

SUMMARY OF 1928-1935 CONDITIONS IN USA AND CPUSA

I.	International Conditions Affecting the US and Party	353
II.	A Brief Idea of the Extent of the Depression in the US	353
III.	State Power in the US	353
IV.	Fascism in the US	353
V.	Bourgeois Attempts to Control the Workers' Movement	354
VI.	The Working Class	354
VII.	Oppressed Nationality Workers	355
VIII.	Strikes	355
IX.	The CP's Trade Union Work	355
X.	The AF of L	356
XI.	Social Upheaval as a Result of the Depression	358
XII.	Effect of the Depression on Farmers	358
XIII.	Assessment of Revolutionary Conditions in US, 1928-1935	358
XIV.	Condition of CPUSA	359
XV.	Failure of Bolshevization	359
XVI.	Bolshevization and the Social Composition of the CPUSA	360
XVII.	Factionalism in the CPUSA	360
XVIII.	Effects of Comintern Politics on the CPUSA	361
XIX.	The Struggle Against the Right and "Left" in the Comintern and Its Effect on the CPUSA	363
XX.	American Exceptionalism	364
XXI.	The Application of the 1928 United Front From Below Line to the US	367
XXII.	Lovestone's Expulsion	369
XXIII.	Right Opportunism in the US Party	371
XXIV.	The Comintern and the US Party	373
XXV.	Was the CPUSA a Leninist Party in the Early 30's?	374
XXVI.	Notes	377
XXVII.	Books Used	377

SUMMARY OF 1928-1935 CONDITIONS IN USA AND CPUSA

I. INTERNATIONAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE US AND PARTY

Beginning with the stock market crash of 1929, international finance capital was in the deepest historical crisis of its existence during this period. Concentration and centralization of capital in the major imperialist countries combined with intense competition for markets and investment outlets, partly due to the rise of new imperialist forces--Germany, Italy, and Japan. World capitalist production dropped 42% and foreign trade dropped 65% in the partial collapse of the international finance structure.

II. A BRIEF IDEA OF THE EXTENT OF THE DEPRESSION IN THE US

Though the World Depression did not affect the US as deeply as it did many European countries, it was devastating. By 1933, 17 million workers were unemployed and wages had fallen from \$17,093,000,000 to \$7,243,000,000. 5,761 banks had failed; the value of farm produce had fallen from 8.5 billion to 4 billion. For Black people, the unemployment rate was twice that of whites, and wages averaged 30% less. Steel plants operated at 12% capacity and industrial construction slumped from \$949 million in 1926 to \$74 million in 1932.

III. STATE POWER IN THE US

Because of its position as the leading world imperialist power, the US bourgeoisie still had the economic resources to recover from the Depression. With the creation of the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal Agencies, the US bourgeoisie was able to use the government more overtly to regulate its interests. The government passed from a laissez-faire to a Keynesian political outlook. The Roosevelt Administration actively intervened in the economy to stop the deflationary spiral of the Depression. The National Recovery Administration attempted to regulate prices, wages and production. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation bolstered the capital structure of banks, becoming the nation's largest investor. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration regulated farm production. The Public Works Administration created jobs for thousands of unemployed.

IV. FASCISM IN THE U.S.

As a result of the world economic crisis, many bourgeois governments began developing fascist forms to control increasing discontent among workers and peasants. Many commentators have noted the similarity between Mussolini's "corporative state" and Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration as systems of state-controlled labor and industry in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Carter Glass, an old school Democrat of the period, called the NRA "the utterly dangerous effort of the federal government to transplant Hitlerism to every corner of the nation." The Comintern stated in 1933 that Roosevelt's economic measures were "essentially fascist in character." Some features of the New Deal

which bore a resemblance to fascism were: The National Industrial Recovery Act, which proposed a state-controlled economy and labor movement; the establishment of compulsory arbitration; the growth of the FBI; an expansion of military production.

The giant corporations were able to dominate the NRA code authorities in 1933 and 1934 using the concept of regulation to raise prices, cut back production, and squeeze small business, labor, and consumers. However, by the end of 1934, the NRA had developed a vast array of critics. People complained of high prices; the labor movement found Section 7A, "the right to organize" clause, inadequate and ambiguous; and many smaller businessmen chafed at government edicts.

Roosevelt asked Hugh Johnson, the first head of the NRA, to resign in the fall of 1934. Though the NRA under Johnson had done little to speed up economic recovery, it probably helped to prevent the depression from getting worse. On the positive side, it gave jobs to 2 million workers, established a national pattern of maximum hours and minimum wages, and wiped out child labor.

Though some aspects of the New Deal bore a resemblance to fascism, fascism did not develop in the US during this period. We agree with the reasons Foster gives for this in the History of CPUSA: 1. The US was not as deeply affected by the crisis as Germany. 2. There was no imminent proletarian revolution here. 3. The US capitalists were not aggressively trying to redivide imperialist holdings but favored preservation of the status quo. 4. The bourgeoisie still had the financial means to carry out a reform program such as the New Deal.

#### V. BOURGEOIS ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

The bourgeoisie, during this period, continued the attempt begun in the 20's to crush workers' organizations and channel the union movement into company unions. Big companies intensified their vicious white chauvinist, anti-union propaganda, hired Pinkerton detectives to spy on the unions, and maintained large scale armories used to break strikes. When outright suppression of the workers' movement became impossible, the bourgeoisie attempted to co-opt it through collaboration--using the state to control the unions through legislation and compulsory arbitration.

#### VI. THE WORKING CLASS

In 1933, over 1/4 of the US working class was unemployed--about 17 million people. Only about 3 million workers had union cards, the same number as in 1917. These were for the most part skilled workers. 8,600 steel workers were organized out of 1/2 million; 10,000 auto workers out of 300,000. Almost half the organized workers were in building construction and transportation unions. They were concentrated in big cities from Chicago east and north of the Mason-Dixon line. A list of the major business corporations was also a list of the firms least penetrated by unionism.

## VII. OPPRESSED NATIONALITY WORKERS

The Depression affected Black and other minority workers much harder than whites. White workers displaced Blacks in industries where they had been accepted and began competing for traditionally Black service jobs. By 1934, 17% of white workers and 38% of Black workers were incapable of self-support. In May 1934, 52.2% of Blacks in Northern cities were on relief and 13.3% of whites.<sup>1</sup>

## VIII. STRIKES

Most employed workers were not particularly militant during the early years of the Depression. In 1932, only about 100,000 workers were involved in work stoppages (out of approximately 23 million people working, 13 million were unemployed, 10 million employed in manufacturing, 3 million union members). Most of these strikes generally were over wages and hours in response to Hoover's wage-cut policies.

Several pre-1933 strikes were broken after weeks of violent, even armed struggle between companies, National Guard, and workers. In some areas, guerrilla war conditions existed, as in a 1932 strike of 8,000 Kentucky mine workers. After the 1933 passage of Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act, with its "right to organize" clause, about 1,500,000 workers were involved in work stoppages in 1934. Most of these strikes were over union recognition. During 1934 there was a widespread strike movement in most major US cities.

