

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

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A THIRD CAMP POLICY IN THE UNIONS

By Larry O'Connor

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1) It is necessary for the Workers Party to further clarify and concretize its general strategy with respect to the labor movement and all popular mass organizations. Such a clarification and concretization should serve to guide our party and its members in working out tactics for each specific situation with which they will be confronted.

Stalinism in America

2) Our organization has a clear understanding of the general nature and the specific characteristics of Stalinism as a world phenomenon. In the Soviet Union stalinism is the ideology and exercise of rule of the bureaucratic collective class. In the satellite states it is the ideology and rule of similar classes in varying degrees of control by the ruling class of the Soviet Union. In the rest of the world stalinism is a political movement which aspires to establish a bureaucratic collectivist organization of society with itself and its leaders as the new ruling class.

3) The pursuit of this aim by the various stalinist parties is conditioned by the specific circumstances of the particular countries in which they operate. In all lands the stalinist parties are subject to the control of the ruling class of Russia, but in varying degrees.

4) The aims, ideology, and methods; the allegiance of the stalinist parties in all lands to the Russian bureaucracy, make of them fundamentally anti-working class, counter-revolutionary, totalitarian organizations.

5) Though this is the fundamental character of stalinism everywhere, the specific character of the stalinist party in each country varies according to many factors. Among these are the specific stage of the class struggle; the size and influence of the stalinists as against other political movements; the traditions and militancy and consciousness of the working class; the degree of democracy existing in the country; the degree of actual control exercised by the GPU or other direct Russian representatives.

6) The stalinists in the United States operate chiefly in the labor movement and through other popular organizations (viz. front propaganda groups, Wallace party, tenant councils, co-ops, etc.). Their party attracts membership chiefly through its work in these organizations, coupled with the prestige of the Russian revolution and the illusions about the character of the Soviet Union which they exploit to the utmost. Their usefulness to the Russian bureaucracy as well as the achievement of their own ambitions depends in largest measure on their ability to gain and retain the support of a majority of the memberships of these organizations.

7) The extent to which the stalinists gain and retain this support by democratic methods (i.e., by propaganda of word and deed)

varies with the character of each particular organization in which they function. It depends on the militancy and consciousness of the membership, the character and strength of the opposition, and the organizational structure and the purpose of each organization.

8) Conversely, the extent to which their methods are bureaucratic and totalitarian is governed on the one hand by their ideology, aims and social character, but is limited on the other by the necessities imposed upon them by the kind of factors enumerated above (in 7).

9) This contradiction between the aims and methods of operation most natural to a totalitarian, bureaucratic caste (would-be class) on the one hand, and the fact that its success depends on the organization and exploitation of the social discontent of the proletarian and petty-bourgeois masses in a country with strong democratic traditions on the other, imposes on the revolutionary socialist opponents of stalinism the difficult task of devising a strategy and adopting a series of tactics related to it which will effectively destroy stalinism while at the same time preserving the movements through which and in which stalinism operates and leading them along the road of class consciousness and socialism.

The American Labor Bureaucracy

10) The American working class is still dominated by bourgeois ideology. Its social, political and even economic thinking ranges between the most reactionary and the most liberal bourgeois conceptions, but except for tiny groups of organized or unorganized socialists or stalinists does not go beyond them.

11) The chief task of the revolutionary socialist movement is, therefore, to find ways and means to assist the working class to rid itself of bourgeois ideology, and to replace it with political, social and economic class-consciousness and eventually with socialist consciousness.

12) The non-stalinist labor bureaucracy in America is one of the chief bearers and propagandists of bourgeois ideology in the working class. Its support to and reliance upon the bourgeoisie ranges from direct sell-outs of the crassest kind to a pre-disposition to make economic and political deals which involve a minimum of struggle, to policies of relative militancy on the pure-and-simple trade union level coupled with ideological acceptance of American capitalism.

13) The labor bureaucracy identifies its interests with the maintenance of capitalism on terms most favorable to itself. Though a part of this bureaucracy is so narrow and reactionary in its vision that it is quite capable of supporting, and in fact does support, the more narrow and reactionary part of the bourgeoisie traditionally identified with the Republican Party, much greater sections of this bureaucracy identifies its interests with the more liberal wing of capitalism in the Democratic Party.

14) Within the unions the labor bureaucracy maintains, fosters and propagates bourgeois ideology by two chief methods:

a) By propaganda for patriotism, "the American way of life," "free enterprise," for the right of the employer to make a "fair profit," for the acceptance of capitalist legality (except when compelled, as in a strike, to do otherwise), etc., in its press, speeches by union leaders, and all other propaganda methods.

b) By maintaining within the labor movement its own bureaucratic regime.

15) The regime maintained within the labor movement by the labor bureaucracy fosters and promotes capitalist ideology in several ways. Most obviously, the bureaucrats combat by all means, ranging from debate to the most bureaucratic and totalitarian measures, socialists and workers who are arriving at class-consciousness. Equally important, however, is the fact that the bureaucratic administration of the labor movement instills passivity in the ranks, re-creates within the labor movement a similar relationship between the ranks and the bureaucrats as exists between the employer and worker in industry. Instead of self-reliance, solidarity, and militancy the bureaucratic regime in the unions tends to create reliance on and fear of the "leaders," suspicion and conflict between different groupings within each union and even more between the workers of different unions, a feeling of helplessness with respect to the ability of the ranks to control the union which reinforces the feeling of helplessness towards the employers and their government.

