

SPEECH BY MORRIS CHILDS

IN HIS "Left-Wing" *Communism*, Lenin wrote:

The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it *in practice* fulfills its obligations toward its *class* and the toiling masses. Frankly admitting a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analyzing the conditions which led to it, and thoroughly discussing the means of correcting it—that is the earmark of a serious party: that is the way it should perform its duties, that is the way it should educate and train the *class* and then the masses.

It is in this spirit of self-criticism that we American Communists must proceed to find the roots of our erroneous policy and the means of correction. This self-criticism applies to leading committees and to individual comrades.

Our self-criticism must not be perfunctory—it must be deep and concrete. It must not be a temporary self-chastisement that soon wears off and is forgotten—it must be practiced constantly.

I think that all the complaints of the comrades, even the so-called "gripes," must be given the most serious consideration. We must ask ourselves nationally and on a district scale if our methods of work did not take on bureaucratic forms which even resulted in a bad relationship

between the leading comrades themselves and with the membership. There is need for a thorough *scraping* off of the bureaucratic *crust*. Collective leadership and connection with the membership will go a long way toward correcting this evil. Together with serious political discussion and work, this correction is bound to effect a real change *in our practice*, in the formulation and execution of our policy. As a result of these discussions there are many errors which I for one will have to discuss and correct much more concretely—particularly in our district. No one else can assume responsibility for these mistakes. We must begin with ourselves.

We have vital ties with the people and their organizations in this country. Therefore our discussion of policy cannot be considered an inner organization matter only. The non-Communist workers are also vitally concerned with our policy and are certainly affected by it. Since our discussion is not a secret, the enemy will undoubtedly try to take advantage of our differences and even exaggerate the differences in our ranks. In fact, the bourgeoisie through its many spokesmen is already seeking to exploit our weaknesses and use them for its own ends. The columnists and editorial writers of the bourgeois press are not "neutral"; on the contrary, like Mrs. Roosevelt,

they slander us and would, if they could, like to prevent us from developing a Marxian policy.

We have no need to be embarrassed by criticism or over-sensitive to it. Let us disregard the needling by our enemies and search out our own weaknesses, and admit them frankly and openly.

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Some comrades — hard-working and loyal comrades—wonder if the terms "revisionist" and "opportunist" employed in Comrade Duclos' criticism of our line are not too harsh. They argue that since they worked to organize the masses and had only the best intentions, how could they be classified as revisionists, especially since they believed in Marxism. I think that in self-criticism it is necessary to place such comrades in a category different from that of our leadership, which must accept *full responsibility*. Yet this question must still be answered.

First, let us dispose of the matter of "intentions." The old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions applies also to our case. In attacking opportunist currents in the Socialist movement of his day, Karl Marx, writing to Sorge in 1877, answered those who tried to find mitigating circumstances for an opportunist, one Dr. Höchberg, who had the "noblest" of intentions, with the castigating exclamation, "I do not give a damn for 'intentions.'"

On the question of Marxism and opportunism—we must say that not

all revisionism openly denies Marxism. On the contrary, some outstanding opportunists and revisionists claimed to be "orthodox" Marxists: Karl Kautsky and Morris Hilquit are notable examples. Yet these Social-Democrats were able, by using Marxism as a cover, to distort it, to take the content out of it and thus mislead the working class. Our most dangerous opportunistic mistakes were peddled by us as the "latest" in Marxism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks used to carry on an uncompromising struggle against the "renovators" of Marxism—against those who doctored it just a little, touched it up a bit here and there, and in doing so covered up or weakened a basic proposition of Marxism.

We, by accepting Comrade Browder's theories, went far beyond the "renovators." We agreed that there is little in the "old books" to base ourselves upon, so we decided that the road we are traveling is a "new one," a road yet "uncharted." Comrade Browder and we who supported him found justification in the pretentious conception that we are "adding" something "new" to Marxism. We took Engels' correct statement that "Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action" and vulgarized it in the most opportunistic fashion. Instead of strengthening the ties between our theory and practice, we departed from our basic theory and loosened the strands that knit our ideology into one whole.

Let me be concrete. Taking Tehe-

ran as a departure, we *completely revised* Marxism-Leninism. I underline *completely* because we departed from every basic tenet of Marxism. How?

In his book *Teheran: Our Path in War and Peace*, Comrade Browder said:

Teheran represents a firm and growing *common interest* between the leaders who gathered there, their *governments*, the *ruling classes* they represent, and the *peoples of the world*. (The words "common interest" were italicized in the original; other italics mine—M.C.)

This is a departure from the materialist, objective analysis of the relationship of all classes in our society. Teheran was an expression of a historical progressive aim agreed to by the coalition under the given circumstances; yet it did not erase class relationship on a worldwide scale (the coalition is made up of governments representing two different social systems—capitalist and Socialist), nor was the declaration of Teheran the incarnation of the identity of interests of rulers and peoples. We know now as a result of experience that the class aims of the signers of Teheran were not identical.

