must not lead to reliance upon spontaneity. In the first place, it will not take place over night or in a straight line development. The bourgeoisie will continue to employ a combination of attack and concession as its method of rule. In the second place, "Struggles must be participated in, organized and led." The reformist and Social-Democratic

trade union officialdom will not "reverse their class collaboration role and policies." In the last analysis, what will be decisive, is "the role of our Party as the foremost force stimulating, organizing and influencing the development of mass united front struggles on the key issues confronting the working class" and the American people.

If our Party is to play this role, it must have close links with the masses. The Party must be able to "link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and, to a certain degree if you will, merge itself with the broadest masses . . ." (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 61). Any failure to establish or to maintain such close ties with the non-Party mass, particularly the organized labor movement and the Negro people's movement, must inevitably translate itself into a failure to play the role of "stimulating, organizing and influencing" the struggles of the people.

Does our Party have such close links with the masses today? It does not. In fact, it must be said quite frankly and openly that in the past few years our Party has suffered considerable isolation from the masses, especially the decisive sections of the organized labor movement. This is to be noted in many ways and most recently and concretely in the results of the November elections.

We are proud of the firm, staunch and correct position which our Party took in opposition to the Presiden-

tial tickets of both major parties. Yet, the harsh truth nonetheless is, that the elections were something of a barometer which registered the ability of the Left to win support for its position and candidates. Certainly we would not hesitate to draw this conclusion were the vote for the Left a high one. We should not hesitate to draw it when the opposite is true, painful as that may be. For only by facing facts, honestly, squarely, and realistically, can we become a *conscious* force for changing the present growing isolation of our Party. Unless we do so, we face the grave danger of missing even greater opportunities to break our isolation than have been true for a good number of years.

If we cannot rely upon spontaneity to develop a broad united labor and peoples' movement, we can even less depend upon spontaneity to break our Party's isolation from the masses. It is necessary to make this point, because in our ranks there are some comrades who actually believe that changing objective conditions will *automatically* and *spontaneously* break our isolation. Thus these comrades resist facing the hard facts as they are, try to soften them a bit, ignore the danger of isolation as a grave one, and hence prove quite incapable of struggling against the pernicious manifestations of sectarianism and self-isolation in our ranks.

The term "self-isolation" is used advisedly. For it must be plainly understood that no matter how vicious the attacks of reaction against

our Party, these cannot, in and by themselves, bring about the isolation of our Party from the masses for any length of time. This is so, because every attack leveled against us is also an attack upon the working class and the entire American people—upon their standard of living, their democratic rights, their peace and their liberty. Thus the more vicious and brutal the assault of reaction, the more does it create the very objective conditions for teaching a larger number of people the correctness of what the Party has been saying and the one-ness of the Party with them.

Of course, objective conditions create only the *possibilities*. In order to transform these into *actualities*, there must be a Party capable of doing so. There must be a Party which tenaciously fights to strengthen its ties with the masses, which combats all manifestations of Right opportunism as well as all "Left" sectarian moods of self-isolation.

If, however, new objective developments will *automatically* break our isolation, then there is really nothing to worry about. In fact, if this is true, then it must also be true that our present relative isolation is caused entirely by unfavorable objective conditions and that nothing can be done about this. Therefore, we should just relax and wait for the ebb tide to turn. This is how some comrades fallaciously reason. That is why they feel no gnawing concern over our growing isolation. They even glory in it. Like typical sectarians, they

are content to find solace in their own puritanism, and only await the day of the Messiah, when ordinary mortals also will see the light!

The majority in our ranks do not feel this way. They are disturbed by our weaknesses and want to find the correct way to overcome them.

In criticizing the viewpoint which waits upon objective developments to change spontaneously our relations with the masses, it is necessary likewise to criticize the opposite side of the same ideological coin—the tendency to close our eyes to objective events and to attempt to fly in their face. Both of these tendencies are frequently expressed by the same people in something of a see-saw fashion. First, they wishfully see in the objective picture what is not there. (And “the most dangerous mistake revolutionaries can make” is to mistake “*their desire*, their ideological-political attitude, for objective reality,” Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 99). When the events prove them wrong, these comrades do not blame themselves for misreading the objective situation; they blame the objective situation for misleading them. Thus, they are always right. It is the objective situation which is wrong!

Is it not true, to a certain extent, that this is exactly what we did following the 1948 elections? Events had proven our general analysis of the role of American imperialism and of the two-party system as correct, but it also had proven our *specific* estimate of a mass breakaway from

the two old parties as premature. Having been proven wrong in this specific estimate of the mood of the masses, we placed our confidence in *future* developments to prove us right. Thus we did not stop and re-examine our position. Instead we concluded that the election results were only a flash-in-the-pan, that within a short period of time the masses would break from the two-party system and flock to the banner of the Progressive Party. We compared the election results for the Progressive Party with those of the Republican Party in 1856, leaving the clear inference that just as the Republican Party emerged as the election victor four years later, so could the Progressive Party today.

