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IS THE STALIN GENERAL LINE CORRECT ?

Contents

The Appeal to the Plenum of the
Communist Party U.S.A. (Opposition)

Statement to the Membership

Issued by the Workers Communist League

24 East 23d Street New York, N.Y.

Price 15 cents

APPEAL TO THE PLENUM
of the
COMMUNIST PARTY U.S.A. (Opposition)

February 11, 1933.

Comrades:

We appeal to the Plenum against the position taken by the National Bureau on the Russian question, which was approved at the New York membership meeting held February 2nd, 1933. We call upon the Plenum to reverse the position of the National Bureau and to take a definite stand in opposition to the basically wrong line and inner party regime of the Stalin leadership. We call upon the Plenum to take this decided step on the Russian question because the Russian question involves such fundamental and basic questions of Communist principle that the taking of a wrong position on the questions involved is bound to cause a crisis in the group which will be so costly organizationally as to bring about the disintegration of the group.

The question of the general line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is of importance to the International Communist movement. The maintenance of our group is directly bound up with the Russian question. The position of our group on the Russian question before it was revised by the National Bureau was that the line for socialist construction laid down by the 15th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was correct, and that the Stalin leadership revised the line in the direction of Trotskyism.

Today the National Bureau rejects its former correct position on the Russian question and comes out in full support of the wrong general line of the Stalin regime.

The National Bureau has yet to explain the objective basis for its radical change of position. All the facts and events prove the contrary. Furthermore the National Bureau gives absolutely no explanation of how a general line in the direction of Trotskyism can be considered as a correct one.

The Bureau's Defense of the General Line.

The Bureau defends its position in favor of the wrong general line of the Stalin regime on the following basis:

1. That heavy industry has increased tremendously and that sixty percent of the peasantry have been drawn into the collective farms.
2. That the standard of living of the workers and peasants has been materially improved.

3. That the cultural level of the masses has been raised.
4. That the number of the proletariat has been increased tremendously.
5. That the difficulties are the result of the growing pains of the construction of socialism, the effects of the economic crisis in the capitalism countries on commodity prices and the increased demands caused by the acuteness of the war-danger in the far East.
6. That the letter on March 2nd, 1930, of Stalin, known as the letter on "dizzy-with-success" marked a fundamental correction of policy.

The method of the Bureau is not a political way of estimating the correctness or incorrectness of a line. While admitting that advances have been made in the development of heavy industry and that heavy industry is very important for the achievement of socialism nevertheless this is not the key question in determining the correctness of the general line. The key question to the entire situation in the Soviet Union is the relations of the classes. Namely the relation between the working class and the peasantry. Only from a consideration of the effects of the general line upon these relations can we determine the actual nature of the general line.

The Wrong General Line.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat can be strengthened and proletarian revolution can be secured from attacks only on the basis of the firmest alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Especially is this true for the Soviet Union where the peasantry constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population. Lenin underlined this basic policy when he stated the following:

"The transitory measure in the future boils down to this: that we create a basis for the exchange of manufactured products for the products of agriculture; that we establish such an order that the peasant shall only then give away his products when he gets in exchange the products of the factory and city and that the peasant shall not find himself subject to the conditions and forms he was in under capitalism."

Furthermore it is necessary to give the peasant technical help to educate him and to make it possible for him to accept the necessity of reconstructing agriculture on a socialist basis. This presupposes that the industries of the city are in a position to exchange the products of the factories for the products of

agriculture, thus providing the peasants with a stimulus to increase the products of agriculture thereby guaranteeing the improvement of the conditions of the workers. In addition for the winning of the peasantry for the socialization of agriculture these words of Lenin are important to remember in the determining the policy to be pursued:

"In regard to this question we must state that we are for communes, but they must be so established as to command the confidence of the peasantry... More than anything else, we must base ourselves on the truth that through methods of force we cannot in the essence reach any results. The economic tasks are entirely different. Here we do not have that top layer which can be cut off and leave the entire foundation and the entire building. That top layer which the capitalists were in the city is absent here. Here, to use force, would be to destroy everything. A long period of education is necessary here. The peasant, who not only here (in Russia), but in the entire world is most practical and realistic. We have to give him concrete examples in order to prove to him that "communism" is better than anything else."

Furthermore a correct policy for winning the peasants for collectivization must be on the basis of proving to the peasants as Lenin stressed that collectivization pays him.

