

# The Party Forum

Vol. 1, No. 2

July 10, 1956

## A GLANCE AT OUR WORK AMONG THE YOUTH

During this pre-convention discussion a good look should be taken at our approach to the young people of our country and state. How do we regard our party youth work? How have we responded to the growing interest of the general public in the problems of the youth?

This interest has been clearly shown by a number of state conferences and some expressions of the President. One could go deeply into these questions, but this article is intended to give my own views on a party approach to youth work. There will be no attempt to spellout a full program.

First I would like to say that more time has been spent in the last year or so on discussion of youth work in the party than we have spent since 1948-49. This has been good. There was a review of youth work conducted by the national youth commission last year, which ended with a report to a national party conference by Martha Stone. (Political Affairs.) That review and conference opened up some new questions.

In the past and up to today the main reflection of party youth work is seen through in the Labor Youth League. While I think that the L.Y.L. has and still is doing fine work, it cannot be considered as the main avenue of party youth work, but only as an important independent youth organization in its own right, which has a program that can appeal to all young people who would like to learn about socialism.

The L.Y.L. is not a Communist youth organization. That being true, the party must have its own program of action for all its members. If the party plays a leading role in all other phases of work, why should it not play the same kind of role as far as youth work goes? Why should the party be satisfied to give the responsibility for a party youth program to a non-party

**The Party Forum is caught in a contradiction.**  
So much material has come in that it is necessary to urge a 1,000 word limit to contributions.

At the same time, more material is needed and wanted—especially from the club level, and most especially from workers who can discuss the problems now being examined in the light of experience within the labor movement.

Signed contributions may be sent to The Party Forum, Room 705, 942 Market street, San Francisco, 2, Calif. Unsigned manuscripts should be transmitted through your party organization.

youth organization? When Lenin called for the independence of the youth, he knew that it must have independence if it is to find its way to socialism. How then, is it possible to have an independent youth organization (such as the L.Y.L.) that will not be saddled with many of the patterns of party organization and program, if the party has not spelled out a rounded approach to youth work?

How can such a program be worked out? It should be worked out in relationship to what the party members are doing now in their other organizations and trade unions. Such a program should be aimed at raising the understanding of the general public on the ways to win for the youth of our country a place in the fight for democracy and socialism.

Let us consider one of the areas where youth work and so-called general party work in the trade unions often seem to conflict with each other. Our approach to the L.Y.L. and young workers (who are members of trade unions) is designed to get the L.Y.L. to do general trade union work. What is needed by the party is a program which includes youth needs in the trade unions. Older members can join in such a program and help the young

party and L.Y.L. member to engage in the type of activity that will win for him a base among the younger workers. Most of them have very little understanding of the trade union and are not very active in the so-called general work of the union.

Most young workers have two approaches toward trade unions. One: a place to find a job (employment agency); two: an organization that blocked them from getting a job. The employers understand this very well.

Not too long ago the Western States Methodist Youth held a conference. In a display of material there was only one item dealing with youth and jobs. It came from the Kohler Company and appealed "To Your Right to a Job"—giving the line that unions make it hard for young people to get jobs.

Young workers of today didn't live through the organization of the trade unions and they do not look upon the trade unions as do the older workers. Older progressive workers could therefore do valuable youth work by getting the trade unions to develop an interesting educational program on the history of the trade unions.

The older party and progressive workers could call for and raise funds for sports equipment and open halls to young workers. Then the young party and progressive youth will have the job of involving the younger workers in such a program.

As these young workers are brought in closer contact with the union through a program that they want, they will act in the best interest of the workers as a whole. One trade unionist who asked about an educational program for young people was told that the union is doing a good job on education now. That union gives scholarships to some young workers to go to college. What he didn't say or perhaps know is what these young trade unionists will learn about the trade unions in college!

This opens another way for the party and progressive to do youth work that will pay off. For the whole field of the Negro people, labor and the progressive is involved here. This program can be carried on through the trade unions, P.T.A., social groups, etc., where party members and progressives is to be found.

The problems of housing in general, strike hardest at young people. The development of "all-white" tracts—which attract mostly trade union members—must become a major issue. For the building of these jimcrow developments will lead to great problems among the youth of our state.

At the Governor's conference two years ago this point was noted as one problem facing the youth of our state. A party youth program should give direction to all mass workers to put up a fight—through education in the people's organizations and legislation in the state, local and national governments—to end jimcrow housing.

These are a few examples of how all party members can do youth work and help carry out a party program in this field.

As part of the party youth approach  
(Continued on back page)

### What's missing in discussion

There are, in my opinion, two factors so far missing from the written material available for party discussion during this crucial summer.

First, the sense of urgency and ideological crisis is not expressed, despite the recognition by the rank and file of this fact.

Second, there has been no expression of the dissenting views of the national committee members. This expression, in addition to whatever merit the views themselves might have, would dramatize for the membership the importance of full and free discussion. It would represent a break from previous discussion periods in which we were, by implication, asked either to agree by ovation with a "draft" report or pit one's opinion against the entire leadership collective.

