

Chewing on Straw - Party Theory

The "theoretical" organ of the Communist Party of the United States is the "Communist". The masses of Communists and sympathetic workers are hungry for theory and explanation, but it is poor fare indeed the party press provides.

The Party In Wonderland

The writers of the articles in the "Communist" live in an unreal world that never was on land and sea. Here is the January 1933 number. It speaks of "left sectarianism which leads to passivity, to refusal to participate in revolutionary struggle, to a capitulation before Social-democracy."

"Is Social-democracy then the main force holding sway over the workers of America?" the reader might ask. "Or did not the millions support capitalism directly in the persons of Roosevelt and Hoover as recently as November, 1932?" Why, the reader is forgetting the "growth of the revolutionary upsurge" for such is the description of the discontent and resistance!

"The Communists need only to exert even the slightest efforts and the leadership will fall into their hands," writes S. Gussev, leader of the American secretariat of the Communist International. Yes, leader, he is referring to America. His test is certainly not the size of the Communist vote, nor the diminishing numbers in the party-controlled unions and unemployed councils,* nor the failure of the party membership to grow during over three years of crisis, nor the loss of influence in the organized labor movement. Apparently Comrade Gussev has other sources of information denied to the rest of us!

"We have now a new flow of revolution," concludes Gussev. (This time he is not talking about America). "But for England and the U. S. A.", he adds, "this victory (of revolution) is only possible if these four fundamental tasks are carried out; the destruction of social-fascism, the formation of a mass political army, the conversion of the party into the fighting staff of this army, and the formation of a strong general staff."

Why is the destruction of the Social-democracy put first? The United States is not Germany. In the United States the Social-democracy has not the main influence over the workers but the Democratic and Republican parties have. The main task, the separation of the workers from the openly capitalist parties, is not even hinted at! A mere trifle—not to be mentioned! Certainly not among the "four fundamental tasks" to be carried out to make "victory possible."

Mountains Out Of Mole Hills

We pick up the October issue—Jack Stachel writing.

"The strike of the steel workers in the Trumbull mill of the Republic Steel in Warren is of outstanding significance, altho it lasted but a little over a day and involved comparatively a small number of workers."

"A little over a day"—but that doesn't prevent Stachel from writing thirteen pages, well over 5,000 words about it! Perhaps Stachel is going to show that it is "significant" for the errors involved. Vain hope! First, this strike shows unmistakably the great depth of the radicalization of the masses! Secondly, it proves that the native-born workers are ready to accept the leadership of the party and the revolutionary trade union movement!

The Secret Of Sectarianism

The "Communist" is presumably addressed to the American workers. True, it is addressed to the advanced workers and treats at times problems of a complicated character requiring special technical terms. But there are limits—or should be, if one wishes to talk to any one but himself. Take, for instance, "sectarianism." It is a technical term and an important one. It means the tendency to act

The "Communist" for One Year

by Bertram D. Wolfe

deed which echoed thruout the world." (!)

Browder confesses seven errors committed in a previous article of his, but none of the confessions seemed to make much sense, so we dug up the original article. It has a peculiar timeliness at this moment when Laval and Hoover are abusing each other and "explaining" the "agreements" arrived at in Laval's visit to America. Browder has applied the keen weapon of Marxism and revealed in an article later published in pamphlet form ("The Secret Hoover-Laval War Pacts"): "The last weeks (after the Laval visit and the Japanese invasion of Shanghai and Manchuria) have clearly disclosed the emergence of a new constellation of imperialist powers, in which the United States is moving toward hegemony of a block for the re-division of the world. In this constellation more clearly appears the leading role of France, Japan and the United States, with Germany and Italy in a subordinate role."

The reader must be rubbing his eyes! What a constellation! Could there be more mistakes in a single paragraph? Even the superficial observer must note the sharpening antagonism between the European debtors and the United States, between France and Italy, between

France and the United States, between Japan and the United States. But the "Marxian method," as employed by Browder, enables him to see "below the surface," to miss seeing what is on the surface altogether.