What was wrong with this reasoning was that it over-simplified the course of development, saw it as a straight line instead of a zig-zag one. In the first place, it permitted wishful-thinking to exaggerate the tempo of development. In the second place, it underestimated the ability of the bourgeoisie and of the Truman Democrats to maneuver by making concessions to the masses, and of the labor and Negro reformists to “cash in” as a result of these concessions. In the third place, it forgot that the masses would not “give up” what they still considered to be a bird in the hand for the offer of two in the bush. In other words, the masses would continue to stick with their present organizations and parties until they had become convinced as a result of their own experiences of

the need for a change. Therefore, the masses would express their opposition to reactionary policies, first of all through the medium and inside of these organizations and parties. Therefore, also, if we wanted to help break them away from old political and ideological moorings, the struggle would have to be conducted *where the masses were*. It could not be done by calling upon them or wishing them to be where they were not.

Even had events moved more rapidly than they have, even had mass disillusionment with the two old parties set in, this would not have meant, ipso facto, a flocking to the Progressive Party. Why? Because under such circumstances the demand for a new party led by labor would have been echoed more and more by sections of the labor movement. As a consequence of this, the position of many of the reformist and Social-Democratic labor leaders also would have undergone alteration. To maintain their positions over the workers, these gentlemen would have stepped forth as the leaders of a new party in order to keep the masses tied to the policies of the old parties and away from Left influence and leadership. (The Liberal Party in New York is an example of this.) Thus, in this hypothetical case the Left still could have found itself completely isolated from the living, concrete development which it had foreseen.

To give an example of this from the actual history of our Party, one

can cite the experience of the early '30s when our Party nearly alone championed the cause of the organization of the unorganized workers in the mass production industries. But this in and by itself did not guarantee Party influence and leadership over the workers when the movement for industrial unionism began to sweep the ranks of the working class. In fact, our Party was called upon to adjust its tactical line to the new situation. It was called upon to urge the Left-led independent unions to re-enter the A. F. of L., so as to affect positively, and *from within*, the emergence of the Committee for Industrial Organization. In other words, had we not taken the necessary steps to strengthen our contacts with the decisive sections of the labor movement, we would not have been able to play the role we did in the C.I.O. development, and this could have meant the difference between success and failure. (Read Foster's *History of the Communist Party of the U.S.*, chapter 21.)

From this it can be seen that there can be no substitute for being *with* the masses at all times. This does not mean succumbing to the backwardness of the masses. On the contrary, close contact with the masses is needed in order *to be in a position* to raise their level of understanding and to counter-act their illusions. Otherwise old illusions merely become exchanged for new ones. Only by being with the masses, only by taking into account the actual state of affairs, only by taking the real

level of the mass understanding as our starting point, can we play the role of "stimulating, organizing and influencing" them in a correct direction. Without this, we become nothing more than a propaganda sect.

Of course, maintaining close links with the masses, and at the same time maintaining a consistent principled class position, is not always easy. It is most always difficult. This is particularly true for the United States, a country in which bourgeois illusions are still rife in the working class, and in which the material basis for opportunism, in the form of economic bribes, is still considerable. The fact that in the United States it is more difficult to attain the unity between firm adherence to principle (theory), and close links with the masses (practice), does not eliminate its need. For only a combination of both these ingredients can provide the recipe for correct Communist leadership.

What is needed for this is a Communist Party of high quality, a Party which is so firmly grounded in Marxist-Leninist theory, that it is capable of applying this theory in a fresh creative way to the practical concrete conditions of the class struggle in the United States. Nothing less will do.

When the "ultra-Leftism" of DeLeonism was splitting the advanced socialist-minded workers away from the organized labor movement of that day, Frederick Engels wrote a letter to Florence Kelley Wischniewetsky in which he said: "I think

that all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position and even organization, and I am afraid that if the German-Americans choose a different line they will commit a great mistake."* (Read Foster's *History of the Communist Party of the U.S.*, Chapter 6.)

In this formulation Engels stresses the two-sided character and role of Marxist leadership, the need "to work along with the general movement" and at the same time "without giving up or hiding our distinct position and even organization." In this combination is to be found the "inseparability of identity and difference" which is at the heart of the Leninist concept of the Party as a vanguard organization.

