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What Is the Communist Opposition?

by Bertram D. Wolfe

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INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of the United States (Opposition) is a part of the Communist movement of the United States and of the international Communist movement. It stands for the reunification of the Communist Party of the United States, which has been split into three currents or tendencies, and for the reunification of the Communist International, which has been similarly divided. Its differences with the official leadership of the Communist Party and the official leadership of the Communist International, are not differences of basic principles nor fundamental aims. Our differences with the official leadership are on the question of tactics, the best methods of reaching our common aim and goal.

The Communist Opposition, like the official party, stands on the following platform of basic principles and aims:

1. We stand for the proletarian dictatorship, the rule of the working class. It is the only possible means of overthrowing capitalist political rule and economic domination.
2. The general form of the proletarian dictatorship is the Workers Councils or Soviets.
3. Under the rule of the workers, we Communists aim to abolish the anarchistic planless capitalist mode of production and substitute a planned society, to abolish private property in the means of production and substitute ownership of the means of production by the producers as social property, to develop a socialist economic order in which there are no classes and no exploitation of man by man. Thus the proletarian dictatorship, or class rule of the workers, unlike the class rule of the capitalists, aims to abolish the very conditions of class rule altogether.
4. The present government of this country represents the rule of the capitalist class. One has to be

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blind, indeed, not to see that the government represents a dictatorship of big business, of a little handful of magnates and money kings. We Communists hold that the governmental form of the dictatorship of capital cannot be used as the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the capitalist class will never give up its privileges and power without a brutal struggle to maintain itself by force against the will and interests of the majority, the producing population.

5. We hold that the Soviet government of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics is a proletarian dictatorship, a government expressing the interests and the will of the workers, that it is building a socialist society and that its existence and progress in the building of socialism are the mainstay and support of the workers of all lands in their struggle for power. The defense of the Soviet Union against all attack by any and all of the capitalist powers is the unconditional duty of the working class of all lands. The defense of the Soviet Union is an indispensable part of the struggle of the world working class for power.

6. In its struggle for power and in the construction of socialism after it has gained power, the working class needs the leadership of a Communist Party. The Communist Party is the most advanced, most conscious part of the working class, distinguished by its greater devotion to and consciousness of the aims and interests of our class and methods of attaining them, and by the organization of its own forces and connections with the rest of the working class. The action of the party is no substitute for the action of the working class. It has no interests separate and apart from the interests of the workers as a whole. Its aim is to lead the entire working class to victory in the proletarian revolution. Its form of organization, corresponding to its tasks, must be the form of democratic centralism.

7. The Communist movement of each country is a component part of the world Communist movement and its struggle is part of the world Communist struggle. The leadership of the world struggle is the function of the Communist International. Its basis of organization must also be that of democratic centralism.

On the above basic foundations of Communism, all

three main currents in the Communist movement (the official Communist Party, the "Trotskyites" and the Communist Opposition) agree in principle. However, the Trotskyites disagree with our estimate of the class character of the state in the Soviet Union (Trotsky's theory of "Thermidor") as expressed in Point 5.

We hold that there is no room for the existence of two Communist parties in any country. The Communist Party (Opposition) is not a new Communist Party. It stands for the unity of all Communist forces into a single Communist Party, on the basis of the above basic principles, and insists that differences on tactics, in how to attain our aims, can and should be settled by comradely discussion inside the ranks of the party, and not by the splitting and division of the Communist movement. The Communist Opposition fights for its readmission into the official party and for its right to advocate its tactical views within the framework of democratic centralism. We are also for the readmission of the Trotskyite Opposition, provided it will give up its "Thermidor" estimate of the nature of the Soviet government and C.P.S.U., which separates the Trotskyites from the other Communist tendencies, not on tactical questions but on the fundamentals involving proletarian dictatorship, Soviet rule and defense of the Soviet Union. On other matters, altho we disagree with the Trotskyites, we fight for their right to advocate their tactical viewpoints within the framework of the party.

We do not insist that the official party adopt our tactical views as a condition for unity. We ask merely for normal party democracy and the right to advocate our views before the party membership. The Communist Opposition considers as one of its basic tasks the fight for party unity.

Recognizing that the workers struggle is international, we have joined up with Oppositions in other countries that hold the same viewpoint, to form the International Communist Opposition, which aims to unify the Communist International and set it once more upon the path of Marxist-Leninist tactics, so that it may grow and be victorious thruout the world. We assume that the reader is interested enough in

the problems of the working class to give earnest and open-minded consideration to the questions raised in this pamphlet, and that, if the facts here set forth and aims expounded convince him, the working class reader will act upon his convictions and join actively and wholeheartedly in our struggle for the unity of our party, the adoption of a tactical line that will enable it to grow, and insure its victory in this country and the triumph of the Communist International and the cause of Communism in all lands.

*Communist Party of the U. S. A.
(Opposition)*

CHAPTER I.

The Crisis In The Communist International

The past four years have been extremely favorable for the growth of the Communist movement.

In the capitalist world—depression, mass misery and starvation, open preparations for a new world war.

In the Soviet Union—freedom from unemployment, expansion of industry, construction of socialism.

Millions are disillusioned and discontented with capitalism. Millions look to the Soviet Union with hope and longing. Never were conditions more favorable for the growth of the Communist movement—here and thruout the world. *Yet the Communist movement has not grown!*

* * *

THE CONDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TODAY

What have the past three or four years brought to the Communist International?

They have brought a continual, steady decline in membership in all important countries except Germany and the Soviet Union.

A profound crisis in inner-party life.

The expulsion of the majorities of the Communist Parties of Sweden, Spain, India, Switzerland, Alsace.

The expulsion of the founders and most experienced leaders and officials of all important parties. (1)

(1) When the German party held the celebration of the tenth anniversary, virtually all the Spartacan leaders, who had founded the party, had been expelled so that the anniversary speakers were men who had opposed or had not participated in the Spartacan revolt. The situation at the tenth anniversary in the United States was similar.

