

Communism's appraisal of such mutually exclusive doctrines as fascism abroad and the New Deal at home could not have been less simple or crude, and this appraisal stuck for quite some time. Nearly a full year after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, January 1933, the 13th Comintern plenum, in December, had this startling analysis to offer: "Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist element of finance capital. . . . Social Democracy is the main prop of the bourgeoisie among the working class." *229

(Though the Communists were chagrined by the total lack of resistance by the militant German Communists to the Nazi seizure of power, their reaction was less hopeless than that of the Social Democrats, partly because of the flood of assurances from Moscow that Nazism would be unable to solve the grave difficulties facing Germany, and that "today's Nazism, however catastrophic, was just a stepping stone to tomorrow's Communism.")

The plenum was still certain of the "maturing of the revolutionary crisis." The spreading strike movement in the United States, encouraged by the new voice in the White House, and the resistance of farmers to mass foreclosures, was interpreted by the Comintern as a definite sign that the masses were "against the bourgeois program for overcoming the crisis," meaning, of course, the New Deal. And Otto Kuusinen, who replaced the purged Ossip Piatnitsky, in his concluding speech, attacked the AFL and the Socialists for helping Roosevelt to carry out "semi-fascist measures."

The old slogans were still in force: *For a Revolutionary Way Out of the Crisis, For the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasants.**230

THE NEW DEAL, A "ROAD TO FASCISM AND WAR"

To Moscow the New Deal was a bourgeois program for overcoming the crisis. To the American Communists it was a "road to fascism," linked with war preparedness. Robert Minor, appearing before General Hugh Johnson, NRA Administrator, February 28, 1934, flatly rejected Johnson's suggestion for the Communist Party's "getting together with the NRA." "There is no common ground," he said. "The NRA is an offensive against the working class. . . . It seeks to beat down their standard of living. Its trade codes are slave codes. . . ." Minor repeated the Communist charge that the NRA was a disguise for war plans. . . . He again insisted that all "war funds" be transferred to the relief of the unemployed and administered by a national unemployed council.*231

The party did not hesitate to attack the purpose of the Wagner Labor Dispute Bill (later known as the Wagner Labor Act) as late as the spring of 1935. William F. Dunne, speaking for the party before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, March 28th, vehemently denounced the bill: ". . . The present form of the Wagner Bill is more dangerous to the economic and social interests of the working people than it was before. . . . Green, Woll, Lewis, Hillman and other official leaders of the AFL made with Richberg and Roosevelt a *Pax Romana*—a peace of death for labor. . . ." Dunne quoted at length from Marx and Engels to prove that the lot of the workers cannot be improved under capitalism.*232

The manifesto of the eighth convention of the party, in Cleveland, April 1, 1934, directly associated Roosevelt with fascism: "All the steps carried out . . . are substantially the same as the steps made by the open fascist governments. . . ."*233

The categorical denial that the New Deal could better the lot of millions of workers hid a deep fear that it might. The new spirit aroused among the workers by the National Industrial Recovery Act and its Section 7a, passed into law July 1933, made the party apprehensive lest Roosevelt's reforms snatch away the longed-for and believed-in "revolutionary crisis." And to round out the charges

of "Roosevelt's war preparation plans," the Communist press cited the Civilian Conservation Corps camps, built to "militarize the American youth."

The few Communists in the thick of trade union work thought differently. They did not argue publicly against the party, but when their turn came at the code authority hearings, they tried hard to squeeze out of the NRA every ounce of advantage for their unions, just as the reformists and "labor fakers" did. Ben Gold, who acquired in the Lenin School in Moscow the proper quotations from Lenin and Stalin and the skill for tactical maneuvering, astonished the code authority for the fur industry and the employers. His judicious and incisive analysis of the fur situation at the hearing, in the fall of 1933, and his appeal for cooperation between management and labor could have done any anti-Communist union leader proud.*²³⁴

RECOGNITION OF SOVIET UNION CHANGES NOTHING

Roosevelt's recognition of the Soviet Union, November 17, 1933, did not mollify the party a bit, though it cheered the rank and file. The party acted as though it had been cheated of a hard-hitting issue for which it had campaigned for many years.