The Stalin regime deviated from this basic correct policy towards the peasantry as follows:

1. An excessive tempo of collectivization without providing the necessary mechanized base for the same.
2. The use of coercion in forcing the peasants into the collectives.
3. Failure to provide the necessary flow of commodities from the city in exchange for the products of agriculture.
4. Pumping out the resources from the village.
5. Classing poor and middle peasants who did not accept collectivization as kulaks and enemies of the Soviet Union.

These departures from a correct Leninist policy towards the peasantry is responsible for the grave critical situation in which the Soviet Union finds itself, has impaired the alliance between the working class and the peasantry and has thus endangered the proletarian revolution.

Precisely the wrong line of the Stalin regime is responsible for the fact that while Stalin boasts of the 60% collectivization as the "greatest achievement" in the Five Year Plan nevertheless these very collectives today to a very large extent have been driven to the position of resisting socialism.

The failure of the general line in agriculture is proven by the following main features:

1. The shortage of food.
2. Refusal on the part of the peasantry to carry out their grain obligations.
3. The extermination of over 50% of the live stock of the Soviet Union as an answer by the peasantry to forced collectivization.
4. The refusal to do the necessary agricultural work for the spring sowing.

Faced with this resistance on the part of individual and collectivized peasants the Party and the Government were forced to adopt such measures in overcoming the resistance that they resemble the period of "war communism".

These measures which are the direct consequences of the wrong line not only greatly strain the relations between the working class and the peasantry but also endangers the very existence of the proletarian revolution.

The results of the wrong line in industry are equally as dangerous. The main features of the wrong line in industry are the following:

1. Excessive tempo of building up heavy industry at the expense of all other branches of national economy.
2. Disregard for the light industry and the supply of the immediate needs of consumption.
3. The almost total annihilation of the private sector before the socialized sector could replace its production of necessary commodities.
4. Inflation.

The XV Party Congress resolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union correctly lays down the line. It provided that while the socialist sector is not yet in a position to satisfy the need of the workers and peasants the production of the handicrafts must be maintained. The resolution of the XV Party Congress underlines the correct policy as follows:

"In making up the Five Year Plan it is necessary to take into consideration the development of small local industry, and handicraft manufacture which while serving as an indispensable supplement to the large state industry at the same time helps to liquidate the commodity shortage and to alleviate unemployment. It is necessary to include this production in the sphere of influence of the state and cooperative organs, cooperating, uniting and rationalizing the production of the small producers and to win them away from the private trader, distributor and usurer."

The departure of the Stalin regime from this correct line of policy injured the relations between the working class and the peasantry. It is however necessary to determine how this wrong policy affected the working class and the membership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. While recognizing the importance of the numerical increase of the working class, nevertheless due to the wrong policy this factor did not serve as it should to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat.

First: The new recruits into industry are of peasant origin and are still tied up closely with the peasantry and the village. Therefore everything which affects the village finds reflection in this new section of the proletariat.

Second: The same is true for the Red Army.

Third: The shortage of food in the city and the worsened conditions of the workers creates intense dissatisfaction.

Fourth: The Party membership as part of the working class and poor and middle peasantry is reflecting this dissatisfaction.

Fifth: The large percentage of labor turnover reflecting lack of discipline in industry is also a factor for the very dislocation of industry itself.

Bucharin in his "Notes of An Economist" warned the Party against deviating from the correct line of the XV Party Congress when he wrote:

".....grave errors in the guidance of economy, violating the fundamental economic proportions of the country, can thus bring about regroupings of the classes extremely disadvantageous to the proletariat. The reverse side of the upsetting of the necessary economic proportions is the shaking of the political balance of the country."

If the present wrong policy of the Stalin faction will continue then there is every danger that what Comrade Bucharin said may become the bitter truth.

The Theoretical Basis of the Wrong Line.

It is necessary to establish the theoretical basis given by the Stalin leadership for revising the correct line laid down by the XV Party Congress. The XV Party Congress laid down its estimation of the situation as follows:

"Under such conditions, even if the capitalist elements have grown in positive figures, the faster growth of the socialized sector of the economy, many times reducing the danger of private capital, which is growing on a petty-bourgeois basis, is creating a solid foundation for the final victory of socialism. From the social and class point of view, it means that though the entire development is contradictory, the bourgeois elements of the city and village are growing (Kulak, Nepman) the gravity of the working class has increased, his bond with the basic mass of peasantry has increased, the dictatorship of the proletariat has been strengthened."

