

CPA Discussion Page

Open to All CPA Members—Send Your Contributions to Communist Political Association, 35 E. 12 St., N. Y. C.

Understanding of Social Forces Is Weapon Against Imperialism

Communists demand from their leaders the strength of recognition and correction of errors. The capitalist class and its press can't comprehend us. They can't understand the way we regard the individual leader. We love and honor our leaders, but ours is more than mere personal loyalty. It is political loyalty, something most of our critics are incapable of. Hero worship is a middle class ailment. That is why a middle class leader gone wrong can lead his unquestioning flock into harmful paths, for they will follow him everywhere. They deify him. Not so with us. We base our devotion and loyalty to individual leaders on a political plane. That is why our leaders grow through the realization of their mistakes and through the correction of these mistakes. Failure to recognize and correct a mistake forfeits the right to leadership. Rationalization has no place in our thinking.

The present discussion unquestionably reveals that our organization has committed some major errors, all of which grew out of a revision of the fundamental teachings of Marxism - Leninism. Comrade Harvey in an article in the Daily Worker told us that Lenin was not satisfied to apply the teachings of Marx to a new period, but developed these teachings to conform with the needs of this new period. He implies that once again it is necessary to implement Lenin, for the world has reached a new epoch. It is true that Lenin has further developed the science of Marxism in the epoch of imperialism (while carrying on a most energetic and merciless struggle against revisionism) thereby making the greatest contribution to the progress of world humanity. He clearly defined the epoch of imperialism and taught us its features, operations and laws. It is because of his greatness that the working mass of Russia found its way to power.

However, the comparison used by Comrade Harvey is not a good one. While there is no doubt that there is a great deal new in the present situation, we could not conclude that we have entered a new epoch. We are in the period of imperialism. Politics grow out of economics. Imperialism must, by its nature, pursue imperialist politics, curtailed "voluntarily" only to the extent that it is forced by other forces in society, primarily the working class.

Certainly the power of the Soviet Union is an influence to the good of all mankind. Its existence and strength will curtail the imperialists. It is precisely because of this that there is so much antagonism shown against the Soviet Union by the imperialists only a few weeks after the defeat of America's and Britain's fascist imperialist rival in Europe which at the same time was an invader of the Soviet Union and the small nations; a defeat to which the Soviet Union made such a tremendously decisive contribution.

The decisive imperialist group in our country knows that a strong socialist land makes it impossible for it to go on unrestrained. So, while hating this great power which thus thwarts their insatiable greed, they have to at the same time grudgingly make concessions. Simultaneously, however, as we can see it today, they will try to build up a Holy Crusade against Russia. So there is no question about the existence of deep-seated antagonism against the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the imperialists know that the Soviet Union is not an imperialist nation. It does not need to be feared as our imperialist rival. They know that it can absorb a great deal of our production, thereby giving profits to the capitalists. These are interests which coincide with the interests of the Soviet Union. This is even more so because there exists concurrently with the above main ideological antagonism a deep antagonism among

the rival imperialist powers for markets and sources of raw material. The Soviet Union is both, a huge market and source of raw material. An the bases of equality as between the most powerful nations on earth.

While we have these interests and antagonisms, we also have the predatory nature of imperialism as well as its blindness to contend with. It is these features that lead it to wars and new wars, unless the working class of each country would be educated to understand the true nature of these rulers and their predatory policies and would exercise its own influence through a merciless struggle against them. Thus, the working class of our own country, with its allies (the Soviet Union, the workers of other lands, the colonial people, the veterans, the Negro people, farmers, etc.) through struggle can play its historic progressive role in achieving democracy and world peace, the promise of Teheran.

"A long period of class peace" can only come about as a result of the abolition of classes. (There is, of course, a possibility for relative class peace for a short period, such as we experienced in the struggle against Nazi imperialism). And that can only be realized through class struggle. But it is false to say that Teheran can only be realized as a result of a long period of class peace. It is precisely the well planned activities of the people, led by the working class, that can bring it about. To say that Teheran can be realized only through a long period of class peace is to make Teheran a political platform, AN IDEOLOGY. The characterization by Duclos of Teheran is correct, and yet in no way minimizes its importance as a great historic agreement between the victorious allies. It is all that. But it cannot be a political platform of a Marxist Party.