The crumbling of entire parties. For example, the Czechoslovakian Communist Party lost 80% of its members in the first eighteen months after the expulsion policy and change in the political line of the International began. The French party has been reduced to a chaotic sect and has lost its influence over the French masses. The English party, once numbering 12,000 members, does not now number 1,000. The aftermath of a general strike, the collapse of the "Labor" government, the breakdown of the pound sterling and a mutiny in the fleet—all leave the British Communist Party smaller than it has been at any time since 1924. The South African party has lost 90% of its membership in two years.

Even the big German Communist Party has lost completely its once powerful position in the German trade unions, has failed to defeat the Social-democracy even tho the latter split, has failed to win the left wing which broke off, and has been unable to check the rapid growth of Fascism or even the streaming of large sections of the working class into the Fascist ranks. While the Communist Party has virtually stood still or made relatively small gain, the Fascists have grown by leaps and bounds to become the largest party in Germany.

In brief, during these four years that were so favorable for the growth of Communism, not only has the movement not grown, but it has failed utterly to give leadership to the masses to meet their needs in the present crisis. The tremendous sympathy for Communism and the hatred of capitalism have not resulted in growing parties nor consolidating class forces, have not been crystallized into an organized force such as the Communists and the working class had the right to expect.

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THE AMERICAN PARTY

In the American Communist Party we find a similar situation. The old and experienced members, the founders of the party, and its builders in the harder years of Palmer raids and "Coolidge prosperity", have

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been expelled by the hundreds. Others have dropped out in disgust by the thousands. Fearful of the outcome of a discussion of their blunders and wrong-headed political line, the present leadership forbids discussion, expels questioners and critics, substitutes name-calling for argument, terror for comradeship and stifles the internal life of the party.

The work in the conservative trade unions has been abandoned or reduced to splitting activities. The once powerful left wing in the American Federation of Labor has disappeared. The independent unions under party control have disintegrated to mere paper unions, shadows of the party. Nothing remains of the "new" textile and miners unions and next to nothing in the needle trades.

Sectarianism, which separates the party from the backward masses, and amateurishness, sensationalism, recklessness and bluff, have taken the place of the earnest building and digging in, which aided the party's growth in the past. *The Party, which in the heyday of "Coolidge prosperity" was able to grow, has actually lost in membership in the period of depression!* From 1925 to 1929, when it was not easy to win workers to Communism, the party grew slowly but steadily. On the eve of the change of line and expulsions, the party membership in good standing numbered about 15,000. In 1932, after three years of capitalist depression and bankruptcy, three years of mass misery and discontent, the dues-paying membership had shrunk to less than half of that! (2)

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WHY DON'T THE PARTIES GROW!

When a new member or sympathizer asks why the party does not grow, why thousands are out, why the party has been split, he is told: "It is Lovestone's fault."

But does Lovestone live in Germany and Switzerland? Is it Lovestone's fault that in Sweden the "expelled party" has over 15,000 members and the official

(2) At the last Plenum, the membership in good standing was reported as between 6,500-7,000.

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party has less than 3,000? Is Lovestone responsible for the collapse of the party in France? or in England, where there was not even an opposition group and almost no resistance to the false line of the Party?

No, the crisis is deep—too deep for explanation as the work of a devil or an angel. The crisis is international. The crisis grows out of the errors of the party in every country outside of the Soviet Union. The errors are persistent and continuous. *They prevent growth in spite of favorable conditions.* They are not isolated errors. *The whole line of the party is involved.* The line of the International is involved. *Until it is corrected, the parties cannot grow!* To be a Communist does not mean "just to belong", to be a cardholder. To be a Communist means to want to build a powerful party, to investigate why it does not grow, to remove obstacles in its path, to help it grow. To such genuine Communists this discussion is addressed.

CHAPTER II.

Roots Of The Crisis

Over one-sixth of the earth the workers rule. Their tasks are primarily those of building up a new social order.

In the other five-sixths capitalism still controls. The tasks of the workers are primarily those of overthrowing the old social order.

As the proletarian revolution is delayed in the West, the gap between the development of the two sections of the earth temporarily widens. This widening gap and the problems and difficulties it creates, are the basis of the present crisis in our International.

In the words of the International Communist Opposition (Resolution of the International Conference, July 1932):

"The real basic source of the ultra-left course is the false transference of the methods and forms of struggle, corresponding to a country in which the working class has already triumphed and in which socialism is being built, to the Communist Parties of those countries in which the majority of the working class has still to be won and the prerequisites for taking up the struggle for power have still to be created."

Since the death of Lenin the leadership of the Russian Communist Party has become much narrower. At the first congresses of the International the Russian delegation consisted of Lenin, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Stalin, Trotsky, Chicherin, Ossinsky and Vorovsky. Of this brilliant and experienced old guard leadership, only Stalin remains. Yet the monopoly of leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the Communist International has grown steadily more complete. Until Lenin's death this monopoly was a fav-

orable thing, chiefly because Lenin opposed its becoming permanent and conceived it to be the duty of the more experienced Russian delegation to aid in the development of the other parties and lay the basis for a real collective leadership of all parties in the International.

"Many comrades have talked themselves into the idea," said Lenin at the eighth convention of the Russian party, "of the submission of all national parties to the International Committee of the Russian Communist Party. I must answer that if any one proposes such a thing we would have to condemn him."

Monopoly of the leadership of the Russian Communist Party was a helpful thing in the early days when the other parties were inexperienced and while it was carried on with the aim of making itself unnecessary. Now, however, the Russian leadership has become narrower, its tasks and experiences radically different from those of the parties in capitalist countries, and yet its monopoly of leadership in the International has become more absolute and complete than ever.

