

# Approaching the Seventh World Congress and the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Founding of the C. P. U. S. A.

By EARL BROWDER

SOON the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International will be held. It will meet in a world situation deeply charged with the explosive materials of revolution and war. Even the bourgeois press and statesmen speak openly of the imminence of new catastrophes. They no longer discuss how these may be avoided, but only how they may be able to shift the heaviest burdens onto other shoulders.

All this is twenty years after the first World War—the “war to end all wars”—which heralded the *general crisis of the capitalist world system*.

The Seventh World Congress will gather together the forces of proletarian revolution throughout the world. It will further clarify and concretize the Communist answer to the problems this world situation places before the working class and oppressed masses of every land.

This is, at the same time, the period of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. Approaching the problems of the Seventh World Congress from the angle of special American problems, a brief glance back over these past fifteen years of our history will have a special value. It will throw light which will give a clearer view of the present moment and tasks.

## THREE PERIODS OF PARTY HISTORY

The fifteen years history of the C.P.S.U.A. present three distinct periods, which roughly approximate the three periods of post-war capitalist development throughout the world, each of which gave the dominant impress upon the Party. For the capitalist system

these three periods were: (a) Revolutionary upsurge that followed the war, under the influence of the Russian Revolution (1918-1923); (b) Partial stabilization of capitalism, defeat of the revolution in Central and Western Europe (1923-1928); (c) World economic crisis, new revolutionary upsurge all over the world, the passing over to a new cycle of revolutions and wars (1928 to the present). We are now living in the midst of the third period.

What did these three periods mean for the development of the C.P.U.S.A.?

The first period, of revolutionary upheavals after the war, was for the United States a period of the struggle to gather all revolutionary forces for the first time into a single party—a party of proletarian revolution, a Communist Party. First, and basically, this meant the gathering together of the Left-Wing forces in the Socialist Party—before all, those who during the war had held aloft the banner of internationalism, who had forced through the St. Louis Convention of 1917 the anti-war resolution under the leadership of C. E. Ruthenberg (who later became the first generally-recognized leader of the Communist movement in the U.S.).

The overwhelming majority of the Socialist Party membership responded to the events of the period by repudiating the old opportunist leadership, by supporting the lead of the Bolsheviks in the formation of the Communist International (March, 1919). But this old S.P. leadership (Hillquit, Berger, Cahan, Lee, etc.) brutally and cynically overrode the membership. Before the S.P. Convention, at the beginning of September, 1919, and at the Convention, they expelled the vast majority of these members, and threw their delegates out of the Convention with the help of the Chicago police. Just recently, Louis Waldman cynically admitted that in 1919 the great majority of S.P. members went with the Left Wing, when in the fight against Norman Thomas and his majority in the recent Detroit Convention, Waldman declared:

“We did not permit the Communists to swerve us from our purpose years ago. Numerically, they were much larger than the Left Wing group is today. But it is not a question of numbers, but of principles.” (*New Leader*, June 16, 1934).

The expelled Left Wing formed the basic nucleus of the present Communist Party of the U.S.A. But already the young Communist Party was divided, before birth, and it was born as twins—the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party. This indicates the main problem of the whole first period—the struggle for unification in one party of all revolutionary forces.

The world revolutionary upsurge marking the birth of the Com-

unist International affected not only the relatively small membership of the Socialist Party. It gathered in the vast masses of the American proletariat also. This was expressed in the stormy strike movement of 1918-1920 (the Seattle general strike, the miners' general strike, the outlaw movement of the railroad workers, the great steel strike, etc.). But the Socialist Party, and the Communist Parties that emerged from it, were not closely, organically, bound up with the colossal events of the class struggle at home, nor with the international revolutionary socialist movements. It was isolated from the masses, and it was theoretically immature. That is why the Party in its formative years went through such prolonged infantile illnesses.