In regard to the crisis in our party: Comrade Dennis' report lists one fundamental error after another, adds statistics that the party has been isolated and documented. This squares with our observations here in San Francisco. Yet Comrade Dennis does not indicate in the report or in any later writing that he has reached any personal or organizational conclusions to deal with the emergency. I am not asking for panic. I do suggest that the leadership, on whom these past errors should weigh most heavily, sound the alarm to themselves and to the party as a whole.

There is more than the shadow of routinism in Comrade Dennis' long articles in The Daily Worker recently, despite the profound seriousness of the topics (anti-Semitism in the USSR and the Khrushchev speech on Stalin.) They were not self-critical; most important, they had no implication of the practical effects these matters are having on our organization. Rather, came a restatement of some generalizations, an expression of shock, and assurances that right will conquer.

I think it is to the point to mention the June issue of Political Affairs. Here, instead of discussion articles by the national leadership, was a routine issue: a series of reports on certain events around the nation, an extract from Comrade Dennis' report, and one (1) discussion article. That this last was a most excellent contribution does not detract from my main point; the issue did not reflect ideological crisis.

The portion of Comrade Dennis' report printed here was no contribution whatever in view of the wide distribution (if belated) of the report as a whole.

In regard to the expression of the dissenting views of national committee members:

Secondary leaders of the party have been advised in greater or lesser detail of proceedings at the national committee meeting. This report, in San Francisco, included an oral statement of differing views on the Dennis report.

I imagine that other areas may not have received even the oral report of the discussion. In any event, the whole sense of the lively discussion at the national committee meeting is reaching only a portion of the membership, and that in an unsatisfactory, second-hand manner.

I feel this was a serious mistake, and one compounded by the silence of much of the national leadership, save Dennis, during the discussion period to date. Ideally, I feel, the views of each national committee member should have been made available to the membership shortly after the May sessions. Granted that these views might be preliminary, subject to any kind of later change, it is critically important that the national leadership play a major part in the discussion of errors it played a major part in committing.

Now this suggestion may not satisfy protocol. Let's change the protocol then, for the important thing now is immediate full discussion with the freest possible exchange of opinion. The leadership must join in this. This participation is indeed a factor in whether the leadership will retain that status.

I should add that the comment as to the dissenting views of national committee members developed from a discussion held by section educational directors. It is the opinion of this group, as well as my own.

—N. C., San Francisco

## A resolution adopted by the LA county board

The County Board generally greeted the forward-looking presentation in the Dennis report calling for a new look at our relations with the socialist-minded left including consideration of the possibility of building a united socialist party sometime in the future.

Along with all the other questions raised in the report this is now in the process of being presented to the membership for consideration and discussion.

It is our understanding, as it is the understanding of the membership, that the Dennis report is but a preliminary estimate, a basis for discussion, which will not be finalized until it has gone through the full process of the current discussion, the pre-convention discussion and convention action.

This particular proposal, because of the profound impact it will have on our whole future course, will of course be subjected to the closest scrutiny and, we anticipate, will bring forward the sharpest questioning and debate. And on this, as on other questions, there cannot be any cutting of corners and any bypassing of the fullest opportunity for the membership to express itself.

We therefore were shocked and surprised to read the editorial call in the Daily Worker (which despite any protestation is considered to represent the opinion of the national leadership, especially since its editor is a leading member of the National Board) for steps to be taken "without delay" and "as soon as circumstances permit" to form a united socialist party. This call was seen by good sections of our membership even before they have had the opportunity to read the projection of the thought in the Dennis report.

This can only have the effect of stifling discussion; of placing in question once again whether the national leadership is at all concerned with the opinions of the membership; of engendering a cynical attitude to the whole full and "free" and "democratic" discussion which we are trying to develop and which we must have if our Party is to come through this period strengthened and re-invigorated. Further, it can make more difficult the centering of attention on the merits of the question.

The County Board therefore wishes to go on record protesting this hasty, ill considered call by the Editor of the Daily Worker and calls on the National Board to re-assure the party membership that, as far as the Party is concerned, its attitude to this question is still to be determined, and that it will not be determined until the Party membership has had its say at the coming national convention.

Unanimously passed by  
The Los Angeles County Board  
June 14, 1956



# HOW DEMOCRATIC IS OUR CENTRALISM

## A rejection of the principle

In the United States we did not develop the cult of the individual to the fantastic extent that it was developed around Stalin, but our bureaucracy took other forms almost as deadly. I wish we would stop using the phrase "cult of the individual" and talk about party democracy, instead.

Based on my incomplete (very incomplete) information I would cite the following examples of our lack of democracy:

(1) Failure to hold conventions every two years as required by the party constitution.

(2) Failure of many leading bodies to function for long periods.

(3) Adoption of the most important decisions without any consultation of the membership. For example, the decision to drop one-third of the membership; the evaluation of the period (in 1950) as "almost fascism;" the third party policy; the court strategy in the Smith Act trials; the decision as to "nonavailability" of party leaders; and many more such.

(4) The dropping of many individual members without a hearing or reason, and without permitting the matter to be discussed by party groups.

In 1946 I had some responsibility for the preparation of an outline on democratic centralism, which was published and distributed far and wide by the San Francisco and California Party organizations. I have restudied the question in the light of developments over the last ten years.

