

Party Battle Crystallizes Around Resolutions

CP Factions Present Rival Statements for Party Vote

By H. W. BENSON

A meeting of the New York State Committee of the Communist Party on December 8 was an event of exceptional significance in the party's internal discussion.

Its 16th National Convention meets in early February to act on a Draft Resolution prepared by the National Committee. In acting upon opposing resolutions on a section of the Draft entitled "On the Party," the State Committee divided sharply into two opposing wings. For this and other reasons, its actions mark another stage in the development of the debate.

For the information of our readers we present extensive extracts from the adopted resolution.

(1) Up to now the only written document advanced for action at the convention was the Draft Resolution. The National Committee had acted almost unanimously in favor of the Draft and only Foster finally voted against it without proposing a substitute. As the fight went on, it was obvious that there was no real unanimity but a basic hostility between two tendencies.

This now receives formal and written expression in two opposing interpretations of an important section of the Draft.

The State majority, the *Gates-Daily Worker* tendency, carried its resolution by a vote of 25-6. The minority, representing the Foster or Russian-Stalinist wing, was defeated 5-27.

(2) The majority is becoming aware of the depths of the conflict:

"We approach the 16th National Convention of the CPUSA with the profound feeling that it may mark a turning-point in our history. Months of discussion prior to and since the publication of the Draft Resolution have revealed substantial differences in our ranks, in the evaluation of the past, and on questions of program, outlook and perspective for the future..."

Meanwhile, Foster issues an unabiguous call for a real drive to smash his opponents. In the national Discussion Bulletin, January 1, he opens up at last:

"The Gates plan to liquidate the party into a so-called political-action organization is the very heart of the threat against the party and its ideology. To defeat this ill-advised plan and to restart building our organization upon the basis of a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party must be made the center of the present party discussion and of the coming CP national convention."

The state minority sharpens up its tone accordingly.

(3) The majority already looks beyond the convention and realizes that the fight has just begun: "though we are on the eve of the party conventions, there are many questions that have not as yet been clearly defined, no less adequately discussed."

(4) Both wings continue to call Russia "socialist"; there is nothing new in that. But the majority faces squarely the cause of the party crisis:

"It is generally agreed that whatever the doubts in the past, the party is in a serious crisis as a result of its extreme isolation from the masses of American people and as a further result of the negative impact of the 20th Congress, the revelations of Khrushchev and the recent events in Hungary. The recognition of this crisis is the beginning of wisdom."

AGAINST MONOLITHISM

(5) On "left sectarianism": Up to now, everyone agreed that "left sectarianism" was the main party error in the past period. But what was the nature and source of "left sectarianism"?

Foster excuses "leftism" by finding a mitigating explanation for it; it was a result of powerful "objective" factors; the party reacted explosively against the attack on it and against the wifelhunt spirit of the cold war. If it was an error, it was justifiable, he indicates.

But the majority ascribes "dogmatism" (here, a synonym for "left sectarianism") to Russian apologetics:

"A major source of our un-Marxist dogmatism was our uncritical reliance upon the Communist Parties of other countries, particularly of the Soviet Union, to interpret Marxism-Leninism for us."

(6) On democracy in the party: Naturally, everyone is effusively for inner democracy. But the Fosterite state minority is eager to reaffirm the principles of "democratic centralism" and "monolithic unity."

No one has succeeded in clarifying what these concepts are supposed to signify to the party. But what they meant in the past is clear: bureaucracy

and an inner totalitarian approach to questions of ideology.

The state majority does not intend to waste time on abstractions but wants to make its position as clear as possible. It proposes:

That we take the necessary measures to strengthen the democratic process in the party and eliminate bureaucracy. To this end we recommend the abolition of the concepts of democratic centralism and monolithic unity. Whether the bureaucratic evils were inherent in these concepts or were the result of incorrect application is not the main issue. What is uppermost is the need to define the nature of the organization as a democratic working-class organization with a common ideology which functions on the basis of majority rule and guarantees the right of dissent."

"TRANSFORM THE PARTY"

(7) The majority proposes to change the name and form of the Communist movement in the following resolution:

"That we consider the transformation of our party to that of a political-action association, guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism as we interpret, develop and apply them to the conditions of our country. It would be an association of Communists, following class-struggle policies, and based on the working class as the most decisive and progressive force in our country. Its program would emphasize the fight for Negro people as the cornerstone of democratic advance. And it would seek to rally all other democratic sections of American society—the farmer, intellectuals and other middle strata—around the leadership of the working class. The name of our party would be changed to correspond to this change in structure."

It will be noted that under the changed form the Communists would retain their own program and policies as the basis for their movement which they would broadly define as "Marxist-Leninist." What is far more important is that the suggested change in form is the basic motivation for it:

"We do not view change of name and form as gimmicks that will transform our relations. This is clearly not the case. We do believe that it represents the beginning of a process—taking all our changes and reforms into account, on theory and program, on the issues of independence, on internal democracy—that in time will help bring about a change in our relationships for the better."