16) Though the bureaucracy is bourgeois in its ideology and its organizational methods, its ability to maintain its social position depends upon its ability to gain and retain the support of the majority of the workers in the unions which it controls.

17) As in the case of the Stalinist movement, the labor bureaucrats must and do gain and retain this support by means ranging from propaganda of word and deed to the most totalitarian and bureaucratic methods of suppressing their opposition. The employment of such methods varies from the most democratic unions such as the UAW to the most bureaucratic ones, such as the Teamsters, in accordance with the problems confronted by the bureaucracy in each, the historical development of each union, the structure of the industry in which each operates, and many other factors.

General Strategy for the Party

18) As stated in paragraph 11, the chief problem confronting the Socialist movement in America is to assist the working class to rid itself of bourgeois ideology and to strike out on the road of class-independence and socialism.

19) Our party has placed such tremendous emphasis on the ideological and organizational fight against Stalinism not so much because of the absolute strength of Stalinism in America, but because it has most effectively blocked the spread of socialist ideology in the working class.

20) In recent years, the Workers Party has adopted the position that the defeat of stalinism in the labor movement is so essential

a condition for the development of the socialist movement in America that socialists must support the American labor bureaucracy in its organizational struggle against stalinism in those instances in which we are not strong enough to conduct this struggle successfully as an independent force.

21) It is incorrect, strategically and tactically, to view the struggle against stalinist and bourgeois ideology and organizational control as capable of being conducted in two separate stages, one following the other.

22) The defeat of stalinism in the labor movement can open a road to the influence of revolutionary socialism only if it is not accomplished in such a manner and by such means as to replace the stalinist ideology and stalinist bureaucratism with capitalist ideology and an equally vicious capitalist bureaucratism.

23) If the propositions set forth in paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9 are correct, it follows that despite the fundamental character and size of the stalinist movement, in the United States it does not necessarily and in all instances saddle on the workers in the unions and other organizations controlled by it a regime any more bureaucratic and totalitarian than do the bourgeois labor leaders.

24) If the propositions stated in paragraphs 12-17 are correct, it follows that at no time, even while struggling against stalinism, must revolutionary socialists give ideological support to the labor bureaucrats (this we have never done).

25) It also follows, and with equal importance, that revolutionary socialists must at all times combat the organizational conceptions and practices of the labor bureaucracy, even while engaged in a joint struggle with it against the stalinists. (See particularly paragraph 15.)

26) Socialists cannot, therefore, at all times and in all instances give organizational support to the American labor bureaucrats against the stalinists. Specifically, they cannot do so when the victory of the latter will objectively result in the replacement of a weak stalinist regime which, in order to maintain its power has been forced to conduct a militant policy and to operate in a relatively democratic manner, by a powerful, reactionary and totalitarian labor bureaucracy.

27) When allied with a group representing the American labor bureaucracy in a fight against the stalinists, revolutionary socialists must at all times maintain their criticism of and active opposition to all measures and policies which tend to reinforce bourgeois ideology and bourgeois-bureaucratic methods, regardless of the fact that such ideology and methods may cloak themselves under the disguise of formally democratic procedures, and regardless of the fact that such criticism and opposition may endanger the alliance.

28) The party understands that socialism has "no future" in a union as long as it continues under the complete domination of the stalinists. It must equally understand that it has no greater future in a union after it gets under and as long as it remains under the

complete domination of the labor bureaucrats.

29) The strategy of the party in the labor movement must be directed to increase the self-reliance, self-confidence, militancy and democracy of the workers in the administration of their union affairs as well as in struggle against the bourgeoisie. Whether the immediate tactical situation is one of a fight against stalinism or not, the party must not employ tactics or lend itself to tactics which contradict this strategic aim.

30) The preparation of the working class for its historic role in the overthrow of capitalist social relations must proceed simultaneously with its training for the exercise of power under socialism. The most important means whereby the working class will get such training is through its day-to-day experiences in the political and economic class struggle and in its experience in the democratic administration of its own affairs. One of the chief tasks of the revolutionary movement must be to lead the workers in gaining this experience.

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ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

December 4, 1948.

Political Committee
Workers Party
New York, New York.

Dear Comrades:

Since the 1946 Convention of the Workers Party, over two years ago, our party has not had a well-developed, clear position, or line on the Negro Question; without which no American revolutionary socialist party can adequately participate in the class struggle. By decision of that convention, an amendment on this question by Saul Berg, which was originally designed for the Johnson position, was adopted to the McKinney position. The Berg amendment made changes in several basic points in the McKinney position; yet to our knowledge, the amendment and the position have never been integrated. Such an integration is mandatory in a Bolshevik organization.

Since the 1946 Convention the party has operated with what we thought would be basic to any position-in-complete arrived at and adopted by the party; namely, "That only Socialism can end Jim Crow," and from this, "Make Jim Crow a criminal offense." This was our complete line and program, all that stood between us and complete confusion on the question.

