

CPA Discussion Page

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Capitalist Ideology and Lack of Self-Criticism

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The Draft Resolution of the National Board is correct in stating that our organization has fallen into a revision of Marxism which led to a series of opportunist errors, and in calling for recognition of these mistakes, seeking out their roots, and correcting them. Comrade Browder in his discussion article printed June 10th in the Worker continues along the line of these errors. In his emphasis upon the "insanity" of an imperialist course for war against the Soviet Union, he implies that it is possible for the bourgeoisie to pursue either a "sane" or "insane" policy, thus reviving the old Kautskyan thesis of imperialism being a "policy."

The revisionism of Marxism into which we fell didn't even have the "doubtful virtue" of being original. Duclos was correct in terming it "notorious revisionism." Some of the ideas we were expressing were refuted so thoroughly before by Lenin and Stalin, and even ourselves (in the fight against Lovestonism) that indeed they should have been notorious to us.

How could almost all of us American Communists have fallen into accepting theories of Social Democracy which we ourselves knocked to pieces so many times in the past? We began our revisionism when we accepted the thesis that we were in an "unprecedented situation" which required application of Marxism in a completely new way. From this we began to erect a systematically worked out revisionism of Marxism in reference to class relations, the role of monopoly capital, the state, the colonial liberation struggle, the struggle for socialism, etc. If we

had remembered the fight against Lovestone's theories of "American exceptionalism" and a "new Victorian era for American capitalism" with the possibility of "peaceful developments free from crises for a long period" we should have seen the errors we were falling into.

We termed the situation "unprecedented." Well, every situation in some small ways is new.

But every situation we face today is in the period of the general crisis of world capitalism which gave rise to World War II, and which in its turn is accentuated by World War II. Our Marxist-Leninist theory, especially Lenin's analysis of imperialism, gave us the general theoretical guide to this very much preceded (not unprecedented) situation.

We made these mistakes for two general reasons which the Resolution states: because of the infiltration of bourgeois ideology into our midst, and because of the suspension of self-criticism in our organization.

On the first question, the influence of the bourgeoisie, we should have anticipated that since we live in the most powerful center of imperialism we would be subjected to bourgeois influence and would need to guard against them. The fact that the American working class did not suffer catastrophic decline in living standards during the war, but instead saw even an improvement of its lot, created illusions among the workers and our own members as to the "new progressiveness" of capitalism.

The fact that the bourgeoisie was engaged along with the people in fighting Hitler fascism tended

to disarm labor and the people to the penetration of imperialist ideological influences; created illusions as to the anti-fascist character of American monopoly capital. The comparative easiness of our lives as Communists in such a period of national unity, prepared our minds for acceptance of these opportunist theories.

On the second question, the suspension of self-criticism in our organization, this is something we have gradually slipped into over a period of years. Some of the reasons for this are:

1) The memory of the bitterness and destructive character of the factional fight. This caused many to shrink from sharp disagreement for fear of destroying the unity of our organization.

2) The love and respect of our membership for our leadership, particularly Comrade Browder. This in itself is a good thing, since it springs from loyalty towards the Communist movement that is necessary for its strength. But we performed a poor service to the national leadership and ourselves in suspending criticism. Our loyalty was transformed into uncritical adulation. (Browder, Foster and others often protested against this.) But this adulation and glorification of Browder, this uncritical inflation, was matched by a similar inflation of ourselves.

We were all convinced we were pretty good. A non-Communist complacency and conceit penetrated our ranks. This caused us not only to uncritically accept everything Earl Browder, Robert Minor and other national leaders said, but caused us to become insensitive to the feelings of the membership towards our own presentation of our

program and theory. We should learn from this never again to elevate anyone to an eminence where his statements are considered infallible.

3) The logic of the arguments advanced for these revisionist theories was very beautiful and consistent in itself. We were carried away by that logic, sacrificing our ideology to logic, which indicated a degree of separation from the masses whose experiences contradicted our theory. Close contact with the experiences of the people would have made us quickly question our theory.

