

Parents and Children

By Max Shachtman

THOUSANDS of working class parents will be found to agree, in the abstract, that the principle of the junior groups is an excellent one. They will agree, again in the abstract, that working class children should be organized in the spirit of the struggle, trained in the ideas and ideals of the Communist movement. Many of them will even wax quite enthusiastic over the thing; they will contribute most generously towards the finances of the young Communists. But when it comes to getting them to urge their own children to join the red juniors, they begin to find numerous objections; when they are asked merely to do nothing to prevent their children from joining the groups or attending of their own wish, these same objections will be raised.

Yes, you will find workers who stoutly maintain that they are good revolutionaries, and yet refuse to have their children enter the ranks of the Communist movement. This type of radical is not confined to any one country, or any section, but can be found everywhere. And his hesitation brings up the problem of the new and old relationship between parents and children.

It is unfortunate and true that most parents, however progressive minded politically, do not rule their households in the spirit of the new society. They rely on their economic power, the fact that the child is financially dependent upon them, to tyrannize over their children, more over the mind than the body. Realizing their own very natural human shortcomings, their pride is disturbed when the child begins to question that which exists. And especially the children whose minds are sharpened by a growing consciousness of self and class; when their observation of social injustices brings to them at least an inkling of unjustified treatment and consideration at home; when they begin to feel and understand the economic basis of the family; when they acquire the critical outlook on society and the individual and see thru the foibles of those humans who are parents—in short, when they have received a training in the Communist junior groups—their attitude is certainly not relished by those parents in whose minds the poison of bourgeois life has not yet been eliminated.

These parents see in their Communist children only that which shatters their vanity. They are unconsciously annoyed, angry at the thought that the "impertinent brat" has the audacity to question their authority and superior brains and knowledge. They cuttingly answer all the child's arguments and counter their proposals with the unfair slurs: "When you've gone thru what I have, then you'll have the right to say something" or "Listen to that kid talking about politics!" And if the bitterness of life under capitalism has brutalized him inwardly, the child is given one of those old-fashioned thrashings which only widens the breach between the old and the young, which is remembered only with bitterness and hatred by the child.

And should our junior be a real rebel and earn the antagonism of his teacher, his father or mother may be inclined to be peevish when they think that their Jimmy has raised a rumpus in school, while Mrs. Brown's little Harry is always petted by teacher, get A-A-A's as his marks on the report card, and delivered a speech on "What Our Flag Stands For." Instead of being proud and happy to find their boy or girl developing into a protestant, a fighter, a rebel, many working class parents actually apologize for the terrible misdemeanors of their children.

The other type of working class parent who is opposed to his children joining the junior group is the one who wants to give his child a "good education," teach him to be an "engineer, or a lawyer, or doctor or something"; perhaps to set him up in business, and make of him a successful pants manufacturer or two-by-four banker. These parents have

felt the iniquities of capitalism. They know what it is to be wage slaves, to toil long hours for a meager wage, to attempt to support a proletarian family. But instead of seeking to train their children in the battle against the vicious system, instead of instilling into the children an undying hatred of bourgeois society, and the ideas and principles of revolution, they too often sacrifice all to make a business man out of him. How well we know the parent who denies himself everything, who scrimps and scrapes together enough money to send his boy to a university out of which the youth comes with a clear memory of fraternities, college yells, piffle about the "ol' Alma Mater," and the parting recommendation to some shyster lawyer where he is to receive his "practical training."

The proletarian parent has a duty towards his children. He must suppress the tendency that urges him on to exercise the big stick on his economically dependent child. To that stain on his revolutionary spirit which brings the pain of his annoyed vanity, at the development of the child's critical faculties, he must say: "Out,

damned spot!" Between the revolutionary child the bond of comradeship must be established. The child must be treated as a young, inexperienced comrade, who relies upon the adult for support and guidance in his own struggles. The "love" which parents ordinarily bestow upon their children is a relationship based on the child's meekness, upon ignorance, upon imposed authority. True love of children depends upon an understanding of their problems and battles, in the home and in the class struggle.

In the junior groups of the Young Workers' League, in the Communist children's groups all over the world, this new bond is being formed. A new relationship is springing up. It is based on a new community life; it is expressed in a wide comprehension, common struggles, mutual aid and comradeship. In the groups there is no authority but that of the children who have learned self-confidence, class solidarity, Communist initiative under the unobtrusive guidance of their friend and comrade: the group leader. Those parents who fear that their guardianship is having its place taken by the relation of the group

leaders and the children have two courses open to them. They can raise the cry of the pen-prostitutes of capitalism who shout that the Communists are breaking up the home, and thus play into the hands of their class enemies; or they can burn out the dross of bourgeois prejudices and ideology, and accept the new relationship.

The group leader is the new parent, and the new educator. The Communist child is the fighter of today and the embodiment of the child of the new society. To the hesitating parents I can do no better than to quote from one of Edwin Hoernle's pamphlets: "Children naturally expect and depend upon the support of the adults. The bourgeois educational system utilizes this inclination to make the children conform to rules and regulations which insure the comfort and peace of the adults. Communist education teaches the child to overcome this inclination and to accustom himself to independence."

Let the working class parents signify their assent by aiding us in our work of building the Communist movement among their own children!

The Party Discussion

HOW SHALL WE BUILD A MASS COMMUNIST PARTY?

