

## 7 *Moscow Takes a Hand*

The CP and the CLP had hardly rounded out their first twelve months and their dependence upon Moscow became a major fact of their existence. It was understandable that the young American converts should look up to the Russians for theoretical and organizational guidance. But it is highly doubtful whether Ruthenberg, Reed, Fraina, Larkin and the others foresaw that Moscow would soon be sitting in the director's chair, intervening in every detail of the American movement.

Paradoxically, the first to rush to Moscow was John Reed, an unattached rebel who had never borne party discipline. And Reed's aim was only moral and political recognition for his CLP as a Communist body. He left for Russia immediately after the CLP convention in Chicago, remarking, "Moscow will have to take notice of us." \*41 The CP, fearing that its rival might gain the approval of Moscow, presented its own case to the Comintern, thus opening a wide door for maneuvers by the latter.

Recognition was vital. Neither of the Communist parties had men of the intellectual stature of Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee, of moral prestige approaching that of Eugene V. Debs, or practical builders of the type of Victor L. Berger. Their leading cadres, with a few exceptions, were relatively young and unknown. In the absence of a single outstanding figure, public censure by the Kremlin of an American Communist would hurt his standing, and perhaps cause his undoing. In the two-party rivalry such censure was a real threat.

The financial aspect must be considered, too. Moscow was more than willing to invest in the American movement in the certainty that this would facilitate its control.

The first direct interference in the affairs of American Communism was a letter from Gregory Zinoviev, president of the Comintern, dated January 12, 1920. Calling the split unjustified, he suggested a joint convention to form a united Communist party. Zinoviev also told the Americans to build an underground body in case of suppression. "The fewer people know of it, the better," he said.

Zinoviev was of the opinion that the language groups, due to their better theoretical training and close ties with the Russian revolutionary tradition, "may in the future have a guiding influence." (This was a nod to the Russian Federation. Later the Comintern began hammering on the Americanization of the party. M.E.) The letter was seized on a courier.\*42

### A UNITY FORCED FROM ABOVE

The delegations from the CP and UCP that went to Moscow at the end of 1920 to plead for recognition by the Comintern were bluntly told to stop feuding and to merge into one party. Seeing the futility of an underground body in the United States, the Kremlin also instructed both delegations to form an open party on a moderate program, while for the present preserving the underground body. Nicholas Hourwich, a delegate, who, in his stubborn resistance to the merger and the open party, went so far as to rebuke Lenin, did not return. The Kremlin saw to it that he remained in Russia. Hourwich became an instructor of Marxism in a military school in Moscow, and died October 30, 1934.\*43

Neither of the two instructions was carried out smoothly. The UCP accepted the directives. But the Russians and their allies kept stalling off. Afraid of unity—and loss of control—and fearing open defiance of Moscow, they proposed a temporary working arrangement with the UCP instead of a merger.

The committees of both parties could not, at first, agree on anything. The CP resorted to a new subterfuge to delay unity, insisting that a common program should be the first task. This would have entailed endless discussions. The negotiations dragged on through



February, March and April 1921. And only strong pressure by Moscow led to a joint call for a unity convention. Moscow knew how to overcome resistance to its wishes. One of the methods was to send representatives—reps for short—to the given country. Being on the spot, these reps could manipulate leading men and, by arguments and threats, pressure them into accepting decisions.

The CP, claiming a larger membership, received 32 delegates to the 25 of the UCP. Watching over the convention was a Comintern committee of three, Charles E. Scott (a Lett by the name of Carl Jensen), Louis C. Fraina and the Japanese veteran, Sen Katayama. They had clear instructions to force a unity.

The unity convention, in Woodstock, N. Y., May 1921, was rent by furious fights for control. There were moments when it seemed that one of the groups would march out. The Russians tried to exploit such phrases as "forcible overthrow of the government," and "by the use of arms." "Force" was piled upon "force" as amendments to the program. There were also sharp disputes on the relation to the IWW and the AFL.\*44

The final point on the agenda, elections to the CEC, split the convention in two. The majority staged a sit-down strike. While the UCP people were discussing, they sang revolutionary songs, mostly Russian. And to break up the discussions, the federationists suddenly rose and started singing the *International*, compelling the others to rise and join in the singing. This was the only moment of unison at the unity convention. In the end the deadlock was broken by the energetic action of the Comintern committee. The new body was called the Communist Party of America, and the program embodied the chief planks of the UCP.\*45

As a partial adjustment to reality, the Communists were now ready to take part in the struggles of the workers for better conditions, and to "remain with the large masses of organized workers," meaning the existing unions. But they were to "carry on a . . . merciless . . . struggle against the social patriots and reactionary leaders."