I conclude that democratic centralism is not a correct principle for our Party. Whether it may be correct for some other country I wouldn't know. My conclusion is based on the abuses that developed under this principle.

I am aware that one might argue — as I have frequently done — that democratic centralism prohibits the undemocratic principles that developed in the CPUSA, as well as in the CPSU. But this argument is no longer acceptable to me, nor is democratic centralism, for three reasons: (1) Where a principle is so frequently "misunderstood" or "misapplied" there must be something wrong with the principle; (2) Most undemocratic principles are carried out in the name, and under the authority, of democratic centralism; (3) Democratic centralism constitutes a struggle between democracy and centralism, a fundamentally erroneous concept.

As it is applied, I can best describe democratic centralism as a scale, having democracy on one side and centralism on the other, with appropriate weights added to one side or the other to adjust for such intangible factors as the degree of the legality of the party, the intrusion of alien elements, the party's class composition and the political level of its membership.

Though not always articulated, I would say the following principles are what democratic centralism is taken to mean: The more centralism, the less

democracy. The less centralism, the more democracy. I cannot accept these propositions as necessary or appropriate.

We must be a centralized organization—that I concede, though not perhaps as fully as we often have been. But there is no reason why centralized control and disciplined action cannot be preceded by democratic discussion and decision by the membership. I am aware that imaginative bureaucrats can think up factual situations which seem to make it necessary for a leading body to act in a hurry. But if they would be just as imaginative they could find the way to consult the membership or a representative section of it, in the time it would take the committee membership to gather.

Frankly I am getting pretty sick of the thin explanations I have been hearing of this or that example of bureaucracy. For example, I hear, "We couldn't have a convention in 1952 as required by the constitution because only full-time functionaries would have been willing to attend as delegates." What kind of balderdash is this? If the membership wants to send a full timer as a delegate they have the right to do so — or perhaps they could find someone else, strange as this may sound. And what about the pre-convention discussion in which the membership expresses itself in the party's program for the coming period. Is that also expendable?

Not only is it always possible to function in a centralized way without any impairment of party democracy but the extent of party unity and discipline will vary directly (not inversely) with the extent of party democracy. As a man, who shall be nameless, once said, "only conscious discipline can be truly iron discipline." The understanding and the morale of the party membership is the measure of the level of its discipline.

Abandoning the concept of democratic centralism will not be sufficient to enable us to create or guarantee inner party democracy. This is so because there is no natural tendency for democracy to develop, either in a government or a political party. If anything, the tendency is in the opposite direction. History teaches us that the struggle for democracy in government is a continual one. The same goes for a political party, in which there are factors constantly at work against democracy. The driving force behind many of these factors comes from the membership.

For example, since Stalin was downgraded many members ask or think, "Whom can we believe now?" By their question they betray a tendency — all too common — to seek authority, to relax and follow orders. No one can deny that it is easier to obey than to think; to do precinct work than to work out the answers to a complicated electoral choice. It is true (even though our enemies say it about us) that many of our members have a religious kind of faith in the movement that expects all questions to be answered.

A Marxist organization has this problem in a more extreme form than many other types of organizations because of the complexity of the problems with which it deals. Most often these problems must be dealt with on the theoretical instead of the practical level, and Americans are notoriously untheoretical (if not anti-theoretical).

Often times a member puts this question: "Am I more qualified than Gene Dennis to answer the question or determine policy?" The answer is that, as an individual you are not, but as a group you are. (A good illustration of the principle change from quantity to quality.) The history of the Communist movement demonstrates that over a period of time the membership is usually right, whereas the leadership — when it cuts itself off from the membership's participation — is usually wrong. Witness Joseph Stalin.

To sum up, the membership has responsibilities, first to fight to obtain and maintain democracy, and second to make it work. It's got to avoid the easy way. It must study, and deal with theoretical questions. Most important of all, it cannot content itself with answering questions put to it; it must raise questions, propose new ways of doing things and constantly examine the correctness of past decisions.

This is not to absolve the leadership from responsibility for the sad state of affairs to which we have fallen. It failed to hold conventions, failed to consult the membership and arrogantly failed to see how much it needed the participation and judgement of the membership. I am eagerly waiting to see what the national leadership has to say on the question of party democracy. I believe it is the key question by which they should be judged.

In the past we have operated on the theory that discussion on all questions is opened up for the membership during the pre-convention period, and then closed until next time. I think this idea is all wrong. Our party will not become a debating society simply because a branch, or any other division of the organization, chooses to discuss a particular question between conventions. Assume a decision which is proved wrong in practice, or becomes wrong because of changed conditions, do we have to stay wrong until the next convention? Such a position is nonsense.

The lack of democracy within our party is sufficient to explain many of our errors and the continuance of these errors over so many years. Though it is true the problems of the 1945-56 period were complicated and unprecedented, we cannot anticipate simpler problems in the future. There are some within our ranks who feel that because of the number and size of our mistakes we should abandon our Party and start all over again. There are others who are approaching such a conclusion, but are waiting to see. In the light of these facts, the democratization of our party is a life and death matter.

