

The Strategy and Tactics of the CPUSA and the CLP in the Trade Unions: A Comparison*

As we move into positions of influence and leadership in the trade union movement, we will increasingly find ourselves working alongside members of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). We will meet more and more often in the practical arena of the day-to-day struggle of the working class, which both our Party and the CPUSA see in certain ways based on our understanding (or lack of understanding) of Marxism and which we both fight to organize around specific demands and lead toward certain goals. On many issues, we will be fighting on the same side; the difference will be in how we organize these struggles and where we try to lead them.

The work of the Communist Labor Party in the trade union movement has immediate as well as long-term consequences for both our Party and the working class. The strategies and tactics we choose flow from our understanding of the present situation and, therefore, of what is necessary to unite and strengthen the working class and organize it to struggle for socialism. Our struggle with the CPUSA, then, must be based on practical questions of strategy and tactics for the trade union movement and the working class. The basis for this discussion is our understanding of the principles of Marxism and how to apply them to the situation the working class is in today.

To begin to polemicize with the CPUSA on strategy and tactics in the trade union movement, this paper discusses projections made by them, especially in the section on "The Class Struggle" in Gus Hall's June, 1978 report to the National Council of the Communist Party. His report is presently being distributed in the trade unions as a pamphlet entitled *The Crisis of Everyday Living and the Winning*

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Fightback. Based on a Marxist understanding of the class struggle, the role of the trade unions in the class struggle, and the tasks of a communist party in organizing and leading that struggle, we shall here respond particularly to the CPUSA's analysis and projections about the economic struggle and the development of a "Left-Center Coalition" as their expression of unity of action in the labor movement today.

The tasks and responsibilities of a communist party in the working class struggle are to analyze the objective situation, to aid in the formulation of definite demands around which to organize the struggle, and to help in choosing the best methods of struggle to win these demands. The following quotation from the program of the CLP sums it up: "Our Party declares that its aim is to develop the class consciousness of the workers, point out and clarify the aims and objectives of the struggle, and to organize and participate in this struggle of the working class of the USNA."

The strategy of the CPUSA is peaceful transition to socialism. This goal is to be achieved through the organization of a people's anti-monopoly coalition. Two aspects of this anti-monopoly coalition are the CPUSA's policy toward the development of a third party and its "centerpiece policy" for work in the trade union movement, the Left-Center Coalition. From this general position flows their major slogan in the economic struggle, the demand for a shorter work week. It is the initial abandonment of Marxism in their strategic formulation that serves to disarm the political independence of the proletariat in every aspect of the class struggle.

How does the "people's anti-monopoly coalition" express itself in the CPUSA's strategy and tactics within the trade union movement?

We declare that relations between the left wing and the center are decisive for the future of the CIO and our relations with the Murray-Hillman forces are not temporary, are not transitory considerations, but are based on a long range perspective of friendly collaboration for progressive aims, without which there can be no substantial progress for the CIO, the American Labor Movement and the developing unity of communists and non-communists. (Eugene Dennis, 1946)

And in 1978:

The Left-Center concept cannot be limited to common actions. It is a much more basic concept. It cannot and should not end with action. It is the basis for continuing actions. And it is the basis for continually bringing the center forces toward the left. (Gus Hall, 1978, *The Crisis in Everyday Living*)

Gus Hall criticizes the CPUSA for a low level of involvement in the economic struggles of the working class. He then proceeds to point out the same path for today's CPUSA that defeated them politically 32 years ago. The CPUSA has again elevated the Left-Center Coalition from a tactical consideration to a question of principle. In doing so, it has failed to propose a line of march that can address the major question facing the trade union movement, its transformation from a bourgeois to an independent, pro-socialist movement of labor.

Who is the "Center"? The CPUSA calls these Center forces "honest militant trade unionists who have broken with the policies of class collaboration forever." While it is true that the heightening economic crisis is bound to accelerate a splitting in the union movement, there is nothing in the strategy or principle of left-center coalition that analyzes the economic lines along which the union movement will split. Lacking a scientific approach, the mass people's anti-monopoly coalition has been substituted for the hegemony of the proletariat. In practice, the "forever reformed leaders of labor" are, in the main, social democrats. They are the Winpisingers, Frasers, Runnells and whoever else is increasingly being forced to utilize the skills of communists, not to build a pro-socialist trade union movement, but to maintain their own positions of leadership. These social-democratic unionists are faced with a contradiction. On the one hand, they are bought, bribed, and owned by the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, they are elected by union members whose relatively bribed positions in the working class are being fundamentally undermined.

