

INTRODUCTION

The following studies were undertaken by a small study group of Marxist-Leninist trade union members in the Bay Area who have arrived at very similar conclusions, despite varied backgrounds within the U.S. communist movement. Before coming together in late 1976 we as individuals had had a broad range of trade union, anti-war, civil rights, study group, and coalition experience, seeking to unite with different "Marxist-Leninist" groups. However diverse our experiences were, we came to the same inescapable conclusion about the "anti-revisionist party-building movement": that a genuine Marxist-Leninist party cannot be built in the United States without the most thorough understanding of the U.S. and international communist movement's history, focussing on fundamental errors which have not been widely understood to this day.

We believed that the anti-revisionist movement was, despite its pretensions, in very bad shape. Yet there seemed to be little awareness of this among the larger organized forces and very few materials available, whether from large groups or small, that shed light on the roots and causes of our difficulties. The history of the CPUSA was seldom examined in any depth, at least in print, and the analyses which groups like the Revolutionary Communist Party and the October League had published seemed to be both shallow and self-serving, whether of their own group, the anti-revisionist movement, or the CPUSA.

We had ideas about what was wrong with the various groups, none of which we had been able to unite with: petty-bourgeois composition, sectarianism, dogmatism, economism, theoretical shallowness, careerism, etc., but we considered our understanding to be superficial and believed it had to be deepened. We felt that to have an understanding of our present failures we had to have more insight into the history of the CPUSA, especially its mistakes and failures. Therefore, we decided to study its history and the conditions in which it operated, to examine its methods and politics, its failures and successes, and to see what from the history of this organization was being carried over into the present movement. While we have certainly not spelled out all the conclusions that need to be drawn from the history of the CPUSA up to 1945, which was the limit of our study, we think the most important are included in our summations and individual reports.

We are considerably more critical of the CPUSA than most other analyses by the anti-revisionist movement that we have seen. We do not agree with the prevailing view that the CPUSA went rotten in the 1940's when Browderism was consolidated and that prior to that, during the 1930's, the party was the genuine vanguard of the working class in this country. On the contrary, our study (along with some interviews) convinces us that the CPUSA was never a model or fully developed Leninist party. The U.S. communist movement had great difficulty forming a party and became one party only under extreme Comintern pressure in 1921. Throughout the 20's the party was split by factionalism, a condition again corrected by the intervention of the Comintern. Neither in the 1920's nor the 1930's did the party succeed in becoming Bolshevized, including the years when it was instrumental in organizing the CIO. In the early 1940's it went over to Browderite revisionism and soon dissolved itself. This history

needs to be squarely faced, all of it, since there has been considerable idealizing of the CPUSA during the 1930's and the introduction of its practice at that time into our movement today has been a source of much economism, reformism, and revisionism.

We included the Communist International in our study for two reasons. One was that the CPUSA was an integral part of the Comintern, a branch party, and to understand the CPUSA it was essential to examine its relationship to the Comintern and the Comintern itself. Again, this necessitated some study of the concrete conditions in which the CPUSA and the Comintern functioned. A second reason was that all of us in the study group either disagreed with or had criticisms of the foreign policy of the Communist Party of China, and this led us to a study of the past line of the Communist movement on the international situation, in particular the foreign policy of the Soviet Union before and during World War II.

In this area, on the international situation and the Comintern, our conclusions are even more at odds with those which have been dominant in those sections of the anti-revisionist movement which have generally followed the line of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA). We disagree with the PLA, for example, when it claims that the Communist International never made major mistakes of principle. Though we believe that the PLA and CPC--the latter until recently, when it was captured by revisionists--have been the leading Marxist parties in recent decades, they have not always been correct in their estimates of the actions of the Comintern or of its individual leaders. One of our major conclusions is that the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, under the leadership of Dimitrov, opened the door to the right opportunism which plagued the world communist movement in subsequent years. While the new line introduced at the Congress did have some correct features, which were essential in the battle against fascism, the line also fostered revisionism on the question of state power and the alliances of the proletariat. (We go into these questions in detail in reports 3 - 12.) Neither the PLA, nor the CPC, as far as we know, ever criticized Dimitrov or Stalin for the right opportunism which developed under their leadership in the world movement. Browderism is condemned, but other manifestations of right opportunism are not.

Another vital point is that neither party publicly protested the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, a dissolution which in our opinion could not be justified by any circumstances. Nor did either party try to reconstitute the Third International in the succeeding decades. In our view, these are major errors, and must not be passed over silently.

We present this material as a small contribution toward the establishment of a genuine Communist Party in the United States. We view this as a contribution in two ways. First, we have come to conclusions on important issues which have received little attention in the anti-revisionist movement to date. Lack of clarity on these issues has been a significant factor holding back theoretical, political, and organizational development of the new communist movement. Second, we have included a large amount of the material on which our main conclusions are based. We believe this material will allow comrades who are not familiar with the periods or the questions involved to get an initial grounding

in them and begin to find their own way. We have also included bibliographies to make further study easier. While we do view this series of papers as a contribution, we do not overestimate it. It is incomplete in several respects, and reflects the limitations under which our study group worked.