A. G., San Francisco

## Some specific in democratic

At the root of much of our present difficulties is an abuse of the principles of democratic centralism, which seems to be shared by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

If democratic centralism is to work it must work both ways. As it has been practised for the last two decades it is a farce and will never be accepted by a sizable section of the American working-class, imbued as they are with the traditions of honest electoral representation and a reasonable regard for minority opinions.

I am not qualified to speak about international or national developments nor should I care to make any theoretical analysis. However, I have been continuously a member of the California Party for over 20 years and during that time:

(1) I have never had the opportunity to vote for or against any of the leaders of the California Party.

(2) I have never had the opportunity to instruct any delegate to vote for or against any leader.

(3) I have never had the opportunity to instruct any delegate to any convention to vote Yes or No on any question of political policy (except once, when I urged a "No" vote on the Browder proposals and was promptly removed from office by section leadership).

(4) I have never heard a minority report presented from the gathering of a policy-making body. Where such minority reports existed they were invariably suppressed by the reporting comrade.

(5) I have never heard an officer of the California Party express any independent or original thought on any political issue of the day without first

## Wanted: some for the student

A group of comrades who have just completed a class in "fundamentals" would like to present the following ideas for consideration.

In the course of this class we had occasion to refer to many of the basic theoretical classics. It is our contention that for a number of reasons it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the average persons to master this type of material.

a. Much of the material presupposes or requires too much prior knowledge and information (philosophy, history, science, etc.).

b. Much of the language and terminology requires a college education to be understood.

c. Very little material of this type is available that deals with the American scene, which might make it more understandable.

d. In the main, it was our conclusion that the average American worker who was interested in Marxism and So-

About a week ago I had decided to write an article entitled "Hold the Line." Why? Because (1) I was disturbed by the way comrades were walking around with blank stares, muttering under their breath; (2) I was a "leader," a member of the county board, and (3) the time had come for me to fulfill my responsibility, and "act" like a leader by pulling out my soapbox and delivering a good rousing pep talk that would set everything right.

Today I can say, how silly, how presumptuous! Why? (1) Because at the time I was going to write the article I, too, was staring blankly and muttering to myself — and I'm still muttering; (2) because the times call for more than saying and doing the things that are usually "expected" of us, and (3) because, just as continuous breast beating and wailing will not set things right, neither will smug pep-talks, and business as usual approaches.

Let's face it. We've been hit hard.

The attacks on us during the cold war, the Khrushchev revelations, the bringing to light of our own stupidities and errors have got us reeling. Perhaps I'm being presumptuous by saying "us," so let me talk for myself.

I was upset when I read the latest Khrushchev report. Two evenings later I found myself delivering a two-hour talk to lift the spirits of my good comrade, Lil. Two evenings following, my good comrade found it necessary to give me a two-hour talk to buoy up my spirits.

I don't know what's happening in other households. I have a hunch. What goes on at meetings, I am sure, hardly reflects what is going on in the hearts and minds of many of our comrades these days. If, let us say, Comrades Foster, Dennis, Schneiderman are not reeling, I'd like to know why not. Maybe they have something I don't

have. I'd like them to impart it to me. Maybe they lack something they ought to have. It should be imparted to them.

We are now discussing incorrect past "estimates." Let's try to estimate this one correctly, otherwise we will be prescribing an aspirin where major surgery is needed — on the Party and each of us as an individual.

The problem, in my opinion, is so serious that we almost have to start from fundamentals. We have to recon- vince ourselves that no matter what goes on in the rest of the world we, as Americans, can't sidestep the class struggle, that the ultimate solution lies in socialism, that only the working class can transform society, that the working class needs a political party of socialism, that this has to be a party that is understood and accepted by American workers, that we have to help build it.

Can we transform our party or shall we orientate on building something new? Can we be effective in building something new without, as a preliminary, transforming our party and ourselves? How can we transform ourselves? Do we have it within ourselves or are we so far gone that it is hopeless — and the job will have to be done by others than ourselves? By whom will it be done if not by us? If not by us alone, then who together with us?

Questions, questions, questions. They can't be side-stepped. They can't be answered by simply coming to agreement on what was wrong with us in the past. If there is no confidence that we can do anything about the future, what value is there in discussing the past? These questions, I know, are present in many of our minds. They are not always placed on the table.

We have to drag the recesses of our minds, without feeling, betraying the work raising them. For to establish in our own minds a sense of confidence in our party, in our ability to be able to face the future course of events no point in discussing them.

Two days ago I said, "Do you think we've answered after a long time, I don't know, the question back at even longer."

Then I said that I was providing: that we are going through a "discussion period" after to business as usual, up our minds to mak-

## In place of an article that wasn't written-



# ISM?—Some views on THE thorny question

## Specific defects in practice

finding out what the National Committee may or may not think about it. If the National Committee is now properly self-critical about its blind acceptance of all statements of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union, the leadership of the California Party has had just as slavish and uncreative attitude toward the Central Committee of the U.S.A. I have racked my brain to find one instance when any leader of the California Party ever expressed disagreement, even in a good, constructive manner, with any decision of the Central Committee, even though the Central Committee itself was subsequently shown to be in error.

