

Draft Resolution Points Way Party Should Go

By DOXEY A. WILKERSON

WE have no fixed standard by which to appraise the draft resolution before us for discussion. On the one hand, the constantly developing theory of scientific socialism provides no Marxist Holy Writ with which to compare the text of this document. On the other hand, it would benefit us nothing to evaluate the resolu-



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tion on the basis of some ideal conception of what we should like to see as the nature and role of our party.

The best we can do is to use the general guides of our theory and the concrete facts of our existence in arriving at an estimate. To what extent does the draft resolution define valid and adequate next steps for the American Communist Party—at this stage of its development, and with its present relations to the labor and people's movement? Here is my over-all point of view.

I think it is illuminating to approach this resolution by comparing its outlook and policy proposals with the views and practices of the party we have been living with during the past generation.

We have long been a party

with pat answers to all questions. We talked as if all problems had been solved, at least theoretically, and we knew all the solutions—or could readily find them in the *History of the C.U.S.U.*, or *Foundations* or the proper volume of *Selected Works*. This, of course, is the essence of dogmatism.

Moreover, many of the answers we gave are demonstrably at odds with the realities of this period and alien to the American scene. Recall, for example, such widely-held beliefs as these:

The Bolsheviks charted the universal path to socialism. Violent revolution is an indefeasible law in the epoch of imperialism. A one-party dictatorship of the proletariat, with curbs on the civil liberties of the class enemy, is the necessary state form for the transition to socialism.

Our strategic outlook embraces only the ultimate goal of socialism; all intermediate policies and programs are "tactical."

The "main blow" must be directed against the Social-Democratic misleaders of the working class and Negro people.

War is inevitable under imperialism.

The necessary solution of the Negro question lies in self-determination of the oppressed Negro nation in the Black Belt.

Political and ideological developments in the Soviet Union and the C.P.S.U. constitute a valid guide to policy for Marxist parties everywhere. Sharp criticisms of Soviet foreign or domestic policy are sheer slanders, or reflect inadequacies in one's understanding.

Lenin defined the organizational principles which must shape the Marxist "party of a new type" in all times and places.

Our party is the vanguard of the American workingclass, the sole organizing and guiding center of those masses which will one day bring socialism to our land.

Merely to restate such ideas now, when fresh ideological

Errors in Running

About This Bulletin

This bulletin will appear every two weeks until the national convention in February. We urge members of the Communist Party to write articles and letters giving their views in the Party discussion. It should be borne in mind that this phase of the pre-convention discussion is based on the draft resolution issued by the National Committee.

The deadline for articles for each issue is two weeks before publication date. If at all possible, manuscripts should be typed (double space). Maximum length for articles will be 2,500 words, though the shorter the better. Every effort will be made to have each issue present varying points of view, cover a variety of topics and represent different parts of the country.

Articles must receive some identification. They must be sent through district offices with an accompanying note from the district (or from the section in cases where the sections are far from the district headquarters).

Copies of resolutions adopted by clubs, sections, districts, etc. should be sent in the same way as articles. Many of these will be printed. Suggested amendments to the draft resolution should likewise be sent to the Discussion Committee. These too will be printed when of general interest.

Address all mail and material to Discussion Committee, 101 W. 16th St., New York 11, N.Y.

winds are blowing throughout the Marxist world, is to dramatize how mechanically we have tried to apply the principles of scientific socialism—without full consideration of varying time, place and circumstance. This is the essence of doctrinairism.

The fruits of these dogmatic and doctrinaire errors should by
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Draft Resolution Points Way for Party

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now be apparent to all: intellectual conformity in our ranks; a parochial outlook on scholarly and cultural developments outside our party; neglect of fundamental research into many areas of American life; deep-going bureaucratic practices which have stifled independent thinking and initiative, and driven many thousands of able men and women out of our party; seeming validation of the slander that our policies are shaped to serve the needs of the Soviet Union; and, with it all, the extreme political isolation of our party.

My emphasis here on harmful subjective factors does not reflect an underestimation of the powerful objective influences that have contributed to our party's isolation. Rather, it is an effort to focus attention on those internal weaknesses which we are in a position to correct, by ourselves. Nor does this one-sided emphasis reflect an overall negative estimate of our party's role in the past. Despite its serious errors, our party has made very important contributions to social progress in the United States; and I have always been proud of my membership. I know that I am a better American because of my experiences and development as a Communist.