## IX. THE CP's TRADE UNION WORK

The CP in 1929 was small, with approximately 10,000 members of which fewer than 2,000 were involved in the labor movement. In 1928, the emphasis of CP work shifted from the AF of L to the organization of independent Communist-led industrial unions. Between 1929 and 1935, when the new policy was discontinued and the CP cadre returned to the AF of L unions, they were able to organize approximately 125,000 workers. Several militant unions were organized in 1928 or 1929 and dissolved in 1934 or 1935, including Food Workers Industrial Union, National Miners Union, National Textile Workers, Marine Workers Industrial Union, Auto Workers Union, Fur Section Needle Trades Industrial Union, Metal Workers Industrial Union. These were all affiliated to the Communist-led TUUL (Trade Union Unity League). Their slogan was "class against class" and their program called for a 7-hour day, a 5-day week, organization of unorganized, industrial unionism, social insurance, full economic, political and social equality of the Negro people, affiliation to the Red International of Labor Unions, world trade union unity, struggle against fascism and imperialist war, defense of the Soviet Union and socialism.

Since the AF of L was collaborating with Hoover's "no strike policy" in the early 30's and was resisting the formation of industrial unions, the TUUL militants were in the forefront of many workers' strikes during this period. Though Communist cadre gained valuable

experience in trade union organizing as a result, the TUUL unions were not particularly effective overall. The AF of L saw them as a threat and hastened to counter-attack by offering local federal unions to industrial workers. Because of its history of union struggle, its comparative strength, and the official sanction of the New Deal government which consulted with the AF of L, many workers wanted their unions to be associated with the AF of L rather than with the TUUL. The companies also put forward propaganda calling the Communist unions "foreign-led" and "nigger lovers" and urging white workers to form "100% American unions," i.e., company unions.

The difficulties inherent in the situation were compounded by internal problems in the CP. The new trade union line which involved changing the emphasis of work from the AF of L to independent unions was developed in a top-down move from the Comintern to the National Leadership to local cadre. It was widely resisted and misunderstood in the US, and when it was put into effect gave rise to sectarianism. In some TUUL locals, decisions were made by out-of-state CP members without consulting the workers. In other areas, longtime allies were now declared to be social-fascists, abruptly cutting bridges which would have to be mended later.

#### X. THE AF OF L

By the early 1930's the AF of L had gone about as far as it could go with its strategy of organizing skilled workers along craft lines. The most rapidly growing sectors of the economy were those which were producing on a mass and automated basis using primarily unskilled workers. The AF of L reflected the contradictory political character of the skilled worker in the US. On the one hand he was privileged vis a vis black, foreign-born, women, unskilled, and nonorganized workers. Making higher wages in a more secure job, he tended to be patriotic, identify with "middle class" values, and white chauvinist. On the other hand, as a worker, he was exploited by capitalism and subjected to the economic insecurities and political violence of that system. Skilled workers and the AF of L which represented them had to make a fundamental decision whether to unite with the masses of unskilled workers in the basic industries or to unite with the capitalists and government. Certainly the leadership of the AF of L took the latter course during the 30's. Again and again they sat on government commissions, strike boards, and convention committees, using every manipulation conceivable to squelch strikes, shelve questions of racism, and turn over control of production to company and government boards.

They were forced to deal with unskilled workers after 1933 by the militance of the rank and file who organized spontaneously and by the successes of the TUUL and CIO in taking up their demands for unionization.

The AF of L dealt with industrial workers through the federal unions, a system set up earlier to disenfranchise Black trade unionists. They organized all of the workers in one plant into one local which craft unions still had the right to raid if their jurisdiction extended to a strata of jobs in that plant. This was no substitute for

organizing all of the workers in one industry into one union. In one rubber plant where several thousand workers had organized themselves into one industrial union, the AF of L organizer sent out to charter the union divided them into nineteen separate locals. This led to a collapse of the whole union organizing drive. In local unions, with 13 million people unemployed, workers were at the mercy of management in negotiating contracts. Most federal unions had no local power to negotiate agreements concerning rates of pay or working conditions and no machinery for handling grievances. In some federal unions, the AF of L national organization claimed the right to make agreements for the workers represented in the federal unions. The local federal unions allowed the AF of L to collect dues and the companies to manage the workers with no-strike agreements. The CP, the CIO, and the TUUL bitterly opposed the federal unions and the 1933 Labor legislation which made them possible.

By October of 1933 the AF of L announced at its convention that they had increased their membership from 2,126,798 to 4,000,000. The breakdown of new members.

New Federal Unions	300,000 new members
Old Federal Unions	50,000 new members
New Locals of Internationals	500,000 new members
Recruits in old Locals of Internationals	450,000 new members

Under such slogans as "the working man should get behind the president," workers were urged to sign up with official unions. The AF of L Amalgamated Association, which recruited 97,000 members in the steel industry between 1933 and 1934, put out a handbill saying:

Under the NRA, the workers of the steel mills are challenged by the president of the US to become members of a labor organization. Will you be slackers or are you going to help him bring back the economic security of the steel worker? You can do this by complying with Section 7 of the Industrial Recovery Act.

Black workers fought hard to be represented in AF of L international unions. After many years of struggle with the AF of L, Black railroad workers were finally allowed to affiliate with the AF of L through the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Once the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was represented in the AF of L conventions, they began to take up the question of Jim Crow unions. In the 1934 convention, A. Philip Randolph demanded the expulsion of "any union maintaining the color bar." Greene held that "the AF of L cannot interfere with the autonomy of national and international unions" and appointed a committee to investigate. This committee held hearings in Washington, but was aborted by Greene at the 1935 convention which advocated "education." The AF of L didn't take up the question again until 1941.

The 1934 and 1935 AF of L conventions held in San Francisco and Atlantic City were battlegrounds over the issue of industrial organizing. After vigorous debate, the industrial strategy was defeated 18,024 to 10,933, and the Committee for Industrial Organizing was formed by: John L. Lewis, United Mine Workers; Charles Howard, International Typographers Union; Sidney Hillman, Amalgamated Clothing Workers; David Dubinsky, International Ladies Garment Workers; Thomas F. McMahon, United Textile Workers; Harvey C. Freming, Oil Workers; and Thomas H. Brown, Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers.

#### XI. SOCIAL UPHEAVAL AS A RESULT OF THE DEPRESSION

Millions of working people in the US were without work, adequate housing, food, medical care or social services. This gave rise to a variety of movements and organizations on the right and left. The CP--with its international links, revolutionary leadership, and superior organization--was the most effective of these organizations in leading social protest movements. Most successful were the unemployed councils and hunger marches which involved over a million people in demonstrations at various times. Other left organizations included A. J. Muste's National Unemployed League, advocating a mass labor party; the Socialist Party; the League for Industrial Democracy; Association of the Unemployed, and so on. Several utopian organizations arose, including Upton Sinclair's society of bartering cooperatives "End Poverty in California" and the Utopian Society. On the right, Reverend Coughlin organized the National Union for Social Justice and attracted over 10 million radio listeners with fascist ideas while the Christian Front actually organized small groups of storm troopers. 22,000 veterans spontaneously organized a "Bonus army," marched on Washington in 1932 and were violently dispersed after 3 months by federal troops led by General MacArthur and his aides, Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton.

