

REPORT TO FIRST SESSION OF COUNTY CONVENTION JANUARY 2, 1956

It has become commonplace to open Communist Conventions with the statement that the session is meeting in an unprecedented time. That somewhat trite statement does not begin to describe this convention, where the question about the Party prominently raised in the discussion is: To be or not to be: and if to be, then how to be?

The posing of such a question reflects the political and organizational crisis both within our Party and in the relations of our Party with the working class.

We believe that the crisis comes as a result of the conjuncture of a number of events. A decade of ferocious attacks against our Party, its membership and its friends was bound to leave serious scars. The Krushev report had a soul-searing impact upon each of us, with the subsequent developments in Poland and Hungary adding new wounds. The accumulating acute criticism of our policies, and our methods, which had no outlet for over 5 years, and which was bound to erupt with the opening of pre-convention discussion, joined with the deep political and ideological questions raised by the Krushev report producing the state of alarming demoralization with which we are now faced. Paradoxically, this situation is present against a new world situation, where socialism has become a world system, where the peoples of Asia and Africa are destroying the system of colonialism and where, therefore, the possibility of peaceful co-existence can become a reality.

The unique nature of our crisis is epitomized by the fact that at the same time that the labor and Negro peoples movement is advancing, we are contracting. We have done little recruiting for over 6 years. As a result we have failed to have the necessary refreshing of membership, and the age level of our Party is the highest in its history. Our membership figure is the lowest in over 30 years. Insistently our Party asks how did this happen?

We believe that the debate over the impact of objective conditions against subjective error in determining main responsibility for our losses and relative isolation to be somewhat fruitless. On what scales can we weigh the impact of one or the other? But because we know that reaction has always conspired to destroy us, to isolate us from the people, we would direct our attention to the question of whether our guiding policies and tactics, based on an estimate of objective conditions, facilitated mass ties, or rendered us more

vulnerable to separation from the masses of people.

We propose to be blunt in examining the question of the Party crisis. We would utilize the approach posed by Lenin when he said: "It is not the defeat which is so dangerous, as the fear of admitting one's defeat, the fear of drawing from it all the conclusions... If we adopt the opinion that by admitting defeats we induce despondency and a weakening of energy for the struggle...we would have to say that such revolutionists are absolutely not worth a damn. Our strength in the past was, as it will remain in the future, that we can take the heaviest defeats into account with perfect coolness learning from their experience what must be modified in our activity...We cannot learn to solve the problems of today by new methods in yesterdays experiences has not made us open our eyes in order to see wherein the old methods were at fault"...

It is the opinion of the County Committee that our guiding policies from ~~xx~~ 1945 on made it impossible to solve practical problems concretely. An example of the connection between political estimates and tactics is provided by spokesmen for the National Committee in 1950: "It is impossible in the context of the present war situation to see anything but greater oppression of the Negro people as the outcome. It is inconceivable that the imperialist bourgeoisie can engage in an intensive drive toward war and carry th through a general attack upon the rights of the American people-- and at the same time advance the cause of Negro rights"...Or, after establishing the primacy of work in the right-led unions, another report said: "it is necessary we understand and apply a number of basic concepts..our members are duty bound to join with broader sections of the workers in establishing mass organizations that serve their interests such as the NLC, Labor Conference for Peace and CRC".... Go, work in the AFL with that as your basic concept!!

We give these two examples because they demonstrate that we cannot again satisfy ourselves with the formula which the National Committee has used too often in the past: "In the main our line was right, but it got distorted"...usually by lower bodies, is the implication! It was no accident that the report to the '50 Convention gave work in left centers as the basic application of our political line. The left centers emphasis represented a distortion of our vanguard role in that it expressed the incorrect belief that our

independent role can be expressed solely through centers representing the advanced progressive forces.

Generally, what was involved in our over-preoccupation with left-centers was an incorrect insistence that we Communists would determine what the masses actually need. The emphasis on left centers represented a dangerous belief that mass action can be replaced by the activity of the vanguard, thereby failing to recognize that the influence of the vanguard depends on the extent to which it is linked to the support of activity of the masses of people. Our tactics are dependent on a correct judgement of what the masses are willing and determined to do rather than on what we are determined to do on their behalf.

