

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE COMMUNIST PARTY WORKS

TYPICAL of questions that Communist Party speakers meet everywhere are the following:

Does the Communist Party take orders from Moscow? ... How is the leadership of the Party chosen? ... What is the Third International and how does it work? ... Is the Communist Party supported by Moscow gold? ... Who is eligible to membership in the Communist Party? ... What is the size of the Communist Party and how fast is it growing? ... Why doesn't it grow faster?

No, the Communist Party does not "take orders" from Moscow. The very placing of such a question becomes absurd when we remember that a political party, even so small a one as the Communist Party still is, can live and grow only to the extent that it directly represents, leads, and organizes the masses whom it would win, in struggles for their daily needs. That cannot be done by orders from anywhere.

The Communist Party is the modern continuation of the revolutionary socialist movement, which has a continuous history of organization in the United States of six or seven decades. It has gathered unto itself the most vigorous of the formerly scattered and split revolutionary trends and currents from the Socialist Party, the Socialist-Labor Party, the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) and even the proletarian elements of the old Anarchist movement. But it has brought them together, not as a loose federation of groupings,

each retaining its old ideas, but by remolding and remaking them all, melting them down and recasting them into the single mold of a unified, uniform party.

This Communist Party is organized on the principle of *democratic centralism*. That means that the leadership of the Party is elected from below, from the membership units of the Party, in a delegated Party convention, which is the supreme authority of the Party. The convention adopts the program and elects a Central Committee, which exercises full power of direction of the Party between conventions. Below the Central Committee, and subordinated to it, are twenty-nine District Committees, elected by District Conventions; the Districts are similarly subdivided into Sections; the Section Committees are based directly upon the membership units (or nuclei).

This system of democratic centralism accomplishes two vital aims of Communist organization. It achieves a united party, motivated by a uniform strategy and tactic, uniting tens of thousands of wills into a single will, concentrating into one great proletarian fist that multitude of individual forces that would otherwise cancel one another by disunity and confusion. Secondly, it achieves this not by blotting out individual participation and initiative, but by broadening and deepening inner democracy, by *organizing* it.

The Communist Party of the United States is, in turn, united with its brother Parties of all other countries (seventy-two of them) into a World Party, organized on the same principles. This is the Communist International (sometimes called the Comintern, for short), headed by its Executive Committee (E.C.C.I.), elected at the World Congress. The Communist International is also known as the Third International, to designate its lineal descent from the "International Workingmen's Association" or First International,

founded by Marx and Engels, and the Second or "Socialist and Labor International".

That hoary old legend of "Moscow gold", which the Hearsts of all lands constantly repeat, is only an effort to hide the fact that Communist Parties grow naturally out of the class struggle in each country. They would like the masses to believe that Communist Parties are mercenaries, imported from abroad or bribed and bought by the Moscow Bolsheviks to "make trouble" in the capitalist countries.

No, the C.P.U.S.A. receives no "Moscow gold". Its finances come from the workers and sympathizers in this country. But that is not to deny that Communists send money from one country to another to help those who are in the most difficult positions. For example, the C.P.U.S.A. itself pays "international dues", which it collects from its members, amounting to about \$20,000 per year, and of which about 80 percent goes to help the Communist Parties in Germany, Ireland, Cuba, the Philippine Islands, Mexico, Canada and Puerto Rico. During 1934, the C.P.U.S.A. sent over \$12,000 to the German Party. The C.P.U.S.A. gets no financial help from the outside, because it is still working under what are comparatively more favorable conditions, opportunities for open work, etc., but must itself help the others, especially in fascist and colonial countries. Such amounts spent for international solidarity are comparatively small, but politically are of great importance. They serve to emphasize and give concrete weight to our conception of a World Party, the embodiment of the stirring Marxian slogan, "Workers of the world, unite!"

Any man or woman is eligible to membership in the Communist Party who subscribes to its program, who actively participates in its work under the direction of the Party organization, and who subordinates himself to the Party decisions.