* * *

MAKING A GAME OF FACTIONALISM

The acute factional struggles in the Russian party have been systematically carried into the International. An effort has been made by both Trotsky and Stalin and to a lesser extent by Bukharin to develop factions in every party, on the basis not of the problems of each country, but on the basis of the party factions. Hence the unreal and unhealthy nature of so many disputes and changes of leadership in the various parties.

When Trotsky was attacking Stalin "from the left" and making pseudo-leftist and ultra-leftist criticisms of the policies of the Russian Party leadership, every party in the International was expected to find an "ultra-left danger" and fight it as "the main danger!" This was put thru even in parties like the Czechoslovak party where leftism was a rarity and the party was rotten with opportunism.

When Stalin finished his fight with Trotsky and broke with Bukharin, Rykoff and Tomsky, he denounced them as "right-wingers" and all the fifty-odd parties in the International were suddenly expected, nay ordered, to find a "right danger" and fight it as the "main danger!" The reader can imagine what that did to the already demoralized Czechoslovak party!

* * *

CREATING THE PUPPET LEADERSHIP

In every party these unreal groupings and factional quarrels introduced confusion and chaos, encouraged the creation of puppet leaderships who would face now "right", now "left", as the factional exigencies of the leadership of the C. P. S. U. required. The more unprincipled these puppets were, the less interested they were in the problems facing the working class of their own country, the less they depended upon the support of the rank and file of their own party and the more they depended for their "places" upon the support of the leadership of the Russian party, the more suitable they were for this type of factional activity.

On the other hand, the necessary controversies about the issues and problems actually facing the party and working class of each country, were held back and prevented.

It was in such an atmosphere that the present disreputable puppet leaderships, having no roots in the masses of their respective countries and parties and no comprehension of the real problems facing them, became the "leaderships" of the various parties. At the same time, the tried and experienced leaderships that had founded and built the parties and were interested in building them rather than holding their "places", were driven out.

* * *

REVISION OF LENINISM

Still worse, however, was the gradual and the more and more rapid revision of the whole foundations of Leninist strategy. Political slogans appropriate to a given stage or situation in a given country were mechanically adopted in all countries at once. Unrealistic methods were applied, that had no relation to the reali-

ties of the situation in each country. In place of real analysis of the peculiarities of each country and situation, was substituted the game of finding "right dangers" and "left dangers". Those who protested, even feebly, or sought to maintain the old methods of Marx and Lenin and the general line that had built the party and the International, were expelled. No attempt was made to convince them or the membership generally of the correctness of the fantastic decisions and mechanical slogans. Those who sought to discuss and be branded as "renegades", "counter-revolutionists", "enemies of the Soviet Union," and were expelled even if they were willing to accept and carry out the false line to avoid expulsion! The reason is obvious: the new line cannot bear examination and discussion! If the new puppet leaderships had consented or been permitted to consent to discussion, they would have been lost! Therefore, instead of conviction, abuse and name-calling!

The new "leaderships" assumed that if they threw enough mud, some would stick. Indeed, the expulsions, the reign of terror in the parties, the flood of abuse, had some effect. Thousands all over the world were expelled. Tens of thousands were driven out or left in disgust. Old members were terrorized. New members were taught to close their minds to anything the "renegades" might say about the needs of the party.

But as the bayonets and injunctions won't dig coal when the coal miners are on strike, neither will terror and abuse build a party when the line of the party is wrong. Now we are in the fourth year of the new line and the progress of the parties is like that of the famous comic opera army which took "two steps forward, three steps backward." Three years of capitalist crisis! Three years of mass misery! Three wasted years for the Communist movement! Three perilous years of Communist decline! So in spite of terror and abuse, the better members, the more conscious Communists, those who want not only to "be-long" but to build the party and help it grow, are beginning to ask: **What is wrong with the line of our Party?**

CHAPTER III.

Building A Party On American Soil

(The Question of "Exceptionalism")

In the queer jargon that takes the place of intelligible English in upper party circles, the American Communist Opposition is denounced as "American exceptionalists."

If we understand what the party leaders are driving at, we plead guilty to the charge. Yes, we consider that conditions in America are different from conditions in Germany or Spain or the Soviet Union. We are more than "American exceptionalists." We are "exceptionalists" for every country of the world! And in pleading guilty to considering the conditions of each country different from those of the rest, peculiar, "exceptional", we are in good company—the company of Marx and Lenin.

The fundamental aims of the Communist movement are the same thruout the world—the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of Soviet Power, the building of a socialist society. *But the methods of reaching that goal, the tactics to be applied at a given moment, are different for each country and even for each stage of the struggle in a given country.*

* * *

A WORLD OF ENDLESS VARIETY

The countries of the earth do not develop evenly, according to some utopian blueprint or mechanical formula. They have different histories, different traditions, different relations of class forces, different degrees of development; they are in different stages. There are "backward" countries and "advanced" countries; industrial lands and agricultural lands; advancing powers and declining powers; big nations and small nations; creditor countries and debtor countries;

colonies and imperialist powers; backward working classes and advanced working classes, etc., etc. *Those who would build a Communist movement in any country must know that country.* They must adapt their tactics to the special conditions of that country. Else they will never build a Communist movement at all.

* * *

LENIN THE EXCEPTIONALIST

Here is how Lenin answered the abstract pedants, the "infantile Communists" as he called them, who did not want to take into account the specific peculiarities, the concrete conditions, of each country:

"We must clearly realize that such a leading center (as the Communist International) can under no circumstances be built after a single model, by a mechanical uniformity and levelling of the tactical rules of struggle.

"So long as national and national-state differences exist between peoples and countries (and these differences will continue to exist for a very long time, even after the realization of the proletarian dictatorship on a world scale), the unity of the international tactics of the Communist labor movement everywhere demands, not the elimination of the varied national differences—but such the present moment is a foolish dream—but such an application of the fundamental principles of Communism (Soviet Power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as would permit of the proper modification of these principles in particulars and their correct adaptation and application to national and national-state differences."

