

# The American Road to Socialism

## A Special Section Devoted to Discussion of the Past and Perspectives of the Communist Party and the American Left

Edited by Discussion Committee,  
Communist Party

### Must Overhaul Theory as Well as Practice

By Albert E. Blumberg

FOR SOME time now American Communists have been engaged in a wide-ranging discussion. They are taking that "new look" at all problems called for by Comrades Dennis and Gates at Carnegie Hall in January.

Thanks to the initiative of the Daily Worker, the discussion has reached a breadth and intensity without precedent in the history of the movement. Past habits and practices that stifled discussion are being pushed aside. The initial indispensable condition for political vigor and growth—broadest membership participation in debate on theory, policy, tactics, organization and methods of work—is gradually being restored. This is the real point, and not whether anyone agrees with all the opinions expressed—which of course no one does.

However, as the discussion now assumes a more organized form around the Dennis-Weiss-Lightfoot reports for the National Committee and the results of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it seems to me that it is in order to focus attention more sharply on the nature and objectives of the discussion. These comments, in outline form, are intended to contribute to that end.

#### I. The Basis of the Party Discussion

To begin with, our discussion should be viewed not in isolation but as an integral part of a general process of re-examination taking place today here and abroad among all kinds of political groupings. In its essence, this re-examination is touched off by the urgent need to study and react to the new world of the mid-'50's—a world marked by new prospects of a lasting peace, the dawning of the age of atomic energy and automation, the break-up of the vast colonial empires, the great advances of socialism.

The point of departure for our reassessment of past policies and future perspectives should therefore be a re-study of our own country and the needs of its workingclass and people against the background of this new objective situation.

#### II. The Dennis Report

In this light, Comrade Dennis' report for the National Committee performs, in my opinion, a vital function. Reviewing our past 10 years, it places before all of us the responsibility to follow suit and to dig into the nature and source of our errors in estimates and tactics which have contributed to our relative isolation from the labor and people's movement. It traces the prime source of our errors to left-sectarianism and to our inability or refusal over the years to combat it effectively.

(I thoroughly agree with this conclusion, both in general and specifically in regard to the field of political action in which I've had a particular responsibility. Not only did I share in the mistaken estimate around the formation of the Progressive Party and its continuation after 1948, but I helped compound the errors by a mechanical and rigid implementation of wrong policies.)

The importance of this finding should not be obscured by certain faults in its presentation. I

### Statement of the Committee

Some weeks ago, this committee announced the opening of a public discussion on the report of Comrades Eugene Dennis, and Claude Lightfoot and Max Weiss to the National Committee of the CPUSA and urged the fullest participation of all Party members and organizations.

We print in this issue the second articles that have been received.

The discussion now being initiated is, of course, not entirely new. For some time now, there has been intense debate in the

ranks of the Party on all phases of our work. A profound process of re-examination is going on. There are differences of opinion within our ranks on a whole host of questions. There is nothing alarming about this. For only an open, frank and vigorous discussion in which every member honestly and frankly states his or her position, can guarantee that we will emerge with a stronger party and one more capable of truly serving and advancing the welfare of

the American people and the cause of Socialism.

We trust that this discussion will mark a new stage; in that it will help further deepen our understanding of the past, both in its positive and negative feature, as well as increasingly bring forth much more thinking with regard to future perspectives.

We urge upon everyone full participation in this discussion.

DISCUSSION COMMITTEE  
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think the report gives insufficient weight to the fight against sectarianism in 1952-5, beginning with the Draft Resolution; it fails to take into account the substantial (if minority) section of our membership who are in the mainstream organizations, and do not consider themselves, and indeed are not, isolated; and creates too negative an impact in its proper concern to be sharply critical and self-critical.

But the ringing call to get rid of left-sectarian estimates and tactics is sound. Removing sectarian blinders is a necessary first step if we are to take a really fresh look at ourselves and our role.

The report, however, seems to me to be inadequate in two respects. The one is the failure, in examining the sources of left-sectarianism, to explore the role of sectarian, mechanical and obsolete elements in our American Marxist theory. Such an inquiry would give added depth to our explanation of the roots of sectarianism. What is more, it would stimulate a bolder, more searching review of our theory as well as our policy, tactics and methods. It would help make clear that the need for a new look at our situation arises not alone from our errors—and those of Marxists abroad, as revealed at the 20th Congress—but from the new objective situation of the mid-'50's.

The second—unavoidable at the time—is in the handling of the party situation and perspectives. Written as the impact of the 20th Congress findings and revelations was just beginning to register, the NC report could not give a full estimate of the developing situation in the party. As a consequence, although it opened up discussion in an excellent way on key features of a future perspective—such as the question of a new mass party of socialism—the report was not able to project perspectives clearly in relation to the present.

