

Five Years of the Communist Opposition

Has It Been Worthwhile?

by Jay Lovestone

It is now more than five years since we have launched our struggle to restore the world party of Communism to a Leninist course of strategy, and to unify its ranks.

Has this fight been worthwhile? Was it necessary? What have we done? What have been the consequences of our deeds? And what is the outlook for the realization of our goal?

Has It Been Worthwhile?

At the outset let me underline most emphatically my conviction that the five years of struggle waged by the CPO for sound Leninist tactics and Communist unity have been not only worthwhile, but urgent and unavoidable. It has been a battle against overwhelming odds for the laying of a sound foundation for a mass Communist Party in the United States. In this sense our efforts are reminiscent of and akin to the struggle waged by the Spartacus Group of Germany for more than four years, and the Bolsheviks in Russia for about nine years. Here we are not playing with historical analogies, nor are we creating fanciful mechanical parallels; we merely examine a struggle for essentially identical objectives waged under different circumstances.

Let us scrape off and discard all the slime and slander which have been hurled at the panorama of events, which we have influenced and which has been unfolded in this half decade. Not to discount these extraneous elements, or to react subjectively to them is, at best, a costly way of blurring one's vision and distorting one's conclusions. Stripping this bitter struggle of all the impermissible that has crept into it, and without in the slightest degree minimizing its destructive, even ruinous phases, one must stress that much good has come out of it, much which will be in the nature of a lasting beneficial contribution to the development and the upbuilding of a sound Communist Movement rooted in the soil of this country, as an organic section of the World Communist Movement.

It has been and remains the firm conviction of the CPO in the United States and everywhere else that all of these issues, all of these serious controversies over important tactical problems could and should have been discussed and solved on the basis of democratic centralism, then tested and fortified by application in life—all within the party and the Comintern. But the Executive of the Comintern, dominated by the C. P. S. U. leadership chose a different course, embarked upon a path of blighting (enlightenment) campaigns, mass expulsions, and wholesale splits. These were not of our making or choice. We faced

them unwillingly, but as Communists, realistically. We could do nothing else than accept these most unwelcome events as objective, tho objectionable facts.

"Destroy Leftism"

During the world crisis in 1921, at an international moment, resembling in many ways the present, Lenin militantly put forward the demand for an uncompromising struggle against leftism. He then inscribed on the banner of the C. I. the slogan: "Destroy Leftism." If it was then necessary for the American and other sections of the C. I. to destroy that whole system of false conceptions of tactics known as "Leftism," it is infinitely more necessary to do so to-day in view of the menace of Fascist reaction and imperialist war. Dogmatism, no matter how embellished, and cultified regardless of its variety or tint, or by whom symbolized, have no place in the science of revolutionary principles or strategy. Firmness in principle? Yes—to the point of utmost rigidity. But in tactics we must strive for maximum flexibility, for studied adaptability, not marred by illusions, not detoured by hopes or wishes, and certainly not hog-tied by mechanical aping or persistent parroting. The soundness of tactics is determined by conditions, by reality, by experience, by life itself, and not by labels or high-sounding, revolutionary phrases, ordered via cable or imposed by tactical strategy, native or transplanted.

The ICO, and its American organization the CPO, say without the slightest equivocation to the membership and sympathizers of the entire CI, to all workers, that we continue unswerving in our determination to destroy root and branch the senile as well as infantile leftism which has been paralyzing the international Communist Movement at the very moment of its greatest opportunity, in the very hour of the world proletariat's greatest need of effective Communist leadership. Here it is fitting to repeat Marx's motto as a warning and alarm-call: "It (Leftism-J. L.) is an off-spring of that false and superficial radicalism that accepts premises and tries to avoid conclusions."

Our Contributions To Marxist Thought

In five years of our existence, we have made significant contributions to Communist theory and practice, that is to living Marxism-Leninism; not only in an analysis of objective conditions and trends, but also in the strategic course to be pursued in meeting and molding

these trends. Merely to recapitulate:

1. A sound realistic, and not a wishful and ordered, evaluation of the economic crisis, of its social and political consequences. We have not only faced facts as they were, but we have also viewed them dynamically, estimated them dialectically, and pointed out general trends months before their appearance and maturing.

2. As to Fascism: Years before Hitler took power, the Communist Party of Germany Opposition and we, warned about the inevitability of the Nazis taking Germany unless the CP of Germany changed its tactics on the trade union field and unless the Communist and Social Democratic Parties resorted to joint action, to a genuine united front against Fascism. While Socialists, Communists, and Liberals banded about the word "Fascism" with a maniacal skill, we portrayed its class content and specific newness of form of this capitalist dictatorship in the period of capitalist decay.