The Party must be an integral part of the working class. It is impossible to be a vanguard without being a part, for the very term "vanguard" presupposes vanguard of something—the masses. By the same token, just to be another part, without being a distinctly different kind of part, is to cease being a vanguard, to surrender that which distinguishes the Party from the class.

Our big problem in the labor movement is precisely how to maintain our common identity with the mass and at the same time our dis-

* Letter dated Jan. 27, 1887 in *Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels*, International, 1942, p. 455.

tinctiveness. Just to be different spells isolation. Just to be identical spells capitulation to opportunism. We face this problem everywhere. How, at a time when the masses are still ideologically confused and even poisoned, can we stand forth clear and unsullied, and at the same time be an integral part of the masses and their movement?

In 1925, dealing with the role of the Party, Stalin wrote:

It is necessary that the Party be able to combine in its work the greatest adhesion to principle (not to be confused with sectarianism!) with a maximum of contacts and connections with the masses (not to be confused with "tailism"!), without which it is not only impossible for the Party to teach the masses but also to learn from them, not only to lead the masses and to raise them to the level of the Party, but to listen to the voice of the masses and divine their sorest needs.

Here Stalin adds something significant to our full understanding of the importance of close contacts with the masses. This is important, says he, not alone so that the Party can *teach* the masses, but also so that the Party can *learn* from the masses. For in order to teach the masses concretely, on the basis of their own experiences, and not in an abstract academic fashion which preaches to them over their heads, the Party must know the mind of the masses. It must know how to heed it and to learn from it. It must learn if it is to teach.

Is it not true that one of the

reasons why our Party frequently errs in its estimate of the mood of the masses is that its links with the masses are not as close as they should be? Is it not further true that we often give little heed to what our closest contacts among the masses do tell us, preferring to hold on to our own preconceived dogmatic estimates? It is because of this that our mass contacts many times fear to tell us those things we do not like to hear. Thus we still have much to learn from Stalin's wise admonition "to listen to the voice of the masses."

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We have stated that it is not always easy to maintain a principled class position and at the same time close ties with the masses. And we know from our own personal and often sad experience that it is much easier to state a generally correct proposition than to apply it correctly in practice. It is certainly true that where we do have the closest links with the masses, and actual leadership over them, there the danger of Right opportunism is more pronounced. In fact, to the degree that our Party breaks its isolation, to the degree that it enters more fully into the main stream of the mass movement, to that extent will the pressure of Right opportunism likewise grow. This is particularly so if the Party fails to conduct a two-pronged simultaneous war against both Right opportunism and "Left" sectarianism, making the main target that danger which is uppermost at each moment

and in each concrete situation. We shall have more to say about this later.

In the given situation of the election campaign it must be said that the main error of our Party was that of "Left" sectarianism. This expressed itself in a dogmatic, inflexible, one-sided position, which in practice based itself almost exclusively on the theoretically correct premise that both old parties had outlived their usefulness, and from the point of history had become obsolete. But as Lenin so well put it, "it is a crying theoretical mistake to measure questions of practical politics with the scale of world history," for from that point of view "capitalism could have been rightly declared to be 'historically obsolete' many decades ago," (*Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 97). Yes, from the point of view of history the two old parties have become obsolete, but unfortunately, not yet from the point of view of the masses, not from the viewpoint of *practical politics*.

What does this mean more concretely? Does it mean that we should have supported Stevenson and the Democratic Party? No, to have done that would have been tantamount to betraying a principled class position. It would have meant feeding the illusions of the workers, the Negro people and other progressive masses, instead of counteracting these illusions. It was necessary to stand forth and tell the masses the bitter truth, that both Eisenhower and Stevenson represented Wall Street and were

pro-war candidates.

The mistake we made was elsewhere. It is that our tactical line did not sufficiently take into account the concrete situation, particularly the actual mood of the masses. For had we done so we would have had to reckon concretely with the following stubborn facts: 1) that there were no immediate indications of a mass breakaway from the two old parties; 2) that the Democratic Party still held the allegiance of the organized labor movement and the Negro people, and that these feared a Republican victory and, in particular, the danger of McCarthyism and Taftism; 3) that the Progressive Party had become even narrower than in 1948; that the masses would not accept its Presidential ticket as a practical alternative; and, that its vote for President and Vice President would be only token in character.

Had these facts been recognized, and they were obvious for all to see, the question of a large vote for the P. P. ticket would not have emerged in practice as the *single* or *main* objective for which the Left fought. Instead we would have seen the main role of the Hallinan-Bass ticket as that of a catalytic agent which produced chemical changes by injecting the *real* issues into the campaign, utilizing the public forum of the elections to speak out boldly and unequivocally for peace.