The first heavy blows of reaction descended quickly upon the infant parties. The Palmer raids, and the ensuing deportation terror in 1920, increased the difficulties by driving the Party underground for almost three years. Formally the new parties began with 50,000 to 60,000 members. But these were loosely organized, more like our present-day Workers' Clubs, I.L.D., etc., than like a Party. They had not been consolidated. From 80 to 90 per cent of them were scattered by the deportations and terror. Thus, the formative period became one of a painful, difficult task of gathering together, under illegal conditions, the scattered fragments and the hitherto unorganized members, untrained in revolutionary theory and action, and cursed with a heritage of sectarian tendencies and factional feuds.\*

During this period, the Communist Party not only fought for and obtained formal unification of its forces, not only did it fight for and win an open, legal existence, but it also gathered around itself the best of the old, traditional, revolutionary forces of the country that had been for long outside the Socialist Party. These were drawn mainly from the forces of the pre-war Syndicalist League (workers in the A. F. of L. unions), the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), and the Socialist-Labor Party (De Leonists).

This formative period may be said to have closed with the formation, in early 1922, of the Workers' Party of America, under which name the unified, illegal Communist Parties emerged into an open legal existence. With this, the Communist Party entered the second period of its development. This was a period in which the Party

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\* The usual anti-Communist disparaging contrast of "50,000 members in 1919, but only 25,000 in 1934", it should be noted, is deliberate deception. The "membership" of 1919 is more properly compared with the 400,000 to 500,000 present followers of the C.P. in the more loosely constructed mass organizations.

was struggling against its basic weaknesses— isolation and political immaturity; struggling to win the basic characteristics of Bolshevism— roots among the masses, and a grasp of revolutionary theory. The Party became the leader of all the healthy currents of struggle among the masses. It was the leader of broad, active Left-Wing movements in the trade unions. It made its first decisive steps in this direction by drawing in a group of old-time militant trade unionists, headed by William Z. Foster. This group was an earlier outgrowth of the Socialist Party, but, in parting company with the opportunist leadership years before, had fallen under the influence of syndicalist tendencies.

During this time the Communist Party began seriously to absorb and master the teachings of the Russian Bolsheviks, of Lenin, and to apply them to American conditions. To this end, it had to fight against and overcome those elements in its own leadership who represented, and stubbornly fought for, the old theories, practices, and attitudes of the Second International, of social-democracy. This struggle had two crises, in the expulsion from the Central Committee (and later from the Party) of J. B. Salutsky (now J.B.S. Hardman, editor of the *Amalgamated Clothing Workers Journal Advance* and member of the American Workers Party of Muste & Co.) and of Ludwig Lore (then of the N.Y. German daily *Volkszeitung*, now on the staff of the *New York Post* and member of the Muste Party).

The necessary, difficult, and painful struggle for rooting the Party in the daily life of the masses, the simultaneous struggle for theoretical clarity in a Bolshevik program, and the struggle for the unification of all revolutionary forces into one Party, proceeded against great obstacles in the ensuing years. Partial stabilization of capitalism and the "prosperity" which followed had propped up the power of reactionary officialdom in the trade unions. While the Party was formally unified and moving toward mass work, within the Party the unhappy legacy of factionalism and sectarianism had not been destroyed; they reasserted themselves in the form of, and through, a regrouping of all old factions into two main camps within the single Party. These two factions came to be represented by Foster and Ruthenberg.

These two factions, whose struggles hampered the Party for years, were not the creations of the leaders after whom they were named. They originated out of the historical circumstances of the Party's formative period. Nevertheless, their struggle, however much it masked itself behind principled issues, was an unprincipled one. This inner struggle was an expression of the immaturity of the Party, of its inability to rise above and overcome its weaknesses,

of its lack of Bolshevization, of its lack of unity of theory and practice. Only in an immature Party could there have existed for so long a division of the Party into two camps under the banners of "practical men" and "theoreticians". With all theoretically-inclined Party members rapidly gaining a rich practical experience in the daily struggles, and with the experienced trade union fighters rapidly being educated in Bolshevik theory, such an unnatural division must soon have burned itself out. This was especially true since also the influence of the Communist International was throughout this period energetically combating this factional cancer, and fighting for its elimination, for the complete unification of the Party.