It is this over-all positive estimate of our party's role in the past, together with the conviction that it has a vital role to play in the future, that dictates my grave concern over our deep-rooted tendencies toward smug and arrogant conceit, deadening conformity of thought, and uncritical adherence to hoary doctrines which—whatever their validity in other periods and places—are but anachronisms on the American scene.

Is this the kind of Communist Party that can play an increasingly vital role in the political life of our country today? Our present critical state of affairs clearly demonstrates that there is no future along this line.

Is this the "Marxist-Leninist Party" some of our comrades are so insistently demanding that we preserve? Nothing is more alien to the living, growing, truly authentic science of Marxism-Leninism.

Is it "liquidationist" to propose that we break sharply with the dogmatism and doctrinairism by which our party has been hobbled all these years? I am convinced that the main danger of actual liquidation comes from those among us who now stand pat on doctrines and policies which are clearly bankrupt.

I think the draft resolution represents a very important step in the direction our party must go in redefining its orientation and role.

It would have us become, first of all, a self-critical party, conscious of our major sectarian errors and determined to correct them. The old cock-sure arrogance would be gone; and we would be more modest and tentative with our answers to the people's problems.

Second, in an effort creatively to apply Marxist theory to the concrete conditions of American life, this resolution comes up with proposals which make a lot more sense than former efforts mechanically to impose formulas developed in other lands and times upon the qualitatively different conditions of our country.

PEACEFUL TRANSITION

Note, for example, the somewhat more rounded and convincing handling of the peaceful transition question, along with the perspective of full civil liberties and multiple parties under U. S. socialism.

Note that "our main strategic aim in the period ahead" is defined as the formation of "an anti-monopoly coalition" government—an intermediate stage on the road to socialism; and that the "main blow" is to be directed

at the monopolies.

Note that we are here called on to orient toward an extended period of peaceful, though competitive, coexistence; to establish more correct and helpful relations with the labor movement and the Negro people's movement; and to "reappraise" our always untenable theoretical position on the Negro question.

Note especially that the party here envisioned would shun any posture of seeming apologist for all that goes on in the Soviet Union or of ideological dependence upon the C.P.S.U., adhering to more valid principles of proletarian internationalism. Moreover, it would "further develop its independent theoretical work," with "ceaseless re-examination and reappraisal of theory in the light of ever-changing reality." And these are but a few

as they press for even more advanced proposals which we are now competent to effect. (And there is no question that the draft resolution should and can be progressively modified.) But none of us can afford to underestimate the extent to which this resolution, as it now stands, marks a very substantial break with much of our sectarian past. Just imagine what would have happened to any Communist advocating many of these policies a few years ago! These comrades, too, have the obligation to join in active support of the forward-looking proposals of this resolution—even while they press for further advance.

PHONY ISSUE

It has been alleged that the draft resolution seeks to abandon the principles of Marxism-Leninism as the theoretical foundation



EVERYTHING CHANGES

of the many ways in which this resolution would have our party break with its doctrinaire past.

Third, the draft resolution holds out new long-time perspectives for the Marxist movement in our country—"a united party of socialism"; and it calls upon our party now to "strengthen in every way its organization, mass work and influence" as a necessary means to this end. Moreover, it envisions a far more democratic organization than our party has ever been, with "bureaucratic concepts of party organization [and] systems of leadership" supplanted by "guarantees of real inner-party democracy."

In short, this resolution would have our 16th national convention register far-reaching changes in the Communist Party as we have known it these many years; and I am convinced that the outlook here defined indicates the direction in which we MUST move if we are to recoup our serious losses and emerge as a vital force in the political life of our country.

Some comrades assail the draft resolution from the Left (or is it the Right?), charging "revisionism," "liquidationism," "Browderism" and all manner of sins. I think they do a service to our party in so far as they insist upon good, sound reasons for all proposed changes. (Certain it is that we have not yet developed fully the theoretical basis for all the proposals advanced by this resolution.) But none of us can now be content with a let's-hold-the-line-where-we-are position; for rigid stand-pattism today means death for our party—or, at best, further degeneration towards one more of those insignificant little sects that the forward movement of history has cast to the side. These comrades, too, have the obligation to join in the search for new paths that open up a real perspective for our movement.