#### III. The Situation in the Party

Reactions to the combined impact of the Dennis report and the 20th Congress indicate several conflicting trends. To secure a general estimate of the party situation, it is necessary to note these trends and evaluate their relative weight.

Roughly they include: (1) outright panic or loss of faith (in socialism, or, what is more frequent, in the party). While there are many in and around the party who have adopted a wait-and-see attitude, experience in a number of areas shows that very few have abandoned ship. This trend is real, but it is quite small,



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and is not our main problem today.

(2) Take-things-in-stride ("We have had crises before"). This trend underestimates and lags behind the situation; it holds back a collective search for answers; its very sterility feeds the conditions that produce a loss of faith. This trend, I believe, was the main initial danger, but is now declining under the impact of events.

(3) Recognizes the party to be in an unprecedented critical situation, whose solution demands bold, creative and radical measures. It is this trend, in my opinion, which must be encouraged.

Throughout the party there is general agreement—often expressed very sharply—on the urgent need to end bureaucracy in big and "little" matters, to

democratize methods and organization, welcome and stimulate membership initiative, listen to and learn from non-party people. This is all to the good, and provides a basis for taking many steps even before the next convention.

But on the fundamental questions of theory and policy there is, still I believe, a sharp divergence. On the one hand, the discussion thus far reveals a strong leftist current. This current sees the answer to our problems exclusively in a change of methods, leadership, etc., while clinging to past theory and policy. It is reflected in the thinking of those who use the term "constitutional Communist" as a term of derision, pin the label "Browderism" on any search for new solutions, and ignore or reject the perspective outlined in the Dennis report of a new mass party of socialism. In my opinion, the main barrier to the basic changes which our party must make is this left-sectarianism in the realm of theory and policy.

The discussion, on the other hand, also reveals a strong demand for a basic re-orientation in our thinking. In this connection, the Daily Worker editorials and some of its columns have initiated a sharp fight against sectarian dogmatism and for an independent, critical, American Marxist approach to our problems, an approach which candidly acknowledges our past mistakes. Despite some serious "excesses" which repel many who need to be won, this fight has been an invaluable contribution to clearing the way for a new

orientation in the pre-convention period.

The working out of this orientation should be spurred on by the fact that ours is not a crisis of retreat. Our critical situation does not result from an unfavorable domestic and world picture. On the contrary, since the objective situation is quite favorable, a solution to our party situation clearly lies within our power.

What is needed, it seems to me, is nothing less than a thorough-going re-examination not only of our estimates, tactics and methods of organization, but of our whole basic theory. This re-examination, I feel, should move along such lines as the following:

First, it should take as its starting-point a Marxist assessment of the new world of the mid-'50's and the specific features of our country and its labor, Negro, farm, liberal and left movements.

Second, it should be governed not by the fear of "throwing Marxism overboard," but by the need to answer the question: "What is a valid Marxist outlook in the USA today, as distinguished, say, from the 20's and 30's?"

Third, it should seek painstakingly to free our American Marxist theory from (1) aspects of Marxism valid for another country but wrongly applied to the USA; (2) distortions of Marxism, especially certain anti-democratic aspects of Soviet development revealed in the re-valuation of Stalin; (3) generally outmoded doctrine, particularly in reference to the transition to Socialism.

Fourth, it should give special attention to past differences between Social-Democratic and Communist concepts of social change and development. What was the origin of these differences? Have the events of the past decade narrowed these differences?

Fifth, it should strive not only for specific answers to specific questions, but attempt to outline the main essentials of an over-all American Marxist democratic socialist outlook, based on the necessity for socialism, on the class struggle, and on the primary role of the workingclass.

(To Be Continued Next Week)

## Says Negro People Have Right to Raise Self Determination Slogan

By BERNARD (New York)

I BELIEVE that the reasons given by Eugene Dennis in his report for dropping the slogan of self-determination for the Black Belt are not valid even though the decision itself is correct. And since, in my opinion, the slogan may become a correct one at some future time, I am stating my views on the subject.

Self-determination is a right which, under capitalism, is sometimes accorded to and sometimes denied to non-independent peoples, depending on the relationship of forces. The demand is sometimes raised by

a dependent people itself and sometimes by a government with designs on them. For example, the people of Cyprus demand the right of self-determination and the same slogan is raised by Greece which wants

to annex Cyprus. The disposition of the demand is determined by the relative strength of the contestants. No capitalist government ever gives up the exploitation of a dependent people unless forced in some manner to do so.