It is the struggle between these two tendencies (bribery of the upper strata and impoverishment of the mass of proletarians) that the history of the labor movement will now inevitably develop; it is substantiated economically. In all countries the bourgeoisie has already begotten and fostered and secured for itself bourgeois labor parties. . . . The important thing is that economically the desertion of a stratum of the labor aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact, and this economic fact, this shift in class relations will find political form in one shape or another. (Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*)

Recognizing their contradictory situation, social democrats are coming out of the closet. They are talking "socialism" and "class struggle." But where are the tactics actively to lead the working class, to prepare it through an anti-fascist united front of the trade unions for

seizure of state power? The coal miners' strike provides a striking example of how the left-center coalition actually functions.

The issue in the coal miners' strike in every respect was Taft-Hartley. Right-to-work laws in western coal states thoroughly undermined the ability of the miners to protect, much less extend, any economic gains. The further use of the injunction was a direct attack by the state on the strike. Our Party's call to shut down the steel mills, organize western coal, and repeal Taft-Hartley was something even the rabid anti-communist John L. Lewis would have understood. Yet the CPUSA refused to put forth any slogan or mobilization that the social-democratic unionists were not prepared to unite with. The CPUSA's efforts focused almost exclusively on charity caravans to the coal miners. Their stated position was not to call for militant united actions of the working class. The class, they said, was not ready. Their stated position on the repeal of Taft-Hartley is that it is not crucial to the organization of the South and Southwest. Their agitation focused more on health and safety than on the root causes of the strike; therefore they provided no tactical leadership in that struggle. Fraser and others, understanding full well that the strike provided the entire labor movement with militant lessons it would not forget, tempered all support by conditioning it on support for Miller's policies. But Miller was hardly the main issue. Who would lead the trade unions, what would be the main program and forms of struggle (legal and illegal) were, however, indeed called into question. The CPUSA, basing its approach to the economic struggle on supporting the workers' struggle for "increased wages and an improved standard of living," fell far short of fighting for the immediate demands of the miners, much less pointing out the long-range interests of the working class as a whole. Such a position did not move the "center" left; the left, rather, capitulated to the center. The same policy is repeated over and over again as CPUSA rank and file groups function as oppositionists within the unions. The Sadlowski campaign, the early Miller campaign, and others, with the aid of CPUSA cadre, hand the union movement, unchanged, to the social democrats.

Another example of capitulation in the left-center policy is the CPUSA's refusal actively to support the Texas Farm Workers Union. The TFWU, a militant, internationalist, pro-socialist, independent

union cannot get forums in front of CPUSA-led unions because the present leaders of labor recognize only the UFW. Like the elevation of detente from a tactic to a strategy, the left-center coalition has functioned to deny the multiplicity of forms of struggle which the trade union movement will increasingly engage in. While CPUSA veterans of the early organizing drives were some of the bravest fighters, they did not grasp then or now the fundamental task in the trade unions and shops—the building of the illegal organizations of the party and the distribution of communist agitation and propaganda. Through the nuclei's network of agents, the injection of socialism into the spontaneous movement is accomplished. Conversely, it is only from this solid basis of organized communist agitation and propaganda that a pro-socialist trade union movement can emerge, maintain itself, and split from class collaboration.

With the Left-Center Coalition as the basic policy of the CPUSA, the shorter work week is its rallying call. Our Party absolutely unites with a fight for the shorter work week. Where we disagree is on, one, how to fight for this reform and, two, its purported centrality to the trade unions and working class. Here again, the Left-Center Coalition has become an end in itself rather than a means to an end.

We must be ready to accept the reality that while there are wrong ideological and political reasons, there are also legitimate reasons why center forces cannot, and frankly should not, take positions that would isolate them. In such situations, our task is to work ways out that will change and strengthen *their* base. (Gus Hall, *op. cit.*, emphasis added)

Insofar as large sections of these center forces are self-proclaimed social democrats, why would a communist party wish to strengthen the base of social democracy? Did not the lessons of Germany in the 30's teach anything? To date, the fight for a shorter work week has been limited to the legislative and collective bargaining fronts. It cannot be otherwise when the aim is left-center unity and not uniting the spontaneous movement with socialism.