Again and again Lenin reminds us that the chief task of the scientific revolutionist or Communist in planning his strategy and tactics is:

"To investigate, study, ascertain, grasp, the nationally peculiar, nationally specific features in the concrete attempts of every country to solve the aspects of a single international problem. . . ."

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FOR AN AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY

In other words, slogans, solutions, proposals and tactics which are mechanically adopted for all countries at once, without regard to the peculiarities of each, are not likely to be good for any of them.

A party that wants to sink its roots in American soil must understand American political and economic conditions. If it wants to influence and lead the American workers, it must speak their language, understand how to solve their problems, make proposals that meet their needs, embodied in slogans adjusted to their development and understanding. This is not nationalism—it is the only true internationalism, for only by such methods can the Communist International develop a powerful American section, only thus can the aims of the working class be served in America, or in any other country on the face of the earth.

The leaders of the official Communist Party of the United States have their feet in America but their heads in Europe. Their speeches deal with the problems of the Soviet workers and forget the problems of the American workers. Foster writes a book "Towards Soviet America" which might as well have been written on Mars for all the reflection of American realities that can be found in it. The latest slogans of the German Communist Party, often wrong even for Germany, are immediately imported into the United States. The German workers are in mortal combat with Fascism, so our party tells the bewildered American workers about Fascism and "social-fascism" in America. Not having a Hitler around at the moment it makes a "social-fascist" out of John Dewey or V. F. Calverton! The Soviet Union has shock troops. The next day the American party has "shock troops." The Soviet Union tries to speed up production by "socialist competition" between one factory and another. The next day the "American" leaders are telling the American workers to enter into "socialist competition." Because the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has behind it the majority of the working class, the American leaders talk and act as if our little party had the majority of the working class behind it, refuse to form united fronts

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with other parties (there are no other parties in the Soviet Union), denounce the millions that our party has to win, and set up artificial barriers between the Communists and the mass of the American working class. Because the fight in America is hard and long, they substitute dreams about what is happening in the Soviet Union and try to keep their followers in a perpetual daze that will blind them to the weaknesses and failures of the American party. By long gazing on the splendor of the rising sun of the Russian Revolution, the leaders of the American party have become blinded to the murky realities of America and all the party's tactics are carried on in an atmosphere of unreality that has nothing to do with the situation and problems of the country in which it is trying to function. The Communist Party (Opposition) draws inspiration from the achievements of the Russian Revolution, but remembers that those achievements were the work of the Russian working class led by the most realistic Communist Party of the world, the Bolshevik party of Lenin. It proposes to imitate the *methods of Lenin* not parroting, but analysis of American realities, and the making of the Communist Party of the United States into what it was rapidly becoming before the change of line in 1929—*an American Communist Party speaking to the American working class in its own language, of its own problems, and proposing tactics and slogans appropriate to the present relation of class forces and present political and economic realities in this country*, so as to lead the working class of the United States forward on the road to the achievement of its own historic destiny, the overthrow of the most powerful master class in history, and the conquest of America by the American workers for themselves and for the workers of the world!

CHAPTER IV.

The Trade Union Question

The differences between the official Communist Party and the Communist Opposition are manifested most sharply in the field of trade union work. These differences show themselves even in the answers to the most elementary questions concerning the unions.

1. *What are the trade unions?* The unions are the most elementary, the broadest mass organizations of the working class. They are "the primary school for Socialism" (Marx). They should include all workers regardless of creed, color, sex, age, occupation or political belief. The acid-test of the soundness of a union organization is its functioning in a strike struggle. When a strike begins, we do not ask a worker: "Are you Catholic, Jew or Protestant? Are you Republican, Democrat or Socialist? Are you Fascist or Ku Klux Klanner? If so you can't go out on strike with us."

On the contrary, we say to Fascist or Ku Kluxer or Tammany voter: "You work in the same shop. You have the same interests. You suffer the same conditions, wage-cuts, long hours. You have the same enemy, the same boss. Therefore you *must* come out with us!"

Obviously, then, a union is not a political party. It must not exclude, but *include*. It must not have a program appropriate to an advanced political party if its aim is to include politically backward workers. It cannot demand that all workers favor proletarian dictatorship, or Communist candidates, or turning imperialist war into civil war, or even defense of the Soviet Union, before they can join. *In short a union of Communists and their close sympathizers is no union at all.* It must seek to include all who toil, all who recognize the elementary fact that in questions of hours, wages and working conditions, there is a con-

lict of interest between bosses and workers. And it must so defend the interests of these workers, as gradually to develop their sense of solidarity and class consciousness to the understanding of the wider class aims of the proletariat.

2. *Are the Communists interested in wages and hours and other "petty" questions?* To this question we reply with an answer of Marx and Engels that will never be "out-of-date."

"The Communists," says the Communist Manifesto, "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole"

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

* * *

3. *How should Communists act in unions they "control"?* Given the relations of forces and stage of working class development prevailing today in America, Communists are not likely to be at the head of many genuine unions. Only exceptionally, where the industry is in such a state as to have a specially radicalizing effect, or a majority of the workers are recruited from some foreign nationality having an advanced Socialist tradition, or the Communists have taken the initiative in organizing some hitherto unorganized field, are the Communists likely to be found at the head of genuine, widely inclusive unions.

Even in such cases, the Communist Opposition insists that the Communists must so conduct themselves as not to narrow the union down to Communists and their closest sympathizers, and must seek to link up the union in question with the rest of the labor movement rather than to isolate it from the other unions.

The Communists must propose an elementary program of class struggle, not an advanced program fit only for adherents of the party.

They must lead the union in the sense of inspiring, convincing and guiding, not in the sense of controlling,

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bossing and running it. They must practise what they preach in other unions—no bureaucratic control, union democracy, maximum initiative and activity of the rank and file, no orders or officers imposed upon the membership from above by a secret caucus or a mysterious order from "headquarters", but patient proposal, explanation, and conviction, the willingness to accept defeat and abide by decisions, without expelling or splitting unions, knowing that future developments and proper explanation will in the long run convince.

