

# On the Party Situation

By William Z. Foster

THE DRAFT RESOLUTION has many good features, especially in its program of practical work. On this basis, at first, I gave it a conditional "yes" vote; but finally, I have decided to vote against it on the fundamental grounds that it weakens seriously the Party's stand on Marxism-Leninism.

The National Committee Resolution now before the Party for discussion and amendment characterizes as "critical" the present Party situation. This is true, both in the sense that the Party suffered serious losses in members and mass contacts during the Cold War under the heavy attack from the government, and also in that there is in the Party a considerable political disorientation. What has caused this situation?

Throughout the intense persecution which it experienced during the Cold War period the Communist Party, aside from minor internal frictions, displayed a high degree of political unity and fighting morale. The Party maintained this ideological firmness under unprecedented government assault, and it withstood solidly the arrest and jailing of its leaders, deportations, discrimination

in industry, in trade unions, and elsewhere, the pro-fascist hysteria of the McCarthyites, the formal outlawing of the Party, the proscription of many progressive organizations, the government-organized expulsion of the progressive unions from the CIO, large membership loss, and the breaking of many of its mass contacts, and serious "Left" errors by its leadership. That the government, however, was unable to destroy the Party or even to prevent it from functioning publicly, was a real victory for our Party and the working class. Because of its staunch stand during these severe trials, the Communist Party won the admiration of Communists and other fighters all over the world.

The foundation of the Party's strong fighting spirit and political unity was its many years of training in the principles of Marxism-Leninism and in the fire of the class struggle. The Party was able to fight along as it did in the face of so many difficulties also because it realized that its main struggle—against the danger of atomic war—was a basic fight in the interest of the working class and the whole

American people. Although the Party felt its losses keenly, it was inspired to sustain them by the consciousness that it was doing its full share as a Leninist organization in the worldwide struggle to preserve world peace and to defeat the war program of American imperialism in its drive for world domination. This correct understanding was the key to the Party's high morale and political unity, which was such a striking feature during these years of trial.

The first serious element of political confusion in the Party began early in 1954, with the agitation of ex-Comrade Starobin and Comrade Clark, successively Foreign Editors of the *Daily Worker*, to the effect that the Party's fight against the war danger was both wrong and fruitless. This was a blow at the very foundations of the hard-pressed Party's morale. They abandoned, too, the Party position that American imperialism was striving for world domination. Significantly, they also resurrected some of Browder's discredited revisionist conceptions. This disruptive agitation, which tended to shield American imperialism from attack and to disintegrate the mass struggle for peace, was not without negative effects in the Party, especially in view of the prominence of the writers concerned.

A second blow against the Party's political unity came in connection with the Party discussion of the Stalin cult of the individual. Naturally, our members were deeply shocked by these revelations. How-

ever, by and large, the extensive Party discussion was sound and healthy, and it brought forth many important lessons which our Party must be alert to absorb. More than a few comrades, however, developed negative attitudes, even verging into liquidationism. These wrong views included bitter attacks upon the Soviet Union, upon our Party, and upon its whole leadership.

Although the situation created by the Stalin revelations presented certain problems, no doubt the Party could have overcome them without great difficulty, absorbing the immediate lessons from the Stalin exposure and studying the long-range implications of this important matter. But a new and heavy blow against Party unity developed. This was during and following the meeting of the National Committee in April 1956. In the report of General Secretary Dennis to this meeting the National Committee, instead of concentrating its attention basically upon the urgent tasks necessary for re-strengthening the weakened Communist Party, drawing all needful lessons from the Stalin discussion and generally from the past, took on the additional task of making a detailed estimate of the work of the Party throughout the entire period of the Cold War. Unfortunately, however, this analysis, conducted in the spirit of the extreme self-criticism characteristic of the Stalin discussion, produced dubious results. Among them were: a) a serious underestimation of the war danger and

generally of the adverse objective and subjective conditions faced by the Party during the period in question; b) a big underplay of the essentially correct role and of the various achievements of the Party, and c) a great overestimation of the Party's errors and shortcomings.

In his report Comrade Dennis laid but little emphasis upon the gravity of the war danger during the Cold War period, nor did he make a sustained analysis of this danger. He also did not state specifically that the United States had been following a policy of war, directed at winning the mastery of the world. This under-statement of the war danger and of the aggressive role of American imperialism put into question the whole previous political line of the Party, which, in tune with that of the world democratic and Socialist forces, had been to fight against the atomic war threat upon the basis that it was a real danger, and that American policy was warlike and aimed at world domination. Comrade Dennis, it is true, stated that the anti-war policy, as originally worked out by the Party, was in the main correct; but he made such an elaborate secondary criticism of this all-important policy that the implication was created that the policy was Left-sectarian. This also virtually condemned the rest of the Party policy, of which it was the center, and of which Comrade Dennis was also highly critical.

These exaggerations of Party er-

rors and shortcomings were seized upon by the strong Right tendencies in the Party, which proceeded to inflate them still further, for their own liquidationist purposes. They added a whole new batch of "errors" to the already over-long list, most of these additional ones being of their own manufacture. They also reduced Party achievements, as well as the objective difficulties faced by the Party, almost to the vanishing point. In their opinion, likewise, the war danger had amounted to little and, of course, the Party's policy towards it was Left-sectarian and wrong. In reality, the Party had more than enough errors, sectarianism, and bureaucracy to admit; but such hyper-criticism as this was laying it on too thick. It was reckless and suicidal for the Party.

The general result of this Right exaggeration, which flooded the Party press, was to cultivate a widespread impression that the whole political line of the Party during the decade of the Cold War had been Left-sectarian. The Party was belittled by the one-sided stress upon its "errors" and its entire leadership was discredited. The Party's membership losses and other setbacks were ascribed almost completely to its own mistakes, and the crippling effects of the government attack were practically lost sight of. This gross over-estimation of Party shortcomings and under-estimation of Party achievements by the Right, with its consequent discrediting of the Party and its leadership served the pur-

pose of preparations for shoving the Party far to the Right. The whole business, highly liquidatory, raised havoc with the rank and file, spreading pessimism and defeatism far and wide.

The Right also seized upon Comrade Dennis' proposal at the April meeting of the National Committee to the effect that the Party should look forward to the eventual formation of a "new mass party of Socialism" through a merger of the Communist Party and other Left groups in this country. Obviously, such an expectation could be only a long-range perspective, the other Left organizations in the United States being much smaller than the Communist Party and in no mood to consolidate with it. The Rights, by giving the whole project an air of immediate possibility, also used this slogan in a liquidationist manner. For there would be no point in rebuilding the Communist Party if it were soon to be replaced by a new and glittering mass party. The Comrades on the Right had thus set up, on the one hand, a fetish—extreme charges of Left-sectarianism—which discredited the previous decade of Party policy and leadership, and on the other hand, a panacea—the slogan of the projected new mass party of Socialism—which was to eliminate the Communist Party, and to show the way for the so-called "Marxist" party.

These negative tendencies were given a strong impetus in the report of Comrade Schrank, made right

after the April meeting of the National Committee to the New York State Committee, which represents over half of the Party's national membership. Together with heaping up Party "mistakes", most of which never happened, discounting Party successes, reducing the war danger to practically nothing, and playing upon the shibboleth of the "mass party of Socialism", Comrade Schrank's report also incorporated that Browder element which has become a feature of the Right tendency in the Party. This it expressed by sweeping characterizations of past Party policy as Left-sectarian—which tended to justify the Browder thesis to the effect that when the Party defeated his revisionism in 1945, it by this act embarked necessarily upon a course of Left-sectarianism. Schrank further declared that the Party was wrong in expelling Browder and he demanded that the latter's work be re-studied. The report was overwhelmingly adopted.