Naturally this erroneous assumption led us further away from Marxism-Leninism. Thus we developed the idea that the anti-German imperialist bourgeoisie has given up Munichism, *i.e.*, the destruction of the U.S.S.R.—forever. And we told

the workers to drop their guard—that the bourgeoisie has nothing but good intentions toward the Soviet Union.

Lenin predicted the establishment of a "kind of collaboration" between the Socialist world and the capitalist world. Stalin knew long ago of the *possibilities and limits* of what he called the peaceful "cohabitation" of the Soviet state with the capitalist states. Knowing the limits of the relationship, he characterized it as a "provisional equilibrium." He, like Lenin, took into full consideration the antagonisms in the capitalist world—the internal and external antagonisms and the fact that the imperialists base their relations with the Soviet Union upon the needs and position of their class and not on good will or justice.

The world relation of forces has undergone a considerable change as a result of this war and the defeat of German fascism. The changed relation of forces does provide the possibility of a long term of "peaceful cohabitation" and peace "if not forever, for many generations." This is not the issue among us. The issue is how the struggle shall be waged for the fulfillment of Teheran. The issue is to realize who the enemy of the Teheran objectives is and how to fight the enemy. The issue is to realize that these basic facts and the changed relationship of forces have not abolished the class relations and their motivations.

Our Party, by accepting and prac-

ticing Comrade Browder's policy, substituted the Marxian-Leninist theory with a bourgeois-liberal one. We denied the class antagonisms and preached class peace. We carried this "peaceful" relation of classes into the postwar period. To make it plausible, we violated every material economic concept of Marxism and even worked out an economic program for the bourgeoisie. Instead of basing our policy upon the existence of exploiters and exploited, we envisaged and urged class cooperation. The capitalists were turned into big-hearted philanthropists who, while allowed a profit (we were not going to disturb their monopolist profits), would nevertheless use their profits for "the good of humanity" at home and abroad. Everything was "planned." If our common sense and Marxian ABC says that this planning is impossible under capitalism—particularly under imperialism, decaying capitalism, "capitalism on its deathbed"—we regenerated capitalism to order by replacing the Leninist theory of imperialism with that of Kautsky. Yes, that is what we did when we proved that imperialism is "capable" of all the things *we* suggested. We did not even behave like a bourgeois opposition; we accepted responsibility for the acts of the bourgeoisie and its state, and urged "compliance"; and we were not, for all of that, even invited into the "government," but kicked around.

Comrades, I insist that I am not oversimplifying. On the contrary, we

got into this blind alley of putrid idealism and bourgeois liberalism precisely because in the past we were too content not to draw every possible conclusion from a Marxian point of view. We were impatient—impatient with ourselves and with the working class. Lenin used to urge repetition of basic Marxian propositions: this we have failed to do.

On June 12, a week ago, the reactionary *Chicago Tribune* published an editorial about our present discussion, entitled "Communism Is a Science." The object of this editorial was to refute Marxism. The *Tribune* asked: "How could a man chosen for his position of leadership because of his knowledge of Communist dialectics and his skill in expounding and applying them have been led into such gross error?"

The *Tribune* is aware of the error charged to Browder, as the editorial put it, "in thinking that the class struggle could be abandoned and a *modus vivendi* established between the revolutionary movement and bourgeois capitalism?"

The *Tribune* says further: "If Communism were in truth a scientific system, Browder could not possibly find himself at issue with Duclos, Stalin or his fellow revolutionists in America. There would be only one choice of action for all. But the quarrel does exist, and the fact of its existence can only lead to the conclusion that the conception of Communism as a science is false." The *Tribune* insists that, "Far from

betraying Marxism Browder has been betrayed by it."

The *Tribune* is resorting to the hoary deception that has always been used by the bourgeoisie. If that editorial succeeds in fooling some people, it is because our toleration of a distorted Marxism lends some credence to the *Tribune's* claim. Every time revisionism is passed off as Marxism, it discredits the scientific validity of real Marxism.

In a most important article entitled "Marxism and Revisionism," written in April, 1908, Lenin analyzes and refutes revisionism as a system of "well-known liberal bourgeois views." Lenin deals there with every argument brought forward by Eduard Bernstein, who became the symbol for this current. Lenin refutes Bernstein in the domain of philosophy, of political economy, and of the class struggle and the final aim of the socialist movement.

"The inevitability of revisionism," Lenin states, "is conditioned by its class roots in modern society. Revisionism is an international phenomenon."

Lenin shows that revisionism is substantially the same everywhere, "notwithstanding the gigantic variety in the national conditions and historical moments of all these countries in their present state." Revisionism denied the sharpening class struggle and the final aim of the socialist movement with the catch phrase, "The final aim is nothing, the movement is everything."

The struggle against Social-Democracy and opportunism by the Bolsheviks, current for all these many years, was around this slogan.