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SOME SECOND-HAND COMMUNIST PARTIES

The conduct of the official party in the few paper "mass" organizations it controls, is a perfect model of how not to guide and lead a trade union.

In the International Labor Defense, the International Workers Order, and foreign-language fraternal and benefit societies, all supposed to be "united front mass organizations" accepting every one who stands on the elementary ground of the class struggle, the party has expelled those who did not accept its full program, just as if these organizations were so many Communist parties (and parties with an unhealthy, undemocratic inner regime at that!). The International Labor Defense, supposed to include and defend workers of all political tendencies suffering persecution for labor activities, has expelled "Trotskyites" and "Lovestones" and has even expelled those who, knowing no "isms", have criticized some act of an official. They have refused to defend Opposition Communists arrested on the picket line!

All these organizations have their officers handed down to them by decision of the Communist fractior or the Central Committee, their funds voted by hand-picked officials for party purposes without troubling to get the consent of the membership, decisions made for them before they meet and no discussion or criticism permitted, the persistent discussers and critics being branded as "Lovestoneites", tho they never heard of Lovestone, and then being expelled. Hence it is not hard to understand why the foreign-language organ-

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izations (Finnish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, etc.) have split and all Communist-bossed organizations have dwindled into mere diluted replicas of the party. Membership in them is a kind of substitute or second-hand membership in a substitute or second-hand Communist party with few duties and no rights.

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FATE OF THE DUAL UNIONS

In the Communist-controlled "unions" (shoeworkers, National Miners Union, Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, Food Workers Industrial Union, etc.), the situation is even worse. They exist only on paper. They include only Communists (not all eligible party members even are in them!) and a few close sympathizers who regard membership as a second-hand party membership. Everything is decided by orders from above and the chief functions of these unions are to try to split mass unions, to call rival strikes when A. F. of L. unions call strikes, to offer sometimes "cheaper terms" of settlement to get boss recognition (Paterson, New York dress strike, etc.), to divide the unity of the workers, and to pull every awakening worker out of the existing unions as soon as he becomes friendly to the cause of Communism.

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CHAPTER V.

Should Communists Work In Reactionary Unions?

Our answer is unqualifiedly: "Yes!" The A. F. of L. and other conservative unions contain more than 3,000,000 workers. They are the overwhelming majority of the organized workers in this country. The Communists must not voluntarily separate themselves from these workers, nor split off the more progressive sections of them, nor abandon the backward ones to their reactionary leaders. The policy of dual unionism, of setting up "Red" unions containing only the Communists and their closest sympathizers, of deserting the conservative unions, of splitting them, of skimming off the "cream" by pulling out small groups of workers as soon as they become progressive or radical, of forming "pure," virginal, revolutionary organizations instead of working from within to transform the existing craft unions into militant industrial unions—such is the policy of the official Communist Party. For opposing this policy more than for any other difference the Communist Opposition was expelled.

Yet the policy of union-splitting and sect-forming has been tried many times and found wanting. It was tried in the days of the Knights of Labor by sectarian Socialist immigrants from Germany and was sharply condemned by Engels.

To friends in America Engels wrote:

"It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously, take root and embrace as much as possible *the whole American proletariat*, than that it should start and proceed from the beginning on theoretically perfectly correct lines. . . . *The great thing is to get the working class to move as a class: that once obtained they will soon find the right direc-*

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tion and all who resist . . . will be left in the cold with small sects of their own. Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement *which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionized from within.*"

Union-splitting as the road to revolutionary unionism was tried again in the days of Daniel De Leon with results disastrous to the Socialist Labor party, which degenerated into a little union-splitting sect, separated from the broad labor movement, which became more conservative due to the De Leonite blood-letting that had drained it of some of its best blood.

The fatal policy was tried once more in the first days of the Communist movement in this and other countries and called forth the powerful argument of Lenin against sectarianism embodied in his great pamphlet on Communist tactics "Left Communism: An Infantile Sickness."

"The Communists," wrote Lenin, "must join such unions in all countries in order to make of them efficient and conscious organs of struggle for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of Communism . . . Any voluntary withdrawal from the economic movement, any artificial attempt to organize special unions . . . threatens to isolate the most advanced and most conscious workers from the masses who are on the road to Communism. It threatens to hand over these masses to the opportunist leaders thus playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie . . ."

"Communists must on no account leave the ranks of the reactionary federation of labor. On the contrary, they should go into the old trade unions in order to revolutionize them."

With irresistible logic Lenin answered all our "profound" arguments (the writer of these lines was once a dual-unionist on principle as were all the founders of the Communist Party at that time) and he answered in advance all the "profound" arguments that the present leaders of the party have been able to invent or rather drag out of their graves.

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"It is difficult to work in the reactionary unions . . ." So is it difficult to overthrow capitalism. The question is: Is it necessary?

"We will lose our purity . . ." Communists who worry about their virginity had better give up being Communists.

"The leaders of the A.F. of L. want to expel us . . ." Of course! They want to separate us at all costs from the backward workers. But is it not strange that reactionary bureaucrats and Communist leaders should agree in wanting the Communists out of the regular trade unions!

"It is hard to work in unions controlled by reactionaries and gangsters . . ." The Bolsheviks worked in unions organized and officered by the Czar's police!—and worked so well that these unions (the "Zubatovschina") led a general strike in Odessa.

The Bolsheviks did not appear as union-splitters either before, during or after the Russian revolution! So the problem is no new one! It isn't as if the matter had not been argued out and analyzed before! The curse of the American labor movement has been the blood-letting process of dual unionism.

* * *

THAT "CHANGE OF LINE"

Today, under the fire of our criticism and the pressure of our example coupled with the patent failure of their policies, the leaders of the party pretend to beat a shamefaced and hesitant retreat. They have launched a whispering campaign about a "change of line."