It is, of course, fundamentally necessary for the development of the Party and its mass struggle that it war relentlessly against Left-sectarianism, which has been the traditional main weakness of our Party. But to bring this point home to the Party—and few there are who would oppose it—such a gross exaggeration of Party errors and playdown of Party achievements was not at all necessary, nor could it help. On the contrary, it was all very demoralizing to the Party membership. This

was particularly the case with the reduction of the Party's heroic and correct fight against the war danger to the status of a costly Left-sectarian blunder. And the opportunist misuse of the slogan "for a new mass party of Socialism" only made the situation worse. The general effect was to lower seriously the Party's prestige and to undermine its morale. Particularly was this the case because the Party was already disturbed over the Stalin revelations. Consequently, open demands were made for the dissolution of the Communist Party, with numerous Comrades declaring that, "We have wasted ten years of our political life". The *Daily Worker* freely carried this defeatist and liquidationist stuff. A far cry, indeed, all this pessimism and political confusion from the splendid political unity and fighting morale that had characterized the Party during the hard persecution years of the Cold War.

The bad situation was worsened by the fact that the National Committee, itself disunited, did not combat the Right-inspired campaign of liquidationism that was running rife through the Party. As for myself personally, I wrote several articles on the situation, but in the hope that the present Resolution, then being prepared, would bring about more political clarity and unity in the Party, I agreed to hold up the publication of my articles.

#### SHALL WE BUILD A MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY?

The most decisive question thrust

up by the current debate in the Party is whether or not we shall go ahead with the building of a Marxist-Leninist Party in the United States? The Party's answer to this elementary question must be a categorical affirmative. However, the strong Right tendency in the Party takes an opposite view. It looks upon Leninism as being Left-sectarian so far as the United States is concerned. It is trying to downgrade Lenin theoretically in general. It is striving to transform the Communist Party into an amorphous "Marxist" party, or into some sort of an educational organization, without Leninism in its program. Some comrades would pattern their projected new party after Browder's erstwhile Communist Political Association, leaving the word "Communist" out of its title. And some would abandon altogether the idea of the Left having a party of its own. Here, again, the situation was made much worse by the failure of the National Committee (itself split on the question) to refute the widespread and long-continued attack being made in the Party against Marxism-Leninism.

The Draft Resolution now before the Party for discussion takes an incorrect position in this whole vital matter. The NC categorically rejected a specific proposal for an endorsement of Marxism-Leninism as our theoretical base in the Resolution and instead made the qualification that we would endorse Marxism-Leninism only in the sense that

it is "interpreted" by the CPUSA. While, obviously, the Party must interpret Marxism-Leninism to the masses, it cannot take the position that its acceptance is limited to such an interpretation. This stand would imply the end of Marxism-Leninism as embodying the principles of Scientific Socialism. Of course, we must read not only Lenin, but all other Communist writers, with a close regard to the adaptability or non-adaptability of their specific formulations to the American situation. This, however, does not contradict the elementary fact that we should also accept the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism as the very foundation of our Socialist outlook, and that we must say so. The failure of the Resolution to do this caused me to vote against it. As the Resolution now stands our Party ceases to be specifically a Marxist-Leninist Party.

Marxism-Leninism is the general body of proletarian philosophy, theory, and action of the world movement for Socialism. Towards it, the Communist parties: a) endorse it *en bloc* as a basic guide to their action, but not as a dogma, and b) they adopt it in their practical policies in accordance with its applicability to their respective national situations. Our Resolution, however, departs basically from this correct Communist procedure. By rejecting (through NC action) a general endorsement of Marxism-Leninism and by accepting only those parts

of it which it interprets favorably it tends to destroy the international character of Marxism-Leninism and to reduce it to the status of a Russian Socialist philosophy, subject to a maze of national "interpretations" before adoption. It also attempts to drive a wedge between Marxism and Leninism by assuming that the former has a universal application whereas the latter has not.

The Resolution also involves the deletion of the term "Marxism-Leninism" from the Party Preamble which I think is a mistake. If we were just forming our Party the question of whether or not we should put the words "Marxism-Leninism" into the Preamble would not be a too important tactical matter; but to take them out of the document, while Leninism is under such heavy fire both within and without the Party, will be understood only as a major ideological retreat. Significantly, the Right tendency voted for the Preamble deletion, as well as for the limitation upon our endorsement of Marxism-Leninism. Leninist democratic centralism is also dropped by this Resolution.

The Communist Party of the United States cannot be some vague "Marxist" party, without a real theoretical basis. It must be founded solidly upon the general principles of Marxism-Leninism, skillfully adapted to the American situation. This is doubly necessary because the perspective ahead for the working class and its allies in this country

is one of sharp struggle. Although our Party firmly subscribes to the possibility of achieving Socialism in the United States peacefully and along parliamentary lines, this is no contradiction to the fact that it also foresees for the broad labor movement and for itself a perspective of intense political struggle against powerful, predatory, and militant American imperialism. Any other outlook would be nonsense, especially when one speaks in terms of the eventual establishment of Socialism in this country. For the American working class a Marxist-Leninist Party is indispensable to enable it to face up to the hard struggles ahead.

The Communist Party must be based upon Marxism-Leninism, but upon a newly invigorated Leninism, cleansed from Stalinist bureaucratic hangovers and fully adapted and applied to the American situation. The Party membership have said clearly in the debate that they want their Party to be more democratic, less dogmatic, and better able to stand up to American imperialism and the many complex problems and struggles which this implies. All this is very correct. Marxism-Leninism has proved that it is flexible enough to meet all these requirements far better than any other conceivable form of theory or party. In line with the many good points made in the Party discussion, American Marxism-Leninism must combat the false charge that the Party is an agent of the USSR by pursuing a course of

political independence, within the framework of international proletarian solidarity. The Party must also cultivate more initiative theoretically, make war upon all forms of dogmatism, and break decisively with its long-time habit of waiting for others to speak out first upon theoretical questions. It must likewise develop new and better concepts of Party democracy, collective leadership, and international criticism, and apply the principles of democratic centralism as Lenin understood and practiced them. It must war endlessly against bureaucracy, and its fight against Left-sectarianism must be at the very heart of all its work.

In working out its political policies, the Party must pay decisive attention to specific American conditions without, however, falling into the swamp of "American exceptionalism," which is based upon the arbitrary assumption that capitalism in the United States, supposedly cut from a special fabric, is not subject to the general laws of the growth and decline of capitalism on a world scale. The Party must especially tie in its policies with American democratic traditions and realities, including a firm advocacy of the possibility of arriving at Socialism in the United States along legal and relatively peaceful channels. As it has proved in the greatest revolutions in the history of the world, Marxism-Leninism is quite flexible enough to encompass the situation in every country, while still maintaining its

Socialist objective, its discipline, and its fighting spirit. If we have failed to adapt the principles of Lenin more effectively in the American class struggle, this has been our fault, not that of Marxism-Leninism, which has proved its full adaptability in countries as diverse economically and politically as Czechoslovakia and China.

To the end of unifying, democratizing, and Americanizing our Party, in line with the new national and world situations, its Program, to be formulated following our scheduled national convention, should deal thoroughly, along with these general tasks, with such specifically American issues as, a) the new relationships of our Party with the Communist parties and workers' organizations in the rest of the world; b) the predatory international role of American imperialism; c) the general crisis of world capitalism, especially with regard to its effects upon the United States; d) the perspective of cyclical crises in this country; e) the status of Keynesism and its "managed economy" in the policies of the United States Government; f) an analysis of the living standards of the American working class, with special regard to the amount and significance of recent increases in real wages in various categories; g) a thorough handling of the question of "American exceptionalism" and the difference between this concept and that of specific American conditions; h) the status of class collaboration be-

tween the conservative trade-union leaders and the monopoly capitalists, and our attitude towards these leaders of the workers; i) a clear statement of the status of the national question among the Negro people; j) a full consideration of the special problems of American youth regarding jobs, education, military service, delinquency, etc.; k) the role of women in this country and period; l) special American election problems and tactics; m) the perspectives for a mass labor-farmer party in this country; n) the application of the principles of democratic centralism in the United States; o) the relation of Socialism to American democratic conditions; p) a thorough review of the war-fascist danger during the cold war years and the struggle of the world's people against this danger; q) the status of the war danger at the present time; r) the question of the parliamentary road to Socialism in the United States and the role of our Party in formulating this proposition; s) the specific qualities of and perspectives for Socialism in the United States; t) a survey of Communist Party achievements and experiences during the past decade; u) an analysis of American Social Democracy, etc.