It is possible that one of the reasons for our failure to correctly estimate the moods and willingness of the working class to move around those issues which were so decisive to peace and progress, was our non-Marxist picture of the past and present status of the working class. American economic conditions being what they are, workers are influenced by petty bourgeois ideology. Maybe, because of our idealized picture of the working class we did not note accurately the fact that the main non-left leadership in the resistance to ~~Mc~~Carthivism and war came from middle class movements and intellectuals. A proper recognition of this would have enabled a more sober approach as to how to use this movement in order to further influence actively in working class organization. Further, an objective examination of this factor could have resulted in a new examination of the contradictions in the ranks of the ruling class, as evidenced by the pamphlets of Weir (National Steel), which called for peaceful co-existence, the publications of the Value Line Investment corporation which denounced American intervention on behalf of colonialism in Viet Nam, etc. We are always so worried about exaggerating these contradictions that we end up by ignoring them. Our confidence in the decisive role of the working class is based on our knowledge of the potential of that class once it moves into action, and increases its class consciousness.

When we criticize our distorted emphasis on left centers, we do not imply that all the activity there was wasted. We believe the facts show that as a result of the impact made by the organized efforts of the members of NLC, the Negro question was forced on the

agenda of AFL and CIO unions, in order to meet and try to head off their challenge. The labor movement developed its own forms that heightened the fight; FEP and Civil Rights Committees, anti-discrimination committees, etc. For far too long a period, we failed to recognize these bodies as expressing channels for advancing the struggles for Negro rights, and our contribution in this field were thereby limited to the left-centers activities.

Similar examples could be given in the field of civil rights, notably the Wesley Well's case, where more thousands were moved into action than any civil rights case since Tom Mooney. There has practically no field of struggle for human rights in which our Party members were not active. Our biggest error, we believe, was in failing to draw the proper conclusions from these activities. Instead of viewing the left centers as mass membership organizations, we should have recognized their limited value in initiating parallel activities and in stimulating broader movements. We could have thereby avoided draining the Party of people and finances, and would have had better guarantees that Communists were primarily active in those organizations which directly influences the thousands and the millions. Considerable progress was made in this direction after the 1952 National Resolution. If, at that time, the Resolution had not limited its direct analysis to the results of a leftist line in the electoral field, we would have arrived earlier at many of the conclusions we are now discussing. The essential vigor of our Party is demonstrated though, by the fact that in spite of the attacks we not only maintained it but did carry on important work in many fields.

We agree with the increasing number in our ranks who suggest that an examination of the work in the last 10 years is not sufficient to get to the source of our crisis. The most serious question is the failure of Marxism to root itself in the American scene, and it is probable that in attempting to define the reasons for this we would also achieve greater clarity on our analysis of the last decade.

We would single out dogmatism and doctrinarism as the twin evils which have dogged the American Marxist movement since the 1880's. Marx and Engels, in their "Letters to Americans" repeatedly singled out the dogmatic failure of Marxists to recognize that scientific socialism is based on an exposition of the processes of evolution.

They ridiculed the Marxists of that period who made of this science a "it-alone-brings salvation dogma". Candor must compeñ us to admit that we Communists have made of Marxism-Leninism the same salvation-bringing dogma. Many of us believe that this is partly at stake in the debate as to whether our belief in the principles of Marxism-Leninism shall be stated in the preamble. The trotskyites have always proclaimed themselves to be a party based on Marxism-Leninism. But not all who cryeth "Lord, Lord" shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and the proof of attachment to Marxism-Leninism does not lie in protestations but in our activities, based upon our ability to fuse the principles of Marxism with the realities of American li fe.

Perhaps reason for the devotion to dogma was our separation of theory and practice. We Communists say there is only one kind of true theory in the world, the theory that is drawn from objective reali and then in turn is verified by it. We know that while theory is a guide to action, action is a guide to new theory.

Did we observe these axioms of Marxism-Leninism in life? We would use one example to illustrate the answer. The analysis of our N.C. on the June 4th, 1951 decision of the Supreme Court on the Smith Act stated, in essence, that our party ~~xxxx~~ was outlawed, and which therefore made necessary the arrangements for a system of leadership designed to secure party cadre. Life soon demonstrated that there was a considerable gap between the desire of reaction to completely outlaw the Party and their ability to accomplish this. But it took almost four years before the Party leadership could be convinced that we were virtually outlawing ourselves. Time does not allow for the additional examples with which our history is replete and which demonstrates our unhappy facility for sterilizing theory by separating it from life.