"Don't go over to the Lovestonites. We are changing our line. We recognize that we have been neglecting (!) the work in the reactionary trade unions. We are correcting this . . ."

They publish long theses about "mistakes" in the trade union work, and then repeat the same "mistakes." They adopt resolution against "neglecting" the work in the reactionary unions and then send a handful of workers into one or another A. F. of L. union, not to seek to rebuild and transform the old unions, but to *undermine and disrupt, to make new and "more*

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successful splits, to urge each worker, as soon as he becomes a bit sympathetic, to leave the old mass union and go into the rival paper union.

They do not even take the *first step* toward a genuine change of line. They do not give up their dual unions! Every Communist who enters a mass union of the American Federation of Labor enters loaded with the weight of an awful handicap—he has been sent in to split off fragments, to “build the rival Red union” by “boring from within.” The average worker who has developed enough class consciousness to be loyal to the unity of his union sees in the Communist not a builder but a splitter, not a unifier and organizer but a disrupter and divider. Therefore, it is easy for the reactionary leaders to expel the Communists with the whole-hearted approval of the union members!

The Communist Opposition proposes that the party abandon its stupid and suicidal tactics of union-splitting and blood-letting, of deserting organizations because they are not yet militant enough. We propose to liquidate all the artificial “revolutionary unions” that exist only on paper and that serve no real purpose except to help the reactionaries in their expulsion campaigns and to separate the Communists from the rest of the organized workers. We propose to end the situation where the Communists appear as union-splitters and restore the state of affairs in which the Communist appear as the banner-bearers of trade union and working class unity. And the Communist Opposition, besides striving to correct this false and dangerous course, shows by example in the daily struggle both to party members and the working class as a whole that the true Communist policy is not union-splitting but union organizing and rebuilding. The other path is the “easier” but it leads away from working class and Communist progress. It leads into the blind alley of sectarianism and isolation!

CHAPTER VI.

The United Front

(The Fight for Working-Class Unity)

The unity of great masses of workers on an elementary program expressing their immediate need, would immeasurably strengthen the workers, give them a feeling of power such as comes with numbers, give them a sense of class solidarity and common interest, enable them to enter into struggles out of which they would learn more than out of years of preaching and abuse. Such proposal of unity to other organizations of the workers, on the basis of an elementary or minimum program, with each participating group retaining its own separate organization and full program, such a first step toward working class unity, is known as a “united front.” The Communist Party has in the past been the most energetic champion of such united struggles.

But in the last few years there has grown up a disposition to treat the united front as a mere clever maneuver to win following away from the reactionary leaders. Naturally, when we propose unity to the leaders of conservative working class organizations, Socialist party or A. F. of L. unions, one of the important “by-products” of our fight for working class unity is the exposure of the reactionary leaders. If they reject the united front proposal, they expose themselves as enemies of working class unity and united struggle. If, in response to the pressure of their followers, they accept the proposal and then do not carry on an effective fight for the program of the united front, they again expose themselves in the eyes of their followers, who can be won away to the support of the Communists as the only genuine fighters for the elementary interests of the working class. But we cannot too strongly emphasize that the Communists

must not make united front proposals merely as clever manoeuvres to win away workers from reactionary leadership. Such "clever manoeuvres" are seen thru by everybody. They do not promote working class unity but earn contempt for Communism as a species of sharp practise, of juggling with the longing of the working class for greater unity and strength.

THE "UNITED FRONT FROM BELOW"

For the last few years, the Communist Party has abandoned the united front altogether. No more does the party embarrass the leaders of the Socialist party and other labor organizations by tireless insistence on working class unity on a program which even the most backward worker can appreciate and be roused to fight for. No more does the party battle earnestly and tirelessly for the unity of the working class. "If the backward workers won't follow us," runs the present official attitude, "then they are reactionaries and social-fascists." And so the party cuts itself off voluntarily from the workers who still have faith in the leaders of the conservative labor organizations.

* * *

DISHONEST JUGGLING

Yet the party leaders dare not openly repudiate the time-honored tactics of the united front. Just as they disguise their attempt to split the mass unions by calling it "work in the reactionary unions," so they disguise their repudiation of the united front by speaking of the "united front from below."

What is this famous "united front from below?" It is an invitation to the non-Communist workers to support the Communist Party! That is all! In short, the "united front from below" is no united front at all. And such dishonest juggling with terms prevents any real discussion of the most complicated tactical problems confronting the party, the problems arising from entrance into united fronts with organizations under reactionary leadership.

The crying need of the German working class during the last few years has been a united front of all workers to fight Fascism. The Communist Party,

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which should have been the driving force for such a united struggle, fought against it. The Socialist leaders were therefore able to herd their followers into a united front with Hindenburg and Bruening "against" Fascism. They were even able to capitalize on the working class longing for unity. "The Communists do not want a united front," said Breitscheid. "If they did maybe we would not have to unite with Hindenburg." A fine state of affairs when the Social-democratic leaders can pretend that they are the apostles of unity!

In the United States, Norman Thomas was enabled to play the same game:

"If Communists were less dogmatically proud of fooling their allies," Thomas wrote in the "New Leader," "and would work in good faith, there might be some chance in Germany and elsewhere for occasional Socialist-Communist joint action." But since they won't, says Thomas, therefore, "I think the German Social-democrats are justified in coalition (with Hindenburg and Bruening) in this emergency."

How does the "Daily Worker" answer this "justification" of Social-democratic treachery?

"The Communists formed and carried out a policy of joint action—but only joint action with the Socialist and non-party workers. The Communists have not formed and will not form a united front with the Social-democratic leaders." (Editorial in the "Daily Worker" April 26, 1932).

In other words, the "Daily Worker" deliberately confuses the invitation of Socialist workers to join the Communists, with the united front of the two organizations.

The Communist Party of the United States will also have a "united front" in the Presidential elections, the editorial continues.