By ALEXANDER BITTELMAN.

THIS is the fundamental question: How shall we proceed to build in the United States a mass Communist party? The basis of the C. E. C. (majority) says: By building and strengthening the Workers' Party. To which the minority replies: No, in order to build a mass Communist party, we the Workers' Party, must first build a farmer-labor party and thru that party we shall create the mass Communist party.

I will deal with the minority thesis in my next article. Here I want to state very briefly the position of the C. E. C. on how we intend to proceed with the building of the Workers' Party.

When we say that the Workers' Party is good enuf as a basis and as a starting point for the creation of a mass Communist party, and that it is not our business to create other political parties for that purpose, we do not mean, of course, that the Workers' Party will become a mass party overnight and by the mere force of our wishes. No, we are not so simple or naive as that. We realize more fully than the minority that the building of the Workers' Party into a mass party is a process of hard struggle, involving complicated strategy and difficult maneuvering, and calling for the most active participation of our party in the everyday struggles of the workers. We have nothing in common with that brand of "Communism" which avoids the masses and their struggles for fear of losing its "purity." We are at one with Lenin in everything he ever said about the dangers of sectarian sterility.

But at the same time we must make it as emphatic as we can that we still have faith in the Workers' Party, that we still believe in its ability to develop and grow and become the recognized leader of the American working class. We are not disappointed in the Workers' Party.

It All Depends Upon Strategy and Tactics.

What we maintain is this; that the success of the Workers' Party will depend wholly (objective conditions developing our way) upon its strategy and tactics. And further, that our strategy and tactics must always be based upon the realities of the class struggle. If you accept this principle, then the first question to be answered is: Where are we at? What is the main link in the chain of present-day events that we must seize upon and

hold in order to pull developments our way?

The answer to that question is: The elementary needs and struggles of the workers in the shops, factories, mines, railroads, and on the farms. It is there that the masses will feel hardest the increasing pressure of triumphant capitalist reaction. It is there that revolt is brewing already. And if our party, the Workers' Party, can supply the proper economic, political, and organizational slogans and also determined leadership, we shall have linked ourselves with a growing mass movement which will carry us to great accomplishments in the near future.

The United Front From Below is the Way.

In other words, we propose to begin to practice in reality and in earnest the tactics of the united front from below. Just the other day we proposed and adopted in the C. E. C. a thoro plan for united front campaign to combat child labor exploitation. We also provided, something that has not been done before, for a special sub-committee of the C. E. C.—a united front sub-committee—to continuously survey the field for the initiation and development of united front action on every question that becomes a burning issue in the lives of the masses, such as child labor, the Dawes' plan, nationalization of the mines, etc. The basic principle of all these campaigns will be to arouse the masses to struggle, to direct that struggle into the channels of class political action in alliance with and under the leadership of the Workers' (Communist) Party.

Furthermore, we do not propose to wander around aimlessly and without definite immediate objectives in these united front campaigns. We have learned enough from the Communist International to know that each united front campaign must pursue a definite, concrete and immediate objective for our party. And we consider this immediate objective to be twofold in nature. One is to combat the LaFollette illusion in the labor movement by bringing large masses of workers into conflict with the C. P. A. and the LaFollette movement generally, and thereby into conflict with capitalism. The other objective is to absorb into the ranks of our party the mature sections of the workers and poor farmers. In this process we shall hasten the growth of our party and at the same time continue the development and crystallization of a powerful left wing in the American labor movement following the lead of

the Workers Party on the economic and political fields.

Farmer-Labor Party is a Poor Slogan.

The slogan, "For a Farmer-Labor Party," which the minority in their zeal have elevated to the position of a Communist principle, we say is at present a poor slogan. It is no Communist slogan at all, and for that reason we reject it.

What is a Communist slogan? It is a tactical means of mobilizing large masses of workers and poor farmers for immediate struggles against the capitalists. A Communist slogan must, first, be of such a nature as to appeal to large masses. Second, it must contain enough dynamic power to move these masses to struggle and to action against the enemies of the working class. Third, it must offer a means for rank and file organization into direct organs of struggle. And fourth, it must enable the Workers Party to become part of these struggles and to win leadership over them.

Measured by these four requirements, we say, the farmer-labor slogan, which means a call for the creation of a new party to stand in between the Workers (Communist) Party and the LaFollette third party movement—this slogan is a dead one. It will not appeal at present to a single rank and file worker or poor farmer outside the farmer-laborites in our own party. This slogan does not possess sufficient dynamic power to move ten workers one inch. You will hardly get a gathering of 100 workers in any large center in the country to listen to a speech on the necessity of forming a farmer-labor party distinct from the LaFollette slogan.

Study the thesis of the C. E. C. (majority) and you will find the reason—mind you, not the facts, these you will observe in your own surroundings. Try to talk to your neighbors, in the shops and in the unions, about forming a farmer-labor party, distinct from the LaFollette movement, and see how much interest you will arouse. Then talk to these same workers about preparing to resist wage cuts, "open shop" drives, dangers of new imperialist wars, child labor exploitation, and about joining with the Workers Party in a united front for common struggle. Talk about forming shop committees to organize these struggles in the shops, and watch the reaction.

The thesis of the C. E. C. merely explains these facts and draws the proper conclusions. Study and discuss the thesis.