(6) I am not familiar with their recent attitudes which may have improved, but I know that for the majority of their terms in office they have resisted rather than encouraged any discussion of political issues in a free and open manner within the Party. Disagreement on any important question has invariably been treated as a security matter.

I do not wish to subtract from the personal loyalty, good faith and bravery under fire of the leaders of the California Party. But no matter what errors they admit, the root source of these errors will remain until and unless the Party is given an honestly democratic structure which has some correspondence to the actualities of American tradition without sacrificing its essential unity of principles.

If the present leadership can make an enthusiastic, sincere effort to introduce real democracy into our Party, more power to them. If not, they should have the good grace to resign. In either case they will be doing the cause of Socialism a favor.

G. H., San Francisco

## The new material study of theory

cialism would not get much satisfaction from the material that is mainly available to us today.

Some proposals:

a. Could a systematized course of reading and study be developed? One that "starts at the beginning" and builds up gradually in intensity?

b. Would it be possible to prepare in the "American idiom" certain basic materials that would make clear the principles of Marxism?

c. We are aware that some material of the above type does exist. Could a bibliography of such material be made available?

d. We need a comprehensive "dictionary" or glossary of Marxism (much more complete than the "Handbook of Philosophy").

It is our proposal that the National Committee set up a commission to study these questions and attempt to answer some of these problems.

A group of students from L.A.

## On the problem of leadership

The object of this discussion is to expose the errors of the last ten years (or however many is necessary and feasible), so that by correcting them, the Party can fit itself to lead the American people out of the valley of the shadow of war, fascism and poverty in the midst of plenty, into the promise of socialism, abundance, peace.

It has been said that unless we discover and admit to the main error of this period — right or left — we can never hope to straighten ourselves out. I believe this to be true. The trouble is, it seems to me, that the reverse is not true.

Finding the errors — major or minor — is absolutely necessary, but it is no guarantee that we will thereafter follow a correct line. To do that it is also necessary to guarantee an alert, self-reliant, militant membership; and a leadership which is all those things and capable of stimulating and training others to be. I want to discuss only the latter question in this letter.

In my own experience of 18 years in the Party, every time we have recognized failure, we have looked for political reasons only. Once they were found — or at any rate announced as found — the leadership accepted the criticism and continued in office. The exception being those occasions on which an individual scapegoat was punished on behalf of the collective, and with noisy severity.

Almost always the same error was committed immediately afterwards, although sometimes under a new name. The exception to this was when an opposite error replaced the "corrected" one; e.g., when the rightism of the Browder period was "corrected" by the extreme and sustained leftism of the 10 years that followed.

Leadership which survived several of these "corrections" grew cautious. It learned how to announce policies in words that could mean a number of contradictory things. Phrases like "although in the main our line has been correct, there have been serious distortions" — or "without overlooking the danger of the fire, we must continue to struggle militantly against the frying pan," — used in such profusion as to obscure the point at issue began to convince others (if not us) that we had lost confidence in our thinking. They also learned to omit entirely from published programs questions on which they could not reach even a compromised verbal position.

The leadership suffered under the repeated necessity to appraise failure and accept harsh criticism. But it never seemed to learn how to use the criticism except as a hair shirt to be worn with determined patience.

All this adds up to many years of training in bad methods of thinking and working. It does not mean that the people who did this were bad — corrupt, weak, cowardly, dishonest. Obviously they were usually quite the reverse. They suffered many things beside the criticism of their comrades without flinching. Perhaps it was in part the necessity to bear up under so terrible an attack by the enemy

that made them so inflexible to criticism by friends.

But the fact remains that they were inflexible; that they are trained in wrong methods; that they have failed to lead the Party to fulfill its function.

In discussing his problem, I have been reminded that it takes years to train a leader; that it is criminally wasteful to reject a trained leader because of error, particularly when he admits it and wants to change. It is argued that once a correct policy has been agreed upon by leaders and members, there is no one better qualified to carry it out than the once-mistaken, now-corrected leaders. It sounds reasonable. The trouble is it has never yet worked that way.

It may be that it takes more than discussion, confession of error, good intentions to correct bad practice. It may take retraining — something like the retraining of an athlete who determines to change his style. He usually has to drop out of competitive sports during this process. I am suggesting that such a dropping-out, such a sternly disciplined retraining may be the surest way of rehabilitating a large part of our leadership.

How many of them? Which of them? These questions and others — including the practical details of replacing them and providing easy avenues for their reentry into leadership — would have to be tackled once the decision was made that the plan had merit. I would like simply to open two general aspects of the problem.

What would it mean to these men and women if they were removed from the closed circle of inner party work and sent out into America — to work and live cheek by jowl with the American working class, day after day, month after month? It is a good time to recall the myth of the old Greek giant, Antaeus, who lost his strength when removed from contact with the earth, and regained it the moment he touched earth again.

