

CPA Discussion Page

Open to All CPA Members—Send Your Contributions to Communist Political Association, 35 E. 12 St., N. Y. C.

Read Marxist Books Believes Browder Not All to Blame With Blinders On

By N. SPARKS, Los Angeles

(Excerpts from remarks at Nat'l Committee Meeting, June 20.)

Everyone now recognizes that our errors centered around distorting (or blinding ourselves to) the role of monopoly capital. But how did we rationalize these errors? If we want to root these errors out, we have got to break down the rationalizations with which we protected them. We exaggerated the differences within the bourgeoisie on strategy into a difference in aims. We loaded all the sins of imperialism exclusively onto the "pro-fascist defeatist section" of monopoly capital, while we gave the "pro-war section" a clean bill of health. Then when we couldn't deny the sins of the "pro-war section," we still contrasted them with the others who were "so much worse."

How did we disarm ourselves theoretically? In two ways. On the one hand, Comrade Browder's statement that we were going beyond the books, and on the other hand Comrade Minor's rationalizations from the books. Of course we recognized that these two approaches were contradictory. But we just enjoyed eating our cake and having it too. But neither one of these rationalizations could have succeeded without the other. If we had just left it that it wasn't in the books, the membership would soon have revolted at the idea that for all practical purposes the classics of Marx and Lenin were just to be left on the shelf—for an extension of Marxism must be in keeping with the classics of Marxism. On the other hand if the rationalizations of Minor had been presented without the idea that it was something new, that it wasn't in the books, the rationalizations would never have been accepted.

Last year International Publishers began issuing a set of the Lenin Home Library, month by month. We assumed that there would be forthcoming from the Center, outlines, guides, book reviews, and we waited. I couldn't understand why we didn't get them, and you know there was talk that in some districts questions were raised as to whether we should popularize Lenin at the time. Well, when we didn't get them, we certainly couldn't accept the idea that we shouldn't study Lenin, and we weren't interested in just selling books, so we proceeded to "roll our own" as regards outlines.

Well, it presented many difficulties. I remember, for example, Volume 4, where a large part of the volume centers on the attack against liquidationism. For several days, I spent my spare time reading and trying to figure out how to square this with the change from the CP to the CPA. Finally I couldn't figure it out, so without noticing it I divorced theory from practice, and wrote in, "Of course the liquidators went beyond 'organizational' questions and wanted to liquidate Marxism altogether as a force in the country," definitely implying that what we were doing was something altogether "different."

Well, I could give you examples from other volumes; but the point is that it did not enter my head that our whole line could be wrong. I must say I feel deeply ashamed of putting such stuff into outlines on Lenin. I could include other errors that I made in Wisconsin, including an exaggerated concern for the opinions of the bourgeoisie as expressed in the Milwaukee Journal, including trying the patience of our comrades in the shops by asking them to rely on some rather empty formulations to keep the situation together in their unions, etc. We had an uncritical attitude.

We blinded ourselves to all warnings and contrary indications.

Take for instance the question of full employment. I wonder how many comrades know that Stalin had something to say on the question of full employment in the U.S. after the war. Last October's Reader's Digest carried an interview of Stalin and Eric Johnston.

Johnston said . . . "I believe that trade between Russia and America will expand after this war."

Stalin: "Depressions come to capitalist countries after all wars. You will have a depression after this one."

Johnston: "Not necessarily. At least not for several years. And if we have courage, vision, and the resourcefulness to use the information we already have, we may avoid another depression."

Stalin: "Well, I didn't fix any dates."

Again, Stalin, discussing exports: "The greatest problem that will confront the American people after this war is to avoid unemployment and thereby prevent another depression." (And Stalin doesn't say that collaboration with the Soviet Union will do it.)

Again, on the question of postwar perspective. Stalin was worried about the continuity of America's policy of collaboration with the USSR. He said to Johnston:

"Credits and economic agreements cannot be considered entirely independent from the government. Therefore it is important in making plans that there be continuity. During war foreign policy must decide everything and domestic policies must adjust themselves to the war while it is in progress." (Bold-face mine.)

Now I read that in September of last year, but we were so uncritical of the Party line that we just blinded ourselves to everything against it.

Another example. Before Comrade Winter left Los Angeles, we spent a whole afternoon discussing the underestimation of the role of the working class in the Los Angeles organization. But it didn't occur to either of us that the whole Party line was liquidationist and was contributing to just such underestimation.

We ran into difficulties precisely in two fields—in the trade union field and in the field of education.

