

Origins of the Crises in the CPUSA

By WM. Z. FOSTER

THE CRISIS now afflicting the C.P.U.S.A. is both organizational and ideological. It manifests itself not only by a considerable loss of members, but even more seriously, by a deep-going theoretical deterioration. The causes of the crisis are various and complex. Let us here indicate its several major roots:

1. *The long-range "prosperity" factor.* One of the most elementary causes of the Party crisis is the long-continued industrial "boom," with its somewhat improved economic conditions for large sections of the working class. This situation, except for a couple of short depressions, has lasted almost continuously for some 17 years. During this long period there has been very little unemployment, much overtime work, an increase in the two-jobs-in-one-family system (30 years ago only one in twenty married woman was a wage earner, but now the ratio is one in four), and there has been increases in wages and "fringe" benefits on a hitherto unknown scale. All this has as its basic causes the effects of World War II and of the rise generally of American imperialism.

Notoriously, such "boom" conditions tend to weaken the revolutionary spirit among the workers, as has been clearly shown in the history of Great Britain, Germany, Japan, and other industrial countries. Relatively better economic conditions have been the fundamental reason for the historical weakness in general of Marxist movements in the United States and for the wide growth of capitalist "prosperity illusions" among the workers. Such illusions, very prominent during the great "boom" of the 1920's, are even more vigorous in the current post World War II "boom." Our Party, naturally, is not exempt from the retarding effects of such economic pressures. In fact, their influence has been one of the most basic factors tending to isolate our Party from the masses and to confuse its ideology, especially during the period of the cold war.

2. *The Government Cold War attack upon the Party.* Most everyone will agree that the bitter assault made upon our Party by the Government during the critical periods of the cold war decade was a potent factor in causing our present crisis. It caused the Party serious losses in members and it has helped to make many of its members and leaders largely lose their Marxist-Leninist theoretical bearings. It is foolish to underestimate, as many do, the casualties that we have suffered in our long and hard fight to prevent American imperialism from deluging the world with the blood of a great atomic world war—a fight which, on a world scale, resulted in an historic victory for the international forces of peace. The arrest and jailing of the Party's leaders, the deportation of many workers from this country, the widespread intimidation and discrimination against Left wing workers in many other spheres, and the ideological terrorism of fascistlike McCarthyism undoubtedly took a heavy toll from our ranks and those of our sympathizers. Other Communist parties, facing similar or worse persecution in specific situations of fascism or near fascism have suffered equal or greater losses than ours.

3. *Powerful anti-Communist moods among the masses.* A special factor during the cold war years, highly detrimental to our Party, has been the extreme anti-Soviet, anti-Communist feeling that has existed among the working masses of the people. Not only did the decisive leaders of the major trade unions, almost to a man, support the aggressive foreign policies of Wall Street and carry on a violent campaign against the U.S.S.R. in general and our Party in particular, but the broad democratic masses of workers, farmers, and others were also heavily influenced by this ocean of anti-red propaganda. While the latter were distinctly opposed to a third world war, nevertheless they were nearly unanimously of the opinion that the Soviet Union (and with it

our Party) was responsible for the war danger which they so greatly feared. This had catastrophic effects upon the Party's mass contacts and made it extremely difficult for it to connect up with the, mostly spontaneous, anti-war activities of the masses.

Communist parties in all the imperialist countries had to contend with similar anti-Soviet moods among the masses, but nowhere did these have such strongly negative effects upon Communist anti-war work as in the United States, the heartland of the imperialist drive towards war. This was because in other imperialist countries the Communists exerted a far greater leadership of the working class and were able to protect the workers from poisonous imperialist pro-war propaganda, and also because the masses basically were animated by a strong hostility to American attempts at domination of their countries and also generally to the warlike moves of Washington. Consequently, in none of these countries were the warmongers able to develop the intense war hysteria and fascist-like persecution of the Communists as took place in the United States which were such grave handicaps to us.

4. *Sectarian mistakes made by the Party and its leadership:* Basic factors, too, in contributing to the Party's present crisis have been the various Left-sectarian errors made by the Party, especially throughout the years of the most serious persecution during the cold war decade. This was the type of error naturally generated under such intense political pressures. These errors, of course, seriously injured the Party's mass contacts and also tended to alienate many of its own members. In the reports, resolutions, and discussions of recent months, however, such errors have often been grossly exaggerated. That the mistakes of the period were serious and numerous, I have tried to make clear in my article in *Political Affairs* of last October; but the ex-

treme exaggeration of them that has taken place has made their damaging consequences far greater than the reality.

