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COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF AMERICA (OPPOSITION)

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by G. Gourov
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Note: The National Committee has sent a special letter to the Branches in regard to the Preliminary International Conference and the decision of the National Committee to send a delegate. On the Gourov letter, drawing the lessons of the treachery of Mill, the National Committee decided to publish it in the Internal Bulletin and to urge all comrades to study it attentively.

January 15, 1933

THE LESSON OF MILL'S TREASON
(A Letter to the Sections)

The case of Mill represents one of those episodes which, generally speaking, are quite inevitable in the process of selecting and educating our cadres. The Left Opposition is under terrific pressure. But all are up to the level. There will still be not a few cases of regrouping and of personal desertion. In this letter, I would like to draw out of the Mill episode certain lessons which, it seems to me, are simple and not open to discussion.

Lenin spoke of ultra-leftism as an infantile malady. But we must remember that ultra-leftism is not the only political infantile malady. There are others too. As everyone knows, children find it hard to realize the nature of their illness and even its location. There is something of the sort in politics, too. It requires a fairly high degree of maturity for two groups, at the very moment of their birth, to be able to define more or less clearly the cardinal points of their differences. More often, young groups, like sick children, complain of pains in the arm or leg while the pain in reality is in the belly. Individuals, or little groups, insufficiently hardened for a tenacious and long-range work of organization and education, disillusioned by the fact that success does not fall from heaven of itself, ordinarily do not take account of the fact that the source of their failures lies in themselves, in their inconsistency, in their softness, in their petty-bourgeois sentimentalism. They seek the blame for their shortcomings outside of themselves and generally find it in the bad character of X or Y. Often enough, they end by making a bloc with Z, with whom they do not agree on anything, against Y with whom, as they say, they are in agreement on everything. When serious revolutionists are then astonished or indignant at their attitude, they begin to protest that an "intrigue" is being woven against them. This pernicious road, observed more than once in various sections, has been followed to the end in Mill episode and that is why it is particularly instructive.

In what way did Mill become a member of the Administrative Secretariat? I have spoken of this in my note for the press. Material conditions demanded the presence at the Secretariat of a person who was closely connected with the center of the Russian Opposition, able to translate Russian documents, to carry on correspondence, etc. Mill appeared as the only possible candidate, practically speaking. He declared his entire solidarity with the Russian Opposition, and took part in the struggle against Landau, Rosmer, etc. All our comrades will remember how Mill then, in the course of absolutely unprincipled conflicts with the leading group of the French League, suddenly tried to conclude a bloc with Rosmer, who had already abandoned the ranks of the League.

What did this fact mean? How was it possible for a responsible militant in the course of 24 hours to change his position on a highly important question for the sake of considerations of a personal nature? Mills himself continued to declare that he had no kind of political differences with the Russian Opposition, only that such and such French comrades "displeased him". In other words, Mill had recourse to the same arguments which only the day before he had condemned in Rosmer. Rosmer has even built, on the basis of the opposition of ideas and of men, a purely anecdotal theory which shows beyond any doubt that Rosmer broke

with the C.I., not because he had raised himself to a higher historical point of view, but because at bottom he had not grown to the understanding of revolutionary policy and the revolutionary party.

The only conclusion which could be drawn from the unworthy conduct of Mill was this: for Mill, principles are in general clearly of no importance; personal considerations, sympathies, and antipathies determine his political conduct to a greater degree than principles and ideas. The fact that Mill could propose a bloc with a man whom he had defined as non-Marxist, against comrades whom he had held to be Marxists, showed clearly that Mill was politically and morally unreliable and that he was incapable of keeping his loyalty to the flag. If he betrayed on that day on a small scale, he was capable of betraying tomorrow on a larger scale. That was the conclusion which every revolutionary should have drawn then.

The Russian Opposition, which, more than all the other sections was responsible for having brought Mill into the Secretariat, immediately proposed his removal from that body. But what happened? This proposal, natural, imperious, corresponding to the entire situation, met resistance among certain comrades. In the first rank were the comrades of the Spanish section, who even considered it possible to propose Mills as the representative of the Spanish section in the International Secretariat. At the same time they declared that they had no kind of political differences with the leadership of the International Left Opposition.

This most unexpected step made a shocking impression on many of us at the time. But we asked: By what do the Spanish comrades let themselves be guided when they put up Mill as a banner? It is clear. They see in Mill a comrade who has "crossed", and they hasten to take up his defense. In other words, in a political question of exceptional importance, they let themselves be guided by considerations which are not political, not revolutionary, but personal and sentimental.

If Mill tried to conclude a bloc with the deserter Rosmer against the French League, the leading Spanish comrades concluded a bloc with Mill against the Russian, French and a number of other sections, although in their own words they had no differences with them. We see in what a maze one can be lost by being guided, in important questions, not by political revolutionary considerations but by impressions, sentimentalism, and personal sympathies and antipathies!