However, with the appearance of McKinney's article, "Can Capitalism End Jim Crow?" in the April 1948 issue of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL, confusion turned into pandemonium, for those who read the article concluded and could only conclude that McKinney's answer was a faltering, "Yes it can," or "Probably it can," thus changing his basic position.

At no point in this article did McKinney state that his views were a departure from the traditional position of the Marxists and the Workers Party; that the views were his own and not those of the entire party; that his views should be considered as the reopening of the discussion on the Negro Question; or that he was wrong in the past about the ability of American capitalism to solve the question of discrimination against minority groups. But even worse, the article appeared with no statement whatever by the Editorial Board of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL. It is valuable to repeat here, what Trotsky said in a letter to a member of the French Communist Party in 1921, when there was a heated discussion of the French trade unions going on in that party and its press:

"To be sure, the columns of the press should be opened up ..., with the opposing side given an opportunity to express itself. But in every case the editorial board must make its voice heard, otherwise the reader becomes hopelessly disoriented and confused This can give rise to the greatest disorder, if the editorial board

vacillates. On the other hand, if the editorial board steers a firm course, the masses will choose the principled, correct and firmly sustained Communist line, and reject the confusion, equivocation, and contradictoriness of all other lines." (Emphasis our own.)

The principle set down in the above is as good advice for our party today as it was for the French Party 27 years ago, but there are two important differences in that situation and the one our party is confronted with in re: the Negro Question:

1. Discussion of the Negro Question has stopped, all but entirely, since the 1946 Convention and the exodus of the Johnsonites. And no attempt has been made by anyone to reopen it.

2. The Editorial Board of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL has no position to steer a firm course with on this question, and the readers of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL are not offered the opportunity to choose a "principled, correct, and firmly sustained," line.

The responsibility for the lack of a position does not rest on the shoulders of Comrade McKinney, but on the shoulders of the Political Committee. We believe that this is self-evident, and in view of this fact we request that you, as soon as is possible, do the following so that the pre-convention discussion on this problem will have the minimum of obstacles in its path:

1. Print this letter in the PARTY BULLETIN as part of the pre-convention discussion material.

2. Give the entire party an explanation as to why an integration of the McKinney position and the Berg amendment has not appeared.

3. Give an opinion or opinions of McKinney's article "Can Capitalism End Jim Crow?" in the pre-convention discussion bulletin so that the party's discussion of this problem will be facilitated. (At this time no one knows to what extent McKinney's views are held by the rest of the party's leadership, and if other points of view are not forthcoming from the leadership, those in the ranks who disagree will have to prepare their own position.)

4. Draw up a statement of opinion on McKinney's article to be printed in the next issue of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL where the article appeared, so that the thinking of our readers can be clarified.

5. Withdraw plans to publish the pamphlet on the Negro Question which is now at the printers. The party has no idea of what line, position or program this pamphlet contains, and the pamphlet's author, McKinney, has in a round-about fashion reopened the discussion that may change our line. Thus the pamphlet will be of no use.

Fraternally submitted,

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA BRANCH
WORKERS PARTY

1986

RESOLUTION ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE
SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL

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1. The Workers Party recognizes as one of its prime tasks to help in the reassembling and political clarification of the scattered and decimated forces of revolutionary socialism in the world.

2. It does not, however, view the realization of this task through the artificial creation of international organizations which, in presuming to speak for and to the world working class, serve only to discredit the very idea of a socialist international. Thus, the Workers Party rejects completely and in advance any effort to erect a new socialist International, while the forces for that International represent no more than a few isolated sects. A new socialist International must be capable, organizationally and politically, of speaking for a significant section of the working class.

3. The Fourth Internationalist movement has declared its own doom as an international center of revolutionary regroupment by its demonstrated inability to assess the major issues of our day, notably with respect to Stalinism, the national struggle and the struggle for democracy. Politically it has tended to degenerate increasingly into the left-wing of Stalinism. It has become a futile alignment of grouplets without any semblance of mass influence. The leadership of the Fourth International has, by its pretentious claims to world authority, merely underscored the sectarian sterility of the Fourth. Bureaucratically dominated, politically discredited, it can in no way serve as a center of revolutionary attraction today.

4. All recent experience with the Fourth International requires that the Workers Party abandon any attempt to seek membership in it. To do so would, in its opinion, require an intolerable violence to its program, given the bureaucratic decisions and regimes of the Fourth leadership; it would as well undermine the seriousness with which a socialist international must be approached in concept and achievement. However, the Workers Party remains, as it always has been, ready to collaborate in closest fraternal association and discussion with the comrades and groups of the Fourth International. The Workers Party holds that to become part of the organization of the Fourth would, in actuality, block the discharge of its international responsibilities.

5. The work of the party during the last few years indicates the direction of the party's work and its possibilities. The party's literature and correspondence has had a marked effect in redressing the political direction of numerous Marxists and Marxist groups. Where the party began with virtually no international contacts a few years ago, it has, through patient and fraternal political intervention, made its influence felt widely among Fourth International groups, and outside these as well. It has undertaken a special responsibility with respect to promoting an understanding of Stalinism, and discharged that responsibility with considerable suc-

cess among the many friends it has established in the European countries.