The general line of the Stalin regime is in opposition to this position of the XV Party Congress. Comrade Stalin lays the theoretical basis for the revision of the line in his speech delivered at the last Plenum of the Central Committee. He states it as follows:

".....The Soviet power cannot for a long time base itself on two opposed foundations, on large scale socialist industry, which destroys capitalist elements and on petty individual peasant economy, which produces capitalist elements."

".....as long as a base of large scale production is not put under the petty peasant economy, as long as the petty peasant economies are not united in large collective economies - the danger of restoration of capitalism in the U.S.S.R. becomes the most real danger of all possible dangers."

Thus the present leadership of the C.P. of the Soviet Union abandons the Leninist conception that the poor and middle peasants are the allies of the proletariat in building Socialism and defending the proletarian revolution by taking the position that this very section of the peasantry constitutes the real danger and the nearest danger at this stage of the revolution. This attitude towards the poor and middle peasantry explains the forceful measures used in the drive to liquidate with the greatest speed the individual peasant economy. These words of Lenin are a fitting repudiation of this wrong theoretical basis and hence the wrong line of the Stalin regime:

"Because of the general political and economic conditions which have now been established, when the proletariat is holding in his hands all the sources of large scale industry, when there can be no talk whatsoever about denationalization we are not to be afraid of him (the small capitalist). And when we are suffering from almost such a complete lack of products, from the whole pauperization of the population,.....it is laughable to be afraid that capitalism on the basis of small scale production is constituting a danger."

The Russian question involving as it does fundamental basic Communist principles and strategy underlying the proletarian revolution makes it absolutely necessary that our group takes its stand in support of the correct position and in opposition to the wrong general line of the Stalin regime.

The Russian question cannot be used either for maneuvering or speculation in our relations to the Communist International and its false line which is directly connected with the wrong line of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union and in the International.

In making such use of the Russian question the National Bureau is preparing to give up other political positions and eventually the entire struggle against all phases of the wrong general line which constituted the basis for our struggle in the Party and the formation of our group.

An analysis of our group's position in the United States will indicate this.

The situation in the United States is characterized by a further deepening of the economic crisis. All signs point to an aggravation of the crisis. The tremendous popular vote cast for Franklin D. Roosevelt has revealed that in spite of the great discontent of the masses as a result of the economic crisis, the masses have not yet reached the stage where they are prepared to break with the two party system of capitalism. The insignificant communist and the small socialist vote in spite of the most favorable objective opportunities proves the failure of the Communist Party to develop a leftward movement on the part of the masses.

The two outstanding mass actions against the capitalist offensive in the face of almost complete passive submission to conditions have been the Bonus March on Washington and the Farmers movement against foreclosures, which have been characterized by their spontaneousness, American origin mass character and the fact that they have almost nothing to do with either the Communist, Socialist or trade union movement.

The trade union movement has been so weakened by the capitalist offensive, by the policies and tactics of the reactionary bureaucracy, by corruption and the spread of racketeering as to be unable to effect any mass action now or in the immediate future to materially improve the conditions of the workers.

The militant section of the working class is without effective leadership because the communist Party which could provide and inspire such leadership continues to pursue its sectarian, dual unionist, adventurist splitting policy which is in a very large measure responsible for the present passivity and lack of militancy in the labor movement.

The further deepening of the economic crisis and the continued policy of an intensified offensive on the part of the capitalists against the workers, farmers and petty-bourgeois masses, to force upon them the costs of the economic crisis and the tremendous growth and long duration of unemployment is causing such widespread discontent among the masses, such a lowering of the standards of living and such a general impoverishment of the workers as to make them more homogeneous thus more susceptible to common class action, such an opposition to the measures of the Roosevelt capitalist administration and the Republican and Democratic parties as to create the basis on the one hand for independent political action on the part of the workers and farmers and on the other hand to give rise to more mass movements of resistance of an American origin to the capitalist offensive, these mass movements spreading and becoming more general and national in character.

In the face of these trends it becomes necessary and imperative that the Communists become the force for the development of unity in the labor movement in the broadest sense, as the prerequisite for the successful building up of a united fighting front of labor.

To achieve this end there can be absolutely no compromise or conciliation with the wrecking policies in the labor and communist movements of the official Communist Party and the Stalin regime.