The fact that Mill "in search of work" entered into negotiations with the Stalinists and finally undertakes to "unmask" the Left Opposition in the press has from now on shown definitely what Mill is a corrupt petty bourgeois. Surely no one in our ranks will deny this. But this alone is not enough; we must understand that the sudden turn of Mill toward Rosmer was in its time only the dress rehearsal for his present turn toward the Stalinists. The basis for both treasons was the same inadequacy of the petty bourgeois who had fallen into the sphere of revolutionary politics.

I pause at this question with so much detail, not on account of Mill but on account of the question of selection and educating the cadres of the Left Opposition. This process is far from finished, although it is precisely in this field that we have important successes to our credit.

The Spanish Opposition at present is going through an extremely difficult crisis. The leadership elected at the last conference has fallen apart although no principle basis for this decomposition can be found; for each member of the Central Committee, we are referred to some particular personal reason. Still, for anyone who in the past had seriously penetrated the position of the Central Committee of the Spanish Opposition toward the Mill episode, it was even then clear that the Spanish Opposition was on its way toward a crisis.

In fact, if the leaders of the Spanish Opposition did not understand the principle importance of the struggle which we were carrying on against Rosmer, Landau, etc.; if they thought it possible to ally themselves with Mill against the fundamental cadres of the International Opposition; if at the same time they repeated that they had no kind of differences with us and so took away all justification from their manner of acting, for all these reasons, we could not fail to say to ourselves with alarm, "The leaders of the Spanish Opposition will scarcely give a correct orientation to their section; but where a well-grounded orientation is lacking, there inevitably appear personal motives and feelings." To weld into a whole men of different training, character, temperament and education, can be done only by means of clear revolutionary principles. In the opposite case, the disintegration of the organization is inevitable. On personal sympathies, on friendships and clique spirit, nothing can be built but a lifeless debating club of the Souvarine type or a home for political invalids of the Rosmer type, and not even that for long.

I must, disagreeable as the task is, again touch a "delicate" point because the interest of the cause demands it; no sound political relations can be built on suppressions and conventionalities.

When in our letters we asked the leading Spanish comrades by what principle motives, by what political and organizational considerations they let themselves be guided in taking up the defence of Mill against the Russian, German, French, Belgian, etc. sections, we received about the following reply, "We have the right to have our own opinion" "We refuse to be ordered about," etc. This unexpected reply seemed to us a highly alarming symptom.

Let us admit that someone among us really has a tendency to order people about. Such a tendency should be resisted, and the stronger the tendency the more the resistance. But the necessity for the most resolute struggle against any such habits of mere command would not free the Spanish comrades of the necessity of establishing a political foundation for their fractional intervention in favor of Mill and against the overwhelming majority of the sections. In the request for principle motives for such and such an action there is in no way a tendency to mere command. Every member of the Left Opposition has the right to ask the responsible institutions of the Left Opposition such a question: Why? To get rid of the burden of a concrete answer by the pure affirmation of the right to have one's own opinion is to replace mutual revolutionary obligations by half-liberal, half-sentimental commonplaces. After such an answer, one could not fail to say to oneself again, "Certain leading Spanish comrades have not, unfortunately, a sufficiently solid common ground with the International Left Opposition. From this proceeds their inattention to the history of the Left Opposition, to the struggles through which it has gone, to the selection of cadres which it has carried through; from this proceeds also the tendency to be guided by personal impressions, by psychological estimations, by individual criteria; from this also, the affirmation of the "liberty" of opinion instead of a Marxist foundation for the opinion.

It is unnecessary for us to say how far removed we are from the thought of comparing any of the Spanish comrades to Mill. But it remains a fact that the leading Spanish comrades have not understood in time why we attached Mill in an intransigent manner and why we demanded that the others do the same. Let us hope that now, at least, this serious lesson may lead to our coming together and not to a future discussion.

Oct. 13, 1932

G. Gourov

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II.

MINUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT
December 15, 1932

Present: Vite, Kin, Bauer, Well.

Note to the Sections:

Please consider the part of the minutes concerning the I.S. Preliminary Conference, etc. as a circular.

I.---Situation of the I.S.: Take note of the proposal of the Copenhagen Committee of the I.S. which calls for a matting of the Preliminary Conference of the I.L.O. which will elect a Plenum composed of representatives of various sections, this Plenum should meet periodically. Between the sessions of the Plenum the work will be conducted by the administrative secretariat which will not be composed of delegates from the sections but those elected by the Plenum itself.

Kin: Agrees with this proposal, the I.S. has not sufficient authority. The Plenum which will decide all important questions will have much more. In view of the special circumstances it is impossible to continue the work in Berlin. All these questions, e.g. the meeting place of the I.S. can be decided only by the Preliminary Conference

A Committee must be formed in Paris, as it is impossible in Berlin to make the preparations for the Preliminary Conference. This Committee will be composed of members of the I.S. The Committee will be composed of members of the I.S. The committee will be composed of the members of the I.S. present in this city, of a representative of the N.I.O. and of a representative of the French Ligue. This committee will have as its task the preparation of the Preliminary Conference and will carry on all work in the meantime. It will be responsible for the I.S. the E.C. of the French Ligue is in agreement.