The other side of our electoral policy should have been to seek out the ways and means by which to march side by side with the great

mass of organized labor and the Negro people in their opposition to McCarthyism and Taftism. We should have grasped every opportunity to work with and within the labor movement and its political action bodies. We should have given support, of a qualified and critical nature, it is true, but still support, to the candidates who were considered to be pro-labor and who while not progressive, were certainly more amenable to progressive pressure.

In practice, in most states, we did not pursue an electoral united front or coalition policy, one which sought out points of agreement with the bulk of organized labor and the Negro people. On the contrary, in many places we pursued a tactical line in an opposite direction. With some notable exceptions our talk of coalition usually meant coalition only of the Left. For example, to have said that a basic condition for the support of any candidates for Congress was how they stood on peace, in practice, frequently meant support only for P. P. candidates. If any Democratic or Republican candidates for Congress came forth with a progressive stand for peace, they were certainly few and far between. The Democratic opponents of McCarthy, Jenner and Potter, to single these out, did not depart from Truman's foreign policy. Yet, it was imperative to join with organized labor and with other anti-fascist forces to help defeat the McCarthys, Jenners, Potters, and Cains. In the eyes of the masses, and in fact, such men were

and are the open symbols of extreme reaction and arch-anti-communism, of American fascism. Their defeat would have had the *objective* significance of a repudiation of McCarthyism and blatant anti-Communism in the eyes of the world and national opinion. This despite the *subjective* position of their Democratic opponents on the issues of peace and Communism.

Of course, to have joined in an *active* struggle to defeat these open symbols of extreme reaction and fascism, required considerable skill on our part. It required the flexibility of being able to work with the movements for their defeat. At the same time, while part of the common fight, it was necessary to find the ways and means of expressing our own distinctly critical position of official policies. It is quite clear that the McCarthyites could not be defeated so long as the Democrats accepted McCarthy's main thesis of the "Communist menace" and strove to out-McCarthy McCarthy in their Red-baiting. The Democrats, by pleading their agreement with McCarthy's "motives," and their disagreement only with his "methods," gave up their chance of beating him. It is impossible to separate motives from methods. The failure to challenge McCarthy's *fascist motives* as well as his *fascist methods* must lead to the strengthening of McCarthyism.

But this kind of argument could best be made while fighting side by side with the labor and progressive movement to defeat the McCarthy-

ites, and not by standing on the sidelines. In many states the Left forces did stand on the sidelines. Where they did not, where they entered the fray, they not only cemented ties with wider masses but also influenced the course of the immediate struggle itself.

It is quite obvious that where the Left did join with the labor movement and with others in joint effort, it is today in a better position to discuss with the workers the vital lessons of the elections and why it is that labor suffered a defeat. Where, however, the Left ran candidates indiscriminately, paying no heed to the danger of running into head-on collision with the labor movement, it widened the rift between it and the ranks of the organized workers. And this in its turn did not win votes for Hallinan and Bass. It lost them, for as the National Resolution correctly states, "a rigid third party line . . . had no foundation in the existing alignment of forces and mass trends." To have pursued it, meant to have lost touch with the realities of the situation in the labor movement, among the Negro people, and in the organized mass movement generally.

A proof of the narrowness of the electoral tactics employed in most places by our Party and the Left is, that it became necessary to combat strong tendencies in our ranks to "sit out" the elections. The most striking thing about this tendency is that it was most prevalent among our trade union and shop workers and among

our mass workers generally.

It is our opinion that the *main* reason for this tendency, and the main obstacle also to the successful combating of Right-opportunist tendencies, was the narrowness of the tactical line pursued. The truth is that many of our comrades, particularly those in Right-wing led unions and mass organizations, found themselves incapable of applying the tactical line for fear of completely isolating themselves. Nor is it surprising that in many industrial areas, unions under Left influence did less to activize their rank-and-file in political action than did conservative-led locals. Thus the cropping forth of an "anti-parliamentary" tendency must be seen as a reflection of the one-sided and narrow tactical line pursued in the elections.

Communist and Left workers must never "sit things out." They must always be in the heart and center of every real movement and struggle. To sit on our haunches until the masses "are ready for us" is to wait both endlessly and aimlessly.

Engels, in his classical work, *Anti-Duehring*, made the penetrating observation that a mere knowledge that the barley plant is governed by the "negation of the negation" as the general law of development, does not enable one to grow barley successfully, any more than the knowledge of how different sounds are produced by the different thickness of strings, enables one to play the violin. One also must learn the *peculiarities* of each *particular* process

of development as a result of *practice*.

To know that labor must break from bourgeois politics, must play an independent class role on the political arena, is one thing. To know *how* to begin, concretely, practically, to *move* labor towards this position, is quite another thing. For the united labor movement of tomorrow can only grow out of the divided labor movement of today. Similarly labor's independent class organization and action on the political field can only grow out of the present-day political action of the labor movement, narrow, restricted, and tied to bourgeois politics though it still is.