Expectant Speculation, the New Theory of the Group.

The present position and orientation of our group, its present adherence to the Stalin policies in the Soviet Union, and its open and covered approaches of conciliation with the Stalin policies make it impossible for our group to be a factor in the achievement of unity in the American Labor movement. Furthermore its flirtation with the Stalin regime besides arousing the distrust of the workers, makes it impossible for the group to rally any masses for the genuine unification of the Communist movement. Furthermore it brings about the disintegration of the group and a movement of the members back into the official Communist Party. In addition it makes impossible any real independent action because it gives rise to a theory of expectant speculation that the present policy of support of the Stalin regime will lead straight back to the Party.

The Group Situation.

The situation of the group today is the result of the policy which is based upon the theory of expectant speculation. The following main shortcomings and grave errors of the group flow mainly from this theory:

1. The present unprincipledness and growth of factionalism in the group.
2. The tendency of leading the group away from independent activity into the activities dominated by the official Communist Party and its auxiliaries which tendency makes the group more and more a tail end to the Party.
3. Failure to fight energetically against and to effectively check the dual-unionist policy of the official Communist Party, as for example such tactics as abandoning the building of a united progressive movement against the reactionary bureaucracy and the splitting forces of the official Communist Party in the bona fide trade unions, as for example the failure to merge the membership of the center with the United Progressive League into one progressive organization in the I.L.G.W.U. Unprepared and spasmodic breaks without sufficient ideological clarification of the masses and sufficient differentiation with our former allies in the trade unions (the Center in the I.L.G.W.U).

Adventurism in trade union policy as for example the recent general strike proposal of the group for the dress industry. The policy of shirking responsibility in the trade unions even on the basis of our own proposals for the unions. Failure to fight sufficiently and energetically enough against the splitting disruptive activities of the Needle Trade Workers Industrial Union, as for example, defending party group members of the I.L.G.W.U. leading their shops to the N.T.W.I.U. The failure to condemn and take up the fight against the N.T.W.I.U. for its defense and organization of the contractors which led to the organization of the Metropolitan Contractors Ass'n., a racketeer organization. The proposal of Comrade Lovestone to Party members at a recent meeting in the Bronx that the Lovestone Group is prepared to issue a call to the Party for a United Front against all other elements in Local 22 including the Center.

4. The New Workers School today the main activity of the group is so directed as to attract mainly non proletarian elements and elements completely divorced from the struggles of the workers. In addition the school has been utilized as the center for factional organization and for factional campaigns against decisions distasteful to the school clique and against those comrades who were for an aggressive independent mass activity. The school has centered upon abstract academic consideration of subjects and has not tied up its curriculum with the actual needs and struggles of the labor and communist movement.
5. The activity of the group was centered in such fields as to make little headway among native American elements.
6. Opposition to branching out independently by organizing an independent American Communist movement with a positive appeal for the organization and unification of the labor movement.
7. Preparing the grounds for the rejection of the Labor party policy as for example comrade Lovestone's recent declaration that the Labor Party is now a "debatable" question. This stand is in accordance with the policy of being a tail end to the official Communist Party because it is preparing the ground for accepting the stand of the official Communist Party of repudiation of the labor party policy.
8. Abandoning the policy of organizing a broad united front unemployment movement, by imitating the Party's sectarian policy by initiating Lovestone group unemployment associations without a real mass base in the workers organizations and without unemployed masses. Furthermore the activities

of these organizations were first confined in supporting the work relief propositions of the bourgeois relief administrators, which were proposals for breaking down wage standards and second they developed into an agency of "fixers" between the unemployed workers and the relief bureaus instead of becoming instrumental in developing a broad agitation and mass movement for immediate adequate relief to be paid by the capitalist state and for unemployment insurance. Also the adoption of an adventurist policy of calling mass demonstrations made up entirely of group members which demonstrations had they taken place would have been devoid of masses and would be even more sectarian than the Party's demonstrations. Today our united front unemployment activity consists in tying up almost completely with the so-called united front unemployment campaigns of the Party instead of striving for a genuine broad united front of all labor organizations.