Well: Agrees with the proposal of the Preliminary Conference and with other proposals but is against the preparation of the former by a committee; preparation should be made in Berlin by the I.S. Otherwise that will bring to mind the liquidation of the Secretariat in Paris.

Kin: The danger that Well raises exists but it cannot be otherwise. It is impossible for us to continue the work here. Comrade Well himself has not been able to give the necessary cooperation to continue the work. The sections will understand that we are forced to form a provisional committee.

Bauer: States that there is a difference in part of Well. In the German leadership comrade Senine shares Well's viewpoint saying that the transfer will cause differences in the German O. Well does not speak on this question.

Well: Has the impression that a reorganization of the I.S. has given cause for a lying information from comrade Bauer to T.R. Bauer has furnished false information on the German difference.

Kin: The Copenhagen proposal concerning the reorganization of the I.S. was decided upon before Bauer came to Copenhagen. Well's accusation is consequently without foundation and before these differences took an acute form; the reorganization is dictated by other considerations. The situation in Germany is not conducive to international political work. The comrades that have carried on this work find it impossible to continue--supplementary explanations will be given at the Preliminary Conference.

Vita: We have already decided on the necessity for the P.C. This does not call for a transfer but for the creation of a provisional committee. Agrees with the proposals. The P.C. will decide what to do.

RESOLUTION: The I.S. taking note of the proposal of the Copenhagen Committee declares its agreement stating that the P.C. should be held as soon as possible. (The decision already taken previously by I.S.) Not having the possibilities to make practical preparations in Berlin the I.S. has created a provisional committee composed of its members, delegate of the I.S., comrade Vita, who will go to P., and of a representative of the Ligue, and of the NIO. Vote: Two votes for, one vote against the creation of the committee (for the continuation of the work in Berlin),

2.--Preliminary Conference: Approximate date fixed. It will be communicated to the sections soon. The date is very near. The leaderships of the sections should make immediate preparations. Agenda of the preliminary conference: 1) Report of the I.S., composition of the Plenum, its statutes, etc.; 2) Preparation for the International Conference; 3) Report of the sections.

All sections should send their representatives to the preliminary Conference and take charge of the practical end of the trip. The I.S. will establish a small fund to help those sections which are not completely able to meet the obligation. But the sections should keep in mind that these funds will be very limited and should count on themselves. The aid will be given in exceptional cases and only to the most important sections.

Particular case: Poland. In view of the fact that we have no Polish section the I.S. believes that a comrade delegated by the group (or the fraction) of those comrades who are in agreement with us.

Austria: It is hoped that the (Mayer) group will be represented with a consultative voice, if it can meet its obligations.

Bordigists: Political discussion with the Bordigists for the past year have yielded no results. And their presence will not yield any political results. We must discuss with them, but not at an internal conference. It is a tendency which is foreign to us on the essential questions. The proposal of the Italian Committee at Copenhagen, sent to the sections, is read. This proposal states that the Bordigists are alien to us

and proposes to clarify this by referendum of the sections on our relations with them. That is to say, to separate ourselves from them. Formally the Bordigists have never been a section, neither politically nor have they participated in the life of the I.L.O.

Instead of discussing our important questions the preliminary conference would conduct endless discussions on questions like the United Front, etc. That would signify the destruction of the Preliminary Conference. The Plenum elected can consecrate a special session exclusively for the Bordigists and discuss the basic questions with them. The sections must decide whether the Bordigists can participate in the preliminary conference. The I.S. cannot decide such important questions. K. communicates that the French E.C., while evidently opposed to the political position of the Bordigists, has declared itself in favor of their participation in the preliminary conference, so as not to be accused of having "bureaucratically" eliminated them. This decision is in contradiction with the Copenhagen proposals.

Well: Declares himself in favor of the invitation, sharing the opinion of the French comrades.

Vits: Declares against the participation of the Bordigists, recalling that the last Gourov letter already posed the Bordigists question in a negative sense, and that all the sections gave their approval to this point of the Gourov letter.

Bauer: Also states that the question is liquidated by the Gourov letter. It is not a formal, but a political question. He is opposed to the participation of the Bordigists.

Decision: The Bordigists do not stand on our political position (do not accept the Fourth Congress, against the United Front, against the Democratic slogans, etc.) The question on the whole has already been ruled upon by the vote on the Gourov letter. The I.S. declares against the participation in the preliminary conference. The sections should reply whether in their opinion the Bordigists should participate in the preliminary conference or not. The sections should express their decision to the conference whether the Bordigists are members of the I.L.O. or not. (The decision of the I.S. is carried against the vote of Well, who while in agreement that the Bordigists have no place in our ranks thinks we cannot fail to invite them on formal grounds.)

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