

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the rank-and-file members of the Communist Party, much of the party's inner corrosion which arouses antipathy and intensifies its isolation can be traced to the abandonment of Leninist principles regarding party life and activities. The leadership of the party, however,

seems to be searching for an ideological "open sesame" for the present crisis.

It would seem that the primary task of the leadership should be a careful evaluation of the thoughts and experiences of the membership to bridge the gap between the membership and the leadership.

The party cannot regain prestige by perfunctory admissions of "bureaucracy" or "wrong methods of work." There is clearly the danger that the cry of ideological errors and of objective conditions, though containing a measure of justification, will lead to an avoidance of self-criticism by the leadership and will prevent definition of the basic contradictions within the party.

Inside and outside the party, people doubt the readiness and capacity of the present leadership to undergo such decisive self-criticism. The editors of the *Monthly Review*, a socialist, non-party magazine, for example, believe that the Communist leadership is hopelessly compromised and that the party has no future. "Eventually," they predict, "its decline will continue until it joins the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Party in the museum of American political history."

Despite the current unpropitious objective conditions in the United States, this dismal prediction need not materialize. The party will probably continue to be harassed and further tactical and organizational retreats may be necessary. But the history of Marxist parties shows that such retreats need not lead to rout, abandonment of correct ideology and party disintegration.

Communist Parties generally do not crumble under enemy repressions or from loss of membership; some even become tempered and politically more mature. Phases of decline and relative impotence have been followed by

resurgence and expansion. In 1940 the Italian Communist Party, now the largest in the nation, counted only ten thousand members.

Resurgence depends chiefly upon a party's moral and intellectual incorruptibility and on the dedication of the membership to the cause of the working people.

Bureaucracy, a term covering many evils, can destroy a party. Many people sought in the party new moral, cultural and intellectual values and social relations free from the venality, hypocrisy and pettiness of bourgeois life. They often found distrust, nepotism, inflexible discipline, slander, ridicule and a philistine anti-intellectualism.

The vanity and sanctimonious insolence of upstart theoreticians, rudeness and arrogance alienated countless party members as well as sympathizers.

These weaknesses date back at least to the Browder period and have continued until the present.

Despite these serious inner-party defects and weaknesses the political record of the American Communist Party is an honorable one. It has helped organize trade unions, fought for social security, housing, education and against war hysteria and McCarthyism and has participated in numerous civil rights struggles and in battles for full citizenship for the Negro people. In addition, the party has enriched and stimulated the thinking of millions of Americans.

Yet "political rectitude," as Charles Humboldt, managing editor of *Mainstream*, observed (October 1956 issue), "needs the leavening of human experience, the taste of kindness, compassionate understanding, the quality of common joy, the sense of solidarity. . . . One should at least try from time to time to resemble the future one claims to be committed to." Intellectuals, he notes, "were

driven to such a pitch of irritation that their conduct provided an opportunity for discounting them as unstable elements."

Although intellectuals compose a large and disproportionate section of the membership, the leadership has exhibited a flagrant disregard of the role intellectuals can and do play in other Marxist parties, treating them with a disdain and suspicion that reflected the general anti-cultural and anti-intellectual orientation of American bourgeois society.

Neither the Draft Resolution nor Foster's rejoinder even mention the acute cultural and educational tasks and problems facing the party in this period of transition and widespread confusion.

It would be incorrect, however, to view all inner-party weaknesses as due to bad leadership only. There has been an interaction between leaders and members and between party members and the surrounding social climate. American cultural and social developments during the last decade has shown many regressive tendencies. Some of this decadence seeped into the Communist Party.

The present confusion and disorientation also reflects the unsatisfactory class composition of the party, for middleclass elements are notoriously politically unstable. Many party members who were once workers have become professional and business people. Much of the membership has considerably improved its economic status under the postwar boom.

The Krushchev revelations depressed party members, and the strains and tensions of the cold war repressions brought on lassitude and exhaustion. Describing a similar weariness among the French revolutionaries of 1930, Victor Hugo commented: "The present has its excusable

amount of egotism . . . and it cannot be expected to sacrifice itself incessantly to the future. 'I exist,' murmurs that someone who is everybody. 'I have a wife and children. I wish to live. So leave us at peace.' Hence at certain hours a profound coldness falls on the magnanimous vanguard of the human race."

Those leaders and members who are convinced of the need for a Marxist-Leninist party in America do not suffer from this "coldness." Many of them have abandoned their former uncritical attitude toward the party apparatus and are seeking to revitalize the party, to transfuse it with a more dynamic workingclass leadership capable of adapting party methods of work to the tasks at hand.

In the American Communist Party as in all social groupings, the old never yields to the new without a struggle. In discussing the continued existence of the party, the leadership and the membership must consider these questions:

To what extent must the party break with its past organizationally and in forms and methods of work?

Will an entrenched leadership be able to make the necessary changes?

Will this transformation be forced by the members?

In a discussion of future program and approach, other questions must be faced:

How was it that hundreds of thousands (some estimates run as high as two millions) of Americans have passed through the party, joining, dropping out and never returning?

What about the party rouses the antipathy of so many politically conscious workers and intellectuals?

Why is the party regarded as discredited even among supporters of socialism and the Soviet Union?

The present crisis may impel a significant transformation in the party and result in the institution of what the Chinese Communist Party defines as the fundamental principle of the "Marxist-Leninist line of work"—"the summing up of scattered unsystematic views, then taking the resultant ideas back to the people explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own, stand up for them and translate them into action."

In practically every country, including those where they are a tiny minority, Communists have speeded the tempo of social progress, advanced cultural standards and strengthened the cause of peace and international friendship.

Progressive America would sustain a severe blow were the Communist Party to dissolve or disintegrate.

A revitalized American Marxist Party can exert considerable influence in enriching every aspect of American life.