"It will do this by bringing about joint action in the struggle of all workers and farmers, including the rank and file members of the Socialist party and the A. F. of L."

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In other words it will actually permit Socialists and members of the A. F. of L. unions to vote for Foster and call it a united front!

"The National Nominating convention . . . has its doors wide open to all toilers and to those ready to fight for the demands put forward in the Convention Call. Here joint action (since when is a Communist platform 'joint action' or subject for a 'united front'?) will be decided upon, candidates chosen and a fighting platform drafted. All workers are invited."

What has this word-juggling with "joint action," this anti-Communist suggestion that the full program of Communism is subject to drafting by united front, what has all this charlatany to do with the united front?

* * *

HOW DO THEY GET THAT WAY

How, the bewildered reader may ask, could such ruinous, sectarian tactics ever get adopted by the party of working class unity? The answer is strange and yet simple:

In the Soviet Union there are no other parties but the Communist Party—there can be no united front except with the non-party workers "from below and around the Communist Party."

In the same way, there are no unions but revolutionary unions in the U.S.S.R. and no problem of working in reactionary unions. Once more our comrades are mechanically transporting Russian conditions and tactics into America and acting as if there were no other parties, as if all reactionary leaders were discredited, and as if the American Communist Party were the undisputed leader of the many million-headed American working class.

The Communist Opposition works to establish united fronts and demands the return of the party to the united front tactics. The party can make no real progress till it again becomes the genuine champion of working class unity thru united fronts of struggle for elementary working class needs.

CHAPTER VII.

On Discipline

The conditions of the class struggle change from day to day, and even a correct line becomes wrong unless it is subject to frequent examination and criticism. If members are afraid to voice objection and criticism, if analysis, whether correct or incorrect, is met not with argument and clarification, but with abuse and expulsion, then the party stagnates and grows corrupt, bureaucracy flourishes as a rank growth that chokes the party's life, and a system of jesuitic hierarchy and rigidity takes the place of the democratic centralism and realistic flexibility which are the cornerstones of Communist party structure.

"Democratic centralism" is a term with two poles. Party democracy implies full and free discussion by every party member. It implies a free play of viewpoints on all questions of tactics and strategy and general line, so long as there is no departure on fundamentals, no abandonment of the basic principles of Communism. Party democracy implies selection of all officials by the membership (in an illegal party this is not always possible) and complete accountability of these officials to the membership which remains the supreme power in the party.

On the other hand, the Communist Party, as a party of action and not a perpetual debating society, must set terms to party discussions, limits at which a discussion should stop and decisions be made by the membership. Thereafter, there must be a subordination of the minority to the majority on the point in question, until the question is again subject to examination, as, for instance, during a convention discussion period.

Such in brief is the mechanics of democratic centralism. Yet there is not a point in the above outline that is not systematically violated in the present life of the party. The line of the party is not subject

to examination. Critics and questioners do not have their views examined, accepted or patiently refuted, but are met with a flood of abuse, threats and expulsion. Comrades are expelled not for differences on fundamentals (proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power) but for questioning the correctness of tactical measures or the limitless wisdom of party officials. The membership, after a thoro discussion, voted by 90% for a given line and leadership at the Sixth National Convention of our party but the leadership was removed, the decisions of the membership reversed and over a third of the Central Committee expelled by cable decree "from above."

Expulsion and slander were substituted for discussion and conviction, and raised to the dignity of a system. To doubt the wisdom of abandoning the trade unions or the united front, was to earn the epithets "renegade", "counter-revolutionist", "agent of Hoover", "social-fascist", "enemy of the Soviet Union." The "Daily Worker" and the "Freiheit" even published weird stories of alleged burglary of the national office, stealing of funds, stool-pigeons, consorting with gangsters, and what-not lurid slanders in the best style of the "Jewish Daily Forward" or the tabloid press.

Lenin once characterized such methods in this wise:

"There is one method of a corrupt press that has everywhere and always proved itself useful and 'infallible' above all others; lies, shouts, slanders, repetitions of lies . . . , 'something will stick!' The heroes who use such methods are already thru."

But the party bureaucrats have gone farther—even to the point of breaking up, or trying to break up discussion meetings by force, as if cracking heads were a convincing way of reaching the brains of comrades who differed with them!

Why the resort to such methods? The answer is very simple: DISCUSSION MUST BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS. THE PRESENT LINE OF THE PARTY WILL NOT BEAR EXAMINATION!

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THE QUESTION OF DISCIPLINE

Inner party democracy is a key to the growth of a mass party. An unhealthy inner line makes impossible the winning and assimilation of new members. No one is born fully Communist and new members naturally come in with doubts and questions and suggestions. If they are met with patient explanation and comradely discussion, they can be made into fully developed Communists. If not, they are alienated and repulsed. During the past three years, it is not true that the party has been unable to attract new members. But it has been unable to HOLD them! By its own records over 45,000 workers have joined the party since 1929 and over 50,000 have left it! The result is a net loss—a loss that is directly attributable to the errors of the party and the unhealthy condition of its inner life.

The enemies of Communism have always tried to attack Communist discipline and to pretend that it is a mere matter of orders from above and obedience from below. In the measure that the party leaders have reduced discipline to such a caricature, they have given ammunition to our enemies and checked the stream of movement toward our party.

* * *

LENIN ON DISCIPLINE

The discipline of Communism is not discipline based upon threat, but upon conviction. We are a voluntary association for a common cause, a cause which enlists our enthusiasm and devotion. Therefore, the primary consideration, the foundation of all discipline, is a correctness of line and the convincing of all members of its correctness. Without these, discipline is a grotesque caricature.

Here is how Lenin put the question of discipline:

"Upon what does the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat rest? How is it tested, controlled, reinforced, strengthened?"

First: by the clarity of aim of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its steadiness, spirit of self-sacrifice and heroism.