9. The failure of the group to grow is best exemplified by the fact that the Workers Age has been discontinued as a weekly paper and turned into a magazine which appears twice a month. Even this new schedule cannot be maintained regularly. The Workers Age today best reflects the degeneration of the group into an unprincipled sect trailing the Party. An examination of the columns of the Workers Age is proof of this. The following are some of the outstanding proofs:
 - a. The opening of the discussion on the Russian question by giving such an interpretation to a statement of Engels as to brand that all those who disagree with the general line of the Stalin regime are Mensheviks and counter-revolutionaries.
 - b. Printing exaggerated glowing reports in favor of the Stalin regime's course in the Soviet Union.
 - c. Printing when the facts were already established gross and incorrect figures on the progress of collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union.
 - d. Ignoring completely or giving half hearted criticism of the inner Party course of Stalin regime today. Failure to comment on the most recent expulsions and statements of loyalty to Stalin at the recent Plenum of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
 - e. Failure to deal critically with the present situation in the Soviet Union especially with the false line of policy underlining some of the important new decrees emanating from the Stalin regime.
 - f. The tendency to accept and approve the major campaigns of the official communist Party.
 - g. Inadequate criticism and condemnation of the C.I. policy.

- h. An editorial policy which is based upon scholastic abstractions as is evidenced by the almost complete separation of the Workers Age from the mass organizations and struggles of the workers.

Perspectives.

The outstanding factors determining the status of the C.I. today which also determines the relations of our group to the C.P.S.U. and to the C.I. and the tasks of our group as an American Communist opposition are:

1. That the general line of the Stalin regime for the Soviet Union is basically wrong and is responsible for the grave critical situation in which the Proletarian revolution finds itself today. The inner party course of the Stalin regime has by a campaign of terrorism within the Party, by the abrogation of inner party democracy, through expulsions and drives against critical members of the Party prevented the C.P.S.U. the leading Party of the C.I. from functioning as a Communist Party should and therefor has failed in the present period of capitalist world crisis to give effective leadership to the C.I.
2. The bankruptcy of the Stalin leadership of the C.I. The fact that in spite of the most favorable opportunities for Communist advance in the last few years the Communist International has been split and its left sectarian policies have resulted only in defeats for the C.I. and the revolutionary proletariat.
3. The victory of fascism in Germany will mark the crushing and annihilation of the German Communist Party, the only mass Communist Party of the C.I. in a capitalist country. It exposes the bankruptcy of the whole theory of social fascism as a theory preventing an effective United Front resistance to Fascism. The victory of fascism is an event of tremendous revolutionary consequences. It destroys the base for the effectiveness of the C.I. in the capitalist countries because its main base in the capitalist countries (namely the German Communist Party) will be destroyed.
4. The victory of Fascism in Germany and the collapse of the C.I. coupled with the critical situation in the Soviet Union, is bound to spread reaction throughout the entire capitalist world by a considerable growth of Fascism, the intensification of the war danger especially against the Soviet Union and the weakening of the proletarian resistance against reaction and imperialist war and a corresponding weakening of the proletarian front in the capitalist countries in support and defense of the Soviet Union.

5. In the face of all these facts the bankruptcy of the C.I. and its failure to give leadership in this most important critical situation confronting the working class in Germany is emphatically brought out by the criminal and scandalous silence of the C.I.
6. A correct United Front policy in opposition to Facism as the main danger in Germany would have given the working class an effective weapon against Fascism.

In the face of these outstanding facts it is the imperative revolutionary duty of all communists with convictions to raise their voices in a mighty protest against the wrong policies and regime of the Stalin leadership, both of the C.P.S.U. and the C.I. Furthermore they must energetically fight to change the policies and the regime. For communists especially in historical moments of such grave crisis and importance to the revolutionary proletarian movement to remain silent or to be conciliatory is one of the biggest crimes against the revolutionary proletariat.

Today unity on the basis of the acceptance of the Stalin leadership and its suicidal policies is absolutely out of consideration. The unification of the communist movement can come only with the decisive defeat of the Stalin leadership and its policies in the C.P.S.U. and in the C.I.

Therefore the imperative duty of the communists in the capitalist countries is to take up the task of reconstituting and building up of their respective communist movements through independent activity and the organization of the revolutionary proletariat in their countries. In the United States this task must be coupled up with the task of achieving unity in the labor movement through the organization of a Farmer-Labor Party. The Communists must not only engage in propaganda for a Farmer-Labor Party but must also take all the necessary organizational steps to organize such a party. This must be the goal in the United States for our group today.

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