#### XII. EFFECT OF THE DEPRESSION ON FARMERS

Farmers' income had been cut in half by the Depression. Banks and insurance companies began to close on mortgages, and from 1929 to 1933 some 1,019,300 farmers lost their property. Farmers organized milk strikes, barricaded roads, carried on demonstrations, and demanded relief. When sheriffs attempted to carry out foreclosures, mobs of farmers brandishing pitchforks and dangling hangman's nooses persuaded sheriffs to retreat or force the sale of land to a friend for a penny. Farmers were organized in the Farm Bureau, the Farmer's Union, and the Farm Holiday Association. In 1932, the CP helped organize the Farmers' National Committee for Action which called for relief to farmers, reduction in rents, taxes, and prices of many goods needed on farms, and also "abolition of the system of oppression of the Negro people."<sup>2</sup>

#### XIII. ASSESSMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY CONDITIONS IN US, 1928-1935

Though 1929-1935 was a time of great crisis for the American bourgeoisie, it did not lose its ability to govern. Through the use of the army and national guard in controlling social protest, and social

welfare programs to buy off discontent, the bourgeoisie maintained ideological, political and economic control throughout the period. The majority of workers in the US supported the Roosevelt administration. Though the Comintern talked a great deal about the radicalization of the American worker, this was greatly overestimated. Being willing to protest when your wages are cut or you are unemployed is fundamentally different from adopting a conscious socialist outlook which seeks to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist ideas have never been as widespread in the US working class as they are in Germany, France, and Italy. It is generally estimated that Socialists, Trotskyists, Utopians, Anarchists, Communists and all other left groups combined made up in the early 30's only about 150,000 people, of which the majority were not part of the working class. Most did not have very much influence in the working class. Further, the CPUSA, which will be discussed in the next section, did not have the ideological or organizational strength to lead a revolution during this period.

Though the Communist Party gained 14,000 members during the early New Deal and became a force in the American working class, it never achieved the role of the vanguard leadership of the class. This was due partly to internal problems (to be discussed later) and partly to a conscious anti-Communist ideological assault on the working class by capitalists, the Roosevelt administration, and the AF of L.

#### XIV. CONDITION OF CPUSA

The CPUSA in 1928-35 grew from approximately 10,000 to 24,000 members. It had the organizational model of the Bolshevik party which only 10 years earlier had carried out the first successful socialist revolution, and a body of up-to-date revolutionary theory. It had the benefit of membership in the Comintern, an international Communist organization which could develop ongoing analysis on an international scale. The CPUSA was engaged in a labor movement in crisis, with masses of militant unemployed workers looking for solutions and a huge largely unorganized industrial proletariat seeking to organize itself. Under these conditions, a party could mature very rapidly.

#### XV. FAILURE OF BOLSHEVIZATION

From the early 20's on, the Comintern had urged all communist parties to Bolshevize themselves. In the imperialist countries, this meant breaking with their "social democratic traditions." The roots of the CPUSA had included the Socialist Party which had concentrated on reformist and electoral strategies. The Comintern wanted the CPUSA to expand the revolutionary content of its trade union work, concentrate on building factory units rather than street cells and foreign language federations which served the function of electoral campaigns rather than trade union organizing. The Comintern was also critical of the CPUSA for the weak theoretical level of its cadre and its failure to train new cadre. Membership turnover was high, work tended to be bureaucratically organized, and there was a low level of discipline. There was little emphasis on serious study of revolutionary theory and



its application to US conditions. These errors and negative factors were only beginning to be corrected during this period.

#### XVI. BOLSHEVIZATION AND THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE CPUSA

One of the negative effects<sup>3</sup> of the attempt at Bolshevization in the CPUSA was the decline in working class membership, especially in heavy industry. Most of the membership of the foreign language federations had been working class. When the federations were dissolved in 1925, about 3,000 people or 20% of the total CP membership dropped out of the Party. Even so, about two thirds of the party members in 1929 were still registered in foreign language groupings.

In 1924 and 1925, about 75% of the party membership belonged to the working class, about 15% were housewives, 10% from middle-class and professionals. Of the workers, about 25% were involved in heavy industries such as metal trades, including auto workers, and mines, and about 50% in small scale or distributive industries such as needle and food trades. After 1925 when 3,000 foreign language federation members left the party, the ratio of metal workers to all workers in the party declined from 15% in 1925 to 10.7% in 1928. Needle trades workers increased from 9% to 21% of the workers in the CPUSA.

In 1929, in Minnesota, a district where the working class membership of the party was high, it was reported that of 850 registered members, 250 were industrial workers, 150 farmers, 150 clerks and office employees, 250 housewives, 10 petty bourgeois elements, and 40 intellectuals. Most districts were much weaker in industrial workers. One of the goals of bolshevization was to form shop nuclei in industries consisting in a single plant of a minimum of 3 Communists. In 1925 15% of the membership of the CPUSA belonged to shop nuclei. In 1928 10%, and by 1933 only 4%.

In 1925 only 32% of CPUSA members belonged to trade unions. Even though the overall number of workers in the CPUSA declined, after 1925 there was a push for union participation by those workers who remained, many of whom were former foreign language members. In 1928 between 45 and 50% belonged to unions, and about half participated in systematic union work. This number declined in the early 30's, partly as a result of the new TUUL trade union policy.

Piatnitzky, a Comintern analyst, gives the following membership figures for Communists in trade unions. (Imprecorr, #74, 1929).

1923	6,532	1925	4,100	1927	3,257
1924	8,456	1926	2,371		

#### XVII. FACTIONALISM IN THE CPUSA

The CPUSA was divided into two established factions by 1928, the Lovestone faction and the Foster faction. The Lovestone faction, formerly the Ruthenberg faction, had come out of the Socialist Party and

tended toward electoral politics and legal work. The Foster faction came out of the trade union movement and tended to see trade union organizing as the main form of party work. The Lovestone faction was in power in 1928, elected by the vast majority of party members. The Comintern's opinion was that there were no major political differences between the two groups, that each side had strengths and weaknesses and could learn from the other, that each side was guilty of trying to manipulate the Comintern and the membership to gain power, and that factionalism was destructive to the interests of the party.