The general effect of error-exaggeration has been to discredit the Party's past policies, its future perspectives, and its leadership. The excesses in self-flagellation that have taken place cannot be classified as healthful Leninist self-criticism—in many cases they reached the extreme of being an actual attack upon the Party's prestige among the masses and, in fact, even upon the very existence of the Party itself. This lop-sided criticism has been one of the most decisive of the various factors in creating pessimism, political confusion, and liquidationism in the Party. It has definitely been cultivated by the Right tendency in the Party as preparatory work for the watering down of our Marxist-Leninist principles and for transforming (liquidating) the Party into a so-called political action association.

5. *The Revelations of the Stalin cult of the individual.* Among the most decisive of all the factors contributing to the existing crisis in the C.P.U.S.A. have been the negative consequences flowing out of the exposure of the Stalin cult of the individual, initiated at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held last February. Undoubtedly, our Party, naturally enough, has been most deeply affected by the shocking bureaucracy, brutalities, anti-Semitism, and dictatorial practices of Stalin in his later years, and of the bureaucratic machine which he built up. This initial shock was greatly intensified by the tragic events in Hungary during the past several weeks. Eventually all this will work out successfully, but the bad immediate results of it were made worse by the tendency of some comrades in our Party to misinterpret the situation and to utilize it to justify attempts at watering down our Marxism-Leninism, at developing anti-Soviet moods, at weakening the Party's spirit of internationalism, and even at liquidating the Communist Party itself into a so-called political action association. This whole unto-

ward development of the Stalin question, coming on top of the various other factors here listed, has greatly intensified the Party crisis as a whole.

6. *The growth of the Right tendency in the Party.* Still another decisive contribution to the growth of the Party crisis has been the development, particularly during the past several months, of a strong Right tendency in the Party. This Right trend has evolved out of all the factors above listed, but its most basic roots are in the "prosperity illusions" bred of the capitalist economic "boom." In this respect the movement greatly resembles, not only the Browder deviation in the middle 1940's, but also that of Lovestone in the latter 1920's—wrong trends which grew out of the illusions created by the big industrial "boom" and upswings of American imperialism of these decades. Other powerful roots of the Right tendency in the Party are its basic misinterpretation of the Stalin revelations, and also its fundamental distortion of the Party's experience in the fight against the war danger during the past decade. But the heart of the Right program is its two-phased proposal to weaken Marxism-Leninism in our Party and to transform the fighting Communist Party into a political action association. With its developing wrong analysis and policies, the Right tendency has also, in itself, regardless of subjective intentions, become a strong factor for intensifying the crisis in the Party. In fact, it is the very summing up of this crisis and the most concrete expression of it. The most serious mistake that the Party has made during the past several months was its failure to realize more promptly the dangerous significance of the rapidly growing Right tendency and to take the necessary steps to correct it.

7. *The changing world situation:* The above-cited several factors making towards the present crisis in the CPUSA have operated under the decisive influence of a very rapidly changing world situation. The substance of this world change amounts to a sharp intensification of the general crisis of world capitalism and a

swift growth of world Socialism. Especially important phases of this basic international change during the very recent period have been, the defeat of the drive of American imperialism toward a third world war, the weakening of American hegemony over the capitalist world, the growth of inter-imperialist antagonisms and the decline of the NATO war alliance, the growth in political influence of the Bandung Asian and African countries, the loss of the Suez Canal by British and French imperialism, the armed invasion of Egypt, the French colonial wars in Africa, the very rapid economic growth of the USSR and People's China, the rapidly changing relations between the Soviet Union and the European People's Democracies, etc., all of which basic events deeply affect the CPUSA and its policies.

During the long Party discussion much that is constructive has been done towards liquidating the Party crisis. The Party is now definitely recovering its political balance, as against the gross confusion that prevailed during earlier months. Definite conclusions have been arrived at, mostly crystallized in the draft Constitution, regarding the democratic reforms necessary for our Party. New and fraternal critical relations are being developed towards the Socialist countries and other Communist parties. Many valuable lessons have also been learned relative to the Stalin revelations. In the knotty Hungarian question, for example, our Party has largely come to the same general conclusions as practically all other Communist parties; namely, that although grievous errors were made in that situation by both Soviet and Hungarian Communists, nevertheless, when the crisis came and Hungary was faced with the establishment of fascism and the world with the growth of a serious war danger, the Soviet Union had no other practical course to take than the one it did, difficult though that was.

The central thing that must be done now to overcome the crisis in the Party is to defeat the efforts to
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water-down Marxism-Leninism and to replace the Communist Party by an amorphous political action association. Obviously, in the discussion the membership are now moving de-

cisively to a positive realization that the Party form of organization is vastly superior to a hodge-podge political action association and that Marxism-Leninism, carefully adapted to the American class struggle, is incomparably more flexible and effective than the policies being improvised by some comrades as a sub-

stitute for it. With these major phases of the Right program rejected in the Party discussion and eventually by the national convention, the Party will be well on its way again to unity and political health. To defeat the project for a political action association is the life-and-death necessity now before the Party.