The question of Americanizing our Party is fundamental, but this must not lead to a weakening of proletarian internationalism on our part. Undoubtedly, there are strong Right trends in this respect in the Party. The Draft Resolution also shows some signs of yielding in this



direction: such as the elimination of the vital question of world democratic influence upon the American Negro struggle, the consideration of United States economic conditions without mentioning the international economic situation or the general crisis of world capitalism, the tentative handling of world Communist relationships, the failure even to refer to the international trade union movement, the underplay on the role of the Socialist sector of the world, etc.

At the present time, as the basic result of the discussion of the Stalin cult of the individual, Communist parties all over the world are re-emphasizing the indispensability of Marxism-Leninism, in carrying forward the workers' struggle. They are not only improving their inner democracy and their international relationships, but they are also undertaking to overcome the theoretical lag which developed during recent years under Stalin's blighting influence. In their time, Marx and Lenin brought the world labor movement fully abreast of international economic and political developments and gave it a long and clear look ahead; but under Stalin much of this analytical initiative was lost, despite notable early theoretical achievements by him. But the initiative is now being regained. The big steps forward in the sphere of theory taken by the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union are proof positive of this. Instead of abandoning Leninism, as

the comrades on the Right want our Party to do, the workers of the world are correctly strengthening their advocacy and application of it. With Marxism-Leninism, the world's workers and their allies have won one-third of the globe for Socialism and they have set the balance of the capitalist system a-totter. With the same great instrument they will also eventually complete the rest of their historical task of establishing Socialism all over the world.

There is every reason why the Communist Party, USA should follow the same general course as the Communist parties in all other parts of the world, in maintaining, strengthening, and adapting Marxism-Leninism to our national conditions. We must stand firm upon the basis of the tried and demonstrated principles of Marxism-Leninism, which are far better fitted to the particular needs of the American situation than any other conceivable theory. Otherwise, we would be a Party without a theory. We must not lose our general political bearings in the present uncertainty prevailing in the Party. For us to repudiate Marxism-Leninism—and this is what "dropping" Leninism from our Program would eventually come to—would be an impermissible ideological retreat, a far-reaching surrender to American exceptionalism. It would introduce endless confusion into our ranks and it would also be hailed by the arrogant capitalists of this country as proof-positive that there is no room

in their so-called "people's capitalism" for a Communist Party or for Socialism. It would put us in the untenable position of saying that Marxism-Leninism does not apply in the greatest of all capitalist countries. Wall Street would blazen forth its victory everywhere and would try to use it against Communist parties in all other countries. The CPUSA must not hand such a vital victory to the main enemies of the workers of the world, the American monopoly capitalists. On this vital point the Resolution must be strengthened and leadership waverings should cease.

For almost four decades now we have been striving to build a strong Communist Party under the especially difficult conditions prevailing in the United States, the heartland of world capitalism. No Communist Party in the capitalist world has a more difficult task than ours. In this long and devoted struggle, endless effort, hardship, and sacrifices have been expended; many comrades have spent long years in prison in carrying on this historic work, and not a few have given up their lives. Now we are at one of the most critical periods in this long and hard struggle. It is a time that demands calm heads and a firm adherence to the tried principles of Marxism-Leninism. While boldly taking every step necessary to broaden out, democratize, and Americanize our Party, we must beware of all those "shortcut" proposals that would divorce us from our basic principles

and eventually land us in far greater difficulties than those we now face.

Although the government's drive against the Party has not ceased (witness the recent convictions of our comrades in New York and elsewhere under the Smith Act) and although world tension has dangerous features in it (as evidenced by the sharp crisis over the Suez Canal), nevertheless there has been a definite improvement in the national and international situations over that of only a couple of years ago. With the workers, the Negro people, and other democratic strata developing more political initiative and now going into a crucial election struggle, the opportunity is here for the Party to better definitely its general position and to begin to recoup the losses suffered by it during the great struggle of the world's peoples in blocking the war drive of American imperialism—in which the Party, acting truly as the vanguard Party of the American people, played such an honorable part.

Were we counting our successes as well as our failures, we could well register as an important victory for civil liberties the successful defense of the Party's life and open existence in the face of the bitter attack from the government. For this we have also to thank the democratic forces both here and abroad for their pressure against the reactionary U.S. government. Although the Party is now in a position of semi-legality and is hedged about by many reactionary laws, it can and must cut its

way out of this maze of restrictions, by building itself up from the mass of surrounding sympathizers, by improving its grass roots mass work, by strengthening its alliances with other democratic forces, and by developing a tireless campaign to amnesty our prisoners and to annul or to render inoperative the various fascist-like laws spawned by the Cold War reaction.

Our Party has faced very difficult situations before and emerged from them. For example, in 1925 the Party, torn for years with a destructive faction fight, had only a small fraction of the 60,000 members that it started out with a few years before. At this critical juncture, the head of the Comintern, Bukharin, advised our Party (with arguments very similar to those now being heard) to transform itself into merely an educational organization. But the Party, on the basis of its Marxist-Leninist spirit, rejected this opportunist advice, and in the ensuing years it went on to lead many important mass struggles and to build up its membership tenfold. In this general respect, history will repeat itself, with our Party getting out of its present difficulties and becoming a real force in the class struggle.

#### THE QUESTION OF A "NEW MASS PARTY OF SOCIALISM"

At the April meeting of the National Committee, Comrade Dennis put out the slogan "For a new mass party of Socialism", to be achieved

eventually by a merger of the Communist Party with other Left groupings. In the succeeding months the way this slogan has been mishandled has added greatly to the political uncertainty and liquidationism in the Party. It is not incorrect in principle that our Party should contemplate the possibility of an eventual unified party of Socialism and to keep this in mind in its work. But in view of the weakness in general of the Left groups in the United States—the CP is by far the largest of them—the slogan must not be put forth in an immediate sense; because, if so, it will act as a definitely liquidating force. For, clearly, the embattled Communist Party will not be rebuilt if it is shortly to be replaced by another and a broader Party. Obviously, therefore, our overwhelming attention now must be devoted to the building up of the Communist Party and its mass contacts, instead of running after the will o' the wisp of a new party.

The Right tendency in the Communist Party, which wants to dispose of the Party as it is now constituted, promptly seized upon the conception of the new mass party of Socialism. Following the April N.C. meeting, it made such a party look like an immediate possibility. This tended greatly to disorient our Party, especially in a liquidationist sense. The slogan has been further a confusing one because the proposed new party has been put forth as a "Marxist" party, a formulation which undermines the adherence of

the Communist Party to the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

One of the many weak spots in the Draft Resolution for the coming National Party Convention is that it plays into the hands of the Right by laying altogether too much stress upon the slogan of the new mass party of Socialism. Thus, the sum-up of four long pages regarding the road to Socialism is an advocacy of the new party. Despite the warning of the Resolution itself that this slogan cannot be "advanced by any tendency to weaken or dissolve the C.P.", nevertheless, this is precisely the effect of the incorrect handling of the question in the Resolution. The slogan, therefore, should be de-emphasized in the Resolution by making it very clear that, at most, it represents only a long-range objective, and by concentrating every practical effort upon building the Communist Party. If this is not done, the slogan, as heretofore, will operate as a strong liquidationist influence in our Party.

Almost certainly in the United States the fight for Socialism will be made not by the Communist Party alone, but by a combination of economic and political groupings among which the Communist Party must be a decisive leader. The present immediate path as the workers proceed to the building of a mass Socialist movement in this country, therefore, is the strengthening of the Communist Party upon the basis of Marxism-Leninism and the development of broad united front mass

struggles. Towards other Left groups, our attitude at this time should be one primarily of active cooperation. If and when an opportunity develops to combine with such groups, the CP should do so upon essentially a Marxist-Leninist basis. Meanwhile, we should proceed upon our general ultimate pattern of a broad labor-farmer party of the masses and a strong Communist Party for the vanguard—it is wrong of the Resolution virtually to abandon the historic labor-farmer party slogan.