We can expect no such miracles. It will not "refresh" or "broaden the approach of" every one who attempts it. But if the experience of working class reality does not bring most Communists new strength, then they are worse off than I believe. Consider, for instance, if at the very least such an experience would not retrain them verbally, so that they spoke a language which American workers understand

But what would it mean to the Party, suddenly deprived of a large proportion of its experienced functionaries? It would certainly mean a rough period of adjustment — even temporary chaos. It would be difficult to replace the absent leaders. There is no crowd of capable substitutes knocking at the office doors. (This is one of the troubles with bureaucrats: they do not train their successors with much skill or enthusiasm.) Also the desire to assume leadership is no guarantee of anyone's ability to do so.

It would certainly be impossible to maintain the present complicated organizational structure or even to pretend to undertake the present program

of work. Some tasks and some departments would have to be abandoned. This might not be entirely bad. But even if it means a setback, it may be one that is necessary to suffer.

There would be others dangers, too. Mistakes would be made by inexperienced people. But at least the dangers would be new ones, instead of those we have long since ceased to recognize — like pictures that have hung so long in the same place that one no longer really sees them. And the mistakes of neophytes would also be more easily correctable than those made by old hands who know how to throw up a protective cover of unintelligible but impressive verbiage.

I realize that any proposal to send a sizeable proportion of the leadership out on even a "temporary leave" will sound to some comrades like a Utopian joke and to others like an expression of disrespect. "Are you serious? You expect a bureaucracy to vote itself out of office?" is one comment, which recognizes ironically the situation in which the membership is in no position to judge individual leaders or to vote them in or out of office. It is true that it is unlikely that leaders can be easily convinced that they or the Party need such a solution. (This is another trouble with bureaucrats: they really do not quite trust anyone but themselves.)

As for the matter of disrespect, it seems to me that the real insult is the criticism that no longer bothers to express itself: that assumes that individual leaders are too far gone in error to be reached by anything less than catastrophe; that the membership is too apathetic and/or incompetent to help itself. I assume no such things.

I believe most of our leadership could be retrained and made a hundred times more effective than it has ever been — but not without undergoing a process far more painful than "accepting criticism." I believe the membership could find the energy and the ability to fill the gaps — at least on a temporary basis. (Many who are not prepared to devote their lives to political work, might be prepared to devote six months — a year — even two years. And it is wrong to assume, as we often do, that such "part-time" leaders are inferior.)

The Chinese comrades have set an example that should give us heart — and help point a direction. They have accomplished what seems a miracle in the rapid, radical change of a national character. They have — almost alone among Communist movements — learned to lose face in order to save something much more precious. Apparently they have done it by practicing criticism in a way and on a scale qualitatively different from anything that has happened elsewhere — with a seriousness, a persistence and an objectivity that makes our practice look, by comparison, like a hypocritical travesty of a weekly confession of sin.

Unless we find and carry out a solution as radical as theirs, I doubt that we are going to lead anyone anywhere in the years facing us with awesome promises and equally awesome threats.

X., Los Angeles

## —a political argument in a personal vein

ing them out from the minds, and discuss feeling as though we are workingclass by even or unless we can rework our minds some measure in ourselves, in the ability to change sufficient to influence the events, then there is discussing past mistakes. I asked a comrade: "we'll make it?" She a long pause, "I don't know." Then she threw at me. My pause was

not give up before trying; that the shock treatment we have been getting causes us all to stop thinking and acting like soldiers in an army and to start thinking and acting like members of the general staff; that we don't stop half way in carrying through all the corrective measures necessary to ensure that the party membership as a whole will be able to make its imprint on program and policies; that we approach the problem realistically, with the understanding that the transformation will involve a long, hard struggle and that we not try to get rich quick.

When I finished the comrade said: "I don't know. I don't know."

Since the conversation I have been asking myself whether I had expressed my real feelings or was I giving out with a pep talk in my capacity as representative of "the county."

I believe I can answer that one. I have confidence that we can make it — that we will pull through our present difficulties and play an honorable role in guaranteeing that our working class will have a Marxist party at its head; indigenous and capable of leading the working class and its allies in struggle.

Just as I have confidence that the resurgence of mass participation in the affairs of the Soviet Union and the Soviet party will continue to set things to rights over there, so do I have confidence that the collective strength, wisdom and will of our party membership will set us back on the highroad here. I include our party leaders when I speak of the membership.

Do we have the strength and will? I believe we do. We found the strength and determination within ourselves to stand up in the face of many difficul-

ties, setbacks, attacks in the past.

Do we have the wisdom? That's more difficult to answer. I believe we can acquire the wisdom if we draw proper conclusions from past experience, if we apply ourselves to mastering the scientific Marxist method rather than the word.

Can we bring forward a strengthened leadership? Yes, if we change our concepts of leadership from one built around a few full-time functionaries, to one that is based on the direct involvement in policy-making of our most effective shop and mass workers.

Do we have the benefit of the life-giving substance that comes from mass contact? Yes. Despite our general political isolation and loss of influence, more of our members are in live contact with non-left people than has been true for any time during at least the last five years.

And we have the beginnings, and must develop further, the type of atmosphere within our ranks which will give full reign to creative thinking and work.

I'll be quite frank to admit that I'm short of answers to many, if not most of the problems before us. The test for all of us in the coming months will be our ability to come up with answers. I have no quarrel with the general estimate of our past contained in the Dennis report. For me, at any rate, life has seemed to confirm the correctness of the analysis.