And truly, the factional divisions were in process of disappearance in 1926-27, until the sudden and untimely death of C. E. Ruthenberg (1927), occurring at the moment of the climax of the international fight of Trotzkyism to dominate the Comintern, and just before the rise of the Right-Wing faction on an international scale, interrupted for a short time this healthy course of inner-Party life. Jay Lovestone, an unscrupulous adventurer, who, for years, had maintained himself by dexterous manipulation between factions and stimulating factional passions, seized the opportunity to gain control of the Party leadership by a wild resurrection of all the old factional flags and battle-cries.

The brief interlude of Lovestone's regime, about 18 to 20 months, was one of feverish, unprincipled factionalism, and the hot-house growth of opportunist tendencies, practices, and theories. He came to leadership through the slogan of preserving the Ruthenberg line, although he himself, in the months immediately preceding Ruthenberg's death, had headed an intrigue to remove him from his position as head of the Party. He remodeled the current work of the Party to conform with what Bertram D. Wolfe expressed as "a program for Prosperity", that is, an adaptation of the Party to capitalism. After the Sixth World Congress, when Cannon suddenly blossomed forth as an exponent of Trotzkyism in America, he turned this issue into a factional weapon to destroy the Foster group, despite the almost unanimous rejection of Trotzkyism by the entire Party. After the Sixth World Congress, emboldened by his connections newly established with the international Right Wing, with which Bukharin, then Comintern leader, was associated, Lovestone came boldly forth with the theory of American exceptionalism. According to this theory, the U.S. was not facing an imminent serious crisis, but, on the contrary, was entering a period of unexampled prosperity and expansion, which could only be compared to the Victorian age of British imperialism, and which Lovestone declared would in future history be known as the "Hooverian age". This

theory, closely connected with the Trotskyist theory of U.S. as a super-imperialism that was putting the rest of the capitalist world "on rations", was an echo of the Second International's deification of Henry Ford and rationalization as opening up a new life for world capitalism, a period of "planned economy" through monopoly, State capitalism, and the elimination of all capitalist contradictions except that between nations.

This was only ten months before the great stock exchange crash that marked the beginning of the world economic crisis. In these days of 1934 it sounds like a fairy tale to recall that the then Secretary of the Communist Party could seriously put forth such fantastic nonsense.

At the Sixth Convention of the C.P.U.S.A., in March, 1929, Lovestone was already fighting a vicious battle against the decisions of the Sixth World Congress of C.I., in agreement with the international Right Wing (Brandler in Germany). This Right Wing rejected the forecast of looming crisis and revolutionary upsurge, and all measures to prepare the Parties for impending battles. But Lovestone, typically unprincipled, carried out the fight under the slogan of a fight *for* the Sixth World Congress. His unprincipledness reached its height when, in the midst of the Sixth Convention, feeling his position endangered by the evident solid loyalty of the membership to the C.I., he came forth to the Convention with the proposal that the C.P.U.S.A. should demand of the Comintern the expulsion of his political associate, Bukharin, at that time still among the Comintern leadership.

Lovestone's fantastic unprincipledness was responsible for the suddenness and rapidity of his downfall as a leader. The C.P.U.S.A. had already matured far beyond the stage where such opportunism and infantilism could long persist in the leadership. Especially when, with the danger of Trotskyism crushed, the Communist International moved to liquidate the rising Right-Wing tendencies in preparation for impending world crisis, Lovestoneism was doomed in the C.P.U.S.A. Under the direct leadership of Comrade Stalin, the Comintern took up the American problems thoroughly, and expressed its conclusions in a few sharp clear words in an Open Letter to the Party membership. The membership responded in one unanimous movement throughout the Party organization. It repudiated Lovestone, his opportunist theories and international Right-Wing connections, with a rapidity and thoroughness perhaps unexampled in Communist history. Within four months he was left with the ragged remnants of his cohorts to the number of about two hundred, mostly aspiring trade union bureaucrats or young collegians bearing the wisdom of the ages in their stupendous intellects. A few months

later the uproar of the gigantic Wall Street crash drowned out the lesser crash of the collapsed theories of Lovestone and the international Right Wing.