We must beware of "political shortcuts" and of being rushed into drastically changing the name, structure, and basic principles of the Communist Party. Such hasty and ill-thought-out devices, instead of affording the Party better legal protection and a broader access to the masses, would only discredit it and weaken its forces organizationally and ideologically.

#### THE RIGHT TENDENCY IN THE PARTY

During the sharp Party discussion of the past several months, strong Right tendencies, for the first time in a decade, have shown themselves in the Party. As yet, these have not crystallized into a definite program, but some of the widely expressed ideas are: a) the cultivation of a sharply critical attitude towards the Soviet Union; b) a big underplay of the role of the Socialist sector of the world; c) a weak

spirit of internationalism, shading into bourgeois nationalism; d) a feeble Party discipline, patterned mostly after Social Democratic models; e) a soft-pedal upon the Negro question; f) the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism in theory and practice as Left-sectarian; g) to see no danger whatever of war now and very little of such danger during the intense periods of the cold war; h) a surrender of the century-long struggle of Marxists against "American exceptionalism", the bourgeois theory that American capitalism is not really capitalism at all, that American workers are not actual proletarians, etc.; i) a giving up of the theory of the general crisis of world capitalism, at least as far as United States is concerned; j) a play-down in general of the significance of proletarian theory; k) a tacit acceptance of Keynesian theories of "progressive capitalism" and the "managed economy"; l) an abandonment of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat; m) a tagging after the conservative trade-union bureaucracy, with little or no criticism; n) a big under-play of the aggressive foreign role of American imperialism; o) the relegation of Socialism for the United States to the background as a sort of museum piece, and above all, p) the transformation of the Communist Party into some sort of non-Leninist "Marxist" organization.

Obviously, many of the foregoing ideas and plans dovetail with the former revisionist, class collabora-

tion system of Earl Browder, who was expelled ten years ago. There is definitely a new Browderism developing in the Party. Some comrades, while repudiating Browder's crassest forms of bourgeois reformism and his ultimate renegecy from Communism, would resurrect what was "good" in his system. They look back nostalgically to the late 1930's, when the Party was making substantial progress, overlooking the vastly more favorable situation then existing, when the Party was going along freely in harmony with the general mood of the working class and under a not hostile government, in the fight against Hitlerism and for the trade-union organization of the basic industries; in contrast to the harsh persecutions suffered by the Party during the cold war years and its considerable conflict with the general mood of the working class regarding the origin of the war threat.

Other comrades, however, are prepared to accept Browderism hook, line, and sinker, justifying his whole revisionist system, and they are running extensive Browderite material in our Party press. They argue that if we had stuck to Browder's line the Party would have avoided the bitter persecution of the cold war period and the attendant losses in membership and mass contacts. They put Browder forth as an original exponent of peaceful co-existence.

In reply to such Browderite arguments, it is well to point out that

at the end of World War II the basic world situation was that two great and militant forces confronted each other; the one revolutionary and the other counter-revolutionary. The first of these elementary forces was the vast post-war revolutionary and democratic wave which swept over much of the world, as expressed by the developments in the Baltic countries, in the People's Democracies in Eastern Europe, in the victory of People's China, in the revolutions in the colonial countries, and in the immense growth of the trade unions, workers' parties, and other democratic organizations in all parts of the world. The second big and militant force at the end of World War II was that of American imperialism — reactionary, powerful, ruthless, and resolved upon dominating the world, even at the cost of a horrifying atomic war—a power which ultimately expressed itself in a wide militarization, in atomic bomb diplomacy, in several predatory wars, and in creating the looming threat of a world war.

To suppose, as Browder did, that these two vast, antagonistic forces could have quietly composed their differences along the lines of friendly international collaboration under the leadership of "progressive" American imperialism, was fantastic. The basic tasks of the world's peoples in this historic situation were twofold: first, to see to it that Socialism and democracy were extended as widely as possible, and second, to checkmate the war pro-

gram of American imperialism and to preserve world peace. The broad growth of Socialism and democracy after the war and the preservation of peace were proof positive that the peoples succeeded generally in carrying out the two-pronged task thrust upon them by history at the end of the war. If, today, peaceful co-existence has become a highly practical policy, this is because the war drive of American imperialism has been checked, if not defeated outright. In view of all this, the CPUSA, like Communist parties all over the world, was fundamentally correct in foreseeing a post-war perspective of struggle and in joining with the progressive forces everywhere in supporting the revolutionary peoples of the world and in blocking the war program of Wall Street, and while doing this, in throwing pro-imperialist Browderism into the ashcan of history, where we should keep it. The claims that the Browder line would have avoided the Cold War struggle and led straight to peaceful co-existence, are opportunist nonsense.

Concentrating exclusively upon the fight against Left-sectarianism, the national Party leadership for several months paid no attention to the developing Right tendency, denying that it even existed. The result was that the latter, of whom Comrade Gates is one of the outstanding spokesmen, had a free hand and it grew rapidly in the uncertain Party situation. It entrenched itself in the *Daily Worker* and in

the New York State Committee, and it also secured a following in various districts. A sharp factional attack was developed by the Gates tendency upon the Dennis Party leadership. At the August meeting, however, this open fight subsided when the National Committee cut the term "Marxism-Leninism" from the Party's Preamble and also made conditional our support of Marxism-Leninism in the Resolution. The Gates forces voted for all this obviously in the expectation that it constituted steps towards the eventual elimination of Marxism-Leninism from our Party life. They also urged and supported the Resolution's serious exaggeration of Party errors, its overstress upon the slogan for a new party of Socialism, and its abandonment of democratic centralism. The strong Right pressure of the Gates group has resulted in seriously undermining the Party's position on Marxism-Leninism. The Resolution, however, finally recognizes, although inadequately, that there is a Right danger in the Party, as well as the major "Left" danger.

#### PARTY MISTAKES AND THE OBJECTIVE SITUATION

Now let us return to a more detailed examination of the important question regarding the errors made by the Party during the cold war period. As we have seen, the vast over-estimation of the Party's mistakes (along with an underplay of its achievements and an under-

statement of the Party's difficulties in the struggle) has played a very vital role in disorienting the Party. It is the main source of the present pest of liquidationism in the Party, and it has caused many disputes in the NC. This whole matter must be cleared up as a basic necessity for reestablishing the health of the Party. First, let us consider the key role of objective conditions in relation to the Party's errors.

It is elementary Marxism that the objective situation determines the character of the Party's deviations at a given time. This does not mean that the objective conditions foreordain that certain mistakes must inevitably be made—skillful Marxist leadership can avoid them. But it does mean that the objective situation sets up a powerful predisposition towards making a given type of mistake. Thus, for example, the notorious Bernstein revisionism of pre-World War I years was definitely a product of the rise of world imperialism, plus an opportunist leadership.

By the same token, Earl Browder did not invent or pull out of thin air his Teheran revisionism of 1943. This notorious deviation was spawned by the current objective situation and by his surrendering to it. During World War II, the USSR and the western capitalist powers had gone through a great war in military alliance together, and it was very easy to conclude therefrom that this cooperation would continue on over into the peace. It was pre-



cisely because Browder's revisionism was thus rooted in the objective situation and, in fact, grew out of it, that not only our Party but almost every other Communist party in the Western Hemisphere, not to mention Communist parties in other parts of the world, accepted Browder's opportunist thesis enthusiastically, almost without discussion.

On the same principle, the characteristic deviation produced by the cold war situation was that of Left-sectarianism. This was because, under the fierce attacks of the Government upon the Party—in the courts, industries, trade unions, schools, housing, etc.—there was generated an elementary tendency for our relatively weak Party, both in its lower units and upper organs, to retreat in the face of its powerful antagonist, American imperialism, and very frequently to cover this retreat with radical phrases and other pretexts. So marked was this trend towards such Leftism, produced by the extreme pressure of the objective situation, that there were very few Right deviations made in the Party during the entire Cold War decade. Of course, to the extent that there were lingering Leftist tendencies in the Party, this helped to produce Left-sectarian deviations. But this is a very different thing from saying that the Party had a Leftist leadership and line.