6. The pattern of international development to the point where the working class can once again look upon a specific body as its international spokesman, as with the great Internationals of the past, cannot now be foreordained. It cannot be "legislated" into existence by a handful of revolutionists. Maintaining the closest association with the various socialist elements, revolutionary Marxist and centrist, who are prepared to discuss principles and program with us, to work with us toward common objectives, we can contribute significantly in elaborating an international program and laying that organizational groundwork which will eventually bear fruit in a world-wide organization of socialist labor. Such an organization cannot be conceived or established exclusively by "Trotskyist" groups or on the basis of ultimatic demands that the "Trotskyist" program be adopted. The socialist International will be reconstructed by a mutual clarification and fusion of various revolutionary currents. Towards that end the Workers Party stands ready to collaborate actively in all efforts designed to promote such programmatic clarification (as, for example, a periodical for international socialist discussion) and the growth of revolutionary forces. Towards that end the Workers Party is prepared to work in intimate collaboration with such groups as the ASR and RDR in France, the POUM in Spain and similar tendencies in other lands. In this collaboration, the Workers Party will continue to put forward the principles and policies which it has worked out in the past eight years and seek, in comradely discussion with all others, to have its views incorporated into the foundation of the new International.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE OF THE
WORKERS PARTY

December, 1948.

THE SLOGAN OF AN INDEPENDENT WESTERN UNION

The problem of Europe may be summed up in this way: to overcome the ravages of the Second World War by such an economic and political reconstruction of the continent as will assure prosperity and freedom to the people and overcome the growing peril of reactionary dictatorships and involvement in the Third World War.

More clearly than anywhere else in the world, Europe is today bisected in two directions. Horizontally, it is divided by the class struggle in every country. But in most of the European countries, this struggle is heavily overlaid and thereby grossly twisted and deformed by the conflict between American and Russian imperialism and their respective agencies. Vertically, it is divided geographically into an East, comprising those countries dominated by the naked force of Stalinist totalitarianism, and a West, comprising those countries which are economically dependent upon and thereby dominated to one degree or another by American imperialism. Europe cannot solve its problem under these conditions. They can only lead to such an economic reorganization of the continent as will make the natural resources and productive equipment of each sector serve the war machine of the imperialist camp to which it is attached, as will transform its manpower into cannon-fodder, as will convert its lands into military outposts and battlefields of the two belligerents, as will assure such a foreign domination over each that no European nation can any longer work out its own destiny. All this will only hasten immeasurably the utter ruin of the continent. To find a way out under the present conditions is impossible. The conditions must be changed fundamentally.

The change requires the establishment and consolidation of a power that can counteract and resist domination by either one of the imperialist giants, that can represent a force actively combatting the danger of the Third World War. No country of Europe, taken by itself, can be such a force. But the unification of all the countries of Europe could constitute such a force.

To speak of the unification of all the countries of Europe is, however, an abstraction at the present time. The prospect of such a unification and the struggle for it can be rendered concrete only by taking for its immediate basis those countries which not only have common problems and needs but which have in common a similar objective situation, a similar relationship of forces, a similar rhythm of development of the class struggle. A quarter of a century ago, the Marxists called for the "United States of Europe" as a slogan which best met the need of finding a way out of the impasse in which the split-up economic unit known as Europe found itself. The slogan of the "United States of Europe" was not put forward then in opposition to the idea of a World Federation, but because the situation in Europe could not be judged in the same way as the situation in the rest of the world, because the social problem presented itself differently to the peoples of Europe than it did to the peoples of the world as a whole. The slogan which best meets the need of finding

a way out of the impasse in which Europe find itself today, which can become a new point of departure and a new impulsion for a re-awakened and reoriented working class and socialist movement, is: An Independent Western Europe. •

The slogan of an Independent Western Union is addressed in the first place to such countries as Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, Austria and the Scandinavian countries. These countries make up not only a more or less compact geographical unit, but also an economic unit which, while not completely self-sufficient, would be sufficiently powerful to assure a speedy pace in the reconstruction of all the countries and a high degree of independence of action. But most important of all, this slogan is addressed to these countries because of all the nations of Europe, these alone have working class economic and political movements with sufficient freedom of action to accomplish the unification of the ir countries without waiting until the political situation of the other countries (not only of the world in general but of the rest of Europe in particular) is similar to the stage reached by the situation in the countries of Western Europe.

However, a broad movement for such a Union would have a powerful effect upon the people of the other countries of Europe, above all the countries ruled by Fascist or Stalinist regimes, where no serious progress is possible without the direct overthrow of totalitarian rule. The formation of an Independent Western Union along democratic and socialist lines would greatly stimulate popular movements to get rid of totalitarianism and would constitute a rallying center for all peoples and countries of Europe who seek to escape domination and involvement in the war by either American or Russian imperialism.

An Independent Western Union, and the struggle for its achievement, is calculated to lead the European countries out of the blind alley to which they are condemned by their dependence upon the economic and therewith the political tutelage of American imperialism. Not a single one of the European countries can exist independently because it cannot exist as an independent economic unit. A unified Western Europe, relying primarily upon its harmoniously integrated economic resources, can exist and act as an independent unit. Such a Union, therefore, would make possible the independence of these countries from Marshallization by American imperialism and at the same time would constitute a powerful assurance against assault and domination by Russian imperialism. By the same token, the struggle for such a Union would help enormously to restore the confidence of the people, and of the working class and socialist movements in particular, in their own power, a confidence which the war, the post-war period and the present blind alley of Europe have gravely undermined. The working class of these countries represents precisely the kind of social power which is capable of uniting Western Europe into an economic and political union. It is the only social power capable of uniting it on a democratic and socialist basis, as the first and most important step in the direction of achieving a United States of all of Europe.