"Self-Criticism"

Plenums come and plenums go and the party abases and abuses itself with confessions of "bureaucracy," "sterile inner life," "lack of party democracy," "failure to work in the reactionary unions," "bureaucratic strangling the party-controlled unions," "resolutions remaining only on paper," "lagging behind the masses," "failure to hold new members," "failure to carry on united front work," etc., etc. This is known as the practise of "Bolshevik self-criticism." Let us compare the "practise" with the theory from which it is derived.

"We need not be afraid," said Lenin, "to expose our errors to the enemy. He who fears that is no revolutionist. On the contrary if we say openly to the workers: Yes, we have made mistakes! that means that we will not repeat those mistakes next time."

But what shall we say of a party that openly acknowledges its mistakes at the Tenth Plenum, acknowledges the same mistakes at the Eleventh Plenum, keeps on repeating them till the Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Plenums,

and so on forever? As a matter of fact, the party has not made the slightest attempt in over three years to analyse and correct its real mistakes. It dares not analyze its false estimate of the American situation, for that false estimate comes from the International. S. Gussev speaking:

"Altho the development of the revolutionary movement in the Anglo-American countries still lags considerably behind the high tension of the whole international situation, even in these countries, the C. I. sections are faced with the same task; preparing the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship. In the Anglo-American countries the winning majority of the proletariat is for the C. I. sections a practical task for the present day!" ("Inprecorr", November 3, 1932, p. 1059).

Second, it dare not analyze its false tactical line in the trade unions (building of separate unions for the Communists and their sympathizers) nor its false tactical line in rejecting the united front (a "united front" in the "Communist" today means only an invitation to non-party workers to support the party) because both these basic causes of all errors in trade union and mass work, are part of the unassailable "line of the Tenth Plenum of the E. C. C. I."

"We have no reason to modify this line in any way. Everything that has happened during this period has confirmed the correctness of this line," said Earl Browder to the Twelfth Plenum of the Party's Central Committee. (Every "application" is a mistake but it couldn't be possible that the line is wrong.)

"There is no one here to speak against this line," continued Browder, "there is no one in the party who retains any doubt about the correctness of our line."

Which brings us back to Wonderland where the oysters, once eaten by the Walrus and the Carpenter, kept silent, because:

But answer there came none—And this was scarcely odd because

They'd eaten every one.

Thus does wholesale expulsion establish the correctness of a "general line," develop "Bolshevik self-criticism," promote "Marxian analysis" and enrich the theoretical life of the Communist Party of the United States!

* "In the first quarter of 1932 there were 30,000 registered in the unemployed organizations and in the second quarter there were 13,000" (in the same article).

of an idea, remains sterile; the intellectual blinders which the "eminent scientists" wear because of their class position prevent them from seeing what fairly cries out for recognition. For it is not just "vested interests" here and there that "resist change," but it is the gigantic "vested interest" of capitalism, controlling the government and the dominant social forces, that resists all social change which even by implication threatens to undermine the very "foundations of society"—the right of private property in the means of production and the profit motive as the driving force in our economic life. And yet, it is precisely these two fundamental principles that are at bottom responsible for the "astounding contrasts in organization and disorganization," for the "lack of synchronization" of the various parts of our social mechanism, and for all the other ills which the report deplors. To urge, therefore, the "application of intelligent planning in social direction," and even to recommend an elaborate mechanism of advisory councils and sub-councils, while at the same time preserving the "merits of private property, individual enterprise and self-help," argues such a colossal failure to understand the realities of the situation that one may well question the capacity of the committee to grasp the simplest social truth!

The fact is, our "eminent scientists"

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On The Hoover "Social Trends" Report

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE UNITED STATES?

