

Democracy in the Communist Movement

I think that the current discussion period is a good time to say a word or two on the important question of democracy in our Communist movement because this subject has a direct connection with the statement of policy which is being discussed throughout our nation right now.

It is not my intention here to attempt to analyze all basic reasons for the mistake in fundamental policy which I believe has been made by American Communists during the last period. However, among those important causes which contribute to the errors must be listed that of unapplied democracy within our organization.

Our organization is founded on the principle of democratic centralism which presupposes leadership from top leaders to membership and from membership to top leadership. Thus the ideas, reactions, experiences, needs and aspirations of the members would have an influence on the actions and ideas of the top leadership.

The fact is, however, that this principle has worked from top to bottom better than it has from bottom to top.

Had our leaders been in more intimate contact with the membership and the working class generally, it seems unlikely that the error made could have been continued without correcting it for so long. Had our leaders been more sensitive to those who, while not so well trained in Marxism-Leninism nevertheless reacted to life around them, our mistake would have been less costly.

It is important for us to look beyond our well-known phrases which sincerely stress "democracy" and "leadership from below" and actually understand what takes place.

Such an examination would reveal that most American Communists are modest people loyal to their ideals and to the working class; but perhaps over-much aware that they have merely scratched the surface when it come to Marxist-Leninist teachings. They are humble before those who are presume to have read the classics and have had the opportunity to receive Marxist training.

Many of our members are new to our organization and only the most daring of these feel competent to

express opinions within our own organizational circle which are at variance with policy, even when a reexamination of policy might be due.

But not only the new but also veteran Communists find themselves with a feeling of inadequacy when it comes to contributing to matters generally handled by top leaders and functionaries. The manner of thinking is generally expressed in some such form as: "The leadership is trained, has had the opportunity to read the necessary books, has traveled, has access to the best brains, knows far more than I can ever hope to know, who am I to know more, etc., etc."

Feels Situation Different Here

While I am only a member of the CPA and do not hold a leading position, I would nevertheless like to take this opportunity to express my opinion about the Duclos criticism of the dissolution of the CPUSA.

I think that most of the members and friends of the American Communist movement will take quite personally the criticism leveled at its leader, Earl Browder. He is well loved for his many personal attributes, as are Foster and many others who have worked so devotedly toward the improvement of the way of life in general. But I believe that the main reason for Browder's great popularity lies in the fact that he so genuinely represents his country and its national temperament, and this is of worldwide importance. He has gone far in showing the American people that Communism stems from their way of living as well as the Russian, the French or any other which most Americans unfortunately consider "alien."

In France, where there are many political parties, many of them bearing the names "Radical," "Socialist," etc. (all terms distasteful to the American palate), where Capitalism has been so much more greatly weakened before and since the war, where for the most part it so obviously supported and col-

laborated with Fascism, where the people at first hand have suffered and still suffer from the brutalities of the Nazi occupation, it is easy to understand leading the resistance against them once they seized the country, should have gained in prestige and popular support. The Communist movement in France is therefore able to establish itself as a political party representative of a great increasing number of the French people without too much difficulty.

In America, none of this is the case. It has been our capitalist government which has planned and conducted the war against Fascism, with the Communists contributing only a little more than the average American, which has been little enough. Of the more than 49,000,000 popular votes cast in the 1940 elections, only some 46,000 were Communist, 27,000,000 going to the Democrats and 22,000,000 to the Republicans. There are no indications I can see that the Communists by the role they played in winning the war (and I do not mean to minimize it) could have seized the opportunity to strengthen their Party, as Duclos suggests, and thereby become a stronger force in the life of the country than the CPA is at present.

Every Communist has a contribution to make in the formation and

alteration of policy. It is important for us all to understand this. At the same time, Communist leaders must safeguard themselves from the easy habit of paying lip-service to such words as "democracy" and "learning from the people." Functionaries, too often, are too full of answers to listen sufficiently to the rank and file.

Having reestablished a correct policy, the best safeguard for maintaining this policy at all times—in addition to constant creative study of Marxism-Leninism, is a reexamination of our approach to democracy within our own ranks. Thus can we go forward as a true vanguard of the American people.

B. C.—New York.

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I do not believe, however, that any sincere American Communist would propose liquidation of our movement. The independent role we have to play in the life of our country and the world as a whole, seems to be an obvious one; that of consistent and intensified education. If the American people are to exert their greatest influence to shape American policy, they must be awakened to the issues at hand and they must understand them.

As Duclos points out, there are many besides the Communists who see the need for progressive action and certain changes which, while it cannot be argued that they mean Socialism, would certainly be a decided improvement over what we have and would help strike a death blow to Fascism that is still very much alive and threatens the world. But few among these forces for progress have the Marxist understanding or Browder's good judgment about how this can be done most effectively. It is these whom we must influence and show by our consistent work that we can help them. Even if we have to lay aside for awhile our most cherished principles, this will have to be our course, if reaction is not to take advantage of our divisions and thereby triumph.

Like a good doctor, Browder feels the pulse of America and knows the most effective and least painful cure for its ailments. In this respect, he has much in common with our late President F. D. Roosevelt, and just, as was pointed out by Bob Minor, as Roosevelt prescribed some bitter medicine for the capitalists in order to save their system, I believe Browder is saving the principles Communists believe in from unnecessary attack and preserving them for the time when they will

be more easily applicable. This, of course, in America.