In the trade union field we ran up against the facts of the class struggle, and in the educational field we stumbled over our revisionism.

For years we have been saying: "What's wrong with our democracy in the Party? Why don't the comrades discuss?" We'd send comrades out to speak in the clubs, and when they came back I'd ask them, "Well, how was the discussion?" and they'd say, "Well, a couple of comrades asked questions." Of course the first thing is: With an anti-Marxist line, how can you have democracy in a Communist Party? They're incompatible. But, aside from this, we have never understood how to model ourselves correctly on the example of democratic centralism given by the CPSU. First, we haven't noted adequately the tremendous widespread democracy down below at the base of the CPSU. Second, we have exaggerated centralism.

Then, we can't get over our terrible experience with factionalism. We're like a "burnt child that shuns the fire." I think this discussion, if we carry it on properly, will cure us of this fear. We will have to overcome it. We have to loosen up the whole rigidity and formalism in discussion throughout the Party. We've got to give comrades a chance to differ.

As for the approach to the cor-

The present discussion in our press and association has indeed been a healthy one from every point of view. It has certainly exposed the revisionist errors of our recent past, especially the line of policy developed by Comrade Browder. But an expose of rightist revisionism is not enough. Nor is it correct to place the entire blame on Browder. True, he must bear the major responsibility, as Party and Association leader. But all of us followed this line with little or no resistance when it was first proposed to the party. In this sense we are all responsible, although, of course, to a lesser degree, for having committed our organization to a non-Marxist policy. Even Comrade Foster, brilliant as was his critique of Browder's line (February, 1944) failed as a Marxist in not openly challenging the line before the entire CP membership.

The main theses of the proposed resolution of the National Board of the CPA are fundamentally correct. However, a few amendments are, I believe, necessary. The resolution as it now stands suffers from a slightly leftist orientation, which if not corrected may lead to error again. The resolution constantly reminds us of the reactionary nature of monopoly capitalism but never speaks of utilizing the contradictions between reactionary and progressive-minded capitalists, except perhaps implicitly. Part 1, section 3, paragraph 5 of the resolution ought to be changed to

read, as per Foster's letter of February 8, 1944 and his article in the June, 1945, issue of Political Affairs, as follows: "While cooperating with the patriotic and democratic forces of all walks of life including these capitalists who loyally support the program of Teheran, Yalta, and 60,000,000 jobs, labor must in the first place strengthen its ties with the veterans, etc." This same concept of national unity should be carried into Part II, section 6 of the resolution. The point should here be made that although monopoly capitalism is not by nature anti-fascist, nevertheless we can cooperate with individual capitalists who support part or all of our program. To do otherwise would be to fly in the face of all Marxist teaching and experience. Progressive anti-fascist strength depends upon the complete unity of all significant progressive elements. This may too easily be forgotten in the present swing away from Browder's revisionist line.

I do not agree with the position of Comrade Duclos on the question of the dissolution of the CP. The resolution of the National Board correctly, I feel, refers to this action as "not in itself a question of principle," no more nor less so than was the dissolution of the Communist International. However, it does characterize the original step of CP dissolution as inappropriate and unnecessary without at the same

time indicating clearly why continuation of CPA will be maintained.

And now in closing I should like to add that Browder's Teheran has not been our first major error in judgement during this war-time period. I am fairly well convinced that our policy during the period from June, 1940, to June, 1941, was also dead wrong. The change in the character of the war from an imperialistic conflict to a people's war did not begin in June, 1941, with the German attack on the Soviet Union, but rather with the fall of France and the aerial blitz over Britain, representing respectively the fall and the threatened fall of two large, virile, long established national states to the powerful fascist foe. This was the end of the "phony war." The change continued with the Soviet reoccupation of the Baltic Republic and Bessarabia, the popular uprising in Yugoslavia against the pro-German fascist clique, the negotiation of the Soviet-Yugoslav friendship pact, etc. The attack on the USSR was the climax or culmination of the transition, not the starting point. The error was based on a disregard of Lenin's teaching on the possibility of national wars in an age of imperialism (See Lenin on the Junius pamphlet, Coll. Works, Vol. 19, pp. 203-204). Recognition of this mistake even at this late date would not be out of place.