The call for a Western Union is not confined to the socialist movement. Indeed, it has already been initiated by bourgeois and

imperialist forces, prominently including American imperialism itself. The United States seeks to organize Western Europe into a single bloc so that it may be more unitedly and integratedly subjected to the imperialist aims of Washington and most thoroughly and consistently mobilized on the side of American imperialism for the Third World War. Toward this end the United States is ready to subordinate the special aims and interests not only of every European nation but of the bourgeoisie of every nation to the overriding aims and interests of Washington. It is not inconceivable that under certain circumstances the United States would be able to impose such a unification upon Western Europe. But precisely because it is imposed from above by a reactionary power, because it would be compelled to serve reactionary ends, a Western Union thus achieved would have the same kind of retrogressive and calamitous consequences of the "European Union" imposed from above, and by military force, by Hitlerism during the Second World War and for the purpose of promoting the interests of German imperialism in the war. England, on the one hand through Churchill and on the other through the spokesmen of the Labour Government, also seeks to establish a Western Union. But its aim is to establish a union of Europe under British domination for the purpose of restoring the old British hegemony of the continent and, with the aid of this enhanced position, to come closer to a position of equality with its now greatly superior imperialist partner, the United States, in the coming struggle with Russia for world dominion. Thus, while the working class is not the only power capable of bringing the countries of Europe into an economic unit, it is the only power capable of doing it in a manner that contributes decisively to the reconstruction, peace and freedom of the peoples.

The position of the Marxists is not and cannot be simply determined by the position taken by the bourgeoisie. It must be determined independently by the objective situation and the needs of the working class. It is on this basis that the Marxists put forward the slogan of an Independent Western Union. The slogan represents for them a stage in the struggle for democracy and socialism.

An Independent Western Union demands a voluntary decision on the part of all the countries entering into it. It excludes any infringement upon the democratic right of national self-determination of any participating nation by any other. To begin with, its functioning requires no greater self-limitation upon the sovereignty of each nation than this, that placed at the disposal of the Union are all the economic resources of all the participating nations, to be organized, exploited and shared in common. The primary prerequisite for this is the complete abolition of all customs barriers now dividing the Western European countries, and the establishment of a single stable currency common to all of them, which alone can make possible a harmonious economic reconstruction of these countries on the basis of economic independence from American imperialism. This economic independence in turn makes possible complete political independence from American imperialism, at home and in the international political arena. At the same time, it consolidates a foundation which cannot be undermined by Stalinist demagogy and reaction. The question of the speed at which the participating nations will abandon the now jealously guarded barriers of national sovereignty and the stages traversed in the achievement of a single federated

state, need not be resolved today.

An Independent Western Union is possible, and can be counter-posed to all imperialist schemes parading under that name, only on the basis of the boldest and most thoroughgoing application of democratic principles. This means, first of all, the renunciation by all participants of any imperialist "rights" to dominate colonies and possessions now under their rule. It means, at the same time, the most extreme democratic reforms of the political structure of every one of the countries in question. It means, in the second place, the full assurance of all democratic rights and unqualified equality especially to such participants as Germany, Italy and Austria, namely, the withdrawal of all occupational troops, the cancellation of all forms of war-tribute and war-reparations imposed upon them, the lifting of all forms of political and economic disability to which they are not subjected. It means, in the third place, that the proper functioning of the economic machinery of the Union shall be assured by unhesitatingly removing all obstacles to it constituted by private ownership of industrial or financial monopolies, and by unhesitatingly imposing the most drastic capital levies wherever and whenever they are required.

The slogan for an Independent Western Union necessarily goes hand in hand with the slogan, in all these countries, of the most rapid possible establishment of Labor or Socialist Governments. The revolutionary Marxists in Europe are condemned to sterility outside the ranks of the popular and democratic mass movements of the workers. In virtually all the countries of Western Europe, these movements are represented by the Social Democratic parties. In these parties, the Marxists must become the most articulate, active and consistent champions of the slogans: "Our party must work and fight to take over the government independently! The workers' governments of Europe must unite into an Independent Western Union!" It is only under such governments that an Independent Western Union is realizable.

In putting forward this position and these slogans, the Marxists remain fully aware of the nature and the limitations of Social Democracy and reformism in general. To the question as to whether or not the Social Democratic and Laborite parties can achieve genuine workers' governments and a Western Union that is genuinely independent of imperialist domination, alliances or policies, they do not give a dogmatic answer that would preclude the mobilization of the workers in a struggle to achieve such governments and such a Union through the medium of those parties and instruments which have the confidence of the workers themselves. The revolutionary Marxists retain in full their confidence that the workers can and will learn through their own fighting experiences, in which the Marxists themselves will participate fully and equally and with their own program, all that is required for the earliest and complete realization of the socialist objective. For the workers to learn from their own fighting experience in Europe today requires the most energetic, conscious and consistent advocacy of the inseparably joined slogans: For a socialist government! For an Independent Western Union!