The question of working inside of, and with, the labor movement, while playing a distinct vanguard role, does not mean putting aside the goal of a new mass party of the common people led by labor, as some comrades may fear. It is bringing that goal closer, for the *only* way to attain it, is by, and through, the organized working class, in alliance with the Negro people, the poor farmers and other progressive masses.

In a letter addressed to August Bebel, Engels once wrote that "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will *never* live to see it." How true is this of every great mass movement! A "pure" mass movement is only a figment of a sectarian's imagination. Every truly mass movement is a mixed movement, a medley of different, frequently conflicting currents and tendencies. The third party move-

ment when it takes shape also will be such a movement. There is nothing to fear in this, so long as we always remember the two fold nature of our task as a vanguard Party. What we should fear is the danger of being isolated just on the eve of new developments which are bound to bring about important political changes.

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In analyzing the weaknesses and errors of the Party and the Left in the elections, it must be noted that the danger of a narrow sectarian policy, of a "rigid third party line" which would bring us into head-on collision with the labor movement, was seen in advance. Attempts were made at the outset of the campaign, and in various stages of it, to broaden the Party's tactical line. The articles by Paul Mercer, which appeared in the columns of the *Daily Worker*, both prior to the Republican, Democratic and Progressive Party conventions, as well as after them, were on the whole sound estimates of the actual situation. They presented a correct line of policy. But these did not become the line of the Party *in practice*.

Why is this so? The first reason is stated in the Draft Resolution. The leadership failed to self-critically examine "the root of the resistance to such a policy which flowed primarily from the mistakes in the 1948 election campaign." The failure "objectively and fearlessly" and also *publicly* to draw all the lessons from the 1948 elections made it difficult

for the whole Party to understand the *difference* in the tactical approach proposed for the 1952 elections. It must be said, however, that if we failed to bring about a correction of the Party's electoral policy in practice, this represented not merely a repetition of the '48 mistake but a compounding of it. For, unlike '48, there was not even the slightest grounds for believing that a mass breakaway from the two parties would take place.

This difficulty became even more pronounced when nothing was done by the Party leadership to criticize publicly the numerous sectarian applications of the Party policy. For example, at the Progressive Party Convention there were various narrow views expressed, and in some cases by individuals who were erroneously viewed as speaking for our Party. Yet these received no public criticism on our part. Or, one can cite the errors made in the State of Washington. There the Progressive Party swung from the extreme of believing that no independent ticket for President was needed, to that of filing candidates for all major offices. It thereby stood apart from the labor movement and other forces in what proved to be a successful struggle to defeat the McCarthyite Senator Cain. Nor was there any public criticism of what was undoubtedly a mistake on the part of the American Labor Party in New York City in running its own candidates in every congressional district but one.

Speaking out publicly on these political errors, was all the more

necessary, and yet more difficult to carry through. This is so because the semi-legal conditions in which the Party had to function made it impossible to convene a national plenum or national conference at which policy could be debated and clarified for the whole Party.

There is a second reason for the resistance in our ranks to a broader mass policy. For some period of time there has grown up a point of view which believes that the Left, by a policy of head-on collision with the existing Right-led mass organizations, and by establishing its own independent Left-led organizations, will successfully undermine the positions of the reformist and Social-Democratic leaders and take the leadership of the masses from them. Expressions of this point of view are to be found in every field of work—in trade union work, in work among the Negro people, in work on the political field, in work among nationality groups, etc. *It is the root cause for the strong resistance in our ranks to work among masses and in organizations not under our leadership.*

What is wrong with this point of view? As we have remarked previously, it is basically false to set up artificial barriers which separate us from the masses. We must be where the masses are, wherever they are! Lenin, in his "*Left*"-wing *Communism*, explains how the Russian Bolsheviks worked even within the Czarist police-sponsored societies for

working people, trying to work legally in the most reactionary-led organizations, so long as these organizations were made up of working people.

In the second place, we must bear in mind that the masses are better organized today than in any other previous period. And it is a serious error to assume that those not organized are more militant necessarily and more to the Left than those who are. Thus, to point to the large number who are unorganized as "our base" is over-simplifying matters. As we have shown previously, even in the '30s when the mass of unorganized workers moved in the direction of union organization, this development found its expression in a mass movement and an explosion *within* the old craft-led A. F. of L. It was not alone, nor even mainly, in a movement towards independent Left-led unions.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to ignore the mass intimidation and terror which exists today. Every organization established by the Left is branded as "subversive" by the real subversives. Under such circumstances to expect a *mass* influx into these organizations at this time, would be to indulge in wishful thinking.