Socialist governments take the position that all peoples have the right of self-determination. Under this policy a future socialist government in the U.S. will take the position that any nation then under the domination of the U. S. will have the right of self-determination. This will apply to Puerto Rico and Hawaii, and if at that time the Negro people consti-

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# We Must Blame Ourselves for Our Isolation

By GEORGE SAMSON  
(New York)

THE PEOPLE, and in the first place the working class, is the mother earth of the Communist Party. It is its source of strength. Just as the separation of Antaeus from his mother earth resulted in his weakness, so isolation from the people resulted in our becoming sterile. Therefore, in the present discussion a major portion must deal with the problem of ending our isolation. The questions of making a correct estimate of the present situation and the working out of correct policies in a large degree are dependent on this.

However, before we can discuss how to end our isolation we must first find out how we got there; that is, seek in the most profound way and with the most soul-searching self-criticism the source of our isolation. In this no individual, individual leader, or collective body has a right to escape its particular responsibility.

In his report to the recent enlarged meeting of the National Committee, Eugene Dennis answers this question in the following way:

"The causes for the Party's weakened base and its increased isolation—in some cases relative, in others absolute—are largely to be found in adverse objective factors (my emphasis). These are a consequence in the first place of sharp, costly, and continuing political attacks and repressions against the Party, the left wing and other democratic forces."

Later in dealing with the subjective factor, that is the responsibility of our Party, he tends to place this question in such a way as to indicate that we didn't have to become as isolated as we did. However, the emphasis persists that it was the objective factors, those things over which we had no control that is the main reason for our isolation. It is my opinion that both from a theoretical and practical point of view this is wrong.

Theoretically; 1) it places in the hands of the bourgeoisie the power to determine whether we will have intrinsic relations with the people. In order to isolate us, all they have to do is introduce repressive measures. 2) It does not fully recognize the relationship between objective conditions and the role of the Party; that is, that a Party and Party leadership must have the ability to quickly recognize and estimate the changes in objective conditions, and quickly work out the necessary changes in policy, methods of work, forms of organization, mass methods of work, etc. Having the ability to do this would mean that regardless

of the objective conditions, we would always retain our connections with the people and constantly increase them. 3) It takes away the major responsibility from where it rightfully belongs, from the Party, its leadership in the first place the National Committee.

From the practical viewpoint I wish to give the example of an area where a recent estimate of the area leadership was that not only was the Party not isolated, but that it was never less isolated. How did this come about? A little less than four years ago there was a change in leadership. The new leadership was deeply concerned about the isolation of our organization and began a most serious search for its roots. It was our conviction then and still is, that the Party generally suffers from the following three most serious weaknesses.

1. The major one is the comparatively low ideological level of our Party membership and its leaders in its understanding of Marxism-Leninism and the ability to apply it to the U.S. Specifically, we have utterly failed to make a study of the history of the people of the U.S., especially the workingclass. And an absolutely inadequate effort to struggle against the dogmatic influence in our Party.

2. The poor class composition of our Party. In a Party which lays claim to being the vanguard of the workingclass in a country that is the most highly industrialized, the majority of our members are non-workingclass. We are especially weak among workers in the basic industries; that is, where we should be strongest.

3. An inadequate understanding and application of the principles of democratic centralism; especially the features of criticism and self-criticism, control of the carrying out of decisions. We have distorted the role of individual leaders, especially the full timers, and leadership bodies to the point where we had plenty of centralism and very little democracy. We failed in practice to consistently struggle against the expedient (pragmatic) methods of work existing in our organization.

Having made the above analysis, we determined on a path of ideological struggle and a plan of action to overcome these weaknesses. We determined not to be swayed from our path by the varying pressures, no matter from what source. The results achieved proved the correctness of our position. Some of the more important of these are:

1. Almost every member in the area is now part of an important mass organization. To a great degree these members have become active and have influence. A large portion are mem-

bers in important trade unions.

2. A 300 percent increase in the number of people in important industry with a consequent manifold increase in our shop clubs. These people also to a great degree are active and have become part of the important struggles of the unions, to which they belong.

3. A 300 percent increase in the circulation of the Daily and Sunday Worker.

4. Every member is a reader of Political Affairs.

These and other important results were not achieved without a constant ideological struggle against pressures from various directions to change our course. We had to constantly resist the effect of objective conditions to force us back into isolation. We had to resist the influence of some sections of our non-workingclass membership not to carry out our plans. Many times we had to oppose the proposals of our state leaders that we felt would force us back into the rut of expedient and pragmatic methods of work which in turn would have resulted in our isolation.