The Draft Resolution, however, almost completely ignores the objective situation in analyzing mistakes made by the Party during the

Cold War period. It reduces the whole matter practically to a subjective basis. The errors are simply blamed offhand upon the Party, as though it conjured them out of the air, or rather, out of a basically incorrect, Left-sectarian policy. In fact, some Comrades declare that even to mention the objective factor means to cover up the Party's mistakes.

The consequence of this systematic ignoring of objective conditions as a basic factor in the making of political mistakes, has been to discredit needlessly the Party and its leadership for having followed a Left-sectarian line, which is just what the Right wants accomplished. The record, however, shows clearly that the Party resisted such mistakes and eventually corrected most of them. The Resolution, thus distorting the line of the Party during the Cold War period, greatly exaggerates the number and the character of the mistakes made, and it also largely ignores the elementary struggle conducted by the Party during these hard years to combat the strong tendency towards Left-sectarianism generated by the specific character of the objective situation. Consequently, the Resolution, in this section, besides stimulating defeatism, pessimism, and the Right tendency, is almost valueless in indicating the line of the Party during the Cold War. The same is true of its lessons for the future in this respect, for in all probability we shall confront a very different objective situation.



## A REVIEW OF THE PARTY'S ERRORS

Before touching specifically upon the distortions and exaggerations of the Party's line and errors, caused by the failure of the Resolution to take into consideration the objective situation in these respects, let us first see just what the Party's more important errors really were during the Cold War.

The fundamental cause of the Party's losses in membership and in mass contacts during the Cold War years was, of course, the long and fierce attack by the government of American imperialism upon our Party. Too often, however, in our eager search for "mistakes" to admit, we lose sight of this elementary fact. Of course, the present degree of our isolation was not pre-ordained, even under the hard conditions that the Party faced—the Party losses were much accentuated by its own preventable errors. However, in fighting against the war-fascist menace and in colliding with American imperialism, the most powerful and ruthless capitalist force in the world, anyone who thinks that a Party the size of ours and in our situation could have avoided suffering severe losses is living in a dream world. Many other Communist parties, facing similar forces upon other occasions, have experienced even greater injuries than we have. As it was, in the struggle for peace during the Cold War, our Party had to contend with more difficult conditions than al-

most any other Communist Party.

Regarding Party errors during the cold war, there were three elementary trends which should be noted: First, the most serious errors were made directly under especially heavy blows from the government—as at the outset of the Cold War itself, during the Korean war, and in the critical situations created by the fascist-like McCarran and Communist Control Acts. Second, as the Party, with the passage of time, learned better how to live under the current repression, it committed fewer mistakes, and the deviations that were made were almost always the faults of individual comrades or of groups, rather than of the Party as such. And third, as the struggle wore on, not only did the Party make fewer errors, but it also undertook, with much success, to correct mistakes that had been made earlier.

The three worst mistakes made by the Party during the Cold War period were: a) the support given to the Progressive Party in 1948 as a third party—an action which cut deeply into our mass contacts and which also served as one of the secondary excuses for expelling the eleven progressive unions from the CIO in 1949; b) the failure of the Party, in the court trial of the eleven National Board members in 1949-50, to put forward definitely the possibility for a parliamentary advance to Socialism in the United States, which had been proposed—it was left out of the lawyers' opening and

closing speeches and also out of the appeals to the higher courts. This Leftist error greatly weakened the position of the Party in the courts and before the masses, in the face of the government's false main charge against the Party that it advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. Government; and c) the approach taken to security measures to protect the Party. The latter was the worst error of the whole Cold War period. It did our Party great injury in losses of members and mass contacts, and in shoving the Party generally too far to the Left. Significantly, these three mistakes, the most damaging of the Cold War years, were all made by the Party's most experienced leaders, before the National Board members went to prison in 1951. These leaders were not Left sectarian. If they made the above mistakes it goes to indicate the compelling power of the objective situation during these crucial years of persecution. Of course, lingering Leftist trends in the Party operated to provoke and to worsen such errors.

There were also some important mistakes made by the Party in the latter stages of the Cold War, the most serious of which was the failure of the Communists to play a more active part in the merger of the AFL and CIO. This was sheer sectarian neglect, a hangover from 20 years of relative inactivity in the conservative unions. Of course, it is no excuse to say that these unions had practically outlawed Commu-

nists. A lesser mistake, stressed in the Resolution, was the Party's formulation that, regarding war, the American big capitalists were divided into two tendencies: the "war now" and the "war when we are ready" groups. Clearly, this was a too narrow conception; for although open capitalist opposition to the war program of the Truman and Eisenhower governments was distinguished chiefly for its insignificant size and general voicelessness, nevertheless it did exist to some small extent. The Party would have done better to stick to the three-group analysis that it started out with. The Party, however, always stood firm upon its basic proposition that the overwhelming mass of the American people were opposed to war.

There were errors, too, in connection with the Stalin cult of the individual, especially manifested by the Party's uncritical attitude towards negative developments in the USSR. These mistakes, however, were international in scope, not merely those of the CPUSA. They spread out over 20 years, and they were particularly damaging during the years of the Cold War. Inasmuch as they have been widely discussed in our Party, there is no need for me to dwell upon them here.

During the Cold War years the Party was also much handicapped by bureaucratism and lack of inner democracy, which crippled the initiative of the Party. In assessing this situation, however, it is necessary to take into consideration the ex-

tremely difficult conditions amid which the Party was functioning under the prevailing war hysteria and persecution. The normal holding of full club gatherings, general local membership meetings, district conferences upon a broad scale, public mass demonstrations, and national conventions, was practically excluded. Too little attention has been given to this aspect in the sharp discussion of the question. Criticism of bureaucracy is very much in order, as Lenin used to insist endlessly. But although Stalin's cult of the individual had definite reflections in the CPUSA, as elsewhere, it is untrue to say that we have had an American cult of the individual during the post-war years. We had, however, a big dose of such poison during the Browder regime.

Bureaucracy is a disease afflicting more or less all organizations, not the least, working class bodies of every sort. Unfortunately Communist parties are not exempt from this pest. But it is safe to say, nevertheless, that the CPUSA, despite its shortcomings, has more inner-democracy than any trade union or other workers' organization in the United States, not to mention bourgeois organizations. In the period ahead of us the fight against bureaucracy must be carried on far more energetically than ever before. This does not mean, however, that we should fly to the other extreme of nihilistic practices of anti-leadership, of which there are now many expressions in the Party. We must

have strong and energetic leaders, but they must be kept within the bounds of Party inspiration, instruction, and control.

The most serious shortcoming of the Party, however, during the Cold War years was its marked weakness in carrying to the masses its generally correct main line of policy. This failure was due to many causes, both objective and subjective. Among these were: a) a certain tactical rigidity—although the Party necessarily spoke out clearly upon the war danger and associated policies, the tactical carrying of its line to the masses, in accordance with long-time practice, was supposed to take into account specific local conditions, a basic consideration which, however, was very frequently violated; b) sectarian conceptions to the effect that the masses were too deeply saturated with imperialist propaganda to put up a real fight for peace; c) the semi-outlawing of the Communists in the trade unions and other mass organizations; d) the violent anti-Communist attitude of the trade-union bureaucracy; e) the greatly weakened and immobilized forces of the Party, including a chronic leadership crisis; f) bureaucratic practices among Party leaders; g) the strong anti-Communist, anti-Soviet moods among the masses, of whom the overwhelming majority, influenced by bourgeois propaganda, held the USSR and the Communists in general responsible for the war danger. With this adverse mass mood the Party was vastly worse off during the

Cold War years than, say, during the World War II period, when it was in general harmony with the masses in the fight against Hitlerism, and when broad united front movements, next to impossible during the cold war, were readily organizable. Notwithstanding all these subjective and objective difficulties, however, the Party beyond question, should have done a far better job than it did in carrying its line to the masses. On the firing line of the class struggle, where the pressure of objective conditions was greatest, the characteristic tendencies of the Party in this period towards Left-sectarian mistakes were more in evidence than in the shaping of general policy.