The fight for a shorter work week is acceptable to the most bribed section of labor. A shorter work week does nothing to realign the trade union movement independently of the capitalist class. The defeats of the Labor Law Reform Bill, Common Situs, Humphrey-Hawkins, and other pro-labor legislation have called into question how long the labor

lieutenants can guarantee votes for the Democratic Party. But an independent movement must do more than reject the Democratic Party in form. An independent movement can only begin its struggle if sole reliance on lobbying, Congress and bourgeois respectability is concretely challenged in the struggle to unite the working class through the repeal of Taft-Hartley.

The strategy and tactics of the Communist Labor Party are built on preparing the working class for seizure of state power. In the labor movement our Party recognizes the unions as the most comprehensive and unifying force. The conditions engendered by over thirty years of Taft-Hartley are maturing. The trade unions are paying their dues as the politically restricting force of the slave labor law is paralyzing the fight in defense of the workers' standard of living. The fight to repeal Taft-Hartley is the concrete expression of the fight to free the Negro Nation. The fight to repeal Taft-Hartley is the leading tactic for a United Front against Fascism and War of the working class. Such a battle unleashes the revolutionary energy of the working-class. Our aim is to recruit the leaders of that struggle into our Party and unite the trade union movement with socialism. That outlook dictates our approach to the Left-Center Coalition. More than a century ago, Marx clearly put forth the tactics of a communist party with respect to fighting for working class hegemony.

The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction (of the bourgeoisie) which it aims at overthrowing. It opposes them in everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests. (Karl Marx, *Address to the Communist League*)

We hold no illusions about the unity of social democracy and revisionism. It is the Judas goat of fascism. But history is not advanced by words. Deeds are what count. The CPUSA is quite capable of uniting the social democrats with the fight for a shorter work week. It is an attainable goal. Winners have a way of rallying friends, at least until the shallowness of the victory is exposed.

We can hardly afford to separate our slogan for the repeal of Taft-Hartley from the concreteness of the existing movement. Our recent efforts to unite the class through an active fight have lacked initiative,

analysis, and concrete tactical leadership. In New Mexico, the campaign for every elected post from governor on down to the state legislature was fought on the issue of right-to-work. In Texas, bloody confrontations as well as parliamentary maneuvers are daily engaged in over the issue of right-to-work. Every trade union paper in the country published articles on the Missouri referendum. The denial of the right-to-strike and threat of injunction defeated the Postal Workers before the first shot was even fired. J. P. Stevens is still the cause celebre, if only in words, of the entire trade union movement. And yet too many times our comrades outside the Negro Nation and the Southwest say "nothing is really happening on Taft-Hartley."

When Ted Kennedy goes to Missouri to support the unions, we must raise the call all over the country for him immediately to introduce legislation for the repeal of Taft-Hartley. Comrades, not one leaflet, not one resolution or letter was introduced into our unions calling for money, forces, and educationals to fight the Missouri referendum. In analyzing the results of the Missouri campaign, George Meany is considering a state by state fight to repeal right-to-work laws in the South and Southwest. We must take him at his word, and begin now to lead this struggle in a really active way.

Our Party has always been clear on its strategic differences with the CPUSA. But this clarity will provide little solace if we are not positioned, prepared and organized to win the dirty little battles that together make up the sum total of a military campaign. The next year poses great challenges and overwhelming opportunities for our Party. Over six million workers, two million in basic industry, will negotiate new contracts. This occurs under the conditions of a very strong bourgeoisie which has already exercised its political power to restrict the workers' economic gains. The left-center coalition will try to lead the fight for higher wages. The CLP must also position itself. As Lenin put it, use any "stratagem, artifices, illegal methods, evasions and subterfuges to get in and stay in the trade unions and *do communist work*." The unity we pose is based on the immediate resistance to wage cuts. The difference is that we are not protecting anyone's leadership position, only the interests of the working class. Those interests can only be represented if we put forth our program for an independent trade union movement and the repeal of Taft-Hartley, and point out that only socialism can guarantee an improved standard of living.