Parenthetically, Maxim Litvinoff, the Soviet Foreign Commissar who negotiated the recognition, caused the Communists here no little embarrassment. At a time when they were often called to demonstrate in front of the Italian Consulate, Litvinoff, after a farewell banquet in the Waldorf Astoria, November 24th, attended by industrialists and bankers, took the boat to Italy to keep an appointment with the fascist dictator. Litvinoff's visit to Mussolini was not the only unpleasant incident. The Kremlin operated with both arms at the same time, one as the state of Russia, the other as the fountainhead of the Communist world movement, the former often exposing the Communists to ridicule and scorn.

Communist antagonism to the New Deal was rivaled only by that of the National Association of Manufacturers, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce and, later, the Liberty League. It was not uncommon to find both Communist spokesmen and big business leaders opposing the New Deal at Congressional hearings.

The utter failure of the grandiose tasks so hopefully set for the party in 1930 could not be glossed over in 1933. The Open Letter issued by the extraordinary party conference in New York City, July 7-10 of the same year, confessed the failures frankly: The party did not "root itself in the decisive strata of the proletariat," the new unions were dying out, the unemployed movement was shrinking and the circulation of the *Daily Worker* had fallen off. The Open Letter went the whole gamut of criticism, including a condemnation of the lack of democracy and the bureaucratization of the party. . . . In the same breath, it strongly warned against "factional methods of work," meaning criticism of the party top. However, the Open Letter carefully avoided any soul-searching; the validity of the line itself was not questioned. Its correctness was duly confirmed, and the poor performance blamed on errors in application and wrong tactics. The remedies offered by the Open Letter amounted to a shifting of the chairs around.*²³⁵

ELEMENTS AND PEOPLE AIDING COMMUNISM

The party's obsession with winning the "decisive strata of the proletariat" blotted out of the Open Letter the one area where it could boast of an advance, that among the intellectuals and white-collar workers. There, Communist isolation was over. The reasons were not only economic. A mixture of despair and hope were at work. The depression brought on a reexamination of values among the intelligentsia. Many a young brain worker, his confidence in the stability of the system shaken, was lending an ear to the high promise of Communism.

Communism was synonymous with the Soviet Union. The early 30's witnessed quite a pilgrimage of intellectuals to Soviet Russia. Most of them returned home greatly impressed with what they saw, or, to be exact, what they thought they saw. Even the incredible hardships of the people did not dampen their enthusiasm. Typical was the reply given to the author by a woman physician, a non-Communist, on her return from Russia in the famine year of 1933: "The people are starving but the idea is marvelous."

Skilled workers, particularly foreign-born, young technicians, and white-collar people, chaffing under enforced idleness, were eager to go to Russia to participate in "building Socialism." Quite a number

went, and many more would have gone if they could. All of them, even the Communists, with the exception of those who gave up their citizenship, came back, unable to stand the low living standard and lack of freedom.

On the international level, Communism was enhanced by the support given to it by Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland of France and John Strachey of England. The latter joined the party, and his book, *The Struggle for Power*, published in 1934, avoiding Marxian-Communist terminology, supplied to many doubting minds the most comprehensive reasoning for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communism's case was also strengthened by the incredible ease with which democracy in Germany had crumbled.

In this country, Communist influence and prestige was heightened by Lincoln Steffens, Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, Dr. George Counts, James T. Farrell, Granville Hicks and Newton Arvin. And this list is far from complete. (Lincoln Steffens' complete identification with Communism was stated by him in 1934, "Communism can solve our problem. Communism does solve our problem in Soviet Russia. . . . The American Communist Party program meets our American capitalist situation precisely, and it is the only American party that meets it head on; all of it. . . .")²⁸⁶

THE FORCED ISSUE OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN 1934

The election campaign of 1934 indicated a somewhat larger party periphery resulting from the depression. It also reflected a perceptible change in the party's political approach. The Comintern had not as yet signaled any retreat from the main goal, a Soviet America, but the cold shoulder given by the workers to this slogan could not be discounted. The party now emphasized immediate demands.

For the first time, the issue of anti-Semitism was brought into the campaign in the Jewish neighborhoods. Jewish Communism had not yet divested itself of its Third Period negation of Jewish problems. But Hitlerism in Germany made Jews more sensitive to signs of prejudice, and the Communists utilized this sensitivity as a wedge to reenter the community. Communist candidates insinuated that their non-Jewish opponents were anti-Jewish in one way or another.

The Jewish press protested vainly against this dragging in of anti-Semitism where it did not exist.