What worries me is how we take it from here. And, especially, how we can guarantee that, alongside of our internal discussion, we take advantage of the opportunities of the election campaign to strengthen our mass ties and influence.

The future isn't rosy, nor is it black. will go a long way towards a correct determination of how to get to where we want to go.

—FRANK CARLSON, L. A.



# Theory, practice; installment two

(CONTINUED FROM FIRST BULLETIN)

The separation between theory and practice led to a separation between our long range and our short range goals. Our day-to-day work became a thing in itself and lost a relationship to more long range goals. Equal rigidity was given to tactics as well as strategy. Our day-to-day work was not adjusted to the rapidly changing events, and in the main, differences between long range and short range aims became either blurred or disappeared altogether.

That our tactics were not attuned to changing events can be demonstrated by an examination of some of our activities.

When the people were moving against intervention in Formosa, we were moving on the issue of banning H-bombs tests. When the people were moving to ban H-bomb tests, we were active demanding the recognition of China. When the people were most concerned with the danger of intervention in Indo-China, we were concerned elsewhere. In each case our tactics had become fixed and as such they lost a relationship with reality and the ability to change as events changed. When serious difficulties were encountered in carrying out a given proposal, such as the Stockholm petition, we refused to examine whether or not there might be better ways to accomplish a given aim. Instead of examining the given tactic, we devoted our full attention to devising arguments that would persuade the membership to carry out the approach decided upon.

The separation between theory and practice had its organizational expression. The role of leadership became that of working out the "line" and the role of membership was to carry out the "line". Correct theory, which is a summation and evaluation of practice, cannot be developed apart from practice. Correct policies cannot be developed apart from those who are carrying out the policies. We, of leadership in the Party, have not understood this unity. Policies have been woven from the ideas of a leader or leaders, or were derived from what was considered international thinking, whether or not these ideas and thinking had any live relationship with what was happening in the mass movement.

It is true that this past period has placed objective difficulties in the path of widest consultation. Because of the separation between theory and practice and the role in regard to theory appropriated by leadership, these difficulties were not seen as those that must be overcome in order to have either correct theory or correct practice. The difficulties were only seen as obstacles in the way of getting the "line" down to membership. Thus the bulk of concern was that of guaranteeing that there would be no road blocks to a one-way street, a street on which the line could travel from leadership to membership. This was not only a case of bureaucracy, its source was also unscientific thinking that enabled a separation between theory and practice. Once such a separation became the mode of our work, then participation of membership was a thing that might be desirable, "but under the circumstances hardly possible."

In the labor movement, the non-signing of the Taft-Hartley Act was a correct demand when the act was first passed. Yet, as time passed, and a number of key unions complied with the act, we continued to make the non-conforming with the act the key issue. This despite the fact that a number of the major unions, whether they signed or not, were ready to unite to repeal the act. We lost sight of the need for this type of all-trade-union unity for repeal, and in fact made a condition of unity that of non-conforming with the act. Our day-to-day work and relations in the trade unions were impaired by making resistance to an accomplished fact our major condition of unity. Our longer range aim of repealing the act was lost sight of.

On many questions within the labor movement and the general mass movement our day-to-day approaches became fixed for long periods of time. We thus narrowed our vision and lost

sight of where we and the mass movement were going. We lost the ability to balance our daily activity against our long range aims. On other questions we tried to apply what were long range approaches to day-to-day situations. With a revolutionary fervor we justified this on the basis of developing a "class" approach in every situation.

This incorrect approach laid the basis for a distorted relationship between democratic procedures and centralism. Centralism achieved a disproportionate emphasis. Centralism became the tool to enforce the "line." Centralism became the battering ram to blast aside "obstacles." Obstacles were anything that stood in the way of getting the line down to the membership and carried out. Thus questions, disagreements, etc., were seen as obstacles and centralism was resorted to as the way to eliminate these obstacles.

Separation of theory and practice in the last analysis leads to separation between a movement and the real live relationships that surround that movement. In such a situation the tendency is to create little worlds of our own. This tendency found its expression in the creation of left centers. Here we projected our own thinking to ourselves and then used our echo to verify the correctness of our thinking.

Our movement is the only movement whose outlook is predicated upon the unity of theory and practice. Other currents in Socialist life have correctly pointed out one-sided errors we have made, but if truth is to be faced, they too are one-sided. They see the struggle for socialism as a thing divorced from the daily struggles and problems of the people. They tend to take an aspect of the struggle for Socialism and make it the whole thing. We can learn from their criticisms, we must engage in critical discussions with them, but in the last analysis only the unity of theory and practice is Marxism. Once we establish this unity we will have a tool to hammer out the approach to Socialism in our country. Once we accomplish this, which we will, we will have taken a major step towards becoming a truly vanguard Party. We will then look back to this period as not only a period of great difficulty, but as the period when we became of age.

—MERLE BRODSKY, Oakland

## To rediscover America

The recent discussion on the 20th Congress of the CPSU has jolted many of us out of the dogmatic, sectarian rut of adulation of the Soviet Union, the CPSU, and Stalin. And, as so often happens in the case of severe shock, there is a momentary loss of stability and perspective.