According to Lenin, this slogan expressed the substance of revisionism better than many a long argument: "To determine its conduct from case to case, to adapt itself to the events of the day and to the windings of political trivialities, to forget the basic interests of the proletariat and the main features of the entire capitalist system as well as the whole capitalist evolution, to sacrifice these basic interests for the sake of real or would-be advantages of the moment—such is the policy of revisionism. And it obviously follows from the very essence of such a policy that it may assume an infinite variety of forms and will give rise to one or other variety of revisionism, each time when there is some 'new' question, or when there is a more or less unexpected and unforeseen turn of events, even though this turn changed the basic line of development to but an insignificant degree and for but the shortest period of time."

We lived and worked under extraordinary conditions during the last few years. That is true. But nothing in the international and national relations, even while accepting the slogan of national unity as very valid in the war against reaction and fascism, can excuse our departure from the Marxian aims of the working class.

Did we not during the last few years accept in essence the slogan of revisionism? Did not Comrade Browder offer to subordinate even our ideology in the interests of unity? Socialism is not the issue of the day, and it was correct, as Comrade Foster also said, that we would not raise this slogan. But why did we have to give up the education of the workers for raising the level of their class consciousness which leads to the understanding of Socialism? The bourgeoisie did not for one moment give up its ideology. When Communists cease to impart their ideology to the working class, they lose that which makes them *distinct* from all other workers. That is why it became virtually impossible for us to explain to the average worker the difference between our organization and any other militant workers' organization. We tried to bring new workers into our ranks, but their instinct told them we were not meeting their needs, even if we worked harder and more consistently than others.

All the organizational and mechanical efforts to change this situation did not result in much gain for our Association. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our dissolution of the Communist Party was a logical step following from the entire policy.

A Communist Party must be a vanguard party; it can be that only if it accepts Marxism-Leninism in its entirety. It is impossible to separate and discard any component part of Marxism at will and still claim Bol-

shevik inheritance and leadership.

I think that those of us who accepted this step without realizing the full implications deserve to be criticized more severely than up to now: we discarded the Marxist-Leninist conception of the role of the Party. This demobilization of the workers logically flowed from our other political errors and will have to be corrected.

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How did it happen that all the leadership, with one vocal exception, which is also on record, Wm. Z. Foster, accepted and endorsed a policy we now recognize as harmful?

It is my opinion that all of us were influenced by our capitalist environment and ideology, that we did not develop our general and tactical policy on the basis of our general theory, but rather developed it empirically.

I believe, also, that the strength of American imperialism had something to do with our thinking. This can take place whether we are conscious of it or not. When we argued against Jay Lovestone, who was expelled from our ranks years ago, we pointed out that Lovestone was reflecting the view of the bourgeoisie and that he put forth his theories of exceptionalism because he was influenced by the exaggerated strength of American imperialism. These ideas of the bourgeoisie, since we do not live in a vacuum, permeate even the ranks of the Communist organization. We are not immune because our ideology is different from that of the bourgeoisie.

In the Soviet Union there is a different class relationship than in our own country. The bourgeoisie has been abolished. There exist only two friendly classes. The foundations of Socialism have been laid. It is reflected in the new Constitution. Yet capitalist ideology found its reflection in the minds of the people in the Soviet Union, including members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. What was the meaning of the trials against the Trotskyite and Bukharin followers? They reflected the ideology of the bourgeoisie. Where did they acquire this ideology? It came from the remnants, even if they were small, of capitalism or enemy class remnants that still remained in the Soviet Union and from the outside. This is how the C.P.S.U. explained the alien ideology. And even now, at this moment, the C.P.S.U. is carrying on an ideological struggle within its own ranks, constantly cleansing out alien elements and warning those of its members now in other capitalist countries against the danger of bourgeois ideology. Now, many of these things we acquired almost unconsciously, but we are reflecting our surroundings. This is the way this ideology has seeped into our ranks. Our leadership, as I said before, fell victim almost without exception. Imperialism still operates in corrupting even sections of the working class—the labor aristocracy—throws them a few extra crumbs out of their super-profits and dulls their class consciousness. This influence, too, seeps

into our ranks. A previous speaker has concretized this point and explained the influence of the Roosevelt era and the illusions it created.

There is another factor which deserves our consideration as responsible for this state of affairs, and that is that we did not sufficiently utilize the weapons of self-criticism, that there was not sufficient discussion on basic problems, on theory and on the Party.

At the time of our differences between Foster and Browder, this discussion was limited to the top committee and was not brought down to the membership, so that the membership might participate in it. I believe that these two circumstances were largely responsible for the ideas held until recently by the main body of our leadership.

A Communist Party leadership must be united. Yet we are paying for our so-called unanimity. Why? Because unity must be based on fundamentals and should be arrived at after thorough discussion.

We must admit that the expression of an opinion, even on a minor matter, was very often frowned upon. Yet we went along tolerating this attitude. I believe the history of our Party also has something to do with this. I think we feared factionalism so much that we suspected every difference of opinion as a danger to our unity. This was wrong. The failure to air and discuss policy can create a basis for factionalism. Open debate and discussion can really unite us.