For the Jewish Communists in New York the "concentration point" was Israel Amter, candidate for Governor; Olgin, for Congress in the 23rd District, and Ben Gold, in the 7th Assembly District, both in the Bronx. All three kept harping on the struggle against anti-Semitism and racial discrimination. If one were to judge by the party press, the campaign was vigorous and down-to-earth. But the results were disappointing, Amter receiving 41,239 votes. The reason was the popularity of Governor Herbert H. Lehman. Olgin's 7,423 votes were nearly half of those of his Socialist opponent, Samuel Orr. None of the other Communist candidates for Congress or for Assembly received above 7,000. Some got less. The party press was heartened by comparing these figures with the much smaller ones in 1932. They were also cheered by the smaller vote of the Socialist candidate.

THE GREAT RETREAT, THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT

The official disengagement from the Third Period began slowly and awkwardly in January 1935. But once the retreat was under way, it proceeded at a rapid pace and on all sectors. The first inkling of a new course shaping up in the Kremlin was a speech by Browder, in Washington, January 6th, before the National Congress for Social and Unemployed Insurance,^{*287} after a hasty trip to Moscow, December 1934, and a resolution of the CEC, January 1935. Political unity of workers and farmers through a labor or a farmer-labor party, rejected as an "appendage to the existing bourgeois parties," was again openly advanced.^{*288} This about-face was motivated by the "new relation of forces" in America. It proved to be the forerunner of the United Front, or, as it became known, the Democratic Front.

Stalin needed more than two years, from the advent of Hitler until the middle of 1935, to fully comprehend the grave implications of German Nazism for the security of the Soviet Union, and to translate this conclusion into a new course for world Communism—the People's Front. His new foreign policy was keyed to courting the friendship of the democratic nations; Litvinoff, in the League of Nations, proclaiming "collective security," and "peace is

indivisible." (The first People's Front was formed in France, March 1935, as a result of the attempt of the *Croix de Feu* [fascists] to seize parliament in February 6, 1934.)

The People's Front course was formalized at the seventh world congress, July-August 1935. The congress pronounced that "The united fighting front of the working class is the main task at present. . . . The unification of all trade unions is an important step in forging complete unity of the proletariat . . . building a Democratic Front of workers, farmers and middle-class elements against reaction, fascism and war." *239

These were strange phrases for world Communism, dictated largely by the requirements of Stalin's new foreign policy. A complete change in tactics followed immediately.

The change was elaborately camouflaged. Under Stalin, a new course was never prefaced by a simple admission that the old one had been a mistake. All resolutions began with the calm assurance that the past years had confirmed the correctness of the party line. Only in the middle of the lengthy text could the reader stumble upon a complete new course. As the reader was usually a party functionary, a man of experience—the rank and file could not wade through these casuistic and repetitious documents—he was not at all deceived by the flood of words, nor by the optimistic end of the resolution.

Only one reason advanced by the seventh congress, the danger of world fascism, was a valid one. The rest was mere subterfuge. +72

Browder began his speech at the congress with a ceremonial praise of Dimitrov's report. This was followed by the admission that the American party had been guilty of a narrow Leftist approach. This was counterbalanced by heaps of abuse on the union bureaucracy and the Socialist old guard—Browder was a master in this art. He then suggested a strong coalition of workers and farmers. Still unsure of his ground, he only hinted at including the liberals. *240

TACIT HELP FOR ROOSEVELT IN 1936

Having brought in the middle class through the back door without being reprimanded, Browder could give free rein to his cherished ambition to inherit for the Communist movement the mantle of the American revolutionary past. He deemed it a prerequisite for

placing the party "in the mainstream of American political life."

A year later, in the Presidential elections of 1936, Browder, the party's nominee, as yet hesitatingly, gave indirect aid to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Touring the country, he kept assailing Alf Landon, Wall Street and the Liberty League, hardly asking his audience to vote for himself or James Ford. And the editorial in the *Freiheit* on the very last day of the elections echoed this tactic by urging its readers to vote Communist, but omitting to mention Browder. The other party papers did likewise. A day later, they hailed Roosevelt's landslide victory. "Toilers voted for Roosevelt to save the country from the Landon's" was their theme.