(Concluded from the last issue)

The committee report calls attention to the already known but very significant structural changes in the body of the gainfully employed in this country in the last several decades. Between 1870 and 1930, the proportion of the gainfully employed in the total population over 16 years of age rose from 50% to 57%, largely due to the introduction of women into industry. But in the same period, the proportion of the gainfully employed occupied in "the work of transforming raw materials into usable, consumable goods," in productive labor, in other words, fell from 77% to 52%! This surprising decrease, made possible by technical progress, expressed itself in the rank growth of parasitic non-productive occupations, such as salesmen, insurance agents, "promoters," etc. Furthermore, considerable sections of workers, apparently productively employed, were really "wasting" their efforts inasmuch as they were subordinated to non-productive enterprises; take the case of printers turning out advertising material, for example—and advertising absorbed almost half of the printing done in recent years! Finally, in the period of 1920-1929, there was an absolute decrease in the number of workers employed in manufacturing industries, in spite of incredible jumps in productivity and production. No more striking evidence of the decadence of capitalism today could be imagined!

Labor In Dying Capitalism

The many paragraphs in the report dealing with labor, however, merit careful study. Of course, the committee makes its bow to much advertised "prosperity" of 1925-1929. But, if we examine the matter closely, some very interesting conclusions emerge. In the pre-war period of 1900-1913, the output per individual wage-earner rose 1.7% per year but average real wages fell 0.1% a year, in contrast to the rise of receipts of stockholders of 1.2% annually. Indeed, the best estimates maintain that in the thirty years preceding 1920 real wages actually fell, while labor productivity and returns to the capitalists mounted sky-high.

by Will Herberg

In the "prosperity" years of 1922-1929, employment slowly declined—already more than 10% of the workers were unemployed—while output per worker rose 3.3% yearly. In manufacturing, indeed, the total increase in per capita output in the years 1920-1928 was 53%—a most amazing figure. Yet, in those "golden years," wages rose only 1.4% a year (this was the "prosperity"! while the receipts of stockholders jumped 16.4% annually. Measured in terms of the unit cost of goods produced, the "reward of labor" was fast declining in the great days of "prosperity"; the share of labor in the products of industry was becoming smaller, while the per capita output of labor was growing with giant strides. In the first two years of the crisis—the report puts the finishing touches to these devastating statistics—not only did unemployment mount to over 10,000,000, but "the aggregate money earnings paid to American employees fell about 35%, while the cost of living declined about 15%." A striking picture of "America the Golden."

And the future? "For the very near future the standard of living may decline further because of the menace to wages caused by unemployment, the possible slowness of economic recovery from the de-

pression, and the weakness of collective action on the part of the wage-earners." The last phrase is indeed significant: it brings us face to face with the tragic failure of the official labor movement in the last decade and more.

"The membership of American trade unions declined from 5 millions in 1920 to 3.3 millions in 1931, the first time in American history that the unions did not gain in membership in a period of prosperity . . . In the big industries, such as coal, meat packing, and steel, the unions have lost ground and have made no gains in others, such as the manufacture of automobiles. When other functions than membership (that is, fighting power.—W. H.) are considered, it is clear that the organization of labor has not gone forward. . . Organizations of employers and employees have changed at unequal rates of speed. . . The organized labor movement seems declining in numbers and vigor."

One has to be completely blind not to see that the marked decline of the labor movement in numbers and fighting power has been due to its official policy of collaboration with the capitalists instead of struggle against them. It is the conservatism of the unions that has brought them to the desperate pass of today. "Strikes have declined about 80% since the World War," we are told, again an unprecedented occurrence in American labor history. Today, this committee of bourgeois sociologists emphasizes "the weakness of collective action on the part of the wage-earners" and warns that, "unless labor organizations show a more vigorous growth in the future, other resources of society must be drawn upon to meet these problems"—a warning that bodes no good for labor!

The Root Of The Question

It is in the concluding sections of the report that "eminent scientists" show their complete inability to cope with reality. Why, they ask themselves, does not "social invention" (change in fundamental social institutions) keep pace with "mechanical invention" (development of the productive forces)? Along with some trite platitudes, we find the significant admission: "vested interests resisting change in self-defense." But this phrase, altho it indicates the beginnings

Have You Read ?

THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, by Jay Lovestone 10c
SOME PLAIN WORDS ON COMMUNIST UNITY, by Ben Gitlow 5c
THE HERITAGE OF THE CIVIL WAR, by Will Herberg 5c
FOR REVOLUTION, by V. F. Calverton 25c

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