". . . The Communists shall not foster artificial division in the labor movement, nor deliberately bring it about," the program admonished.\*46

However, on the thorny issue of the language groups the Russians scored a partial victory. The federations were restored as units of

the party, but with the proviso that the CEC of the party could change a decision of any of the language bodies and remove an elected officer if his activities would be considered against the best interests of the party.

#### REVOLUTIONARY TIMETABLE UPSET; THE RETREAT

The partial retreat in America was not an isolated step by the Kremlin to save American Communism. It was but one move in a general shortening of the line and entrenchment executed by Lenin on the domestic and international fronts after the hopes for a revolution in Germany had faded. Lenin's plans for combining German technology with Russian manpower and natural resources for a Socialist economy in both countries were frustrated.

Lenin, Trotsky and their associates were not Russian nationalists in the accepted sense. Russia was primarily the laboratory for their great experiment and their base of operations. They were thinking in European—even in world—terms. And after seizing power, much of their energy and finances was devoted to prompting the workers of Germany to revolt. The Soviet Embassy in Berlin, headed by Adolf Jaffe, opened after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, March 1918, was busier promoting a Communist revolution than maintaining diplomatic relations.\*45

However, the Soviets in Bavaria and in Hungary were crushed. Minor Communist uprisings in various parts of Germany were easily beaten down. (Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered January 15, 1919.) And the last attempt to kindle the revolutionary fires, the uprising in the Ruhr, March 1920, was short-lived, the workers in the other parts of Germany not responding.

The hope to force a revolution in Germany by a powerful stroke of the Red Army, that loomed so close at hand during the early victories of the Soviet armies in the Russian-Polish war, summer of 1920, vanished with their defeat at the gates of Warsaw in August.\*46 And the exuberant boast of the Red Army marching toward the West, "We will set Europe afire!" gave way to desperate efforts to save its main force from being encircled by the reorganized Polish army, under the command of the French General Vigand.

Blaming the Socialist "traitors" for "obstructing the revolutionary march of the German masses" was convenient but not comforting.

Lenin must have known better. As early as the spring of 1920, he began hammering on the necessity for Communists abroad to cease being a revolutionary sect. His articles, published under the title, *Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, became a classic in Communist literature. In one passage Lenin made this telling point: "It is necessary by every means to prevent . . . West European and American revolutionaries . . . from paying as dearly for the assimilation of the truth as did the backward Russians. . . ." <sup>47</sup>

The New Economic Policy in Russia—NEP—introduced in 1921, permitting limited private commerce and trade, aimed to stave off total economic collapse, was Lenin's own example in the art of flexibility. And though the party retained political rule as tightly as ever, none could predict with certainty the course in Russia were it not for Lenin's paralyzing illness at the end of 1922. He died in January 1924.

Forming an open, moderate party in America was a shrewd and timely step. Communism's only chance for survival lay in emerging from hiding. But to create such a party alone would have been utterly futile. Partners—non-Communists—were indispensable. Rising discontent within the SP, that ripened into a new division, brought such partners within reach. It was only necessary to find an appropriate formula. And, again under pressure by Moscow, such a formula was found.

An open party, with non-Communist allies, was launched January 1922. The second stage of the American Communist movement had begun.

## 8 *The New Concept*

Contrary to what an outsider might have expected, Jewish Socialism, in all its sectors, withstood the crusading onrush of the Left Wing. The Jewish Socialist Federation was not in the SP split of 1919, nor did incipient Communism make a noticeable dent in the unions or the Workmen's Circle.

To be sure, the ranks of the federation, the unions and the WC could not altogether escape the powerful emotional appeal of the Bolshevik Revolution. The Left was able to snatch away many youthful members, but the active cadres successfully resisted Communist penetration.

This is not to imply that the number of Jews in the Left Wing was small and their role inconsiderable. An appreciable number of Jews, including American-born, belonged to the CP. There were also Jews in the Russian and Hungarian federations.

To gain a perspective of the trends prevailing in Jewish labor in that period, one must review the enormous part radical ideas had in molding its thinking. And the roots of this phenomenon must be traced to the old country.

As described in the third chapter, the handful of intellectuals in the first mass immigration were all under the influence of Russian radical ideas—there were no neutrals among them. Spreading of rudimentary secular education was interlaced by them with a tempting vision of a classless society free from poverty and injustice. A small but lively movement was thus created.

As the Eastern European community began to settle down, many