Previously, the *Freiheit* had done its part by printing an article by Moishe Bacall, of Chicago, hinting that Landon was tainted with anti-Semitism. *241 The entire Jewish press condemned this slur. Still, the *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker* repeated the charge on the front page. *242 However, it must be noted that the attacks by the Liberty League in New York on three of Roosevelt's electors, Hillman, Dubinsky and Zaritsky, did carry anti-foreigner and anti-Jewish insinuations. *243

The Browder-Ford national vote was 80,159. Browder's small vote was out of step with the party's growth in size, strength and periphery. Many Communists and Lefts had voted for Roosevelt via the American Labor Party, originally formed to campaign for Roosevelt in New York State. It was no secret, and no one was rebuked for it. This is confirmed by the wide discrepancy between the Browder vote in New York City and that for Israel Amter, candidate for president of the City Council: Browder—32,172, Amter—62,414. The same discrepancy could be found in all large cities. The party claimed that the combined vote of its local candidates reached several hundred thousand.

SUPPORT DEWEY AND KELLY; INFILTRATING THE ALP

Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, 1935, and the rebellion of the Spanish fascists and monarchists, July 1936, was viewed in the Kremlin as a curtain raiser for World War II. Stalin felt a greater need to play the good neighbor to Western Europe and to the United States. As a consequence, criticism of Roosevelt disappeared from the Communist press. The President was lauded for his domes-

tic measures, the increased budgets for the armed forces included, and was steadily urged to "lead progressive mankind to check fascist aggression."

In 1937, the Democratic Front course was already in full swing and the CP was openly campaigning for "capitalist" candidates alongside the unions and Right-Wing Socialists. In the New York municipal elections of the same year, the party, uninvited, was in the thick of the campaign for the La Guardia-Morris-Dewey ticket. Party candidates, previously nominated, were obligingly withdrawn. Only one nominee, Israel Amter, running for congressman-at-large, was retained for political-demonstrative purposes.

Communists helped to pack the election rally in Madison Square Garden, October 29th, and rose in a tumultuous cheer for Thomas E. Dewey, running for district attorney. The enlarged plenum of the CEC of the party, in session at that time, was recessed, and all participants came to the meeting.*244

Support to Democrats was given unstintingly. In Chicago, Communists worked for the election of Mayor Kelly on the ground that he supported Roosevelt on national policies. Radical elements there were incensed at this backing of a corrupt machine. Mayor Hague, boss of Jersey City, received underhand Communist support, and for the same reason.

In California, the Communist Democratic Front operated effectively through the Democratic Party itself. By colonizing the Young Democratic clubs, the Communists, in 1938, actually took over the direction of their central body. William Schneiderman was the state party secretary; Paul Kline, secretary of the Los Angeles County Committee.*245

The unusually accommodating behavior in New York and in those cities where Labor's Non-Partisan League functioned was ostensibly a desire to dispel the deep distrust of the high command of the garment trade unions, the backbone of the ALP and the LNPL, who, led by David Dubinsky, steadfastly rejected all overtures for a United Front with the Communists. Actually, it was a disguise for a planned infiltration of the clubs of the ALP. Blocked at the front door, the Communists began a systematic individual invasion through the back, joining the ALP clubs and capturing one after the other. This enabled them to put through a number of their own people as candidates of the ALP in 1938. They found

an ally in Vito Marcantonio, congressman from the 20th Congressional District in Harlem. Marcantonio, a Republican, became the foremost Communist collaborator on the New York political scene.

Here too the *Forward* was the first to sound the alarm. On the eve of the elections in 1938, it ran a front page box with the names of 18 ALP local candidates. "They are not our candidates," the paper warned. "They are Communists or their friends. Don't vote for them!" The *Freiheit* and the *Daily Worker* replied by calling the *Forward* a traitor to the ALP.

However, any illusion of a peaceful coexistence with the Communists in the ALP was dashed in the fall of 1939. Dubinsky and his associates, Isidore Nagler, Luigi Antonini, Charles S. Zimmerman and Louis Stulberg, of the ILGWU, and Alex Rose, of the HCMWU, always skeptical of the sincerity of Communist overtures, were now faced with the serious threat of the Communists capturing the ALP for their own purposes. The Stalin-Hitler pact made a showdown inevitable. The first Communist move was to call a conference of their adherents in the Hotel Brevoort, December 28th of the same year. Morris Watson, vice-president of the American Newspaper Guild, then under Communist control, was chairman. Its aim was "to rebuild the ALP on a democratic basis," and a "progressive committee" was elected for that purpose. This committee put up a list of candidates in the ALP primaries of August 1940. They won a majority in New York City, but the Right Wing maintained control of the state committee.