What were some of the methods that we introduced and fought for:

The struggle to put into practice the principle developed to a high level by the Chinese Party of "from the masses, to the masses." The first step to do this was to become part of the masses, especially the workingclass. To accomplish this we struggled for a policy of concentration in the important industries in our area. As part of this we attempted to convince a number of non-workingclass comrades to go to work in industry. In spite of the sceptics, we were able to convince about 75 percent of the group that was asked to do this. At this point it is important to point out that in the reports made at the National Committee meeting there is not a single mention of the key question of concentration. This to me is indicative of a trend now developing among our leadership of underestimating the decisive role of the workingclass. It is also indicative of their isolation from the workingclass and the people in general as well as the Party membership, resulting in an incapacity to chart the course necessary for us to end our isolation.

Another method that we struggled for was to make the Party club the spokesman for the Party in the area or shop in which it operated. The club was not to be by-passed in anything which was its concern. It was to make policy and carry out the activity in its area of responsibility. This was done in cooperation with the area leadership. In order to do this we many times had to

oppose the expedient (pragmatic) proposals of one or another state leader who demanded "quick," but of course not lasting results.

We felt that we had to do away with a situation in which Party members did nothing but engage in inner-Party activity. We therefore decided upon and fought for a policy of combining in every member and every leader both mass and inner-Party activity. Today there is not a single member who does only inner-Party activity. At the same time it was our feeling that the Party leadership of the clubs and the area could only be those that were leaders of the people and in the first place the workingclass. Therefore changes were made in this direction until everyone, including the area chairman, consisted of this type of member. The qualifications for membership on the area leadership body was whether the comrade was a mass worker and leader, whether he was able to reflect the thinking of the people he worked with, and whether he did independent thinking.

Here again on occasion we ran into conflict with members of the state leadership. For instance, about a month before the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party we had a discussion on the peace question. The person making the report criticized some of the foreign policy tactics of the Soviet Union at the time that Stalin was alive. The comrade from the state leadership was amazed that such a person was a member of the area leadership.

Later another comrade in the state leadership suggested to the person who made the report on the peace question that he drop out since his ideas were alien to the Party. It should be apparent now even to these two and other "Johnny Come Latelys" from the state leadership whose ideas were alien to the Party.

It might be mentioned at this point that while these state comrades have jumped on the bandwagon and joined in the general criticism of Stalin, etc. and even of the National Committee, as yet there is not the slightest hint of self-criticism on their part.

I might add at this point that in my opinion the most serious feature lacking in the present discussion is that of self-criticism in the Leninist manner. This means not only stating that mistakes were made, but delving profoundly into the sources of the errors. This is true from Khrushchev all the way down and most true of the Party leadership which has the greatest responsibility for the present situation.

The above mentioned basic weaknesses existed prior to the Browder period. Given the par-

ticular objective conditions existing then and a failure on the part of the National Committee to develop in practice a serious struggle to overcome them, we were led into the swamp of Browderism. This was a deviation to the right. With the expose of Browderism by Comrade Jacques Duclos, and again the failure of the Party leadership to conduct a serious struggle against our basic weaknesses, and given the pressures of the objective conditions following the war, we were led into the ditch of left sectarianism.

One would think that the exposure of the bureaucracy during the Browder period would have an affect on broadening inner-Party democracy. Following the discussion on Browderism, just the opposite took place. There was a gradual chipping away of inner-Party democracy by the leadership to the point where he had mainly centralism and very little democracy. Why did this happen?

We must recognize the fact that a Party leadership which, with the exception of Comrade William Z. Foster, were active advocates of Browderism could not automatically of and in itself make the necessary changes in the correct direction. The necessary addition of new forces on all levels of leadership from among those who were active participants in the struggles of the American people, especially the workingclass, was not made. The drawing into leadership of a substantial number of such people could have had a leaving effect on our leadership and helped provide a more correct estimate of the moods and readiness for action on the part of the people. This could have helped in preventing the leadership from making the full swing from a right deviation to left sectarianism.

Instead of working in the direction of overcoming their relative isolation, they developed tactics and methods of work which led to the greater isolation of the Party and themselves. In the course of attempting to put these sectarian policies into effect, opposition developed, especially among some members who were not isolated. Instead of realizing that these comrades could more accurately estimate the situation and giving serious consideration to their views, the leadership in their idyllic vacuum of isolation attempted to cram their ideas down the throats of these members.

If the differences of opinion persisted, every type of pressure was brought to bear on these comrades to give up their ideas. In some cases expulsions took place. Criticism of a leader or leadership body, especially on

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## Says Negro People Have Right to Self Determination

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tute a nation, it will apply to them. But, except under socialism, raising the slogan of self-determination implies a desire to separate from the dominant country, as is the case with Cyprus.