For example, some Milwaukee trade unionists suggested to a company that it go after orders for turbines in Yugoslavia to help keep full production in the postwar. The management replied: "We could seek orders there, but things are so unsettled in Yugoslavia that we don't know if we'll ever get paid. We don't trust the present government." This incident from life shows the Utopian character of our conception that monopoly capital would "prefer" democratic European governments because they would be "sounder risks" than fascist governments.

4) Our National Committee itself gave impetus to an uncritical approach by decapitating the discussion on Teheran, when it did not release Comrade Foster's views to the organization. Comrade Foster himself should bear some criticism for this, I believe. He sacrificed the presentation of his Marxist position to a formal unity and discipline, and the whole stage was set for a formal discussion all through our organization, in which the considerable opposition to our "new" line was not properly eval-

uated. This action of the National Committee displayed a certain fear of the membership, testifying to an amount of alienation from the thinking of the people, an alienation which the state leaderships also shared.

5) The traditional American emphasis upon practicality and theoretical weakness laid us open to these errors. Had there been great numbers of members in our organization well-versed in Marxism, these departures from Marxism would have been challenged and checked. One of our main conclusions should be to organize continual deep study of the basic Marxist-Leninist classics among our members and the working class in general.

It is this American emphasis on practicality, (practice without theory is blind and gropes in the dark, but it gropes, and sometimes in the right direction), and our ties with the trade union movement (which could not, in practice, put into effect our opportunist theories without being crushed by the bourgeoisie), along with the fact that we were consistently fighting fascism, which gave rise to the situation where "The opportunist errors which we were committing did not dominate our wartime policies." But there is no doubt that our work was weakened and our vigilance dulled.

I think that everyone of our policies needs re-examination and re-evaluation. Specifically I believe our stand on the Negro question needs examination, and recommend that the question of land reform in the South be included in our program of demands, in the nature of a "New Homestead Act for the South" to guarantee land to the landless Negro and poor white farmers.

Communists Should Resume Vanguard Role

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I agree with the Resolution with the following exceptions. In the third paragraph from the end in Part I the slogan "Prosecute all violators of the anti-trust laws—" would literally commit us to a trust-busting (Populist) policy and precipitate a head-on collision with the forces of monopoly capital. Our policy is correctly defined in the preceding slogan. We should formulate our policy towards monopoly capitalism with the greatest exactness, as this has been the source of many of our difficulties in the recent past.

In this same paragraph the slogan against cartel practices should include Anglo-American, which may constitute a greater danger in view of the elimination of German industry as a main competitor in the world market.

It seems to me that our status as a Communist organization is not yet entirely cleared up. The Resolution admits that the change from CP to CPA "could not but strengthen certain dangerous tendencies towards liquidating the independent and vanguard role of the Communist movement"; that it "was not required to carry out our correct policy of support for President Roosevelt," and that "the growth of the Communist movement among the industrial workers was undoubtedly retarded." The only justification then for the change must be Comrade Browder's estimate that the change was sufficient to make the difference between the possible defeat of Roosevelt. There is no practical way of finding out if this is a fact. We are more justified, it seems to me, in concluding that had we not made these mistakes associated with the change, our contribution to Roosevelt's reelection would probably have

been greater and we would be in a much better position now.

With the change in perspective to a future of class struggle and struggles in sharpened form between the capitalist powers themselves and between them and the Socialist power—the Soviet Union—in place of the Utopian conception of the suspension of the basic laws of capitalism (though the way in which such laws operate is certainly effected by particular situations), the question as to whether the Communist movement in the U. S. can best continue to function as the CPA seems to me open to debate. If the former situation required us to function for a time not as a political party in the accepted American sense, does not the changed perspective now require us to reestablish ourselves in the classical Marxian sense as the independent, Marxian

party of the working class?