B. B., Bronx

False Notion of Party Unity

Since our liquidation of factionalism, a few years back, we have gradually been developing a "worshipful" attitude toward unanimity that reached its peak at the convention last May. Unanimity became the all-important criterion. Under the slogan of "unanimity" Foster's Marxist criticism was suppressed. The representatives of the capitalist press were invited to our convention to witness our "unity of outlook," and the membership of our organization was presented a program which carried the "unanimous" support of the national committee and the convention. Our task was not to fight for unity, but rather to demonstrate it.

Such a situation is contrary to the fundamental understanding of the Communist Party as a party whose whole history is the history of struggle against ideologies alien to the working class. These ideologies will necessarily be reflected within our Communist movement. If they were not we would have to presuppose an impossible situation, that is, that not only had the capitalist class been replaced by the working class in power in the United States, but also that all remnants of its ideological influence were dead. Twenty-two years after the establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union the Russian Com-

rectness of our mistakes, I want to recommend that we all re-study Stalin's *Mastering Bolshevism*. I believe this was the only instance where practically the whole CPSU also made a great mistake. It was under vastly different circumstances, and an altogether different kind of mistake: Underestimating the wrecking activities of Trotskyites within the Party. It was a mistake that created a terrible situation for the CPSU and the whole Soviet Union. Stalin's handling of this mistake in *Mastering Bolshevism* gave a classical example of how a Bolshevik Party should deal with its errors. If we handle our present situation in the spirit of Stalin's chapter, "How to develop cadres on the basis of their learning from their mistakes," then I am sure our Party will come out of this discussion strengthened.

munist Party was still concerned with fighting against right and "left" deviations having their source in hangers of non-working class ideas. In discussing this question Stalin said that inner party democracy "does not exclude but presupposes the criticism and struggle of opinions within the party."

The working class party has to fight not only the ideas of its direct enemy, the big bourgeoisie, but also the ideas of the petty-bourgeoisie. Particularly in the recent period, when the working class has been tremendously enlarged by the entrance of previously non-working class elements, should we have been on guard against the pressure of petty-bourgeois ideas within our Party. But because we had, for a long time, laid aside this "struggle on two fronts" we were disarmed and unable to recognize the opportunism and revisionism of the program set forth at the January Plenum and adopted at the CPA convention. Genuine unity will only be achieved by vigilance and uncompromising struggle against deviations and not by avoiding, glossing over or suppressing divergent views. A "unity" that comes "automatically," not through struggle of opinions, is not a unity based on understanding and conviction. That our "unity" was not based on democratically arrived at convictions was demonstrated by the rapidity with which the whole national leadership, with the exception of Browder, realized the validity of the Duclos criticism.

Prior to the convention, during the discussion period and even before January, 1944, we were not carrying on an educational campaign to show the dangers of right opportunism in the working class. This failure helped to lay our movement "wide open" to the acceptance of "Teheran." Rather we were developing the idea that, contrary to Stalin's theory, presupposed not "criticism and struggle of opinions within the party" but rather that "individual Communists under the most diverse conditions and widely dispersed geographically, come to identical conclusions about the world situation." (Browder, *Communist*, March, 1944.) Needless to say, if Communists reached the

same understanding "even without the opportunities of consultation and discussion," as Browder states, there would be no need of democratic centralism in our movement.

For those who do not agree with the perspectives outlined Browder had this to say: "Of course, in real life absolutes do not exist, and the unanimity of the Communists is not absolute. In every great crisis or historical turning point, we always find a few who have stopped thinking, who have become welded to old formulas, or who, for various particular reasons, find themselves diverted out of the main stream of historical development into stagnant backwaters. They are the exceptions that prove this general rule."

This attitude only took us farther away from the understanding that there will, inevitably, be differences of opinion within our movement that cannot be eliminated by name calling, but must be combatted by serious polemics. In addition this attitude created further barriers to democratic discussion. A member who wanted to express disagreement, was, in advance, placed in the position of violating the "unity" which was set forth as the "character of the Communist organization," and, as a result, loyalty took precedence over understanding.

To deny the struggle of opinions within our movement is to remove the basis of our educational work and when we did this we failed to carry on a Communist educational program on the current issues as well as discarding the "textbooks" of previous periods. Our line, our position, is not just deduced from a set of "facts," it is hammered out through polemics. Our whole theory has been developed in this manner.

Our real educational program has just started with the publication of the Duclos criticism. Through the sharp, non-conciliatory struggle we are waging against right opportunism and against the dangers of "left" sectarianism, we can achieve a unity that will serve, not as a fetish, but as an instrument for welding our movement into the vanguard of the working class.

IMOGENE JOHNSON,
Indianapolis.