The ECCI sent the following telegram to the CPUSA on July 7, 1927:

The Comintern is categorically against the sharpening of the factional struggle and under no circumstances supports the statement of the "National Committee of the Opposition Bloc." The Comintern recognizes that in many political questions the Ruthenberg group followed a more correct line in the past than the Foster group. On the other hand the Executive is of the opinion that the Ruthenberg group had not understood how to estimate sufficiently the full significance of the trade union forces in the Party and that Foster at that time was more correct on many trade union questions. The line of the Comintern has been: On the whole for the political support of the Ruthenberg group and for bringing Foster nearer to the general political line of the Ruthenberg group, at the same time, however, following the course toward the correction of the trade union tactic of the Ruthenberg group on the line of Foster through cooperation in the Party leadership. Now the previous political and trade union differences have almost disappeared. The Comintern condemns most categorically every attempt toward the sharpening of the situation in the Party, especially in the present objective situation as exemplified by the formation of a National Committee of the Opposition Bloc. The Comintern considers factionalism without political differences as the worst offense against the Party. (Theodore Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia, p. 262)

#### XVIII. EFFECTS OF COMINTERN POLICY ON CPUSA

Political disagreements in the Comintern and in the Soviet Union affected the outcome of events in the CPUSA. The struggle against the "left" in the Soviet Union ended with the expulsion of the Trotskyites in 1927. Trotsky circulated a letter to the representatives of the July 1928 Comintern Congress containing his criticisms of Stalin. In it he stated that the leadership of the Comintern and the Soviet Union were decaying and counter-revolutionary, that the attempt to build Socialism in the Soviet Union was a perversion of the international revolution, etc. This point of view was taken up by James Cannon and Max Shachtman of the CPUSA who convinced about 100 other members of the CPUSA upon their return from the Soviet Union. They were all expelled from the CPUSA in 1928. They set up a separate organization linked up with the Trotskyites' International Left Opposition, published a newspaper called the Militant and later in the 30's founded the Socialist Workers' Party.

The struggle against the right in the Soviet Union and the Comintern heated up in 1928. Just as the expulsion of the Trotskyites was being completed, a difference began to develop between the Stalin and Bukharin groups in the Soviet Union over the introduction of socialism in rural areas. Stalin wanted to move faster, Bukharin slower.<sup>4</sup> Bukharin was to be accused of making right opportunist errors in allowing capitalism to develop freely in Russian agriculture. The split between Bukharin and Stalin began in the Soviet Union and widened during the 1928 Comintern Congress when Bukharin failed to fully grasp the new line on the nature of the Third Period, the destabilization of world capitalism, the growing militance of the world proletariat, and the rising prospects for world revolution. This line change is referred to as the Comintern "Left Turn of 1928."

The struggle against the right was also begun in 1928 in the trade union bureaucracy of the Soviet Union as well as in the RILU. At that time, Stalin and Lozovsky attempted to displace right trade union leadership in the Soviet Union.

In the Fourth Congress of the RILU and the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI, both held early in 1928, a new line emerged formulating the beginning of a new period requiring new tactics. Here Lozovsky revived the demand for separate Communist unions. With this idea came the revival of the idea of "fascist" aspects of Social Democrats. At the RILU Congress, a French Communist leader, G. Monmousseau, delivered a report on "the fight against fascism" in which he declared that the "reformist trade union bureaucracy had become the chief agent of fascism." In the discussion that followed, no one objected to this formulation. This concept of fascism was strongly opposed internationally at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International of July 1928. Togliatti of the Italian CP warned against excessive generalization -- "Fascism as a mass movement is a movement of the petty and middle bourgeoisie dominated by the big bourgeoisie . . . . On the other hand, social democracy is a movement of labor and petty bourgeois basis: it derives its force mainly from an organization which is recognized by enormous sections of the workers."

A French delegate, Pierre Senard stated "We have observed the tendency in the parties and in the sections to neglect the correct analysis of the actual political situation and to be satisfied with mechanical classification, social fascists, fascist left bloc, fascist government, etc. Everything was put down as fascist . . ." Senard said such practices were disastrous in that "we must beware of putting the label of 'fascist' upon any situation and any reactionary manifestation of the bourgeois governments as well as on the Social Democrats because . . . it cannot yet be demonstrated to the masses who are still behind social democracy." Bukharin, while agreeing that Social Democracy revealed a social-fascist tendency, warned that this was merely a tendency and not a completed process, "It would be a mistake to line up social democracy and fascism together."

In January of 1929, the "right" opposition in the KPD, Brandler and Thalheimer, were expelled with their followers. In the Soviet Union, Bukharin was removed from his position in government and in the ECCI and accused of "trying to discredit in every possible way the healthy process of purging the Communist Parties of Social Democratic elements."

XIX. THE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE RIGHT AND "LEFT" IN THE COMINTERN AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE CPUSA

In May 1929, Lovestone and his "right faction" who were allied in the Comintern with Bukharin and the "right" were purged from the American Communist Party.

The expelled KPD members formed an International Communist Opposition (ICO) whose general line was "faithful adherence" to the decisions of the Comintern including the Sixth Congress, but refusal to abandon the previous way of applying the united front tactics.<sup>5</sup> They argued that fascism had been made into an unrecognizable, all-pervading generality instead of a phenomenon arising in certain historical conditions. The theory of "social fascism" was a dangerous false line and was anti-Leninist. For the most part, this argument of the ICO was aimed not at building a mass movement but at convincing party cadre. It made little headway after the onset of the Great Depression because it seemed to most party members that the Depression would cause a great increase in radicalization of the working class and increase the likelihood of proletarian revolution, weakening the social democrats.

The ECCI connected Bukharin's errors on the development of socialism in the Soviet Union with his 1928 right errors on international line in the Comintern

Comrade Bukharin's errors in regard to the policy of the CPSU (b) are inseparably connected with his erroneous line in international policy. By underestimating the socialist offensive of the CPSU as a factor undermining capitalist stabilization, Bukharin together with Humbert-Droz, Serra (Angelo Tasca), Arthur Ewart, and others is in fact providing an ideological-political basis for the policy for the right elements throughout the communist international. Contrary to the line of the Comintern and especially contrary to the decisions of the Sixth Congress, Comrade Bukharin is slipping over into the opportunist denial of the fact of the ever growing shakiness of capital stabilization, which inevitably leads to denial of the rising of a new revolutionary tide in the labor movement. (Helmut Gruber, Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern, p. 237).

Part of our sum up of the line of the Sixth Congress is given in the paper, "The Concept of 'Social Fascism' and the Relationship of Social Fascism and Fascism." Here we stated "given the generally correct estimation of the coming capitalist crisis, the line adopted

by the Sixth Comintern Congress was, in general, considering what could have been known or forecast, correct. However, the tying up of social democracy with fascism into the concept of social fascism, which occurred as far as I can determine, shortly after the Congress, was wrong, and insofar as it was maintained after fascism became a clear danger in Germany, disastrous." Thus, though we share the criticism of the ICO on the theory of social fascism, we agreed with the Comintern on its overall assessment of the destabilization of world capitalism. As Stalin pointed out, the line of the Communist parties and their day to day work did depend on their assessment of how world capitalism was developing.

Are we passing through a period of the mere gathering of forces or are we passing through a period when the conditions are maturing for a new revolutionary upsurge, a period of preparation of the working class for future battles?