I think that anyone who will conscientiously read over our leading political material—the book of Comrade Browder—in the last few years, will realize that we did not just suddenly come to our present mistaken position. (I refer, of course, to our position previous to the Resolution). The "line" has been a gradual development. Its complete acceptance blinded us to a critical evaluation of its implications so that in the unprecedented world situation we easily accepted the view that "something fundamentally new and original in Marxian theory" had to be the basis for our activities.

The probability—nay, the certainty—of a generations-long peaceful co-existence of the socialist sector of the world with the capitalist sector, with a necessary correlate of the suppression of the class struggle within the capitalist sector, was the

prediction on which we as Communists were to carry out our responsibility to the working class and nation. Workers told me this perspective was a pipe-dream. I had my doubts but I had been informed authoritatively that all the leadership except Darcy had agreed.

Now we know that all this time Comrade Foster had been in fundamental disagreement! Whatever discussion had been going on among the top leadership, it is a fact that the article by Duclos brought things to a head.

The opportunist tendencies developed by our policies are embodied in the Preamble of our CPA constitution: "It (CPA) looks forward to a future in which, by democratic choice of the American people, our own country will solve the problems arising out of the contradiction between the social character of pro-

duction and its private ownership, incorporating the lessons of the most fruitful achievements of all mankind in a form and manner consistent with American traditions and character."

What does this actually mean? Avoiding the statement outright that the CPA has socialism for its (final) goal, it declares that the CPA "looks forward to a future" where the basic contradictions of capitalism will be solved." Communists have always declared this would be possible only under socialism. Why did we evade using the term "socialism"? This contradiction, we say, will be "solved by the democratic choice of the American people." The implication is that socialism will be VOTED in. This disregards the fact that monopoly capitalism is master of the country and in control of the most powerful weapons on the largest scale known in all history. It disregards the basic works of our movement on the character of the state under capitalism.

The whole paragraph should, in my opinion, be rewritten with a clear declaration of our stand for socialism. Needless to say, I am not advocating raising socialism as the immediate issue of the day. However, in such a period as the present, I do not think we should ignore the possibility that future developments in an era of sharpened class and national struggles may greatly increase the receptivity of the masses to socialist opinions and attitudes.

Let us rid ourselves of such conceptions that under any circumstances it is our duty as Communists to "make capitalism work," that socialism can come to America only in consequence of GREAT DISASTERS to the country, and that "decisive" sections of the "big" capitalists (monopoly capitalists) will ever be for the "eradication of the last vestiges of fascism!"

How to Develop Democratic Discussion in Clubs

Now that organizationally we have come to recognize the need for "Democratic Discussion and Marxian Self-Criticism" the problem how Self-Criticism" the problem now becomes how to attain it.

To me it seems that basic attitude on the part of club leaders must be corrected before any appreciable amount of progress can be made in that direction. It is they who interpret the directives of the top leadership. It is the manner in which they function that creates the general club atmosphere conducive to the development of democratic discussion. For example, to give a rank and file member the floor in the spirit of a hangman offering the condemned the privilege of a few last words can never promote democratic discussion.

I quote from the magazine sec-

tion of The Worker, June 10th article by Starobin: "Marxists cannot ignore any question. They cannot evade foreseeing any eventuality." Democratic discussion cannot be developed by ignoring questions troubling the people's minds or by evading problems.

MARXIAN SELF-CRITICISM

That too is a necessary goal. But before it can be attained certain changes in the club atmosphere must be brought about. The membership must be made to know and feel that they can disagree with older Communists, or leading personnel without being classed as Trotskyites, Social Democrats, Nationalist Negroes, Ivory Tower Intellectuals, Male Chauvinists or disrupters.

In other words, all must be made to know the difference between

Marxian self-criticism and name calling.

Our leading club personnel must be taught that successful political leadership among Communists cannot exist in a vacuum; that it is a part of the general problem of developing successful human relationships. They must know that only by actually deepening our understanding of people as humans can we successfully base ourselves on the genuine democratic instincts of the people.

It seems to me that if branch and local leaders were to pay stricter and closer attention to these seemingly small things much could be automatically accomplished in the field of democratic discussion and Marxian self-criticism.

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