Of course, it cannot be precluded that large masses will at certain points along the way be compelled to leave some of the present reformist-led organizations, when they can no longer influence the policies and leadership of these organizations.

This can only come about through a *revolt from within*, and only when the rank-and-file in these organizations feels compelled to take this action.

Nor does this mean that the present organizations led by the Left are unimportant. *They are of great importance.* They give a lead, exert pressure and guarantee that masses are not left leaderless. Their very existence becomes a factor influencing larger masses and larger mass organizations. Thus, the existence of the Civil Rights Congress, for example, has been of great importance in giving leadership on a whole number of struggles and issues. It has exerted pressure upon such organizations as the N.A.A.C.P. and the Civil Liberties Union to act more vigorously in behalf of civil rights and civil liberties.

But Left-led organizations can become obstacles to reaching the masses. This will be so if and where they are seen as the *main* mediums for our work. Or, if their needs are counterposed to the main task of working within, and influencing the larger mass organizations of the people now led by reformists and Social-Democrats in a constructive and progressive direction.

Thus it can be said, that one of the major reasons for the resistance to a broader tactical line in the elections is the fact that sectarianism does exist in our ranks. High sounding "Left" phrases are used to conceal what is essentially a Right-opportunist fear of working among masses

not directly under Communist or Left leadership.

How sectarianism warps the thinking of sections of the Party can be seen in a crass and even shocking example. In one state organization of our Party all Party clubs were asked what perspectives they saw for mass work in their own areas and fields of work. A majority of the clubs replied that they saw no possibilities for mass work. Imagine! No possibilities for mass work in this day and age!

It does not take much thought to figure out how comrades could draw such completely erroneous and impotent conclusions. In the first place, they apparently live in a world unto themselves, completely separated from the existing mass organizations and movements. And there are mass organizations and movements everywhere on one level or another. In the second place, these comrades apparently conceive of mass work as consisting merely of the projection of some Left-led organization or Left-led campaign. *They do not think of mass work as starting with the masses themselves and the issues that are uppermost before them.* They do not think of mass work as the work of being with the masses, of patiently, tirelessly, step by step, drop by drop, and not all in one leap or in one dose, bringing them heightened understanding. What, may we ask can the perspective of such comrades be? Apparently, to wait for the tide to turn and for the masses to come to them!

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While treating the subject of "Left" sectarianism, it is important to touch on the relationship between the struggle against sectarianism and that against Right opportunism. We do so, because in our opinion there is widespread confusion in our ranks on this score. Such confusion hinders and harms both the struggle against sectarianism as well as Right opportunism. This confusion is frequently expressed in a lifeless, dogmatic and pedantic discussion over which of these dangers constitutes the main one.

A few months ago, in the publication of one of our state organizations, the following query appeared: "In the August issue . . . you emphasized the fight against sectarianism. Does this mean that Right opportunism is no longer the main danger?" The editor of this publication replies to this question with a most emphatic, "Absolutely not. To the contrary, Right opportunism remains the main danger."

Is this a correct answer to the question? It is not. In the first place, the very posing of the question in that form is incorrect. It is a general abstract way of posing a question which can only be answered correctly in a *concrete* way. It asks whether Right opportunism is still the main danger. Where? In the labor movement? In the Party? If in the Party, under what concrete conditions? In what field of work? To what concrete struggle or set of conditions is it referring? Apparently to all in general, and therefore to

none in particular.

The comrade editor who answers the question, gives reasons for his (or her) reply. He writes: "So long as the American ruling class follows policies aimed at world domination, militarism and force (both at home and abroad), and so long as the official leadership of the labor movement continues to capitulate to these ruling class policies, so long will Right opportunism continue to be the main danger facing the working class, its organizations and its vanguard Party. For the Party cannot be separated from the working class and the labor movement of which it is a part."

This is indeed a simple measuring rod. But we fear this yardstick is a bit too stiff and brittle to measure an object which is not straight but multi-curved.

The first error made by this comrade is that he sees the identity between the Party and the working class in a mechanical and non-dialectical way. He says that since the Party cannot be separated from the working class, therefore that which constitutes the main danger in the working class must also be the main danger in the ranks of the Party.

Lenin declared many years ago that "the principal enemy" of the Communists in the working-class movement, the enemy which "has claimed, and still claims, most of the attention" is, opportunism. But Lenin wrote this precisely in a booklet in which he was singling out "Left" sectarianism as the main danger

within the world Communist movement of that day (1920). Lenin hit out so sharply and so scathingly against phrasemongering and "Left" sectarianism in the young Communist Parties because he realized that this "disease" was the *main obstacle* at the time to a *successful* struggle against opportunism within the labor movement as such.