#### PERIOD OF REVOLUTIONS AND WARS

Here begins the third period of our Party's history. The Party is finally unified, not only in form but also in its inner life, on the basis of a clear Bolshevik orientation. From 1929 to 1933, the Party accumulated a rich experience of leadership in mass struggles, more and more illuminated by the growing grasp of Bolshevik theory. With all its weaknesses, which are only slowly being overcome, the Party moved forward steadily. In this brief article, we can only glance over a few of the outstanding achievements.

United at last, after ten years of inner struggle, our Party began a steady forward movement that has continued without any major setback down to the present. At the Tenth Meeting of the Central Committee in the beginning of October, 1929, the resolution adopted clearly forecast the economic crisis that broke before the month was over. At every major turn of events since then, the Party has been able to adjust correctly its policies.

In January, 1930, when all camps from Hoover to the Socialist Party, Lovestoneites and Trotzkyites were unanimously proclaiming that what had happened was only a temporary stock exchange flurry, the Central Committee gave a thorough analysis of the events as the beginning of a deep-going and world-wide economic crisis that would shake the foundations of capitalism. Already the Central Committee put forward the demands for relief to the growing army of unemployed and for unemployment and social insurance, and issued the call for action, which on March 6 brought a million and a quarter workers into the streets of American cities in a series of mighty demonstrations that jolted the whole capitalist class out of its complacency and forced the recognition of unemployment as the dominant issue of American life. Towards the end of March, under Communist leadership, was held the first Unemployment Conference, with delegates from over the country that launched the nationwide movement of organized Unemployed Councils, that was crystallized in a National Convention in Chicago on the following July 4. On May Day, 1930, the Communist Party carried through the first series of gigantic May Day street demonstrations seen in America since the 1890's, in most cases having to break through the threat of suppression that was backed up by the greatest police mobilizations the country had ever seen. In New York City, for example, Police Commissioner Grover Whalen banned the demon-

stration and boasted that he had 19,000 police and 8,000 firemen to suppress the demonstration. On April 29, the renegade Ben Gitlow, Communist Party candidate for Vice President in 1928, denounced the Communist Party's decision to go through with the May Day march at all costs, as an "adventurist provocation of police violence" and called upon the workers to prevent the Communist Party from marching. Late on April 30, Police Commissioner Whalen, under pressure of the mighty mass movement that had been roused by the firm leadership of the Communist Party, withdrew this prohibition and graciously permitted the parade that had announced it would march in spite of him. This was the period of "the fight for the streets", in which, under the leadership of the Communist Party, the American working class for the first time won in most sections of the country, to some degree, the rights of public demonstration. In the fall of 1930, our Party initiated and led the first of a long series of local and State hunger marches, that roused the force which rapidly brought into existence all of the existing measures of unemployment relief.

In the spring of 1931, our Party went to the rescue of the nine unknown Negro boys in the obscure Alabama hamlet, Scottsboro, and began a battle, which continues down to the present day, preventing the electrocution of the Scottsboro boys, making their cause famous throughout the world, and rousing around this fight a nation-wide movement for Negro liberation that has stirred the whole 12 million Negro population of America, and began the historic penetration of the reactionary "Solid South".

In 1930 and 31, the Party began the struggle against the reformist, opportunist theory of the impossibility of successful strikes in the period of the crisis (a theory most energetically propagated by Trotzky and the Trotzkyites), predicted the imminent rise of a strike movement, and was soon, in May, 1931, effectively leading the first great strike of the crisis period, the Pennsylvania-Ohio miners' historic battle that lasted ten weeks and involved 30,000 miners

In December, 1931, the Party initiated and led the great National Hunger March, which shook the country and made Unemployment a national issue.

In May, 1932, the Party initiated the veterans' Bonus March, which grew so rapidly and spontaneously that it swept over our heads and into the hands of the demagogue, Waters; but, nevertheless, in the July days, contributed greatly to the final discrediting of the Hoover regime, and took the veterans' movement out of the current of fascization.