Here, in the U.S. the reactions range from a crude call to throw out the entire leadership of our party and replace them from top to bottom to a maudlin defense of the errors and those who committed them.

For us, here in America, the main lessons to be learned from the experience of the CPSU are the need for constant critical and constructive study of all our policies and day-to-day activities. There is also the necessity for continuous struggle for democracy within our party which is seemingly always in danger from bureaucratic practices developed in the name of expediency. While, to a certain extent certain of these practices may be justified in a given situation, we find that, even when the situation changes, the "temporary" bureaucratic approaches persist.

We have gone through our own era of the "Cult of the Individual" and, in 1945 when we reorganized our party we resolved that we would not permit such hero-worship and adulation with its inevitable stifling of criticism and constructive questioning and study of Party program and policies.

Yet, eleven years later we are witnessing a flood of praise and adulation for Wm. Z. Foster. Certainly Foster

## Vanguard party— illusion or reality?

Much has been said by this time about hero worship and its dangers. Perhaps the lesson we ought to learn from all this is that no one is all good or all bad, all right or all wrong. This goes for Stalin, Lenin, Marx, Lincoln and Jefferson.

If hero worship has its dangers, so too does party glorification. A party should be judged by its deeds, not by its slogans or its declarations. There is no infallible party, including the Communist party. It has no monopoly on good leadership or correct policy, whether in the United States, China, Italy, or the Soviet Union. When a party of revolutionaries, dedicated to mankind's progress, permits tyranny and murder on the part of its leaders, it must share responsibility for what has happened.

American Communists who took everything coming out of the Soviet Union as the final word also bear a share of shame and guilt. However, it would be foolish to condemn everything wholesale, like throwing out the baby with the bath water. But it is important to learn from mistakes and to bring about radical changes in outlook and program. The time is long overdue for the Communist Party of the U.S. to look at itself and see itself as others see it.

In the first place, the party is not the "vanguard of the working class" in the U.S. This kind of phrase is self-deceiving. During the depression years Communists gave leadership and taught thousands of men and women to fight for their rights. And today individual Communists have sacrificed much in the struggle for civil liberties.

This does not make the party anything but a tiny outpost in a wide struggle. It is not the key to leadership nor will the reward for these good deeds necessarily be leadership of any kind. Whether the party likes it or not, American working people do not look to it for leadership.

In the second place, it is a sad fact that the American party, technically independent, has lived in hero worship of the Russians. And this almost to the exclusion of any objectivity. Whether in the study of economic theory, child care, education, drama or biology, the Russians were looked upon as infallible. Of course their contributions in these fields were many and good. But some contributions were highly subjective

and some were not scientific and lagged considerably behind other countries.

If the American party is to live and grow it must be pervaded with humaneness and modesty. Phrases and slogans, long-winded analyses, "of the current situation" and impossible programs to meet it must give way to what is real and possible.

Above all the party must have faith in the American people. They will have good sense to adopt Socialism when it represents something better than what they have. Perhaps that day will be soon.

B.W., San Francisco

## Youth work

(Continued from Page 1)

We must have an attitude toward such organizations the L.Y.L. The party should support the L.Y.L. and help build it, as an important independent youth organization of an educational type, which can give young people education in socialist ideas. Because the L.Y.L. is a youth organization which discusses and carries on a program which is attractive to many young people, the L.Y.L. can help young people to find their own path to socialism.

The relationship that the L.Y.L. has to the party should be such as to obtain help of an educational nature and such other help as may be requested. The party should raise questions about youth work with the L.Y.L. and make suggestions that the L.Y.L. may reject or accept. There should be no control over the actions of the organization, nor any political direction by the party. For the L.Y.L. has its own program and organization.

One might then ask: Why should we support such an organization? If we understand that only an independent youth organization can win large numbers of youth to an understanding of peace, democracy and socialism, I am sure we will then ask ourselves this question: How can we afford not to help build an independent Marxist youth organization, as one of the most important parts of our overall youth program?

William Lowe  
Alameda County

## As others see us

Would you be interested in the reactions of a group of my friends to two points raised by a discussion of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist party?

In talking about capital punishment they said:

"I definitely don't agree with capital punishment."

"Why I assumed the Communist party was against it."

"How can you 'rehabilitate' someone who is dead?"

"This is the one thing that has always puzzled me. How can the Communist party be for it?"

"Way deep inside me there was always a doubt about it."

"It's a hangover from barbarism."

Concerning democracy within the Communist party their remarks were:

"In the correct desire to have a disciplined party a great deal of rigidity has crept in—a fear of not conforming. This has become very excessive and has hurt the party."

"There is a difference between being disciplined and having some room for expression."

"This rigidity is the main reason the party is isolated."

A Housewife, Compton

### A CORRECTION

In the article by William Schneiderman, "Some Questions for Discussion," appearing in the last issue, a sentence reads: "But even here, we did not fully develop why we could not adopt this position (that socialism will come to the U. S. by the free choice of the majority of the American people)." This should read: "We did not fully develop why we could adopt this position."