Some comrades assail the draft resolution from the Right (or is it the Left?), expressing "keen disappointment" and the wholly negative judgment that "this is the same old stuff—nothing new or inspiring." I think they do a service to our party in so far

as they press for even more advanced proposals which we are now competent to effect. (And there is no question that the draft resolution should and can be progressively modified.) But none of us can afford to underestimate the extent to which this resolution, as it now stands, marks a very substantial break with much of our sectarian past. Just imagine what would have happened to any Communist advocating many of these policies a few years ago! These comrades, too, have the obligation to join in active support of the forward-looking proposals of this resolution—even while they press for further advance.

Are there among us some who do, indeed, want to forget about Lenin's teachings? Of course there are. I, too, read one "Bernard's" letter to the Daily Worker, asserting that Marxism-Leninism is for Russia, Marxism-Maoism for China and for the United States—well, it is even less clear. And I've heard similar ideas from other sources. But it would be gross distortion to claim that this nonsense represents a current in our movement. It's not even a trickle; and it certainly does not warrant a big campaign to defend Leninism against the machinations of the so-called Right.

The teachings of Lenin are an integral part of the body of Marxist thought; and I know of no significant move to abandon them. Have I overlooked proposals to throw out Lenin's profound analysis of the imperialist stage of capitalist development, or his elaborations on dialectical and historical materialism, on the class character of the state, on the national and colonial question, on the fight on two fronts, on the necessary leading role of the working class, guided by its Marxist vanguard?

Let us be specific: Who wants to throw out what teachings of Lenin? Perhaps the comrades making so much ado about preserving Leninism are really concerned about certain principles omitted from my enumeration above. Perhaps they want us to reaffirm Lenin's teachings on the inevitability of war, on violent revolution, on the one-party dictatorship of the proletariat, on the form of party organization developed half a century ago in Russia. If it is these out-moded propositions of Lenin that they want to preserve, let them say so, specifically, rather than hide behind omnibus formulations about "downgrading Lenin theoretically." Our debate could then proceed around clearly defined issues.

Scientific socialism, like any other science, grows and develops on the basis of accumu-

lated experience. Once valid propositions become obsolete; new propositions are developed; and specific applications of general principles necessarily vary under different conditions. None understood this better than the great teachers of scientific socialism; and it is this—truly "Leninist"—approach to our theory that is expressed in the draft resolution.

Read what the resolution says on pages 55-56. This is no abandonment of Marxist-Leninist principles; it is a scientifically correct reaffirmation of those principles.

Some comrades object to "qualifying" our adherence to Marxism-Leninism by the phrase "as interpreted by the Communist Party of our country." Whom would they have do the interpreting?

The whole question is being blown up all out of proportion. Why, the very term "Marxism-Leninism" is coming to be regarded as a kind of shibboleth by some of our comrades; unless one does obeisance by using this precise term on every occasion—rather than "Marxism" or "scientific socialism"—he is suspected of "abandoning Leninism." One comrade even accused the Jefferson School of "downgrading Lenin" because she saw only the pictures of Marx, Lincoln, Douglass and Roosevelt hanging in the outer office!

The basic issue raised by the draft resolution is not whether to abandon or downgrade Leninism, but whether to abandon our former doctrinaire distortions of the whole of Marxist theory. Shall we now proceed CREATIVELY to apply and further develop the principles of scientific socialism on the basis of the realities of social life in our country? This is the real question our party has got to answer.

SOME PROPOSALS

Does the resolution before us adequately define the outlook required for our party to re-emerge as a vital force in American life? I do not think so; there are many respects in which I think it needs to be improved. Here are a few:

I should like to see the resolution begin with a spirited reaffirmation of our love of country, our thorough devotion to the interests of our fellow-Americans, and our aspirations for the United States to forge ahead in this period of "competitive coexistence"—on the only basis possible: abiding peace, respect for



the sovereignty and dignity of all other nations, thoroughgoing democracy here at home, and the socialist reorganization of our economy.