In 1932, the Party carried out an unparalleled election campaign,



behind its candidates, William Z. Foster for President, and for Vice President, James W. Ford, the first Negro to be a candidate for such office on the ticket of a nation-wide political party. In this presidential campaign, the Party distributed over a million pamphlets, over seven million political leaflets, and spoke directly in meetings to more than a million workers.

In December, 1932, the Party led the second great National Hunger March, in which 3,000 delegates from all over the country broke through Hoover's military mobilization, marched to the steps of the Capitol and delivered to Congress the workers' demands for the enactment of the Unemployment Insurance Bill and the granting of Federal Unemployment Relief.

During this whole period, up until the Spring of 1933, the Party had been growing and becoming Bolshevized. The Party membership, while carrying on tasks multiplied manifold, and bearing greatly increased financial burdens, had grown in numbers from 7,545 at the Seventh Convention in 1930, to 16,814 average for the first half of 1933, measured by weekly dues payments. The political level of the Party was immeasurably higher, as demonstrated by the quality and quantity of its literature.

The Party had become a Party of action among the masses, but it still was extremely weak in the factories and in the trade union field, which means among the most decisive strata of the workers. The Party at this time conducted a drastic stock-taking. It made a fundamental re-examination of all its work. It brought the results of this re-examination to the Extraordinary Party Conference in July, 1933.

The result was the famous *Open Letter*. The *Open Letter* inaugurated a period of intensified growth of the Party, which brought the membership, at the time of the Eighth Convention, April, 1934, up to 24,500. It increased the number of our shop nuclei from 140 at the time of the Extraordinary Conference up to 338 at the Party Convention and well over 400 at the present moment. It opened up a period of unparalleled expansion of the revolutionary trade unions and a new growth and deepening of the revolutionary oppositions in the A. F. of L. It began a serious turn towards the decisive strata of workers in the basic industries and in the most important industrial sections and largest factories.

The Extraordinary Party Conference in July, 1933, was again a stage of severe political testing of the Bolshevik qualities of our Party. The Roosevelt New Deal policies had just emerged as a completed system. The N.R.A. was just adopted. The country was flooded with all the rosy illusions of the New Deal honeymoon. Norman Thomas was hailing the Roosevelt "revolution" as a step

towards socialism and the best policies that could be expected in favor of the working class under a capitalist system. Our Party was able to go boldly against the current and to analyze clearly and completely the true nature of the New Deal policies. On the basis of its correct analysis it was able to formulate and immediately begin to carry through policies of mass struggle against the N.R.A., against the industrial codes, for an uncompromising fight for the immediate interests of the workers, which quickly resulted in multiplying the membership of the revolutionary unions three-fold, and began a rapid expansion of revolutionary opposition work in some sections of the A. F. of L.

The period from the *Open Letter* of the Extraordinary Party Conference in 1933, down to our Eighth Convention in April, 1934, is amply known to even our new Party members. The reports and decisions of the Eighth Convention, available in cheap and voluminous pamphlets, tell the story. This article is intended only to provide the setting of a glance backward over our fifteen years historical development.

On the road to Bolshevization we have taken only the first few firm and decisive steps. We are finally and definitely out of the swamps of the pre-Bolshevist stage of Party development. But we are still fighting to complete the process, and must fight for a long time to come. Now our problems are on a higher stage.

In the next issue of *The Communist*, we will continue this discussion by taking up, in a more detailed manner, the development of revolutionary strike experiences and policy, the new problems of the trade union movement, some questions of the new stage of the struggle for the united front and the struggle against social-fascism, and the fight against rising fascism and the danger of imperialist war.

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In all united front activities, the Communists must always grant the right to all other groups, and reserve the right for themselves, of mutual criticism. It is permissible and correct to make specific agreements of non-criticism during the actual carrying through of joint actions agreed upon, within the scope of the specific agreement, so long as these agreements are loyally adhered to by all sides. But the Communists can never agree to be silent, to refrain from criticism, on any breaking of agreements for struggle, on any betrayal or desertion of the fight. Any such agreements would not be contributions to unity, but rather to disunity. (Earl Browder: *Report to the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.*)