We think a contributing factor in our failure to adapt Marxism to the American scene was our literal translation of Russian life and experiences to American soil. Listen to Lenin's ridicule of Russian Marxists who attempted such literal translation of Marx's writings about the American scene to Russia. "To think that these recommendations of Marx and Engels to the British and American labor movements can be simply and directly applied to Russian conditions is to use Marxism not in order to elucidate its methods, not in order

to study the concrete historical peculiarities of the labor movement in certain countries, but in order to settle petty factional intellectual accounts..."...We believe that further probing will indicate that we did exactly what Lenin warned against in our mechanical application of the definition of a Party of a new type, in our political approaches towards social-democracy and reformism, and in many approaches towards the labor movement. We think a great deal more time is necessary for our party to more correctly estimate the realities of American life, including the impact of the united labor movement and the militant Negro freedom movement on our country. We would content ourselves therefore, with giving an immediate example in a field with which we are all too familiar, the question of beurocracy within our own party. As a result of using the form but not the content of Marxism, we made a travesty of the concepts of democratic centralism and monolithic unity, both of which should be dependent upon the atmosphere of independent debate and political conviction, not dictation. We believe that the bureouracy which enveloped our organization cannot be solely identified with good or bad leaders in the Party. The whole Party was the victim of it. In the later session of the convention, when the County leadership examines its own work, we hope to critically deal with our own role during this decade. But for the nonce, we can state that our own failure to allow our membership to be aware of the disagreements over political line and theoretical questions in this last decade robbed the Party membership of any opportunity to exercise its fundamental role of helping to develop policy and changing or modifying it as life dictated.

There have been some proposals made that the only answer we can give to the Party ~~is a crisis~~ crisis is dissolution. Some comrades have already suited the deed to the word by leaving the Party. We are overwhelmingly opposed to an answer which would liquidate the Communist Party. We believe that our Party is at this time an indispensable instrument in providing American Communists with a collective through which we can participate in the activity and the study necessary to produce new answers. We believe that the form and character of a Communist organization in America will be determined by the tremendous changes in the world and in the United States. Liquidation would deprive us of the necessary collective through which new answers can be found.

We do not agree with those who feel that if we dissolve we can still function correctly by ~~xxxx~~ working through unions, NAACP, or other people's organizations. Life has proven the correctness of the Communist Manifesto's definition of the need of a Party that would see and serve the interests of the whole, not just sections of the class.

The great majority of the County Committee is likewise opposed to premature changes in name and character of our Party. We think there is present in these proposals an old sin of jumping over stages, of bringing forward conclusions before both the right questions have been asked, and the correct answers found on the basis of all the necessary facts.

We think there is a serious danger in underestimating the liquidation that can come from failing to make drastic changes at the National Convention. We can become a sect if we fail to comprehend the new conditions present and transform our organization accordingly. Unless we can discard the reactions among some who resent the significance of the world changes, we will fail to be sufficiently sensitive to the task of finding new ~~x~~ answers, and will thereby wither on the vine. We must, if we are to live, discard approaches of self-righteousness which lead some comrades to believe they are the sole guardians ~~xx~~ of the purity of our scientific approaches.

Allow me to give two examples of the new theory and policy which are called for to correspond to the changes in the world:

1. Internationalism: We have always made synonymous the concept of internationalism with complete defense of all that takes place in the Soviet Union. Many believe there were sufficient reasons for this approach in the past, when the Soviet Union was the only land of Socialism, when it was a beleaguered fortress surrounded by hostile encirclement. But there are many countries now which are socialist-led, and as a result great new problems have arisen in regards to the relations of the Soviet Union to these countries, and respect to our relations with each and all of them. The old definitions will not help us to understand the contradictions present in the growth of Socialism on a world scale. The previous answers cannot guide us as we try to understand the painful process by which the Soviet Party will disentangle itself from its own wrong past

policies. We think it quite probable that the new definition of internationalism should contain guarantees against our past approach which criticized only after the Soviet Union itself had been self-critical, and the classless approach which equate the Socialist and Capitalist worlds as representing equal channels for fulfilling mankind's aspirations for freedom from exploitation and human dignity and decency.