Our revisionist guilt lies precisely in that we have on the basis of our understanding of Teheran "transformed" imperialism by giving it new political content, thereby, while not in words, in fact we "abolished it." Once you abolish something you cannot fight it. So "struggle" becomes but a synthetic word, and we are on the road to an "alliance" where we are becoming mediators between imperialist powers (Comrade Browder's criticism of Eric Johnston's trip to Britain) and act as a break upon the militancy of the working class without which the realization of Teheran is impossible. We lose our own voice and our reason for existence. Since the "common ideology" is the agreement of Teheran, what use is there for separate existence? That is how we came to the dissolution of our organization. It is this whole concept which is at its very core.

By realizing our revisionist error, we at once find the correct balance and the correct path to peace, jobs and democracy, through cooperation with all democratic forces, through a strengthened working class, which instead of illusions has the weapon of clear understanding of the forces at work in the world.

It is false to fear that by abandoning our previous position we leave ourselves without a programmatic approach. The Resolution of the National Board has a programmatic approach. It has to be concretized to the needs of all sections of our people and all localities. Our work will be strengthened, our prestige enhanced and we will be in a position to work more fully and effectively for a broad, democratic coalition of all progressive forces around the immediate issues of the day upon which the future peace of the world depends.

L. SASS, N. Y.

Wants CP to Regain Leadership

The danger in the discussion that is going on the National Board Resolution is that we are inclined to put any faults that may have arisen on the dissolution of the Communist Party on the shoulder of some individual member.

According to the facts at our disposal Comrade W. Z. Foster offered his objection and pointed out the dangers and it behooves us to be modest in our efforts to abridge the perspective before us. The present situation proves that despite all the knowledge that has been handed down to us by Marx, Lenin and Stalin, we are human, all too human, and prone to many mistakes. It appears we still have a lot to learn. We should ask ourselves have we understood the teachings of Marxist Leninism? Have we been too ready to accept passivity?

Lenin always taught "That the Party must heed the voice of the masses, must pay close attention to their revolutionary instincts, must study the practice of the struggle of the masses; and on this basis test the correctness of its own policy. We should ask ourselves if the CPA has fulfilled its objective as stated by Lenin. If it has not then it should.

The best way to find out is by dealing with your own experiences, and I am asking myself: Did the dissolution of the Communist Party activate the masses better? Were we able to reach the union organization more effectively? Did the working people react better to the CPA than they did to the Communist Party? Was the membership more active since the dissolution of the Communist Party?

I am asking these questions to satisfy myself, particularly as it appears to me to apply to Detroit, and the membership are asking them also especially as it affects the shops and plants in this vicinity. We have grave doubts of the continuation of the present policies of the CPA because of the breakdown

of our activities among the broad mass of industrial workers.

I had occasion to raise this question with Comrade Earl Browder three or four months ago while he was in this city. Most of the speakers were reiterating the strength of the Reuther forces. My thoughts then, and still are today, that the forces of Reuther were not stronger, but we were weaker because our activity was less, and we had become disorganized. Our Community clubs never have functioned effectively. The average attendance ran about 25 members out of a possible 100. The union members who attended the clubs were almost zero. Collection of dues and registration were an impossible task. Although they did do a tremendous job for the reelection of President Roosevelt.

The union members in the CPA are inactive. We can and do mobilize them for Press Drives and collection of funds that are needed, proving they are still loyal to the Party while lackadaisical towards the policy of the CPA. It was a bright ray of sunlight when Duclos sent the article on "The Dissolution of the Communist Party" and in my opinion; the resolution of the National Board stems right into the path which will enable us to become again the leaders of the working people.

Lenin said "The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party and how it fulfills, in practice, its obligations towards its class and towards the masses of working people." The Communist Party in my opinion should, again come to the fore, a party which will in its own name and program, put forward its own candidates in local and national elections.