Not, being qualified, I should, however, not undertake to make a Marxist analysis of the situation. But I am making one which seems to me most logical. In order to save itself, Capitalism must be progressive. More and more capitalists are beginning to realize it in spite of the frenzied attacks upon progressive policies by the forces of reaction. (These still have in them the germs of Fascism which must still be exterminated). Progressive Capitalism can develop and industrialize great regions whose peoples can then share the benefits of Western Civilization and better fight for their independence or whatever is necessary. Progressive Capitalism can live with the Soviet Union whose potential influence upon enlightened peoples can not be underestimated.

Whether or not the transition to Socialism can be peaceful and can come about through enlightenment and understanding, I am not certain. But it seems that even if not, the world can go through a period of desirable progress and the transition to the higher stage of society could therefore be less painful.

Should Capitalism not be progressive, even the American Communists will win many allies from among those who fought to make it so. We can thereby only gain, it seems, and not lose from the course upon which Browder has led us.

If it is true that our membership figures are decreasing, I believe that this can be explained by a number of factors other than the change in our form of organization. Longer working hours, night work, a general shifting around the country, the fact that much of our leadership as well as our membership has gone into the armed services are all partly responsible. Also, the fact that we are the only country in the world to have raised our standard of living during the course of the war is bound to have encouraged a certain amount of complacency, even among those we think should know better. If we have lost some of these, and I know that we have, plus some who cannot adapt themselves to changing conditions, I don't think that we are any the worse for it.

On the other hand, it seems to me that our influence among the people as a whole is increasing. I judge this from certain progressive trends in the movies, literature, some newspaper reporting and radio commentators. From what I have seen at the Jefferson School, the demand for education seems to be insatiable and there is less of a tendency to regard the Communist with suspicion. I believe that this is because we have shown our willingness to work with other forces for progress without desiring to "capture" them for ourselves. People will come to understand and accept us only if we are able to work among them. I believe that the course upon which Browder has led us has made this more possible than ever—and if anything, it is most realistic.

H. B., New York.

: CPA : Discussion

On the CPA Resolution

The National Board of the Communist Political Association has made arrangements with the Daily Worker and The Worker to publish discussion material daily on the CPA resolution: The Present Situation and the Next Tasks.

To guarantee the broadest participation of the CPA membership in the discussion, and to ensure the publication of the maximum number of contributions, all articles should not exceed 1,200 words. This rule will apply equally to members of the National Committee and to all other members of the Association. The committee reserves the right to print excerpts from contributions exceeding this length so as to realize this objective.

Eugene Dennis
William Z. Foster
Robert Thompson

Says Foster's Letter Was Suppressed

By C. SOLOMON

The recent article by Jacques Duclos and certain revelations it has made have aroused troubling questions in my mind in regard to methods of reaching decisions democratically within the old CP and now within the CPA.

I refer specifically to the Foster letter, written to the National Committee of the CP. This letter was unknown to the rank and file of the Party at the time of discussion regarding the National Committee decisions. The opinion, the divergent opinion, of one of our foremost Marxist leaders should have been made known to us in assisting us to formulate our approval or disapproval of the NC decisions.

The NC should not have suppressed this divergent opinion until the decisions had been collectively approved by the rank and file on the broadest possible level. The matter should not have been clinched on the upper level before the Party had reached its decisions on a democratic Marxist level.

Why, comrades, should a French Communist have seen it necessary to divulge the opinions of an American Communist leader to the American Communists?

The answer is that the National Committee had acted in an un-Marxist manner.

We have not been functioning in an underground manner. Then, why the secrecy and undemocratic behavior?

Duclos has worked in an underground Party, where one might expect democracy to be limited, and yet even he has seen the maneuver to be flagrantly un-Marxist.

Why was it done, then?

Was Shocked to Hear News Of Dissolution of the Party

CHICAGO.
To William Z. Foster:

The articles appearing in our papers relative to the position of the French Communist Party secretary Jacques Duclos has impressed me very much.

One who has cherished a deep and everlasting conviction in the correctness of the principles of Karl Marx and Lenin whose rigidly scientific application could only lead a student to one conclusion and that would be to not dissolve the American Communist Party.

When I read that the Party was dissolved I was shocked, and when I did not notice anything from you to the contrary, I felt with the faith that I had in you, I should fall in line and carry on. I have done this in face of what my long experience in the class struggle has caused me to detest.

I have read over and over the whole question in the Sunday Worker and in every instance your position, in my way of thinking is correct. The collaboration put into effect since the Party was dissolved has been a stimulant to an acute stage of infantile paralysis in the labor movement.

If conditions here in Chicago in any way reflect the general conditions throughout the States as far as membership meetings are concerned, then things are in a bad shape indeed. Unions with hundreds of members hold meetings and if they can get 10 or 15 members to attend they are lucky. The days when a member could get up in the meeting and ask a question or get the floor to discuss a grievance of

a minor importance is past. The leaders will tell the members, "I'll do the talking here." And they are discarding taking the minutes of the meeting, in many cases. No financial report is made and no one dares to ask about it.

It has always been my contention that the union meetings of the workers should be educational and the place where the members could present his grievances between him and his employer. The rank and file members should be encouraged to learn the why and the whereof of organized labor. For after all this is where the spearhead of the class struggle derives its strength from.

It is very obvious that some of our labor representatives have fallen victim to the idea that the racket leaders have, that the interest of labor is identical to that of capital, and like the AFL whose principles are founded upon the right of capital to first make a profit, and the demands of the worker shall not be in excess of a just profit of private enterprise.

They seem to have accepted the old adage, that the lion and the lamb will lie down together side by side. But to me that will only come to pass when one is inside of the other.

However, since the light has been turned on, let us hope that the line of the Party will as soon as possible be turned in the direction that it was intended by those who have gone before us, and return to you the fullest degree of recognition that you are entitled to.

Fraternally yours,
JOSEPH TUMILTY.