While it is always permissible to discuss theory, and while every nation, including the Negro nation, is entitled to self-determination, and while the Negro people have the right to raise this demand at any time they want to, it was incorrect for the Communist Party to raise the slogan on its own initiative. The CP does not have the right to tell the Negro people what slogans they shall raise or to raise slogans for them. For the Party to raise this slogan for the Negroes in the U.S. was equivalent to demanding separation, and since there was no demand on the part of the Negro people for

separation, it gave the appearance of a desire on the part of the CP for such separation of the Negro people.

As a matter of fact, the Negro people have never considered that demanding the right of self-determination was good strategy in their fight for freedom. But to draw from this the conclusion that they have already exercised their right and have elected to merge with the rest of the U.S. is unrealistic. All that they have decided is that the best strategy in their struggle for freedom is to demand equal rights with the white people. This is sensible strategy. It wins them the support of most of the white people, including many important elements of the ruling class. To demand separation at this time would alienate most of that support.

Whether, having achieved their civil rights, the Negro peo-

ple will then demand the right of self-determination has certainly not been decided by them yet. Actually, it is only after equality has been obtained that the Negro people will for the first time be in a position to decide whether they want to separate. If they do, they will raise the slogan of self-determination and the Party will support them.

The choice of integration which the Negro people have now apparently made was made under duress and is not binding. How often has a southern Negro said: "We do not want social equality. We only want the right to work?" Did that express a free choice or a choice under duress? Or was it no choice at all and only a matter of strategy? What would happen to the NAACP in the South if it raised the slogan of separation from the U.S.?

Moreover no choice made under the right of self-determination is ever irrevocable. It is of the essence of the right that a people can change its decision. If the people of Cyprus vote to unite with Greece, are they thereby forever foreclosed from demanding independence from Greece?

The question of whether the Negro people at the present time constitute a nation is not germane to the discussion. The correct question in this respect is whether, when a socialist government is established in the U.S., or when, earlier, the Negro people achieve their civil rights, they will at that time constitute a nation, or such other entity as well be entitled to self-determination.

The question will be affected by whether at that time there will be a contiguous area of Negro majority. Lack of such

an area will not mean that there is no Negro nation. It may only mean that the nation has been dispersed. Whether or not the Negroes reassemble, the existence of a large white minority or of a white majority in the territory of historical Negro concentration will raise the question of a bi-national state and of proportional representation. These problems have no bearing on the question of whether the Negroes are a nation. They only complicate the problem of self-determination. But in a period when the Negroes have already obtained equal rights, and certainly in a period of socialism, these problems will be amenable to solution. In any event, the Negro people have the right at any time to raise the slogan of self-determination. And if, and when, they do so, the CP should support the demand.



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the higher levels, was characterized as anti-Party. The leaders made themselves synonymous with the Party and the ideas and viewpoints of individual members were disregarded and suppressed. Unfortunately, basing itself on the wrong concept that "leadership was infallible" the majority of the membership went along with this situation, although there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction.

It is my opinion that the nub of the present question is not the development of the "cult of the individual" because this does not explain how the "cult of the individual" came into existence, but rather a distortion of the correct role of leadership by the leadership itself. Each particular leadership body demanded that its opinions be accepted as infallible by those below its level. Criticism could only come from

above. Therefore, the first guarantee of correct policies "from the masses" and to paraphrase this, "from the membership of the Party" was eliminated.

Therefore, to talk of ending our isolation without at the same time giving serious consideration to making changes in a leadership which is isolated not only from the masses but from the Party membership is simply to lay the groundwork for a new series of errors; this time, because of the objective conditions now developing, to the right. This does not mean a wholesale overhauling of leadership up and down the line, but rather a serious consideration to two things.

1) An examination of the present leadership and a rehabilitation of those most isolated by assigning them to work in important industries and mass organizations. When they have proven their ability to become part of and lead the struggles of

the people, the natural course of events will bring them back into leadership according to their abilities. 2) The drawing into leadership of those comrades, especially shop workers, who have in the past proved their ability not to become isolated and are presently part of and leaders of the struggles of the people.

This of course cannot be done unless the National Committee begins by making the most serious self-critical examination of its role and the role of every individual member in this past period. It is no good, as Comrade Dennis does in his report, to state that "WE" have made mistakes; that is, apparently all of us equally, without estimating the particular responsibility of each leadership body and its members. Only if this is done can we place ourselves on the path of truly becoming the vanguard of the working class.