At that time the Communists again found an ally in John L. Lewis, who also turned against Roosevelt. His first blast against the President and his policies was made at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the miners' union, January 1940, in Columbus, Ohio. His main charge was that Roosevelt had "not fulfilled his promises to the people," and that he had not consulted with the representatives of labor. The Communist press warmly applauded his speech.

The Right Wing began in earnest mobilizing to stop the Communist grab of the ALP, but it was too late to save the party. After a series of skirmishes, the Right Wing left the ALP in 1944, forming the Liberal Party. Their defeat in the ALP referendum of that year was in a great measure due to Sidney Hillman's refusal to associate himself with them in ridding the ALP of the Communists and the Lefts. (La Guardia sided with him.) Hillman, head of the Politi-

cal Action Committee of the CIO, of which the Communist-controlled unions were a part, could not see his way clear to banning them in the ALP; this would have run up against a major CIO policy.⁺⁷³ Besides, Hillman, confident that he could always keep the Communists and their friends under control, believed that a split should be avoided. But the Communists could not be controlled. Nor was a split avoided in 1948.^{*246 +74}

JEFFERSON, JACKSON, LINCOLN—AND STALIN

Inheriting the American revolutionary traditions became the well-spring of the new line. Men who had been repeatedly labeled social fascists and lackays of Wall Street were now entreated to join the Communists in a common front for the "unity of all democratic forces against reaction, against the offensive of monopoly capital, and for the defense of civil liberties and democratic rights"—the American counterpart of the French People's Front.

Browder, trying to obliterate the recent past, blandly stated before the Massachusetts State Legislative Investigating Committee, headed by Representative Sherman, "The Communist Party does not seek the overthrow of the government. On the contrary, the party is helping to carry on the democratic system of government according to the best traditions of the United States."^{*247} Paine, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln were recognized as builders of American democracy. And, on February 22, 1937, George Washington was included too. From there it was but one step to Browder's famous slogan of 1937, *Communism Is 20th Century Americanism*. For the first time American flags hung prominently from Communist platforms alongside the Red flag of the party.

Soon the capitalist class disappeared altogether from the Communist lexicon. The enemy was now located only in "some Wall Street sections of big business." They and they alone were accused of nursing fascism in the United States, assisting Hitler, planning a world war and aggression against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Fatherland was quietly shelved, and replaced by allegiance to America. This new allegiance was officially sanctioned by the tenth national convention of May 1938, in New York City.

This convention struck a high pitch in patriotism. Without the pretense of a pre-convention discussion, the old class struggle theory

was discarded. The preamble incorporated in the new party constitution, printed in the membership books, stated in part:

The Communist Party of the United States . . . carrying forward today the traditions of Jefferson, Paine, Jackson and Lincoln, and of the Declaration of Independence; it upholds . . . democracy, the right of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and defends the United States Constitution against its reactionary enemies who would destroy democracy and all popular liberties.

True, in the same breath—to be exact, in the second paragraph—the preamble spoke of the "establishment of Socialism according to the scientific principles enunciated by the greatest teachers of mankind, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, embodied in the Communist International. . . ." But this hodge-podge of a platform was a deliberate move to leave an exit for a possible return to the old line. It was also meant to placate the old Communists who could not bring themselves to take the leap from revolutionary Marxism into outright social reformism blended with American patriotism.

Strict adherence to American democracy was aggressively repeated in Article four of the party constitution. Section one read: ". . . The Communist Party . . . , standing unqualified for the rights of the majority to direct the destinies of our countries, will fight with all its strength against any and every effort, whether it comes from abroad or from within, to impose upon our people the arbitrary will of any selfish group or party or clique or conspiracy." The pledge that a new member had to take, in Article three, Section three, also omitted the phrase, "I agree to submit to the discipline of the party." Instead, he had to pledge "to work actively. . . ."

Parenthetically, the Americanization of the party brought a recognition of the country's political divisions. The previous arbitrary geographical lines were abolished; the section and district committees were abolished in favor of the regular state, county and city organizations, and the neighborhood branches were reorganized into assembly and congressional districts. In 1938, the party had 40 state organizations and units in all 48 states.

The Communist Party had gone far since the early 30's.