The way this question was answered would determine the overall strategies of the parties. It is clear that much of the international right as well as the CPUSA under Lovestone's leadership did not take up the revolutionary tasks of the third period because they did not think a fundamental change in capitalist stabilization had occurred.

#### XX. AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

One effect of the 1928 "Left Turn" of the Comintern was to challenge the view widely held by American and international communists that the United States was in a different economic condition than most European countries. The US was classified by the Comintern in 1926 as a capitalist country still on the upswing, while most European capitalist countries were not. "American capitalism is still healthy. As opposed to European capitalism, it is certainly on the upgrade," wrote Varga, one of the chief economic theorists of the Comintern. Bukharin had held, "Our party in America is quite small. American capitalism is the stronghold of the entire capitalist system, the most powerful capitalism in the world. Our tasks in this country are for the present still very modest." (Draper, p. 272)

But in 1927 Stalin began to state publicly that in his view world capitalist stabilization was collapsing. He believed that the capitalist world was on the "eve of a new revolutionary upsurge." At the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Bukharin, who was already on his way out, disagreed with this assessment. "I do not wish to say that we are now on the eve of an immediate revolutionary situation in Europe." He cautioned against overestimating the strength of the CPUSA and pointed out that real wages of American workers were more than four times that of the average European worker. Manuilsky, a Russian Comintern leader siding with Stalin, predicted an industrial crisis, "revolutionization" of the American labor movement, and a war in the Pacific which would weaken the US bourgeoisie. Lovestone agreed with Bukharin's thesis that America was in a different situation than

Europe. In his view, American capitalism still had enormous reserves based on the drain of Latin American resources by the US bourgeoisie. Though he believed a crisis of American capitalism was coming, he did not believe in an "immediate deep-going crisis" or final crisis. "We should not develop a disease with which we once suffered in America where we expected the final crisis, the collapse, to be around the corner, every time unemployment increased in volume." But even the politician, he conceded in 1928 that "the class struggle in the US today is at a turning point. The period of retreat we are leaving behind us. A period of sharp fights is ahead of us." Lovestone argued that the new international line of 1928 was not appropriate to US conditions. He did not see a big upsurge of radicalization in the US working class in 1928. Fascism was not developing in the US government; and social democracy was not a main enemy since it barely existed in the US labor movement. Further, the US situation was fundamentally different from the situation in Germany where a smaller working class was being led by a large mass party. According to Lovestone, applying the United Front from below tactics of the 1928 Comintern Congress to the US would lead to radical isolation of the US party.

Though these specific features of the US were correctly pointed out, and though we agree that the social fascism line was incorrect and did not apply to US conditions during the third period, we think Lovestone was using these specific facts to avoid the responsibilities of carrying out the revolutionary role of the CPUSA. His attitudes were fundamentally careerist, reformist, and class collaborationist as his activities after leaving the Party were to show. In fact, his factionalist manipulations (as well as Foster's) were preventing the party from taking up the real problems of Bolshevization and fusion with the working class.

As the "Left Turn" was consolidated in the Soviet Union and the Comintern, American exceptionalism was branded as a fundamental error, a root of all other errors made by both factions of the Party. According to Stalin in 1929

. . . both groups are guilty of the fundamental error of exaggerating the specific features of American imperialism . . . . This exaggeration lies at the root of every opportunistic error committed by both the majority and the minority groups . . . . This is the basis for the unsteadiness of both sections of the American Communist Party in matters of principle. (Gruber, p. 232)

The estimate of the United States as being in a different economic situation than other capitalist countries was dealt with by the Comintern as if it had originated spontaneously in the CPUSA rather than being the stated International position of the Comintern before 1928. The Comintern did not analyze the relationship of the line of the CPUSA to that of the Comintern. World economic conditions had changed by 1929 but Lovestone and others had held on to the previous estimation and magnified its implications. Finally, the line was

blamed almost totally on Pepper and Lovestone. "The ideological lever of the right errors in the American Communist Party was the so-called theory of "exceptionalism" which found its clearest expression in the persons of comrades Pepper and Lovestone, whose conception was as follows: 'There is a crisis of capitalism, but not of American capitalism, there is a swing of the masses leftwards but not in America. There is the necessity of accentuating the struggle against reformism, but not in the US, there is a necessity for struggling against the right danger, but not in the American Communist Party.'" (Gruber, p. 232)

This is in fact an exaggerated and oversimplified account of Lovestone's position. Lovestone was intelligent as well as being an unprincipled opportunist and one can quote several different positions from his speeches and written works, some in agreement with the new line. If there is a criticism to be made against him, it is more that he would pragmatically hold any theory based on what he thought would gain his faction more power in the CPUSA and the Comintern. We are critical of the ECCI and Stalin for carrying on struggle in an exaggerated and oversimplified way with party leaders who were in error, for not exploring the Comintern's own role in making errors, and for beginning the onesidedness in democratic centralism which would develop more fully in the late 30's.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, it was true that factionalism and right opportunism including an exaggerated sense of the unique strength of American capitalism were holding back the revolutionary development of the US party. The Comintern was correct to struggle with these errors and take action against them.

Further, Lovestone was wrong in his understanding of the relationship of the CPUSA to the Comintern, a member party in a democratic centralist organization. Lovestone believed that as leader of the majority of the CPUSA he could negotiate with Stalin from a power base independent of the Comintern. Most CPUSA members who supported Lovestone however did so because they thought he had the backing of the Comintern. Lovestone incorrectly believed he could keep his majority in a fight against the Comintern.

That is why Lovestone and his closest associates never missed an opportunity to stress their "majority" in the Party. That is why, ten years after his expulsion, Lovestone was still able to say: "I was not only a personal friend of Bukharin, but I had fundamental agreement with him on international questions, though on Russian questions I had agreement with Stalin and not with him." This statement implied that Lovestone, as the American communist leader, enjoyed such an independent status that he could make separate "agreements" with the two Russian leaders even when they were at loggerheads with each other. (Draper, p. 439)

## XXI. THE APPLICATION OF THE 1928 UNITED FRONT FROM BELOW LINE TO THE US

The purge of Lovestone and his followers took place in a situation of intense struggle between both factions and the Comintern. The new line was first introduced in the US by Lozovsky, head of the Red International of Trade Unions in 1927. The US party and the Comintern had long agreed that given the low level of politicization and organization of the US working class and the small size and lack of influence of the CPUSA, most labor movement work should be done within the AF of L unions to avoid isolation of the CP cadre. Lozovsky, representing the new line in the Comintern, now pressed the CPUSA to begin forming independent Communist-led unions outside the AF of L. These would expose and isolate the labor leaders who were, in his view, collaborating with a bourgeois government which was developing towards fascism. Both Foster and Lovestone argued that this would isolate the CPUSA, though they agreed on the necessity of organizing the unorganized.