The resolution's somewhat euphemistic discussion of the party's previously "over-simplified concepts" of its relations to other Marxist parties should be modified into a more forthright, self-critical analysis—along with reaffirmation of our very positive estimate and special high regard for the Soviet Union and other socialist lands.

It is unfortunate, at this late date, that our National Committee is in position to do little more than recommend a committee "to BEGIN drafting" a basic written program, and that the resolution has to leave open so many important theoretical questions for further study. But I guess there is nothing to be done

about it—except really to start grappling with our unsolved problems. Our party simply cannot make the turn now required unless we take a serious approach to the theoretical education of our entire membership; and the resolution should call for a program to this end.

I am generally in agreement with the resolution's handling of the Negro question; and I do not go along with assertions by some comrades that white chauvinism is rampant in our movement. Still, I think the resolution should make very clear the importance of positive and vigorous INNER-PARTY discussion and education on the question of white chauvinism, as an ideological buttress for effective participation in the mass struggle for Negro rights.

The mechanical balancing of "Achievements" vs. "Errors" in the resolution tends to obscure the inter-relations between the two; and the catalog of "Achievements" is unduly boastful, often seeming to confuse what we TRIED or INTENDED to do with what WE actually accomplished. I think these two sections should be rewritten.

In view of the fact that our big swing to the Left following World War II came in large measure as an over-correction of Browder-revisionism, it seems unthinkable to me that we can go into our national convention with a resolution which makes no pretense at analysis of the whole Browder period.

The resolution is eminently sound in its assertion that "the unfolding of a correct mass policy by the party, as well as its ability to attract and hold masses of socialist-minded Americans, requires extensive changes in its structure and methods of work"; but I think the National Committee was unduly "bearish" in advancing concrete proposals along this line. The recommendations made are good; but we also need specific guarantees that conventions are truly delegated bodies, that officers and leading committees are democratically elected—and subject to recall by the membership, that our membership is fully involved in discussions of basic changes in policy, and that there can be no expulsion on grounds of policy disagreement.

I assume from the resolution's silence on "vanguard party" and "democratic centralism" that we are now to accept a more modest and realistic conception of our role as an advanced sector of the labor and people's movements, and also to abandon whatever lingering ideas there may be about an American Communist Party of "iron discipline" and "monolithic unity." If this assumption is correct, I am in full agreement. I prefer, however, a more explicit dealing with these questions.

AGAINST DISSOLUTION

I strongly oppose any suggestion that we dissolve our party, or even that we try now to implement the resolution's correct orientation toward a broad, united party of socialism. The one is unwarrantedly defeatist; and the other seeks futilely to jump over stages.

I have come around to the belief, however, that a fundamental reorganization is now in order. I think that our 16th national convention would do well to change the name of our organization, and also to register formally what is already a fact of life—that we are much more of a political-action association than we are a "party" in the American sense of that term. A few weeks ago I considered this proposal desirable but probably "too advanced" to win overwhelming support by the time of the convention; but the more I listen to discussions "down below," the more I am convinced that our membership is way ahead of our National Committee on this question.

Changes in the name and

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structure of our organization should not be made in a vain effort to conceal our identity as Communists, as an organization based on the principles of scientific socialism. Rather, they should be made for the actual and avowed purpose of dramatizing for our countrymen—and, indeed, for ourselves—the fact that American Communists are effecting a radical break with their sectarian past. Such changes might also facilitate our “unfolding a correct mass policy,” and enhance our ability “to attract and hold masses of socialist-minded Americans.”

Finally—and this is at once the most important and the most difficult—our resolution should be imbued throughout with the confidence and enthusiasm which the rapid forward movement of the world's peoples now inspires in true Marxists everywhere. The contours of this “new world situation” are outlined in the “Foreword”; but its spirit never quite breaks through that stodgy prose which has come to be our hallmark. Our problem here, of course, is not only one of semantics and rhetoric; it is also one of vision. Let us fight for and win genuine unity around the exciting new perspectives now opening up for our country and all mankind; then will we draft a policy statement for the American Marxist movement that is not only “correct”—but also inspiring.