#### THE EXAGGERATION OF PARTY ERRORS

The foregoing listed Party errors and shortcomings are far too many and they cast no credit upon us, even though they were spread out over ten years. But the Draft Resolution makes the situation appear much worse than it was, citing literally shoals of additional "errors." The Resolution, written under strong Right pressure, obviously does not make an objective analysis in this respect, but seems to set out to "convict" the Party of as many errors as possible, and to reduce its credits to a minimum. The idea appears to be that the more "mistakes" the Party confesses to, the better will be its standing among the masses, which

is absurd. The effect of such exaggeration, a product of divorcing the analysis from objective conditions, is to discredit the Party, to weaken its morale, to demolish the standing of its entire leadership and to feed the Right tendency in the Party. While, of course, the fight against Left-sectarianism is basically important, and we must also freely admit our errors and learn from them, we do not have to cut our Party to pieces in order to do this. Such an exaggeration of mistakes as we have had in our Party during recent months would not be tolerated in the Communist Parties of the USSR, People's China, Italy, etc. It is not constructive criticism, much of it, but a form of self-destruction for the Party. It definitely originates in and feeds the plague of pessimism and liquidationism now afflicting the Party. The Resolution still reflects much of this harmful stuff; hence the section dealing with Party errors should be re-drafted in accordance with Party policy and experience during the Cold War years.

The following examples of such exaggeration, even the manufacture of "errors," by no means cover all such cases, but merely give an indication of the trend. If it were desired to liquidate our Party no more effective means could be used to this end than the current discrediting of the Party and its leadership by thus ascribing to them endless "errors," many of which never happened. It all fits in with the Right policy to undermine the leadership

of the Party and prepare the ground for pushing the Party to the Right, as is now being done.

The Resolution, for example, reiterates the charge that the Party overestimated the war danger, and especially that it considered war to be inevitable. This is flatly false. Actually, a central policy of the Party was to combat the persistent campaign of the warmongers to make the people believe that war was inevitable and that the people could do nothing to halt it. The Party's stand, militantly against war's inevitability, was expressed in innumerable articles. Among the masses, who were deluged with imperialist war propaganda, there was a widespread conviction that war was inevitable, but the Communist Party stood like a rock against it. One of the Party's biggest accomplishments during the Cold War was precisely its firm stand that war was not inevitable and that the people could block it, as they eventually did. For this position the Party deserves credit, not censure.

The Resolution also incorrectly asserts that the Party's "estimates excluded the possibility of the peaceful settlement of differences, except through a major change in the relation of class forces." That this is a serious misrepresentation of Party policy is to be found, among many other examples, in the fact that, toward the end of the Korean war, as the truce negotiations had been stalled for months over the thorny issue of returning the war prisoners

to the respective sides before the armistice was signed, the CPUSA came forward with the proposal that first the cease-fire should be signed and then the prisoners-of-war question should be taken up later. As it turned out, it was along this line that the war was finally settled. All through the Cold War years the Party took a similar practical and realistic position, laying every possible stress upon the policy of negotiation and upon the ultimate perspective of the peaceful co-existence of all powers. Why not credit the Party with this major achievement?

As for the Resolution's statement that the Party did not understand before-hand the significance nor possibilities of the Geneva Conference, let me cite a paragraph from an article of mine (*Daily Worker*, July 14, 1955), which reflected the Party's current thinking:

The Big Four conference scheduled for Geneva on July 18th is the center of unprecedented attention. This is because the overwhelming mass of humanity, alarmed at the menacing atomic war, are looking to the conference to end the nightmare situation, taking steps to end the Cold War and to establish peace in the world. This is a realizable hope on the part of the peace-loving masses throughout the world.

This is a correct statement, which will bear favorable comparison with any made in the United States or anywhere else. Why condemn our Party for such a sound stand?

The Resolution also charges the Party with overestimating the danger of fascism. This, too, is altogether contradicted by the facts. If the Party is entitled to any credit whatever in its fight during these hard years, it is precisely for its resolute struggle against McCarthyism and for its limitless confidence that the people could and would overcome this fascist menace. Members here and there doubtless overestimated fascism, but proof that the Party as such did not do so was furnished by its reaction to the passage of the notorious Communist Control Act in 1954, which caused a very critical situation. This vicious law formally outlawed the Communist Party. Many comrades became alarmed that this law, on top of all the other reactionary legislation, meant the beginning of actual fascism in the United States. But the hard-pressed Party did not lose its head in the face of this new menace. Instead, it published in *Political Affairs* of November 1954, the article entitled, "Is the United States in the Early Stages of Fascism?", in which it declared that although the Bill of Rights had been seriously infringed upon, nevertheless it could not be said that there was fascism in the United States, "early stages or otherwise," and the Party called upon the workers and the people generally to fight and defeat McCarthyism. This sane analysis of the situation in the United States was cited far and wide in other countries, which were also disturbed by the growth of McCar-

thyism in this country. Instead of being condemned for its stand regarding fascism, the Party deserves credit for its steadiness and clear-headedness in those times of severe trial. Typically, however, the Resolution ignores this whole vital incident. In view of the facts, the Resolution's statement that the Party "tended to equate the attempted outlawing of the Party with fascism" is harmful nonsense useful only to the Right tendency in its attempt to discredit the Party's past policy.

There are many in our Party who believe that actually there was little or no real war danger, and they imply that, somehow or other, the Party could have avoided the severe issue of the anti-war struggle. But this is only an illusion. As a Leninist party, particularly the one in the home country of the main aggressive power, our Party had no alternative other than to follow the policy that it did. It would have been impossible for the Party as such to have tried to take refuge from the storm in a policy of neutrality or of soft-peddalling the war danger, as some now indicate it should have done. This would have meant a cowardly retreat in the face of the offensive of American imperialism, and it would also have marked the end of the Communist Party as the fighting party of the working class. With the mass organizations, however, there was greater latitude of action.

In fighting actively against the looming war and fascist danger, the

CPUSA was true to itself, to the working class, to the American people, and to the world struggle for peace. It acted, in fact, as the workers' vanguard party had to act. Its fight during the Cold War against the fascists and warmakers constitutes one of the most glorious pages, not only in the life of our Party, but also of the American working class. We should be proud of it, instead of apologizing for it, and trying to make it look as though the whole long and bitter struggle was just a Leftist blunder. Let us not, with one-sided, ill-grounded criticism, rob our Party of its well-won share of the great peace victory of the world's peoples. The price of such folly, as we can see now in our Party, is demoralization, liquidationism, and Right opportunism.

Let me cite only a few more of the many exaggerations of Party "errors" in the Draft Resolution. Among others, there is the repeated implication that the expulsion of the eleven progressive unions from the CIO in 1949 was due to Left-sectarianism on the part of the forces of the Left. Here, again, we have a characteristic misrepresentation, in which the Party is given the worst of it, and thus we have another manufactured "error" to confess. While, obviously, there were some Left-sectarian trends in CIO unions (which, incidentally, the Party systematically fought against), these had little or nothing to do with the 1949 split. The split, in fact, was organized by the U.S. State Department and

its labor agents, as a basic move to overcome American and world labor opposition to Wall Street's war program. The split encompassed not only the American labor movement, but also those in Italy, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Latin America, and many other countries. It likewise split the World Federation of Trade Unions. The progressives, both in the United States and abroad, did everything possible to avoid the rupture, but in vain. Also the break-up generally of the "Left-center" coalition in the CIO, for which the Party is also unjustly blamed, was deliberately engineered by Murray, Reuther, Curran, Quill, *et al*, who had become committed to the aggressive foreign policy of the State Department, and for them, consequently, a break with the "Left" was a "must."