In Germany in 1928, the situation was fundamentally different. There, large social democratic unions put forward socialist ideas in a context that betrayed workers' interests and, in the end, helped the fascists to come to power. In Germany it was important for the Communists, who had a large mass base, to break from the social democrats and put forward an independent analysis of fascism and bourgeois government. But in the US the Communists had no independent mass base in the labor movement. The Socialist Party and other left social democratic groups had even less influence. They certainly were not social-fascists, and the CPUSA was hard-pressed to portray the do-nothing Hoover administration as rising fascism. They were reduced in the party press to such enlightening statements as, "The American Socialist Party has not yet had the incomparable opportunities for social fascist repression of the working class that have been afforded certain of its brother parties in Europe. Consequently, we find its social fascist tendencies less concretely expressed on the political field than in those trade unions where it has won power." When they used strong-arm tactics to break up Socialist party meetings, they did not win away masses of American workers from "social-fascist" leadership but fueled the Anti-Communist press with stories of splinter group sectarian extremism. Stories attacking the American Socialist Party in the "Daily Worker," entered the realm of fantasy. Some characteristic headlines were:

SP Competes with KKK for the Title of "American"  
 Fascist White Terror Sought by Socialists  
 Yellow 'Socialist' Forward is in Favor of Lynching Negroes  
 (Howe and Coser, The American Communist Party, p. 187)

Neither the Foster faction nor the Lovestone faction wanted to change the emphasis of the US party from working within the AF of L to the formation of independent Communist-led dual unions which is what the formation of the Trade Union Unity League represented. Comintern policy had opposed dual unions in the past in the US. Lovestone predicted it would completely isolate the CPUSA from the labor movement.



In December 1933, O. Piatnitzky, a Comintern spokesman, was to write, "The Communists . . . in most countries surrendered the reformist unions to the trade union bureaucrats almost without a fight and thus isolated themselves from the broad working masses."

In the Passaic strike of 1926, Albert Weisbord, a young Harvard graduate, went to work in a Passaic textile mill which the AF of L had little interest in organizing. When a 10¢ wage cut was announced, Weisbord and other Communists were able to organize United Front Committees supposedly to unite the different unions organizing the textile workers. Foster, whose TUUL operating within the AF of L had been by-passed, accused Weisbord of setting up a dual union as the United Front Committee was giving out membership books and collecting dues. Since the Comintern policy of the time was to work within the AF of L unions, the Foster faction was given control of the trade union committee of the party. The Comintern's position: "Secessional movements and the formation of parallel trade movements should not be instigated or encouraged in any form."

Two years later when the international line of the Comintern had begun to change, Lozovsky accused the CPUSA of "dancing quadrilles with the AF of L" in the Passaic strike. He said that the fear of dual unionism was a fetish of the CPUSA and they had been wrong not to set up an independent union at Passaic. He did not acknowledge that the CPUSA had been acting on instructions from the Comintern.

In 1927, the CPUSA following Comintern policy had successfully gained leadership of a militant left caucus in the UMWA. The UMWA leadership, John L. Lewis and company, was corrupt and conciliatory, agreeing to lay-offs of miners and failing to fight for the union. The TUEL, a CD-led committee, organized a Save the Union Movement which led masses of coal miners to vote for Brophy, the TUEL candidate for head of UMWA, and to support the 1927 bituminous strike.

After the strike had been going for a year, the Save the Union Committee held a mass conference in Pittsburg to extend and strengthen the strike. 1,125 delegates, representing 101,000, were present (about half the total UMWA membership). This conference was to issue a call to the miners in non-striking fields to come out. Just at this moment, Losovsky arrived in America and attacked the CPUSA for collaborating with reactionary AF of L unions. The Save the Union Movement was dropped, all the CP forces were pulled out, and the strike collapsed. Six months later the National Miner's Union, a dual union in the coal industry, was formed under the Lozovsky leadership as part of the formation of the Trade Union Unity League.

Both factions of the CPUSA disagreed with the idea of withdrawing from the Save the Union Movement during a strike which they had helped organize. They saw working within the AF of L as a major priority of the CPUSA.

The Comintern acted as if the CPUSA had independently decided to work with the AF of L and made no self-criticism of its role in the development of CPUSA trade union work.

Five years later when the Comintern saw that the major arena of workers' struggle in the US was still the AF of L, not the TUUL, they were to write, "In the US there can be no question of the Communists building up a revolutionary trade union opposition parallel to the existing unions of the AF of L. There the task is to penetrate deeper into the AF of L. It was a complete mistake to try to build up a revolutionary trade union opposition in all countries." (Howe, p. 269)

## XXII. LOVESTONE'S EXPULSION

Lovestone's group won 90% of the Party vote for the delegates to the Sixth Convention of the CPUSA which was held in March 1929. In May 1929 the ECCI characterized the Sixth Convention in this way:

The executive committee of the Communist International is compelled to record that at the Convention itself, and after it, not only was there no appreciable result achieved in the matter of doing away with factionalism, but on the contrary, the factionalist struggle had become still more accentuated. Due to the unprincipled factional struggle, the Sixth Convention of the American Communist Party failed to produce the results which it should have produced in regard to Bolshevization and the establishment of a healthier condition of the American Communist Party. Many of the most important political questions and tasks confronting the party were not discussed by the convention. The errors of the majority and of the minority party were not explained at the convention as they should have been as a matter of Bolshevik self-criticism. The Party was not mobilized for the struggle against the right danger. No consolidation of all forces of the Party for the struggle against factionalism was secured at the convention. On the contrary, this convention, which was composed of the best proletarian elements of the American Communist Party, could uphold the line of the Comintern, became an arena for unprincipled maneuvers on the part of the top leaders of the majority as well as on the part of the leaders of the minority. The convention was forced off the line proposed by the Comintern and was mobilized for the purposes of further factional struggles by both groups . . . . (Gruber, p. 230)

Two Comintern representatives came to the convention with an open letter containing political and organizational instructions. These instructions which were reaffirmed after the convention contained the following points.

1. To place the majority as well as the minority of the central committee under the obligation of dissolving immediately all actions and ceasing all factional work. To call upon all organizations of the American Communist Party to secure the putting into practice of this instruction, not shrinking from the application

in regards to factionalism of the most severe disciplinary measures including expulsion from the Party.

2. Comrades Lovestone and Bittelman, as the extreme factionalists of the majority and the minority, should be removed for a time from work in the American Communist Party.

3. To reject the demand of the minority of the central committee in regard to the calling of a special convention.

4. To recognize as necessary the reorganization and extension of the Secretariat of the Central Committee on a basis of securing real collective non-factional activity, and to render to the Central Committee every possible help in the matter of putting an end to all factionalism in the Party.