December, 1948.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE OF THE
WORKERS PARTY

1992

A WORKING PERSPECTIVE

By Vincent S. Wheelon (Calif.)

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Fungous Stalinism, feeding on the decay of the Russian Revolution, has perverted socialist orientation among the masses of the world. But the Socialist Workers Party, to whom Leon Trotsky bequeathed unsullied the legacy of Marxian Leninism gravitates toward Stalinism, becomes monolithic, corrupts its heritage and seduces the Fourth International. The Workers Party remains the only vanguard organization capable of resuscitating revolutionary leadership on a global scale.

Break from the Socialist Workers Party of the Workers Party faction precipitated by a dispute concerning the nature of the Russian regime, was actually consummated because the founders of our organization refused to surrender the fundamental principle that one or more opposing tendencies can exist in the same vanguard party. These comrades were responsible for rescuing from malicious perversion, if not oblivion, a maxim that guided the pre-Stalinist party of Russia.

But since the controversy leading to the split took place at a time when the questions involved did not possess the clarity vested in them at the present time -- thus constituting subjects having little interest for the average militant, leaders of the dissident group were (and had to be) theoreticians of an extremely high caliber.

While they subsequently became leading cadres of the Workers Party, they were not (and are not now) geared by background and experience to the temperament, atmosphere and "language" of the shop, the factory and the field. Their approach to audiences, groups and individuals, their writings and speeches, THE NEW INTERNATIONAL and LABOR ACTION, manifest their inability to clothe the party's propaganda and agitational material in the "overalls" of the working class.

This influence, permeating all layers of the party, often impels the younger and active comrades to drift away from their "native tongue" and adjust their discussions and writings to the dry polemical patterns of the leadership.

Max Shachtman is on solid ground when he argues in his "Party or Propaganda Group" (Convention Bulletin No. 1) that the objective situation harasses the continued existence of the Workers Party as a "party." But he fails to indicate what he means by the organization and procedural failures he assigns to the "second, third and fourth" in his hierarchy of reasons why our movement has failed to attain the status of a party.

The overriding motivation behind his proposed reorientation is to break down the barriers between us and the workers (even those "a foot high") which prevent us from convincing them we are a loyal left-wing tendency resolved to accompany them through their experi-

ences again and again if necessary.

This means that if the top cadre layer is not reconditioned in such a way that the flavor of our propaganda, spoken and written, on the platform and in the press, does not absorb the earthy simplicity of the factory and the field, if the Workers Party leadership is not made up of individuals fortified by experience and background to the actual thinking, feeling and attitudes found in, for example, factory lunch-hour discussions, the guiding stratum of our movement will be unable to furnish the membership with the correct approach to the type of workers we want to attract.

While Shachtman states that "program" furnishes a sufficient disciplinary norm for the cadre, these key leaders -- even if they are struggling to hammer out a correct line on this or that issue -- will drift away from the "life" led by the militants we wish to bring to a full social consciousness.

II

In motivating his demand that the Workers Party cease identifying itself as a "party," Shachtman declares in the same article: "We must start from the fact ... that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution has resulted in an unprecedented defeat and decline of the Marxist movement and its almost complete isolation from the class on which it must base itself, the working class, which remains most completely under the sway of the bourgeois or Stalinist labor leadership. We add the no less significant fact ... that this same working class continues almost unremittently, even though in an elemental way, without socialist consciousness or leadership, the struggle to lift itself out of the bloody chaos of social decay, and will continue to struggle because it is the only class whose conditions of existence dictate the fight against its conditions of existence."

The National Chairman reasons that chiefly because of the "degeneration of the Russian Revolution," the workers continue to struggle desperately in the face of "the profound decay of capitalist society," without guidance of Marxian leadership.

For this reason neither the Workers Party, the Socialist Workers Party nor any of the socialistic formations have been able to break through to the masses for the purpose of organizing and leading their struggle. Consequently, since the Workers Party has failed to reach a position where it can speak for an appreciable segment of the working class, Shachtman says: "Let us stop calling ourselves a party. The Marxist movement today is reduced to the state of a propaganda group.... We have all been thrown back to the early days of the Communist Manifesto when it proclaimed" (in substance) "revolutionary organs must be inseparable parts of the working class, are 'the most resolute and persistently progressive sections of it' and remain ahead of it in understanding the 'determinants of the proletarian movement....'"

"In our view, this means," says Shachtman, "that the Marxist groups should everywhere enter the broader democratic political movements of the working class and constitute themselves a loyal left-wing tendency... to become the broad left-wing that seeks to convert

them into genuine socialist organizations; and not for the purpose of raiding...."

Thesis of the National Chairman reveals a decidedly healthy trend, a willingness to face realities and -- what is more important -- realization that, despite the objective situation, the party has failed to get down on its belly and crawl with the political infantilism of the American working class.

III

The party press -- LABOR ACTION -- is a clear manifestation of how remotely the personnel of the Workers Party's editorial cadre is removed from the "life" of the workers. The articles are relatively and individually too long. They have been far more agitational than even the present perspectives of the party allow. They are often written "down" to the workers in a fluff and puff style, devoid of the factual material which the average intelligent person looks for when he reads such a paper as LABOR ACTION. Much of the material is handled without the use of writing techniques necessary to treat complex problems with simple English.