Growth of the C.P.U.S.A. for the past six years is shown

by the following approximate averages of dues-paying members (Members pay dues each week on a graduated scale, beginning at two cents for unemployed, ten to twenty-five cents for those with incomes up to \$25, two percent for those with incomes of \$25 and above, with higher assessments on incomes over \$50):

Average dues-paying membership in 1930, 7,000; in 1931, 9,000; in 1932, 14,000; in 1933, 18,000; in 1934, 26,000; in 1935, 30,000.*

Membership in mass organizations of various kinds, not affiliated to the Party but in general sympathy with its program on the main issues of the day, numbers about 600,000. Hamilton Fish, the Red-baiting Congressman, has estimated that this figure should be 1,200,000, but he does not use such strict organizational standards for his judgment as do we Communists. We have no interest in overestimating our own strength.

On special issues, such as the campaign for the Workers' Unemployment, Old Age, and Social Insurance Bill, H.R. 2827, there are associated together in the broad united front on this single issue about 5,000,000 members of various organizations.

Is the Communist Party satisfied with this growth? No, not by any means, no more than the impatient person who asks "Why doesn't the Party grow faster?" We are constantly studying the problem, and in part beginning to solve the question of how to become a mass party.

But in solving this problem, we know that the suggestions of many of our correspondents that we copy the methods of Townsend and Father Coughlin will not help us. These correspondents are impressed with the huge claims of ten or

* The average dues-paying membership at the time of the Ninth Convention, June, 1936, reached 40,000.—Ed.

more million members of the Share-the-Wealth Clubs, the Townsend Clubs, and the Union for Social Justice, and would like to hear us making similar claims. We, however, could not obtain any comfort from such a "membership", even though we counted it in millions. These movements have a following which is almost, if not quite, unorganized. They can disappear as rapidly as they arise. We dare not fool ourselves, however, by claiming the strength of unorganized following. Our strength comes only from organization capable of action and struggle. They get their following by irresponsible promises of all things to all men. We promise nothing but mass struggle and the fruits of mass struggle, based upon a realistic program which we can and will actually carry out when the masses are behind us. Father Coughlin obtains enormous financial backing from capitalists, by using his mass influence, demagogically obtained, to support special capitalist interests. We can win from the capitalists only their undying hatred and ever fiercer suppression. We must rely for finances upon poverty-stricken workers, with a trickle of funds from middle-class sympathizers.

The Communist Party is driving toward a more rapid growth, with the ambition of becoming in the near future a real mass party. We will not consider that a serious beginning has been made until we have 100,000 members. That is the next goal we are striving to reach.

How will we get there? Chiefly, and above all, by making the Communist Party known to millions of toilers as the best fighter for their immediate interests. Examples of how we do this are the campaign for the Workers' Unemployment, Old-Age and Social Insurance Bill, H.R. 2827, leadership of the struggles of the unemployed, strike leadership and similar work in every field of mass endeavor. We take pride in the unwilling testimonials of our enemies that we are becoming

successful in this field. For example, the one dollar per copy *Fortune* magazine, dealing with the Communist Party, concluded an article replete with inaccuracies and misinformation with the following sound observation:

“Not long ago a governmental official toured the country, penniless and clothed in tatters, to see for himself how unemployment relief was being handled. He learned a great deal. ‘Even the Communists taught me something,’ he told reporters. ‘I learned the power that the Communists have is gained principally because they will listen to people who are down and out and will work for them and fight for them.’”

That is true. But it is only part of the truth. The Communists do something else, without which we could never have become as much of a power as we have, and without which we can never move forward seriously. That something else is that we always and everywhere give these immediate struggles a higher goal than the mere winning of the demands of the moment. We fight to win these demands, but we fight even better and more uncompromisingly, because at the same time we show the workers how, by building ever stronger class organizations for this fight, we are preparing for bigger struggles that can end only by the final defeat of the capitalists and the establishing of the workers in full power in the state. We give the workers a vision of the socialist society and show them the road to attaining it. We rally around the workers all other oppressed people and all those intelligent enough to cast in their lot with the future.