The Resolution also asserts that some (meaning me, among others) held the opinion "that the (AFL-CIO) merger was being consummated upon the initiative of the State Department." What I actually said, however, was:

The conservative Meany group, which has come to the top of the merged organization, hopes thus to be able to tighten still further its grip upon the labor movement and also to tie the working class to the imperialist anti-Soviet program of the State Department, of which they are the most militant supporters and instigators. Generally, this consolidation is a big step forward for the American working class, but a millstone around its



neck are the ultra-conservative bureaucrats who dominate it (*History of the World Trade-Union Movement*, p. 541).

That statement, I still think, was in accordance basically with the facts.

The Resolution flatly declares, in connection with the basic error of 1951, that this "led to the introduction of a system of leadership which virtually abandoned the fight for legality and tended to accept a status of illegality. . . ." This is a basically incorrect interpretation of the actual situation. The fact was that the National and Administrative Committees, immediately after the 1951 security error, developed a sharpened orientation for maintaining the legal existence of the Party. Strong features of this fight were the many months'-long trials in defense of the Party leaders, the maintenance of open Party headquarters in spite of the police persecutions, the continued circulation of the Party press, and the carrying on of various other public activities, notwithstanding the sharp government attacks. Doubtless, more could have been done. However, the Party's defeat of the government's attempt to break it up or to drive it underground should be hailed as a real victory for civil liberties, instead of being condemned as a mistake and a defeat for the Party.

Finally, let us mention only a few more of the typical exaggerations of Party "errors." Thus, the Resolu-

tion literally slashes to pieces the Party's post-war economic analyses, because these made the same mistakes as Communist and bourgeois economists all over the world, in foreseeing a sharper economic depression than actually took place. In reality, however, despite this error, which was world-wide, our Party now has a better group of economists — Allen, Bittelman, Lumer, Strack, and others—and they are doing better work, than ever before in the Party's history. Also, in line with the characteristic overstress on Party weaknesses, the Resolution simply wipes us out on the theoretical field, although here our Party also very distinctly has to its credit some notable achievements, which must not be ignored or belittled. Likewise, the Resolution gives no credit whatever to the many, often inexperienced, comrades who had to bear the burdens of leadership during these severe years, and who generally did so with credit to themselves and the Party.

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The tendency of the Resolution to see Left-sectarianism and failure in every feature and phase of the Party's work during the Cold War period, even in disregard of the plain facts to the contrary, is one of the many signs of the strong Right influence in the writing of the Resolution. The Right tendency to belittle the Party and its work during the period is just so much preparation for pushing the Party as far as possible to the Right.



## THE PARTY'S FIGHT AGAINST LEFT-SECTARIANISM

Many comrades believe that the sharp attack by Comrade Dennis against Left-sectarianism at the April meeting of the National Committee represented a complete turnabout in policy for the Party; but this was not so. Instead, it constituted the sharpening up, under much more favorable circumstances, of an already definitely established and correct trend to combat the sectarian mistakes and tendencies that had been stimulated by the government's attack. Such a correct tendency, which, of course, could have been more actively expressed, had become well-marked in the latter Cold War years. This fact was proof that neither the Party itself nor its leadership was Left-sectarian, nor were they deliberately carrying on a Left-sectarian line. But the Resolution, typically, gives the Party very little credit in this general direction.

At its national convention in 1945, when Browder revisionism was defeated, the Party, basing itself upon continuing and strengthening the old Roosevelt coalition, warned sharply of the danger, after such a battle against the Right, of the Party swinging too far to the Left. As it was said at the time, we did not overthrow Browder's reformism, in order to fall into the swamp of Left-sectarianism. The Party, in line with this conception, also refused to make "a clean sweep" of the leaders under the Browder regime, as was

widely demanded at the time. As a result of the Party adopting these essentially correct policies, Leftist groups in various parts of the country, led by Darcy, Dunne, Smith, and others, split away from the Party, alleging that the new leadership was centrist. During the conventions, conferences, and other gatherings in the several Cold War years following, the successive reports of Comrades Dennis, Hall, Stevens, Gannett, Perry, and many others, reiterated the Party's timely 1945 warnings against the danger of Left-sectarianism. That various "Left" mistakes were made, nevertheless, go to indicate mainly the compelling power in this direction of the government attack upon the Party.

During the April meeting of the National Committee, in an effort to show a "Left" orientation by the Party during the Cold War, much was made of the fact that Foster had said in 1948 that the main danger was the Right danger. It might have been added that all the other leaders then said the same thing. But, even so, this would not have proved the point in mind. Because, in determining whence came the main danger it was all pretty much a matter of definition. If, for example, the criterion taken was the labor movement itself, as was usually the case, then the answer, considering the role of the conservative trade-union leadership, was that the main danger came from the Right. But if the criterion taken was the Party itself, the answer should be

that the main danger came from the "Left." The basic thing, however, was that the Party, all through this trying period, fought, and generally correctly, all the obstacles that were weakening the fighting unity of the working class and the people, regardless of whether it called them Right or "Left" dangers. The simple fact is that, under the heavy blows of the government attack, there was practically no Right danger within the Party; the danger being almost entirely from Leftist mistakes, and it was against these naturally that the Party had to, and did, fight.

In the article, "Left Sectarianism in the Fight for Negro Rights and against White Chauvinism," written by myself and discussed at length before publication by the Administrative Committee (*Political Affairs*, July 1953) it was pointed out clearly that the main danger confronting the Party, not only in Negro work, but also in the fields of trade unionism, peace, Party defense, etc., was Left-sectarianism. The article stated: "The sectarian trends in our Party's Negro work are part of this general pattern of Leftist errors characteristic of this period of severe governmental repression." The allegation that the Party "balanced off" Right and "Left" errors and fought them both equally, does not make sense, precisely because, as pointed out previously, there were very few Right errors made during the Cold War period, the characteristic mistakes in these times, under the blows of the government, being

of a Leftist character.

Further proofs that the Party had no general sectarian line, as the Right charges, were to be found in the many examples of its fighting not only to prevent wrong tendencies from developing into serious errors, but also to correct errors that had been made previously. Take, for instance, the Party Program of 1954. This document, written mostly by the National Committee, climaxed a long process of criticism of the Progressive Party mistake of 1948. Not only did the Program finally correct this mistake, but it also definitely registered a solid advance in general for the Party in its electoral work.

The same corrective trend was also to be seen in the Negro work. In this vital field two groups of Comrades developed serious Leftist deviations, with roots running far back into Party history. They were both futile efforts to explain and correct the Party's diminished influence among the Negro people at the time. One deviation tended to overstress the value of "Left centers" and the obsolete slogan of self-determination; while the other, more subtle and dangerous, vastly overestimated the degree of crippling white chauvinism in the Party. The common result of both deviations was to substitute intense inner-Party discussion for mass work among the Negro people. The Party fought both of these serious sectarian deviations actively and, in the main, liquidated them

ideologically. In doing this, the Party held one of its most profound discussions on the Negro question and it assembled materials for a greatly improved program in this field. The Resolution, however, with its usual one-sided treatment of Party errors, completely ignores these basic facts.

Among other similar corrections of previously made errors may also be cited the efforts to overcome the effects of wrong security measures. The new Party leadership re-opened district headquarters, resumed public activities, encouraged similar action by the youth, and generally stimulated and strengthened the Party's fight for a legal existence in the face of sharp governmental assault. These steps to utilize all legal opportunities for Party work, were of the most vital consequence. During these hard years the Party also broadened out politically and in a mass sense the various succeeding Smith Act trials of Party leaders. In the field of economics, too, notwithstanding all the sharp criticism of the Resolution in this field, the embattled Party found it possible to register some progress in lessening the sectarianism which for many years had hampered it. Especially this was done by taking up seriously the questions of Keynesism and its "managed economy," basic economic matters which for many years had been virtually ignored by the Party as such. Even in the extremely difficult sphere of the application of the Party's policies among the masses, some progress

was also made. This was notably the case in the distribution, during an intense mass discussion, of almost one million copies of the Party Program, an achievement which would have been hailed as important in any period of our Party's life.