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Second: by its ability to lead the toiling masses, to form contact with them and to a certain extent to fuse itself with the proletarian masses primarily but also with the non-proletarian toilers.

Thirdly: the correctness of the political leadership carried out and by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, based on the idea that the workers convince THEMSELVES of the soundness of this political leadership, strategy and tactics thru their own experience. *Without all these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party of the advanced class whose object is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and revolutionize all of society, is impossible of realization. Without these conditions, all attempts to create discipline result in empty phrases, in tomfoolery, in clownishness.*"

Thus Lenin makes the correctness of the line of the party **THE VERY BASIS OF DISCIPLINE** and not discipline a substitute for a correct line. To Gorki he also wrote:

"You must and certainly will understand that once a member of a party is convinced of the absolute incorrectness and harm of a certain doctrine, he is duty bound to take a stand against it . . . **AT ALL COSTS.**"

CHAPTER VIII.

What's To Be Done?

The object of a Communist is not merely to "belong", not merely to have a party card in his pocket, but to build the party. The party is not a church calling for blind faith, nor a Society of Jesuits calling for unthinking obedience to superiors; it is a revolutionary party to be built, to be strengthened, to be made into a mass party, to be linked up indissolubly with the masses, to give correct leadership, to guide on the path that leads to working class victory.

The Communist sympathizer may well say: "My party right or wrong," for the Communist Party is the only hope of the working class. But there is a far higher, far more Communist loyalty, which says: "I'll keep my party right at all costs," for it is the hope of the working class only if it leads aright, if it pursues policies that make it grow and will give it victory. It is a poor Communist, indeed, that does not know how, or that does not dare, to transform the slogan: "My party right or wrong," into the genuine Communist slogan: "My party must be right! I'll fight like hell to keep it right—and, when it goes wrong, I'll fight harder still to set it right again."

That is the meaning of the Communist Opposition. We did not choose expulsion! Too many of the best years of our lives went into the building of the Communist Party; it means too much to us for us to accept expulsion lightly. Yet we would have been cowards and traitors to Communism, if we had seen our party set on the wrong track, isolated from the masses, following paths that lead away from growth and ultimate victory, and remained quiet just so that we might hold on to party cards or party posts. For a while we wavered between loyalty to the party's true interests and the keeping of our party cards at the expense of treason to the interests of the party. We offered to

ON COMMUNIST UNITY

obey mechanical discipline, to carry out the line we found so harmful, until a new discussion should open. But the party bureaucrats helped us to decide. The new puppet leadership did not dare face a discussion. The new line could not bear examination. So they split the party, and forced us to carry on our fight for a healthier party outside of the regular party channels. We have never recognized our expulsion. An examination of our organ, "Workers Age," will show how loyally we have carried on our fight for a better party in the face of shameless provocation and abuse. The party officials combined with the needs of the party to force us to understand the difficult decision of Lenin as written to Gorki. "You must and certainly will understand that once a member of the party is convinced of the absolute incorrectness and *harm* of a certain doctrine, he is duty bound to take a stand against it . . . at all costs."

* * * A WORD TO HESITATORS

The party officials did not limit themselves to the expulsion of conscious elements fighting to correct the line of the party. They expelled hundreds for merely questioning or doubting. They repulsed thousands by their stupid tactics. They demoralized countless loyal, old members who grew disgusted and dropped out. These forces stand now on the side-lines watching our struggles and the party's blunders, demoralized, without hope. They wish for correction of the party line as for a miracle but they do nothing about it. To them I say, quoting an old proverb: "Expect poison from standing water."

Look out lest you wait so long away from the stream of struggle that you indeed become a stagnant pool. "He who desires, but acts not, breeds pestilence." The true Communist is one whose desire is harnessed to his will and directed by his understanding. The sooner you join us and the harder you work with us, the sooner will our fight be crowned with victory and the painful period of party blunder and isolation be over, the sooner will party unity be restored and the party begin to go forward.

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The Communist Opposition stands unswervingly for the reuniting of the Communist movement. There are two possible roads to unity. One is the road offered by the official leadership of the party and the International. First, we are asked to denounce ourselves as "renegades" and "counter-revolutionists" and thereby proclaim our "fitness" for membership and end our usefulness to the working class forever. Second, we are asked to drop our struggle for the correction of the line of the party and thereby connive at the injury that the present leadership is doing to the party and the cause of Communism.

The other road to unity, our road, is the road of restoration of party democracy, a full and free discussion of differences in the party and the International. We do not insist that the party accept our line as a condition for unity. We abide confidently by the results of any untrammelled discussion of the issues.

* * *

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Many party members and sympathizers have come to us expressing agreement with our views, demanding "guarantees" that if they joined us, it would be a short fight. "How long?" was the constant burden of their inquiries.

We can not honestly give any promises as to the length of the fight. We can only point out that the fight is necessary, that the party cannot grow nor give real leadership to the American working class, till it shakes off the curse of its wrong sectarian, union-wrecking, isolating line. Long or short, the fight must be made, must be fought to a finish.

All we can answer to such queries is: Come in and help us and the fight will be shorter. The more there are of us, inside the party and out, the quicker we will win, the sooner this painful period of reorientation and reconstruction will be over. Therefore, if you are truly a Communist, if you are more than a "church member", if you are not content to ignore and condone the errors of our party just for the sake of being a

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"card holder", at any price, even at the price of injury to the party, then you will raise a struggle inside the ranks of the party to set it straight, and, inside or out, you will join with us in our struggle for the reunification of the party and the Communist International, for the future of the party and the Communist Party, for the building of a powerful section of the Communist International in the United States, a Communist party truly equal to its tasks, the defeat of the most powerful ruling class on the face of the earth.

JOIN the

**Communist Party of the U.S.A.
[Opposition]**

Enlist in the struggle to reunite the Communist Party of the U. S. A. and the Communist International, to restore the Communist movement to the course of Leninist tactics and to strengthen the influence of Communism among the masses of the workers.

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