SOCIALIST UNITY

The process that the authors refer to leads, in their view, toward a new broad movement for socialism which they call a "United Party of Socialism":

"Because it represents a form of transition that would facilitate the struggle for a new and broader party of socialism. It would dramatize to masses of non-party people that the position stated in the Draft Resolution, that we do not have a monopoly on building socialism, is genuine and true and not a maneuver. It would give greater latitude and encourage other forces to come forward and organize for socialism. In effect we are saying by this change we are but one group in America that believes in socialism and we are prepared to make a modest contribution together with you, or independently, in cooperation and sympathy with you, to advance this aim. With this change we will place our movement on a better footing with radical and socialist-minded Americans today. Can this be done within the framework of the party form? Possibly. We believe however it can be done more effectively by such change. And time is important."

(8) On the "United Party of Socialism": This is undoubtedly the most significant aspect of the New York majority resolution, for it poses an immediate

and "central" task for the party and not a mere expression of opinion:

"That we place as a central duty of our party strong efforts toward effectuating a regroupment and eventual unification of various socialist currents in our country. We endorse the general outlook of the Draft Resolution toward the eventual formulation of a united party of socialism as the orientation which should guide our work in the period ahead."

This brief statement is presented as a concrete amendment to the Draft Resolution and was adopted 30-7. The minority on the other hand wants none of it.

"The attempt to make the formation of a united socialist party an immediate goal," its resolution states, "which in effect is what the proposal means, is only a defeatist attempt to leap over difficulties by projecting false, illusory prospects."

What the majority actually suggests is not that such a "united party" be formed immediately but that the Communists make it a central aim and begin to explore all possibilities:

"Will the changes in our party alone bring about this socialist movement?"

"Should we not seek out every possible path for more rapid development of such an organized socialist movement, even if the immediate perspective of united action is as yet extremely limited?"

"What is our relationship to this concept of a more effective movement for socialism in America?"

"There is one view that bases itself on the idea that the Communist Party remains the only instrument for socialist transformation of society in America. It rejects the view of the National Draft Resolution that we were wrong in the past in recognizing that other forces for socialism existed and could come into being. It feels that the Communist Party remains and is the revolutionary vanguard of the working class—though diminished in members and influence, and that in time, with changes in the objective situation, it will grow into the mass party of socialism capable of winning the working class in the struggle for socialism."

"We believe there is, as opposed to the first view, another alternative—looking to the creation of a broader socialist movement in our country, or what is referred to in the Draft Resolution as the United Party of Socialism. Without having the blueprints or the form of such a socialist party or movement, we think it necessary to begin now to explore, make contact with, seek joint activity with other socialist trends in our nation. We recognize that at this time it would be premature and wrong to attempt to merge the small and relatively ineffective socialist groupings in the country. But we believe that a process of stimulation and exploration would reveal new possibilities, especially in the labor movement, which must be the foundation of an effective socialist organization."

TRY-OUT GROUND

What form will the Communist movement take in the future? The authors of the majority resolution adopt no preconceived notions. They are ready and willing to wait upon events:

"We do not propose a categorical answer to all the real and challenging questions involved in this changed outlook. We do propose an approach that on the one hand does not negate the old, but on the other provides for the opening of the new."

"There are those who argue that such a perspective will result in the liquidation of our party. We believe the contrary is true—that it provides our members with the historic mission of Marxists—that looks to the development of a union between the socialist movement and the working class."

"There are those who argue that the dissolution of the party is the prerequisite for anything new. We disagree. We believe our party has a vital contribution to make in furthering this objective. Furthermore, in the evolution of a new socialist movement in the USA it is possible that the Communist Party may become absorbed in this movement or it may develop cooperative ties with it while maintaining its distinct Marxist-Leninist position."

The State Committee meeting, then, became a preliminary try-out ground for issues that will be debated at the National Convention.

Black Year Looms Ahead — —

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A quick check reveals that 3 million engineering workers, a quarter of a million shipyard workers, 340,000 railwaymen, nearly a quarter of a million truck-drivers, three-quarters of a million shopworkers, one million building workers, and 53,000 London busmen are impatiently awaiting the outcome of wage claims they have lodged with their employers. So far the employers are stalling, and when they finally get around to answering, the unions will be preparing new wage claims to meet the increased cost of living which has occurred since the original claims were lodged.

Not even the most optimistic trade-unionists imagine that the employers will come across with the extra wages demanded; they are well aware that the government is actively encouraging the employers to hold off paying wages in an endeavor to avoid an inflationary burst in the economy. Such a situation has an explosive potential, far more dangerous for the government than the rebellion of its middle-class supporters.

And there is always the possibility that more enlightened sections of the

middle class may join in with the organized workers in attacking the government on economic issues. Signs of this are apparent among the bank clerks—usually portrayed as typical middle-class Britons—who have recently embarked upon a big drive and built up a trade union of 100,000 members, and are now demanding a 10 per cent wage increase in answer to the refusal of the banks to negotiate with them through proper negotiating machinery.

Exhausted by its struggle to put over an unpopular policy to the people, and weakened by internal faction fights, the Tory party thus faces a very difficult year in 1957. The Labor Party, on the other hand, faces a year of tremendous possibilities if it has the courage and determination to seize the opportunities which will be coming its way.

The real big issue for the Labor Party in 1957 will be whether to go all out and fight the Tories on a firm socialist program—which poses the necessity of formulating such a program—or whether merely to oppose the Tories as an alternative government which is better fitted than the Tories to manage the affairs of a capitalist economy.