The Party's efforts to combat sectarianism were also particularly demonstrated in cases of very heavy attacks by reaction upon the Bill of Rights and upon the Party. Thus, the passage of the notorious McCarran act, which provides concentration camps for Communists and demands that our Party register with the government as an alien agent, caused leading comrades, upon three different occasions, to make certain unwarranted proposals, as a counter measure against the law. However, the National and Administrative Committees correctly rejected them all as liquidatory.

The passage of the Communist Control Act, which formally outlawed the Party, also set afoot active fears throughout the Party to the effect that the passage of this law marked the beginning of fascism in the United States; but, as we have seen earlier, the Party promptly and effectively overcame these sectarian alarms. This most vital action has also escaped the attention of the Resolution. In the same spirit and during the most difficult period of the Cold War, the Party also set actively about correcting the serious sectarian error made by some in respect to the perspective of winning Socialism in the United States by parliamentary

means. As a result of this corrective trend and despite a continuing top leadership opposition, the proposition was written clearly into the Party History and into the election program of 1954. It was also made a central feature of the trial of Comrades Flynn, Gannett, Perry, Bittelman, Weinstone, and the others. For the first time, too, this basic proposition was incorporated in our appeals to the higher courts. It was also included in our defense in later Smith Act trials. This adoption of the definite perspective of a parliamentary road to Socialism in the United States, done during the most intense period of the Cold War, constituted one of the greatest steps away from sectarianism and towards a broad mass policy ever taken in the entire history of our Communist Party. In this sense the Resolution should record this very important development.

Significantly, Earl Browder, who then still called himself a Communist and who is now being boosted in our Party as a super-mass worker, saw fit to intervene in this situation. He took definitely a dogmatic and sectarian position. Late in 1949, he wrote a 70-page pamphlet, entitled "In Defense of Communism Against Wm. Z. Foster's 'New Route to Socialism'." It was an all-out attack against my pamphlet, published earlier in that year, called "In Defense of the Communist Party and the Indicted Leaders," which contained the pioneer presentation of the parliamentary ad-

vance to Socialism in the United States. Browder denounced my writing as the crassest revisionism and "an attempt to reshape the fundamental theories of Marxism." Indignantly, he declared that, "The repudiation of the 'New Route to Socialism' is the first step necessary to restore a Party of Marxism in America." He also forecast that it would not be long before "Foster's 'New Route to Socialism' (is) rejected by Communists all over the world as a major departure from Marxism-Leninism." Obviously, by this big pitch Browder was making a bid to regain the leadership of the Communist Party. But it did not work. As we all know, his prophecies came to nought. These facts, incidentally, may help dispose of the newspaper lies to the effect that we split with Browder because he advocated a peaceful road to Socialism while we insisted upon a violent one.

From all the above, it should be obvious that although the Party suffered much from damaging Left-sectarianism during the Cold War period, which kept cropping out under the hard pressure of the government attack upon the Party, the Party leadership in no sense cultivated or reconciled itself to such errors. On the contrary, it fought against them, and in various instances, successfully. In short, in this crucial situation, despite the Party's traditional sectarian weaknesses, the Party did not have a sectarian leadership or line. This elementary fact should be made clear in the Resolution as a

basic measure to combat the strong Right tendency in the Party.

### STRENGTHEN THE DRAFT RESOLUTION

The Resolution should be changed to take a correct stand upon the vital question of Marxism-Leninism. First, it should give a general endorsement to Marxism-Leninism and then deal with questions of its applicability to the American situation in specific cases. We must be alert to defend the Marxist-Leninist basis of the Party and not permit the Right in the Party to downgrade Lenin theoretically. The Resolution should also de-emphasize the slogan for a new mass party of Socialism from its present implications of immediacy to the status of a possible long-range objective. Otherwise, the slogan, as it has done up until now, will exert a liquidatory influence. Necessary also is a proper placing of the historic mass slogan for a labor-farmer party, which is unduly played down in the Resolution. Especially important, too, is it to strengthen in the Resolution the vital element of proletarian internationalism, which is but weakly developed.

The Resolution presents a good program of practical work for the Party in various fields—elections, trade union, Negro, etc., and this should be put into effect actively and at once, even as the discussion proceeds upon the general Resolution. Without an all-out stress upon mass

work, all other methods to improve the Party's difficult situation would prove sterile. The developing favorable political situation is offering the Party opportunities for broad united front work to establish the people's anti-monopoly coalition. The Party must meet this situation in a flexible spirit. This, among other things, implies less reckless criticism of labor leaders than we have made in the past. But needful criticism of labor reactionaries is always in order and is no bar to broad united front policies. In this general respect the Resolution could also be strengthened.

In the crucially important matter of the estimate of the Party's policies during the Cold War, the present Draft Resolution, as a result of the broad Party debate, including intense discussion in the National Committee, represents a considerable improvement over the April meeting of the NC. Thus, it contains a recognition of the seriousness of the war danger during the Cold War; it states definitely that the United States was following a war policy aimed at securing world domination; it gives a better analysis of the harsh objective difficulties faced by the Party during the Cold War, and it makes at least a start at estimating the Party's achievements during the period—in all of which matters the April NC meeting was seriously lacking. However, the extreme exaggeration of Party errors, which has already wrought such confusion in our Party during the past months, still

persists in the Resolution. This can only help the Right tendency to push the Party to the Right by unjustly discrediting the Party and its leadership. The situation should be corrected by re-writing this section of the Resolution upon the basis of the actual experience of the Party during the period in question. This is a fundamental necessity for the restoration of the Party's prestige, to raise the morale of the membership, and to make it possible to recruit again workers who may have quit the Party under the severe pressures of the Cold War attack upon the Party. It is inconceivable that such a one-sided and harmful body of criticism should be allowed to stand.

The Resolution should also be strengthened by stressing much more the importance of an active political initiative by our Party. Such initiative has been a striking characteristic of all our important struggles of the past, the amalgamation and farmer-labor movements of the early 1920's and the strike activities of the same general period; the Party's strong leadership among the Negro people at this time; the big unemployed struggles during 1929-33; the huge union organization drives of the 1930's; the immense youth movement of the same period; the people's front struggle against fascism and war all through these years; the Party's active support of World War II; the hard battle against an atomic war during the Cold War period, etc. In all these memorable struggles our Party's policies and ac-

tivities always bore an advance-guard character. Although small in size, the Party gave definite leadership to great masses. This Leninist leading principle must be retained by us, applying it skillfully in the light of changed conditions. A Communist Party can amount to but little if it merely keeps abreast politically of the mass organizations, or, worse yet, if it simply tags along after them. Incidentally, practically all the above notable struggles were good examples of fitting the Party's program to specific American conditions.

In the time-tested Leninist method, the Party must fight ideologically on two fronts, with the main emphasis against Leftism. Its major struggle should be directed to eliminate all manifestations of Left-sectarianism from our thinking and action. This is indispensable for the development of the Party. At the same time, the Party should combat the vigorous Right tendency which has so suddenly sprung up within its ranks during the recent period, including its pro-Browder manifestations. This Right tendency is now menacing the Marxist-Leninist foundations of the Party.

The coming national convention of the Party must unify and strengthen our organization for the big struggles ahead. Every Communist who understands the fundamental importance of our Party for the working class will work to this end. From its present critical situation the Party can and will emerge safely, all the

stronger and the more steeled because of the many difficulties it has been passing through. During the world struggle against Wall Street's war threat, our Party proved, as it had done on many other occasions, that it is made of the same fighting stuff

as the great and victorious Marxist-Leninist parties which are now changing the world by winning it for Socialism; and once again it is being called upon to demonstrate these Communist fighting qualities. It will not fail in the test.

It has been necessary to postpone for one month the publication of the concluding installment of W. Z. Foster's article, "Marxism-Leninism in a Changing World," the first half of which appeared in our September issue—ed.