3. While the other revolutionary and radical forces, particularly the CP, were writing off the American Federation of Labor as a dying organization, with its future ever further in its past, as an organization that wouldn't and couldn't organize new masses, we forecast years in advance the present great waves of strikes and organization by the A. F. of L. What is more, we mapped out a strategical course to enable the Communists to be well prepared to meet this eventuality.

4. When the New Deal, with its NRA came, we refused to join the chorus of official Communist and Civil Libertarians in branding it as Fascism, wrapped up in the Stars and Stripes. We analyzed it critically, we singled out the new and the different in its form, and underscored the terrible menace to labor in its substance.

5. The solution of the Negro question has been buried by the CP in the mechanically transplanted bog of "Self-Determination for the Black Belt." We have avoided this morass, and instead have examined objectively the roots of race prejudice and persecution in the United States, and resorted to a program of practical activity for overcoming this most dangerous obstacle to working-class victory.

6. With the growth of capitalist reaction the CP dug itself into a corner where it could and did proclaim to its own satisfaction: "We are the vanguard of the proletariat; we are the only organiza-

tion struggling and even willing and able to struggle against capitalism; the Socialist Party and other reformist organization are social fascist outfits; only those whom we approve and trust count; all others are enemies of the working class." Against such suicidal nonsense we have waged a merciless fight. Against the idiocy of "social fascism" and the "united front from below" claptrap we have sincerely and consistently posed the need for genuine united front actions of all working-class organizations, regardless of principle differences.

7. Granting all the shortcomings of American trade unionism even at its worse, we did not lose heart or head to fly to the simple, swift, but suicidal solution of dual unionism, of fabricating pure but sterile revolutionary unions. In the most difficult and darkest days of the American trade union movement we fought an uphill fight to build constructive, progressive forces in their midst with a view of strengthening the weaker organizations, of making still stronger the strong ones, and of transforming the entire A. F. of L. from a craft organization dominated, all too often, by corrupt reactionaries into a powerful militant industrial trade union movement. More than that, here we have aided not only in the working out of correct strategy for building a constructive opposition in the unions, but have also indicated the main roads in the development of the technique of dynamic militant leadership of mass unions. Our concrete work in the shoe, textile, coal, auto, and needle trades, tho far from being free from errors and shortcomings, bears striking testimony to the generally healthy tactical line pursued by us.

8. Thru these practical activities, accompanied by intense Marxist-Leninist educational work in the New Workers Schools, the Workers Age, and a number of timely publications, we have been able to achieve a four-fold task: (a). We have, in a substantial measure, been able to counteract, if not yet completely undo, the serious damage objectively done to Communism by the false tactics of the Official Communist Party. (b). We of ICO have been able to wield an increasing influence on the CI membership to hasten a break with the ultra-leftist tactical course. (c). We have been able to solidify and train our own ranks into a unified, experienced body of revolutionists winning increasing confidence among the mass of workers. (d). We have advanced along the path of rooting ourselves in the soil of the country, of utiliz-

ing the exceptional and peculiar features of American conditions and developments for the purpose of enhancing the growth of the Communist Movement in the U. S. as an integral part of the World Communist Movement bound by common international principles. At this point we can not over-emphasize the importance of our efforts, to Americanize in a truly Marxian sense the Russian question, to bring home to the average American worker and farmer the inspiration and lesson of the experience and successes of the victorious Russian working class.

9. Tho far from having won to date our fight for a new relationship, for a genuine collective leadership in the CI, and the restoration of democratic centralism in its various sections, yet, particularly in recent months, we have seen that our fight on this front has not been in vain, and is finally meeting with serious response from the rank and file of the party membership. We are confident that we will win our struggle to substitute self-reliance of the masses in the party for the prevailing procedure of revolving around some synthetic saint or cult. The CP membership is beginning to see that among revolutionists "Yes men" are no men.

10. Finally, we of the ICO view with increasing satisfaction the recent turn made by the CI in Germany, Austria, Italy, and France. Here is a change of tactics by the CI, not only entirely in the direction of the tactics for the advocacy of which we were once expelled and branded as outcasts, among outlaws, but also specifically, in response to the pressure and influence of the ICO. Even in the U. S. where there are special factors hindering a return by the CP to a sound Leninist tactical line, we can see, in a slow, vague, hesitating, and distorted form, the faint beginnings of a break with ultra-leftism.

For A United, Healthy Communist Party

In the life of some individuals five years or so are a long time. In the life of social and political movements of great vitality such a period is not at all long. What the CPO has been fighting for is most worth while—a united, healthy, Communist Party. Has our fight been worth while? Most assuredly. Are we satisfied with the results to date? Not quite. We would and should do much more and better towards our goal, towards the victory of the world Communist Movement and its forces in the U. S.—towards a vigorous unified Communist Party, firm in its correct principles and sound in its tactics.