In the last two years, while we have been doing our study, other small groups have also been addressing some of the same questions. We look forward to the publication of their results.¹

As our Table of Contents shows, the book contains two kinds of reports. The first are summaries of our conclusions (along with some factual material). These are reports 1, 2, and 14. The second are reports written by individuals originally for presentation to the study group. These are reports 3 - 13 and 15 - 16. They contain factual material, quotes, and tables, as well as observations and conclusions.

While, broadly speaking, the subject of our study was the CPUSA and the Comintern, we have focussed on the most significant periods, events, and questions.

Reports 1 and 2 summarize the history of the Comintern and the CPUSA from their founding up until the 1928 VI Comintern Congress, which marked the turn toward the tactics of the "third period" for the world communist movement. Reports 3 - 9 focus on the international conditions from 1928-1935 and the major questions raised by the line of the VI Congress, including the concepts of "social fascism", and the "united front from below".

Report 14 summarizes the line and practice of the CPUSA in this period, and its relationship with the Comintern. Report 13 discusses and evaluates one particular resolution of the VI Congress which marked a fundamental change in CPUSA line regarding Blacks in the United States, the resolution calling for self-determination for the Black Belt nation.

Reports 10 - 12 mainly concern the 1935 VII Comintern Congress. Report 10 contains our conclusions on the reorientation of the "tactics" of the world movement put forward there, while reports 11 and 12 investigate the application of the united front "tactics" in France and Spain, and our evaluation of the popular front governments which were temporarily established there. Together, reports 3 - 12 contain our conclusions on questions which were not only prominent in the period 1928-1935, but which still reverberate in the world communist movement today. Broadly, these are the nature and threat of fascism, the stand of the communist movement on wars of several kinds in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution when fascism is a threat, and the strategy and tactics of communists in countries at different economic and political levels of development. Another major concern was the form and nature of the communist party, both in specific countries and internationally.

Report 15 continues the history of the CPUSA up until its dissolution in 1943 and reconstruction in 1945, focusing on the extreme right opportunism which developed in the United States party under Browder, and commenting on its origins.

Report 16 is a discussion of what we think was an over-all correct application of united front tactics by the Communist Party of China.

In addition to the reports we have included bibliographies for each report, plus an annotated bibliography of our most useful sources.

As we noted earlier, our research into these areas has had certain limitations. Although we had a division of labor, we are not a large enough group to benefit from the resources that some of the larger collectives have; for example, comrades who can be freed to work full-time on a project. (We all work, mostly in industry, and have several children among us.) This will also limit our ability to engage in correspondence, but we welcome criticism and comments.

These limitations have meant that in some cases we have had to rely more on secondary sources (studies by communist or by bourgeois scholars) than we would have liked. When we have done this, we have compared sources and traced doubtful points back to primary sources. Further, our languages are quite limited, so we have not been able to use sources which a party could and must be able to utilize.

Most of the conclusions represent the whole study group; where there is a minority opinion on a significant point, it has been noted.

We are publishing these materials in the hope that they will aid other comrades in gaining an initial or deeper understanding of the periods, events, and questions we have examined. Further, in this period in which, as so many say, "theory is primary", we strongly urge comrades to seriously study and scrutinize our conclusions. Only by tackling head-on the problems of the international and United States communist movement yesterday and today can substantial progress be made toward building a real Leninist party in this country. We think these remarks by Lenin aptly describe the current situation, though written over 75 years ago:

In our opinion, the crisis of socialism makes it incumbent upon any in the least serious socialists to devote redoubled attention to theory-- to adopt more resolutely a strictly definite stand, to draw a sharper line of demarcation between themselves and wavering and unreliable elements. (Lenin, CW 6.186)

It is in the spirit of resolving this crisis of socialism, in the spirit of Lenin's remarks, that we present these materials.

1 Also, comrades should examine the analyses of a few other groups, though they have not been conducted from a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint. For example, Progressive Labor's Road to Revolution III may be read for an objectively Trotskyist account of the VII Congress and related questions. The RCP has begun, four years after the founding of their "party", to explore some of these critical issues in their theoretical journal, The Communist. If they had taken these problems seriously at the outset, they wouldn't have put forward the "united front against imperialism" as their "strategy" for revolution in the United States and would not be saddled with it today. Also, a small group in the Midwest, the Communist Workers Group, has published their analysis in summary form in Forward, like PL, from an objectively Trotskyist viewpoint, one which belittles the forms of national struggle in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution. We mention these analyses because though we are convinced they are flawed or plain wrong, they should be read for whatever facts and correct observations they may contain as well as for understanding centrist (RCP) and objectively Trotskyist (PL, CWG) interpretations of events.