The Comintern stated that "in the absence of substantial differences on points of principle" between the two factions, the factions were to be liquidated and workers to be drawn into the leadership of the party. The open letter of the Comintern caused an uproar at the Convention and was opposed by Lovestone. Lovestone went to Moscow with a delegation from the CPUSA to argue his case. When it became clear that the Comintern had no intention of letting Lovestone return to power in the US, he secretly attempted to split the party and take over its assets. This move failed and he was expelled with a few hundred of his followers. Over 2,000 members left the CPUSA in 1929 but did not unite with Lovestone. The Lovestoneites formed The Communist Party (Majority Group), later the CPUSA (Opposition), and finally the Independent Labor League of America. They completely disbanded in 1940. All of their main leaders became strong anti-Communists.

Following the expulsion of the Lovestoneites, Bedacht, a former member of the majority (Lovestone) Secretariat, was appointed acting Secretary of the party on the motion of the Comintern representatives. This was to reassure members of the former majority group that the party was not being handed over to the former minority group (Foster). At the Seventh CPUSA Convention in June 1930, the Secretariat of the CPUSA was reorganized. W. W. Weinstone became organizational secretary; William Z. Foster, Trade Union Secretary, and Browder, Administrative Secretary. Browder had long been a member of the CEC. We aren't going to go into Browderism because "The Roots of Browderism" is the subject of the next report.

## XXIII. RIGHT OPPORTUNISM IN THE US PARTY

Though the CPUSA made "left" errors from time to time, overall, as the party in the strongest imperialist country in the world, it was plagued consistently with problems of right opportunism. The Comintern throughout the late 20's and early 30's pointed out that the party overestimated the strength of US capitalism. There is a worldwide system of imperialism and the US was an integral part of that. The CPUSA didn't understand the links between the United States and the world revolutionary movement. This was a serious theoretical failure in an imperialistic country, characteristic of the CPUSA. It was even more serious because of the extent to which the bourgeoisie was able in the US to penetrate the working class with its ideas and agencies.

The ever growing economic power and ever increasing importance of American imperialism in the world arena, the specific method of economic and political oppression of the working class on the part of the bourgeoisie who used the powerful apparatus of the AF of L as an agency in the working class--all these conditions give rise to the most serious danger of the development of a strong right-wing tendency in the American Party. (Gruber, p. 229)

This right wing tendency can be observed in many areas of the party's work even before Browder consolidated it into a political position in the late 1930's.

The class base of the party was never taken up and solved as a serious problem of the CPUSA. Many people in leadership in the party were of non-proletarian origin and had no factory or trade union experience. The percentage of working class base deteriorated throughout the late 20's and early 30's in the CPUSA. In 1924 75% of the party was from the working class, much of it in the foreign language federations. Partly through the loss of foreign language federation members during Bolshevization that number decreased. Because much of the CP work after 1930 was in neighborhoods, organizing tenants, veterans, students, housewives, intellectuals, artists, many new recruits came from these areas. Since the new trade union line of 1928 through 1934 deemphasized work in the AF of L unions, this organization declined as a recruitment source. Many new workers were recruited through the TUUL unions, especially the needle trades workers. By 1930 one-third to one-half of the membership was from the working class (depending on how you categorize clerks and office workers). After 1936, a disproportionate number of artists, writers, and intellectuals was recruited as a result of the United Front Against Fascism strategy.

A further problem along these lines was the low representation in the party of those most oppressed by American capitalism--Blacks, Chicanos, Asians, American Indians, and so on. In 1928, there were between 150 and 200 Black party members in the CPUSA. About 1,000 Black cadre were recruited between 1928 and 1930 as a result of the Comintern's emphasis on national oppression. The number of Black

cadre in the party in 1934 was reported at about 10% of the party membership. This growth in Black membership was initiated by the change in line on the national question in the Comintern in 1928 and reflected in party work with Black people. We think it was a positive aspect of the growth of the CP during this period. There was a neglect of other oppressed nationalities in most sections. In spite of the emphasis on the recruitment of Black cadre during this period, the party never fully grasped the importance of the national question in relationship to US imperialism as explained by the Comintern in 1928. A 1930 agitational pamphlet for Marine workers still stated its position on the national question in two sentences at the end of a sixty-page pamphlet:

"Solidarity of workers of all races; no discrimination on account of race, creed, or color; full political, social, and economic equality for Whites, Negroes, and Asiatics." There was no mention of the fact that the oppression of "Negroes and Asiatics" might have a different character than whites.

Partly as a result of the class base, some people in leadership had little faith in the abilities of the working class to grasp problems of political line in the party and were comfortable with a style of work in which the top leadership made all the decisions. In general the party frequently took a pragmatic and bureaucratic approach to its problems. Decisions were made in a top-down manner with little discussion of the implications of political lines. For example the Sixth Party Convention failed to take up major political questions according to the Comintern. Local meetings tended to take up scores of issues with five minute discussions of each rather than make a serious political analysis of the work. Achievements seem to have been assessed pragmatically rather than from a Marxist-Leninist point of view. In The Communist "right errors" are regularly defined as lagging behind the workers in organization, i.e., not dominating the Bonus March, not seizing the leadership of a strike.

One of the reasons for the party's bureaucratic approach was its failure to develop its cadre theoretically. A developed cadre would have combatted this bureaucratic approach. There was no regular program of study for old or new members. New recruits were taken in on the basis of their militancy in local struggle and seldom trained in Marxist-Leninist theory. Many did only busy work for the party without ever discussing its overall line and strategy. Because of the low theoretical level of its cadre the party rarely raised ideas of revolutionary theory in the working class in a way which would create widespread socialist consciousness there.

Many people outside of the party were loyal to the party because of its strong stand on narrow issues without ever understanding the nature of the socialism which the party was ultimately fighting for. For example, in much of the literature of the period, workers were exhorted to defend the Soviet Union for the following reasons: it was the fatherland of the working class, it has a seven or eight hour day, it looks out for the special interests of its workers, its standard of living is rising, its industry is increasing. Where it

was mentioned that the Soviet Union was a socialist country or a workers' state, little explanation was given of how socialism differs from capitalism, how the workers organized to take over the state, or what implications that might have for the US working class.

As a result of the absence of a widespread Marxist-Leninist understanding of the revolutionary process in the US, much of the work of the CPUSA was narrow and economist in approach. Some argued that the workers were not yet ready for socialist ideas. This took the form stated by Lenin in What Is to Be Done?

Some began to say that the working masses themselves had not yet advanced the broad and militant political paths which the revolutionaries are attempting to "impose" on them; that they must continue to struggle for immediate political demands, to conduct 'the economic struggle against the employers and the government.'

#### XXIV. THE COMINTERN AND THE US PARTY

The Comintern regularly made the above criticisms of right opportunism of the US party throughout this period as a part of its attempt to help member parties Bolshevize. We see the relationship of the Comintern to the US Party as partly positive and partly negative with the positive predominating.

On the positive side the Comintern had a clearer grasp of the overall development of imperialism and the course of the world revolution than the CPUSA. It was able to predict the world depression, analyze the growing importance of the struggles of oppressed nations, and force the US party to deal with the Black national question and white chauvinism from a revolutionary point of view.