There is an element of unreality in some of the sharp criticisms against the Soviet Union today. The correction of the grave mistakes made within the Soviet Union and in its relations with other Socialist-led countries takes place against the background of a world imperialism devoted to the destruction of the Socialist world. Every step taken of correction is, therefore, fraught with danger to the security of the Socialist countries, and to believe that rules of good conduct to regulate these relations can be laid down is to believe that the Socialist world exists on a different planet than the capitalist world. We are not neutrals in the battle between the capitalist and socialist worlds. We are fiercely partisan on behalf of the Socialist countries. Our criticism must be based on the realities of the whole picture, and not on some idealized version of fair play treaties. We will not find our way if we name-call those who pioneer in seeking new answers by calling them "anti-soviet" or those who are more cautious and slower by "stand-patters". We greet the letter of the Nation Committee to the Convention, which sets a welcome tone to our present and future discussions on this and other questions.

Finally, we agree that our internationalism will become more vital as it includes working-class solidarity with the workers in capitalist and colonial countries, particularly with those whom American imperialism directly oppresses.

2. Vanguard Role: We believe it would be well nigh impossible to maintain our Party if we retained our old definitions of our vanguard role. We doubt that it was ever correct, but at least in past periods, when there were not important people's organizations on the scene, we helped fill in the vacuum, and helped stimulate the growth of some of these movements. But in this last decade, vast changes have brought renewed strength to these people's organizations, who are now leading these struggles. If we agree that the primary

aspect of the vanguard role should be in bringing socialist and class consciousness to the working class, and in representing the interests of the whole working class, then we must all participate in searching for a more correct political and organizational expression of our role. The County Committee believes ~~xxxx~~ that an important reflection of this will be in collectively participating in finding new answers to an old need: How to unify both the socialist and communist workers, and how to attract new people who are searching for a way to express their hatred of capitalist life. This is summarized in the County Committee resolution, which states:

"The Communist Party will encourage and further all trends and currents contributing toward the establishment of an effective, Marxist vanguard party, and declares its readiness, when conditions have matured, to take whatever steps may be necessary to enlist the fullest support and allegiance for such an organization, from all Americans dedicated to the cause of Socialism".

This is necessary in regard to how we initiate and test political line, and how we play our role in participating in the movements of today, in order to demonstrate the need for Socialism tomorrow. The resolution from the Harriet Tubman Club places the question of how we do this and still avoid the charge of interference in other organizations: "Party discussion of problems confronting other organizations shall be in the spirit of adding to the understanding of these problems through scientific socialist analysis, and not for the purpose of making decisions. Such decisions are properly made in the organizations themselves on the basis of the enriched thinking that comes from the friendly sharing of all points of view".

A third example of the defining of vanguard role deals with the continuing search for the road to socialism in the United States. We believe that any answer to this will have to deal a body-blow to the dogmatism of the past, which prevented us from seeing the many-sided realities of American history and tradition. The current debate around a constitutional path to Socialism exemplifies some of the problems before us in finding answers. There are some who dismiss any such perspective as representing an acceptance of a classless position. They do not see the continuing realities of the Constitution as an Historical instrument for change, through the process of amendments. Does this perspective negate struggles? On

the contrary, a look at American history indicates that the amendments to the Constitution came as a result of tremendous struggle. The 19th Amendment, providing for women's suffrage, was not given out of the benevolence of the ruling class. Years of heroic struggle were necessary before sufficient strength and allies were accumulated to force it through. Struggle is not only decisive to enact amendmmts, it is equally necessary to give them life. The great clashes in the South, led by the Negro freedom movement, is for the first time permitting at least partial expression of the 13th and 14th Amendments, which were themselves enacted as a result of the Civil War. We believe, therefore, that the constitutional path to Socialism ~~is~~ is based on the class and national struggles, which in turn can utilize the Constitution for providing one of the instruments of change.

We believe the Draft Resolution reflects this desire for a fresh approach towards defining the stages of mass and class struggles before us, in its presentation of the anti-monopoly coalition as the strategic goal on the path to Socialism. This approach is also expressed in the refusal to blue-print how the historic need for an independent Labor Party can evolve, but rather the posing of alternative paths through which a Labor Party could develop.

It is not possible to discuss a definition of our vanguard role without including mention of the People's World. Whether the People's World continues as a daily or becomes a weekly, it is going to require our combined strength to ensure its publication and our utilization of it. The paper can be indispensable in bringing a Socialist outlook to California, and in dealing with the events of the day.

