

Read Marxist Books Believes Browder With Blinders On

By N. SPARKS, Los Angeles

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

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

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

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

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

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

We had an uncritical attitude.

We blinded ourselves to all warnings and contrary indications.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As for the approach to the cor-

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

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

False Notion

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

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

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