The Comintern also had a clear understanding of the nature and role of a vanguard party and was able to help the US party transform itself into a more disciplined organization. The Comintern rightly stressed the need for building factory nuclei, organizing in basic industries, integrating with the working class, and building discipline and unity within the party.

The CPUSA could never have been formed without the Comintern. Certainly it was the Comintern that prevented its being torn apart by factional struggle by the late 20's. Without the Comintern leadership the CPUSA could never have carried out the Bolshevization campaign even to the extent it did.

On the negative side, the CPUSA's tendency to top-down leadership and bureaucratism was reinforced by the Comintern. Revolutionary theory was established in Moscow without enough regard for concrete conditions and specific differences in the US. Connected with this, there was a problem of democracy in the Comintern so that decisions were made in a way that did not create local initiative and theoretical development. Of course, the CPUSA was a branch of

the Comintern, subject to its discipline and not an independent party. The low theoretical level of the CPUSA made it unlikely that an adequate revolutionary strategy for the US could arise independently from the CPUSA. On the other hand, leadership has a responsibility to create a climate in which objections can be raised and it is here that the Comintern failed. Not enough attention was paid to the input of people in the field. There was no democratic process for working out the application of general theories to specific US conditions. As a result, many clumsy errors were made which could have been avoided. In the long run, putting a "yes-man" like Browder into the leadership of the US Party was no substitute for a vitally theoretical membership which could independently apply revolutionary strategy to US conditions.

The Comintern throughout this period maintained the belief in its own infallibility. If a policy failed, in their analysis, it was rarely due to an error made by the Comintern, even if the Comintern had initiated a policy and supervised its implementation. Failures were often blamed on change of situation, error of member parties, or political deviations of certain factions. In some cases, these were the problems; in others, it would have been better for the Comintern to have been more self-critical of its own role. This failure of self-criticism seems to be a failure of democratic centralism. It created a situation in which the average party member was isolated from the development of theory. Comintern lines were handed down without enough input from the parties and implemented without thorough discussion of their applicability. Thus when social fascism became the main problem for the Comintern it was also the "main problem" in the US; but this was an incorrect line even for Europe where there were Social Democrats. All of this did not contribute to the ability of local communists to find their own bearings.

We believe that it is correct for there to be strong centralized leadership in the international communist movement. It should be noted that in 1935 and thereafter, as part of the United Front Against Fascism, the control of the Comintern over the individual parties was significantly loosened. This encouraged Right tendencies in the member parties.

#### XXV. WAS THE CPUSA A LENINIST PARTY IN THE EARLY 30'S?

Stalin gives the following criteria for a Leninist party. (we are using Stalin's Foundations of Leninism, because it's clear, standard, and easily available to everyone):

1. The Party as the advanced detachment of the working class absorbing the best elements of the class and arming them with revolutionary theory.
2. The Party as the organized detachment of the working class, the sum total of its organizations, and at the same time a single system of these organizations with subordination of the minority to the

majority, and with practical decisions binding on all members of the party.

3. The party as the highest form of class organization of the proletariat, determining a general line for all class organizations, and influencing non-party organizations like trade unions and cooperatives to voluntarily accept its political leadership.

4. The party as an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat, gathering all the threads of the revolutionary movement in the struggle for power, for achieving the dictatorship and consolidating it.

5. The party as the embodiment of unity of will, unity incompatible with the existence of factions, presupposing both iron discipline as well as criticism and conflict of opinion, with unity of action after a decision has been arrived at.

6. The party becomes strong by purging itself of opportunist elements, agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, who may arise from bribed workers of the labor aristocracy or from the influx of peasants, petty bourgeois and intellectuals, proletarianized by the development of capitalism.

In looking at the CPUSA, we want to see it in its historical development, keeping in mind the extent to which any party of the Third International had become a fully matured Leninist party. The question then is to what extent the US party was moving toward fulfilling the requirements for a Leninist party.

1. The Party was weakest in its functioning as the advanced detachment of the working class during the late 20's and early 30's, with only 4% of its membership in factory nuclei in 1933 and few cadre from oppressed nationalities. It can not have been absorbing enough of "the best elements of the class." More important, those workers who were absorbed were not adequately trained in revolutionary theory and the whole party was theoretically weak, both according to the Comintern and our analysis of its literature.

2. The strong point of the CPUSA lay in the organizational sphere after 1929. It had the loyalty of its membership which operated in a disciplined way. A large number of mass organizations, committees, propaganda groups, and trade union groups were organized under its leadership. The party was a system of organizations as well, but unfortunately bureaucratic tendencies were dominant.

3. The party was to a certain extent functioning as the highest form of class organization in the 30's, able to coordinate and organize massive strikes, hunger marches, and unemployment rallies in scores of cities all under the general line of the party.



4. The party never adequately functioned as an instrument for achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat in the US. Before 1935 its small size and low theoretical level prevented it from putting forward an overall revolutionary theory, and its general right opportunist tendency concentrated work at a reformist level. Its greatest successes were in reform and anti-war struggles. After the Seventh Congress of the Comintern which we have criticized elsewhere, the general line of the International was to make the fight against fascism the main task of the CPUSA. Right opportunism then emerged victorious in completely transforming the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat to the struggle to safeguard democracy. Communism in the US became in Browder's words, "20th century Americanism." Foster wrote:

'The socialist revolution will signify the salvation of the nation,' said Dimitroff; and as he also indicated here was a situation under capitalism where the workers following the leadership of the communist party had to save the nation from disaster.

But the CPUSA all too easily forgot that saving the USA from disaster means ultimately making revolution and establishing a socialist dictatorship.

5. The party was purged of its factions in 1929 by the Comintern; but in the process open discussion, criticism, and conflict of opinion, which should have been the norm of the democratic centralist party, were restricted. More often than not, after 1929 lines came down from the Comintern without criticism being encouraged. Therefore the rich theoretical life which is essential for the proper functioning of a democratic centralist party never developed adequately in the US party.

6. The party purged almost 300 members and lost almost 2000 others during the late 20's. Most of these people held Trotskyist and Social Democratic ideas and would have been detrimental to the Bolshevization of the party and can correctly be called opportunist elements. On the other hand, since Browderism developed relatively soon afterward, it is clear that it was not enough just to make purges, but that a thorough going rectification campaign was also needed.

We date the height of the CPUSA, the period when it came closest to being a Leninist party, at approximately 1930 to 1936, though the party never completely met the criteria for a Leninist party as set out above.

## XXVI. NOTES

1. Depression statistics used are from Bernstein, The Lean Years and Leuchtenburg, FDR and the New Deal.
2. For more information on Blacks in southern agriculture, see our report, "The 1928 Comintern Resolution and the Black National Question."
3. For more information on Bolshevization, see Draper, pp. 186-200.
4. See our report, "Crisis of World Capitalism: World Economic Situation."
5. See our reports, "Strategy and Tactics of the Comintern" and "Some Questions Regarding the United Front Against Fascism."
6. Discussed further in our report, "Crisis of World Capitalism: World Economic Situation."

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