The paper should absorb some of the earthy texture found in THE MILITANT and THE INDUSTRIAL WORKER. Believe it or not, LABOR ACTION need not be a polished journalistic product -- which it is. The organ is the smartest looking sheet of its class. Maybe that is a handicap. It has all the characteristics of professional craftsmanship. The paper employs type faces, column measures, gutters instead of rules and other wrinkles that give it technical leadership.

Nevertheless, there is a question of whether reversion to more familiar formats would not place LABOR ACTION more in conformity with the type of orientation the party now seeks to employ.

Let it be made clear, however, there is no implication here that the columns of the paper should be thrown open to all the confused "think pieces," bad spelling and hideous sentence structure of those with a Dear Editor complex. But were the paper cast in a more earthy, familiar tone, it is possible that the average comrade might be inclined to write more articles than he does now.

News writing, feature writing and newspaper makeup are governed by techniques. Therefore, the problem of LABOR ACTION is one of deciding precisely what effect is desired and producing according to plan. Editors must not take everything and anything that comes in, write heads on it and toss it to the linotype operator. They must decide what sort of a paper the party needs and then set about lining up material for it. Even though comrades and sympathizers may labor long and lovingly over super-political pieces, they should not be unhappy if the staff rips them to shreds and boils them down. Anyone who has worked on a copy desk knows a trick or two about re-writing copy in the style of the writer -- often better than he can himself -- and making it shorter and more to the point.

Content of the paper should be geared to the interests of the areas in which the party elects to concentrate. While each branch

should bend every effort to secure subscriptions, it must be recognized that intensive circulation can be expected only in the territory where the party decides to center its activity.

IV

Shachtman's estimate of the Trotskyist groups in Europe (same article) is anything but encouraging. "To one degree or another," he declares, "they are intoxicated with their own phrasemongering, of the variety favored by Cannon and his foster-son, Johnson.... But accepted or not, we have the duty to reflect upon our own proposal and see what can be done to apply it to ourselves, here in the United States."

Most certainly that is our initial obligation. But if our program means anything, if there is any value in the theoretical and political positions we have hammered out in eight years of sweat and labor, then we must hold that they are absolutely essential for conduct of the entire world struggle for socialism.

The Workers Party may be harassed with orientation and organizational problems at home. But it has also thrust upon it the task of rebuilding the world revolutionary movement. This fact must sink deep into our ranks. It must infuse us with a global perspective. This obligation to Trotskyist comrades the world over must be evaluated when the leadership considers the distribution of forces in the next period. One or two leading comrades should be sent abroad for an indefinite period and make an inventory of possibilities for resuscitating the world movement and negotiate working agreements with all groups not caught in -- or that can be torn loose from -- the Cannonite web.

V

Main organizational task should be reshuffling of the apparatus so that intense concentration of work can be carried on in those areas of the United States where the potentialities for recruitment and activity are the brightest. The Workers Party should use the cream of its cadre to sink reinforced concrete cores, deep and wide into the ranks of the workers, in these spots. When in the opinion of the Political Committee, the National Committee and/or conventions satisfactory results have been obtained, other bases of operations should be selected and staffed with personnel properly seasoned to duplicate the activity in the original cores. Then the party can fill in the gaps.

While the above formula is posed as a working thesis for the Workers Party, it is too mechanical and over-simplified in its present form. But despite its vagueness, I propose that it shall constitute the basis of our organizational and procedural perspectives.

There is grave danger, nevertheless, that those (like myself) who seek to implement it may crowd the bench where the "astrologers," as Shachtman calls them, are sitting. Just as Cannon, Johnson and the IKD gaze at the stars and peddle panaceas for clearing up slight congestions in an otherwise perfect Marxist movement, so the blacksmiths who hammer together gadgets and gimmicks may be, with-

out realizing it, pointing their telescopes at the mud.

And yet, after all is said and done, it will probably be from the comrades comprising the "practical school" (of which I am one) that the party will draw suggestions for reframing the party to meet the challenge ahead of it. What puts these ideas in the "gimmick" class is the fact that they are not considered as a whole; are not adjusted to square with the present size of our forces, lack of competent people to staff the various party posts, heavy burden on the apparatus at the center, our pressing financial liabilities; and they are not related to the consideration of whether more harm than good can result from sudden and severe alterations. Some of these ideas are:

(1) Move the party center to Chicago, Detroit or some other city within the concentration "triangle."

(2) House-clean the National Committee and the Political Committee. Elect to those bodies comrades who have lived close to the ranks, who understand the thinking and feeling of the workers, who speak their "language."

(3) Shut down branches where the comrades have failed to demonstrate any appreciable activity in labor unions or other formations where political ferment should be instigated.

(4) Close up small "muzhik" branches and assign their active comrades to more active centers.

(5) Concentrate on the labor unions to a degree that weakens our organized and center-directed participation in the American Veterans Committee, Negro groups, tenant organizations, Socialist Youth League and so forth. Justify this procedure by holding that all of the problems these groups confront can be dealt with in organized labor.

(6) Consolidate -- or link close together -- the work of the party educational director, trade union secretary and organizer in order that emphasis can be placed on the labor movement.