In other words, Lenin never forgot that in the imperialist countries the main enemy in the working-class movement was opportunism. But he also understood that the reflection of this opportunism within the parties of the working class could and did frequently take the distorted form of "Left" sectarianism. "Leftism," Lenin said, "was often a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement. Both monstrosities mutually supplemented each other" (*"Left"-wing Communism in Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 71).

This last sentence deserves special attention. How these "monstrosities" mutually supplement each other, mutually feed upon each other, is too little understood in our ranks. Were it understood, there would not be so much smug feeling that Right opportunism is a crime and abomination, but "Leftism" only "a little bit bad."

In Comrade Foster's latest book there are a number of vivid examples from the history of the American working class and our own Party of how Right opportunism fed "Left" sectarian views, and how "Left" sec-

tarianism, in turn, only further entrenched and strengthened the tendency of Right opportunism. In 1903, for example, the socialist-minded workers introduced a resolution in the A. F. of L. Convention which called upon the trade-union movement to "advise the working people to organize their economic and political power to secure for labor the full equivalent of its toil and the overthrow of the wage system" (Foster's *History of the Communist Party of the U.S.*, pp. 98-99). This socialist-sponsored resolution got tremendous support, being defeated by the narrow margin of 4,899 to 4,171 votes. Yet two years later, in 1905, the Gompers opportunism which held sway in the A. F. of L. became so unbearable for the Left-wing and socialist militants, that they decided to depart from its ranks. They took the path of dual-unionism, forming the I.W.W. Thus the Right opportunism of the labor officialdom led to "Leftism" among the class conscious workers.

What was the consequence of this development? Did it weaken or strengthen the dominant current of opportunism in the labor movement? It strengthened it. It withdrew from the ranks of the A. F. of L. the very workers who were cognizant of the danger of opportunism and could give battle to it. It therefore turned over the bulk of the organized workers to the tender mercies of the labor bureaucrats.

Today we can see all this. We are plainly and unalterably opposed to

dual unionism. And yet, here and there, within unions in which opportunism on the part of the official leadership must be fought, we have frequently weakened this fight by narrow and sectarian policies on our part. We have thus inadvertently strengthened opportunism. *It must be understood that to fight opportunism in a sectarian way is to strengthen opportunism!*

The comrade who wrote the reply to the question about the "main danger," seems to believe that the main danger within the Party can be established for a whole period of time as something fixed and immovable. The logic of his answer, in fact, would be to assume that Right opportunism must inevitably be the main danger in the ranks of our Party until the leadership of the working class is won. And after it is won, does "Leftism" then become the main danger? Obviously, this is mechanical and false.

As against attempting to find the main danger in an abstract way, and for whole periods of time, it would be better to accept the more scientifically accurate characterization of this problem by Stalin. In his report to the 17th Party Congress, delivered in January 1934, Stalin explained that: "It would be absurd to attempt to give ready-made recipes suitable for all times and for all conditions as regards the major and minor danger. Such recipes do not exist. The major danger is the deviation against which we have ceased to fight. . . . The question as to which is the

major danger . . . is determined not by futile, formal controversies, but by a Marxian analysis of the situation at the given moment, and by a study of the mistakes that have been committed in this sphere" (*Leninism, Selected Writings*, pp. 348-9).

The "sphere" of which Stalin was speaking was that of the "national problem," but he added: "The same should be said of the *Right and the 'Left'* deviations in the sphere of general policy. Here, too, as in other spheres, there is no little confusion in the views of certain members of our Party. Sometimes while fighting against the Right deviation, they turn away from the 'Left' deviation and relax the fight against it, on the assumption that it is not dangerous, or hardly dangerous. This is a grave and dangerous error. This is a concession to the 'Left' deviation which is impermissible for a member of the Party" (*Ibid*, p. 349).

Why is it impermissible? Because, adds Stalin, "We have always said that the 'Lefts' are also Rights, only they mask their Right-ness behind Left phrases." How true this is! Those in our ranks who refuse to work with the masses *as they are*, in reality are only capitulating to opportunism, are *afraid* to fight it in the ranks of the masses.

How concrete one must be in determining which danger is uppermost and must therefore receive the major blow at the given moment, can be seen by the way in which Lenin fought against both Right opportunism and "Leftism." In July,

1921, at the Third Congress of the Communist International, Lenin hurled his sharpest lance against what he termed 'Left' absurdities." A few months later, after the "ultra-Lefts" had been defeated at the congress, the Right opportunists within the German Communist Party began to raise their heads more openly and more boldly. Lenin then shifted his main attack in that direction, while defending his position at the Third Congress, where, as he put it, "I was on the extreme Right flank" (*Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 310).