It appears to me to be an anomaly that in the greatest capitalist country in the world we have no

Communist Party activity at the polls to press forward the workers' demands and elect candidates to fight for them in the local and national assemblies. Have we lost the strength and courage of Bolsheviks to allow ourselves to be a tail of a kite to the progressive Democrats and Republicans, and sometimes some who are not so progressive. Are we so naive to anticipate that everything will just work out under capitalist economy for the working people because Kaiser, Eric Johnston, and one or two more have expressed themselves as willing to cooperate with labor. It appears that there must be an intensive educational apparatus set up to re-educate our members on Marxist policy. There are tens of thousands of capable and talented people in the working class. We have to promote them to leading positions in the Party. We have to rebuild the organization within every shop and plant and neighborhood on a new basis.

Stalin expresses more precisely my fervent thoughts when he stated "that the Party should not command but above all convince the masses and to help them to realize by their own experience the correctness of the policy of the Party; that it must therefore be the guide, the leader, the teacher of its own class." "The membership of the CPA are expecting a clear directed Communist leadership from the National Board and the National Committee. The question of shop and plant organization, separate, but not altogether apart from the community should be decided upon, but I think that union members nationally should be called together to discuss this important matter. The question of unity of the CIO and the AFL and the Railroad Brotherhood as well as other questions should be discussed.

I am generally supporting the National Board Resolution.
BILL McKIE, Detroit.

Only Self-Criticism Will Correct Basic Errors

By KAY BURTON, Baltimore, Md.

Last year, as a club leader, I helped put over the policy that most of us now agree was so wrong. I do not use the words "put over" lightly, for that's just how we went about it. We were proceeding on blind faith in our national leaders. Our approach didn't encourage free discussion, and, although we went through the motions of "democracy," anyone who wanted to differ with the new line didn't get very far.

Most members are not in contact with national or state leaders, but with the officers and executive committee of our clubs. The club is the basic organization of our movement, the one place in which any member should feel free to help guide the policy and program of the Communists as a whole. We brought into our clubs the same attitude of hero worship, the same "big boss" method of working, that characterized our national leaders. Therefore, we club leaders are as much under review by the membership as are the leaders of our state and national organizations.

Whether or not our clubs will consider us fit to continue in leadership depends first of all on how we conduct ourselves during the pre-convention discussion period. Are we going to our clubs to again "put over" a job? Or are we putting up a real struggle to understand our errors and correct our approach?

At a time when self-criticism is general, it's easy enough to say, "I, too, was wrong. I, too, accept responsibility." That, of course, is necessary. But there's more to self-criticism than admitting a mistake; even more to it than showing how to correct it.

In turning to Marxist writings on self-criticism, I came across a note written by one who was helping to guide the work some of us were doing in a small town. It said, "As a guide to all your political thinking about the work of the section and an analysis of shortcomings, look up Lenin's definition of self-criticism from Left Wing Communism (which is also used by Stalin in Mastering Bolshevism and a number of other places), and stick to it like a formula. There are four points to it—the first and last point are comparatively easy, but the two middle points are the tough ones, and on sticking to them depends the success of the whole formula. You may be surprised at what begins to happen to your analysis if you do this, and if it's good enough for Lenin and Stalin, it should be of some value to us."

The author of this note was Hank Forbes, New York Communist Party leader, who later was killed in action in Italy. Here is the Lenin definition of self-criticism, which Hank advised us to "stick to like a formula."

"The attitude of a political party toward its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party and of how it fulfils in practice its obligations toward its class and toward the toiling masses. To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyze the conditions which gave rise to it, to study attentively the means of correcting it—these are the signs of a serious party; this means the performance of its duties, this means educating and training the class and, subsequently, the masses. ("Left Wing" Communism, Chap. VII.)

I think we club leaders can re-establish ourselves with the membership only by using this method of self-criticism. In admitting our mistakes, in showing how to correct them, we must also analyze the nature and basic source of the "wrong way of working that we have followed as club leaders; we must explain why these errors happened. It isn't easy. But those of us who are honestly willing to put up an ideological struggle will have some real success in pondering the deep meaning of the Lenin method of self-criticism.

Finally, I believe that the entire membership should accept the responsibility of correction that faces our organization. Attend the discussion meetings. Speak what's in your mind. If you don't know the long words, use the simple ones. If you feel you don't know enough theory, remember, except for Foster, nobody else knew enough among our leading Communists. Speak from what experience itself is teaching you. In an attitude of real responsibility on the part of our members as a whole, we will have the best guarantee of the correction of the very grave mistakes that the American Communists have made.