We do not try to project all of the big, new problems before us. We use these examples mainly to demonstrate the need of fighting to maintain our Party organization, in the only spirit that we think will allow for its life, one of ruthlessly destroying the dead hand of dogma of the past, and the determination to face the present and future problems ~~xxxx~~ in searching for truth wherever it may be found. We think that the search for truth includes probing into what, why, and how the developments pictured in the Khrushchev report occurred. Like the rest of the Party, our County Committee has been limited by time to concentrating on immediate problems. Some of the questions which I would raise on this point do not, therefore, necessarily represent the opinions of others on the County

Committee.

I would agree with those who say that the problem of building an economy of abundance, which would thereby guarantee the fullest expression of democratic socialism, was the most complex with the first revolution occurring in a semi-feudal country, surrounded by enemies determined to destroy it, if at all possible. The march towards industrializing the backward economy required heartbreaking discipline and sacrifice. But from these facts I would not agree with those who thereby conclude that the violations of socialist democracy were either inevitable or unimportant. I think Lenin ~~xxxx~~ gave some of the necessary warning when he stated that the trade unions must defend the workers against their own State, because of the nature of the bureaucratic distortions that would be present in building Socialism in a backward country. If it was necessary to warn of the guardian role which the trade unions must play to protect workers' rights, how much more essential to guarantee the purity of a Party which must act as the guardian of the rights of the whole people. I think it possible that the increasing fusion of the Soviet Party with the apparatus of the Soviet State, robbed both the Party

and the State of the independence which would provide the checks and balances necessary to guarantee against violations of Socialist principles. Political disagreements within the Party became crimes against the State, and non-Party Soviet organizations and governmental bodies dissipated their strength and became appendages to the Party. Furthermore, I am interested in the point stressed by Krushev at the 20th Congress in regard to the composition of new members coming into the Soviet Party. To my knowledge, this is the first time since 1936, that the Soviet party has stressed this question. Perhaps, one of the reasons for such emphasis is that the managerial forces, developed by the Socialist State, had over-dominated the Party in the past, and thereby weakened its role in serving the working class. Further, the events in Poland and Hungary force us, I think, to examine the contradiction of the unselfish Socialist aid given to the People's Democracies in their industrialization, and side by side with this, the one-sided trade treaties which operated mainly at the expense of the People's Democracies, and which may have represented economically the political presence

of Soviet ~~big~~ (big power) nationalism. But whatever the future answers may be, it is clear that our Party must continue debating and discussing the question in order to benefit from the pioneering role played by the Soviet Union.

If we try to guarantee the proper atmosphere, life can be very exciting as we extend the areas of our search for the questions and answers which will influence our political futures. Our attitude towards civil liberties, not just in the far-off future, but in capitalist America, our approach towards other socialist-oriented movements and peoples, a new look at forms of organization and structure for our own Party....these are just a very few of the questions which are before us, and for which we need greater time to find answers. We think those provisions of the Draft Constitution which help to guarantee the end of the monopoly of leadership in ~~the~~ developing policies will be of considerable importance in democratizing our Party, and providing some organizational safeguards against bureaucracy. We hope that our next session, after the National Convention, will produce local by-laws which will continue and extend this process. But we do not think all the answers can be found either in resolutions or in constitutions and by-laws. The task of enriching Marxism by American theory will not be solved solely thru codifying principles and policies.

The Party is the sum total of its membership, and our efforts to learn from the past, to struggle against inertia, routinism, subjectivity, will be successful only to the extent that each one of us tackles our own backyard. We will be able to help our comrade remove the mote from his eye only to the extent that we concentrate on the beam in our own eye. Each of us has the task of trying to acquire the modesty and humility which should be the characteristic of Communists, and without which we cannot learn from the people, nor from one another. An awareness of this can diminish that note of arrogance present in the belief that the right answers can be found only in one direction.

We became Communists because of our hatred of capitalism and its degradation of human beings. We remained Communists, in spite of the persecution, because our vision of Socialism gave us strength. But neither devotion nor dedication by themselves, can maintain and build our Party. We, who are willing to give our lives for our ideals, must be equally willing to transform those lives, if we are to participate in ending, in our Country, the exploitation of man by man - that noblest task of all mankind.