Earlier, in the midst of the intense terror following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership conducted an endless struggle against all tendencies towards Right opportunist capitulation and liquidation. But they just as zealously fought for close ties with the masses, for mass policies. In 1908, they were compelled to wage a *major* struggle against the "Left" sectarians who opposed participation in "the most reactionary 'parliament'" (the Duma), and who likewise opposed working in the legal workers' societies "which were restricted by the most reactionary laws." In this struggle Lenin did not hesitate to admit that the Bolsheviks had been mistaken in their boycott of the Duma in 1907, and "that in this *single*" case "the Mensheviks were right as against the Bolsheviks."

We should learn to display the same concreteness in the struggle against Right opportunism and "Left" sectarianism in our own

ranks. And it is not too difficult to find numerous expressions of both these tendencies. Each particular situation and struggle must be examined concretely in order to ascertain the specific errors made. What may be the main danger in one place may not be in another. For example, in Right-led unions in which our forces are in the main isolated and hold no leading posts, the main tendency most frequently, although not always, is that of "Left" sectarianism. This is expressed in a narrow approach to the union, in a failure to see and think of the union "as our own"—not in a partisan sense, but in the broadest working-class sense.

Where, however, Communists hold positions of leadership in trade unions and in mass organizations generally, there the main tendency frequently is that of Right opportunism, although this too is sprinkled liberally sometimes with sectarian practices. Particularly in trade unions where Communists are in posts of leadership they must beware of a certain danger of isolation arising from the Right opportunist tendency to base themselves on the more highly-paid workers, and not on the great mass of unskilled, semi-skilled and new workers, which includes in the first place the Negro workers, but also the women and young workers. This type of isolation can arise where Communists in the leadership of unions work exclusively through top "maneuvers," do not base themselves always upon the rank-and-file, resist following broad united front

policies, and work in a bureaucratic way typical of the style of the reformist trade-union officials.

Thus it is necessary to be concrete, for even the danger of isolation need not always arise from the "Left."

It is the opinion of this writer that *at this particular moment* the main danger in the ranks of our Party is that of "Left" sectarianism. But this does not mean that we can become complacent about the many manifestations of Right opportunism, for to do so would only mean to swing from one extreme to another, and inevitably to create the conditions in which Right opportunism would assume the proportions of the gravest danger. The sad experience of our Party with Browder Right-opportunist revisionism should still be fresh in our memories.

This means that the struggle should never be conducted on one front to the exclusion of the other. Can we, for example, ignore the continued manifestations of white chauvinism in our ranks? Or, those of Negro nationalism? Can we overlook the hesitations to defend our Marxist-Leninist principles from the attempts of the enemy to distort and discredit these in the eyes of the people? Can we close our eyes to the tendency to give way to the difficulties of circulating our Communist press and literature to larger numbers of workers? Or, to hide the face of our Party? Can we continue to tolerate the low theoretical level of our Party and the still strong influence of narrow practicalism upon our thinking? No,

these opportunist tendencies cannot be overlooked.

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The Draft Resolution of the National Committee should bring about the most intense, thorough and self-critical review of the work of our Party in every field of activity and from top to bottom. It should open up a period in which the struggle for correct mass policies, for close ties with the masses, is one participated in by every Communist and every Party organization. Every Party club should ask itself: What are our links with the masses? How are we working among and influencing masses? What lessons are to be drawn from our own work?

In this way we can thwart the attempts of the enemy to isolate our Party from the working class and the American people. In this way we can strengthen the ideological clarity and unity of our Party around

its National Committee headed by Comrades Foster and Dennis. In this way we can take to heart and translate into deeds the words of Georgi Dimitroff: ". . . the leadership of the working class by the Communist Party cannot be attained by a process of spontaneous development. The leading role of the Communist Party in the struggles of the working class must be won. For this purpose it is necessary, not to rant about the leading role of the Communists, but to *merit and win the confidence of the working masses* by everyday mass work and correct policy."*

In the period ahead, with its sharpening class struggles, we shall have every possibility "to merit and win the confidence of the working masses" if, however, we do not forget the need for "everyday mass work and correct policy."

* *The United Front Against Fascism*, New Century, N. Y., 1935, p. 85.

A CORRECTION

A typographical error occurred in the "Draft Resolution on the Situation Growing Out of the Presidential Election," by the National Committee, C.P.U.S.A., as published in *Political Affairs*, December, 1952. The line reading: "It placed the professed party of monopoly capital, the Republican Party, in control of the government" (p. 5) should have read: "It placed the preferred party of monopoly capital, the Republican Party, in control of the government."—Ed.