All of these suggestions -- and perhaps many more of the same nature -- should be submitted to rigid laboratory analysis to determine whether they represent the structural and procedural modifications necessary to move the Workers Party closer to the layer of militants now struggling on their own near the periphery of socialist consciousness -- whether they are essential for removing all the barriers between us and the workers (even those "a foot high") which prevent the Workers Party from exploiting to the full all the opportunities the depressed objective situation affords.

VI

This program, based on temporary geographical concentrations, strategic retreat to a propaganda base, an intensive utilization of the party apparatus in a narrow field, is surrounded by, let it be repeated, grave dangers. Unless they are anticipated and unless the party is prepared to recognize them when they reach perceptible pro-

portions, the Workers Party will plunge into an orgy of opportunism, sectarianism, adventurism and every allied sin which writers from Marx to our own party members have warned against.

FIRST -- An all too sudden shift in this direction would overtax the capacity of the center, the energy of the directing comrades and might cause an excessive drain on the already low bank account.

SECOND -- Laying down immediately a sweeping program for colonization and recolonization is impossible. Party members who cut any sort of figure in their respective communities have usually been there for considerable time. They have driven their roots into the organizations they use as arenas for party work. They have won hard-to-get seniority on their respective jobs. Shifting them suddenly would saddle them with heavy personal burdens and perhaps make them ineffective operatives for a considerable period.

THIRD -- Excessive worship at the shrine of the "raw militant" may open the dikes for the inwash of the debris of Wobblyism, Anarchism, the "Workers-Committees-and-Militia-Now" sect and so forth. Under a program that requires far more attention to the understanding and the revolutionary development of the members than ever before, there is a danger that new recruits, steamed up for a big adventure, may tire under theoretical pounding and quit the party.

FOURTH -- Once this program is launched, there is a fair chance that an "advanced" segment of the party will go on an agitational drunk. Forgetting the propaganda phase of the program, some hot shots may propose a parade on Washington or a mass demonstration for this and against that. Who said we can't March on Washington? Well, maybe we can. But under what conditions? Others may want to run candidates for public offices. Okay. But under what conditions?

FIFTH -- Instead of looking forward to building a re-vitalized movement, comrades residing outside of the orbits of concentration may be hit by a wave of discouragement. They may abandon work on projects already started, become demoralized, perhaps a little bitter and resign in disgust. What this program will require is a few self-reliant, self-starters willing to maintain each branch in the best possible condition under any and all circumstances.

SIXTH -- Unionitis is a term identifying restriction of activities to organized labor. Indeed, this form of malignancy could very well ruin the party if the boundaries of concentration became the length and breadth of the meeting hall and the shop-committee room, "for we would tend," as Comrade Irving Swanson says in his "For a Party Perspective" (Convention Bulletin No. 3) "to shut ourselves out of intervening in a host of political issues that (have) not arisen out of the labor movement."

But the burden of this entire presentation, let it be understood, rests precisely on what political consciousness we can stimulate within the union movement by becoming a catalytic agent which provokes the organized workers to grapple with ideas arising outside of it, i.e., concepts we propose they shall adopt as their own.

SEVENTH -- During the eight years of our existence as an independent political tendency we have attracted a considerable number of sharp-minded individuals to our ranks and to our periphery who have rationalized themselves into a revolutionary socialist position.

While their "lives" are remote from those of most workers, while their pursuits of the arts, sciences and letters place their interests on a different plane from that of the average militant, their training makes them indispensable for maintaining the political and theoretical health of the party.

To a large measure it may be upon them that the Workers Party will have to depend for strengthening our positions as crucial issues sharpen and expand in the coming period. Their capacity for objective analysis will serve as a counterweight to any impulsive tendencies threatening to sway the party toward adventurism and opportunism.

The Workers Party must cultivate them assiduously. But they, in turn, must recognize the reasons for our basic orientation and why we choose to envelope ourselves in an atmosphere alien to our own. We have the task, on the one hand, of stimulating their maximum prolificacy and, on the other, of restraining them from using the party press for exchanging Marxian recipes in the language of the academy.

VII

The Workers Party, or whatever its name may be in the future, has an irrevocable obligation to the world revolutionary movement because it possesses the only programmatic base for instituting an overthrow of capitalist imperialism and Stalinism.

But if the burden of world-wide revolutionary leadership must be entrusted to the United States workers, then reducing the imbalance between objective and subjective forces can be facilitated only by a Workers Party re-conditioned in such a way that it can cut a road immediately to the widest layer of conscious militants. Just how this can or shall be done must be determined by feeding through a carefully controlled series of tests every scrap of suggestion formulated to break the party out of the shell that, at the present time, tends to shield it from a vast layer of militants we can coax toward political consciousness. Each proposition must be related to whether its adoption will or will not jeopardize the solid acquisitions already in our possession and whether it might or might not dilute the fundamental Marxian character of our movement because we can't afford to go off the deep end. At the same time, these laboratory tests must not be so rigidly controlled that each one turns up "negative" and we remain as we are. If we do, we perish.

Therefore, with the certain prospect that the green fruit of America's unpoliticalized masses will ripen overnight into social consciousness of the need for socialism -- once they suffer the bitter experience of trying to find redress through their own independent political party, our movement must immediately reorient itself or it will be annihilated in the mounting fury of economic and political maelstroms now hurtling society into barbarism.