

CPA Discussion Page

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'Teheran': Socialism? Shh! Not So Loud!

CPA Members

By HARRY MARTEL

Years of opportunism are not disposed of by mere repudiation. Browder's dangerous course was followed only because we had been prepared for it through a gradual absorption of opportunist ideas and modes of work. The nature of our recruiting, for instance, tends to liquidate the distinction between the vanguard and the class. The need to understand American history was satisfied with a one-sided political approach to the past, enabling us to make artificial analogies to fit our shifting tactics.

This essentially petty-bourgeois approach to American history found expression in the ambiguous slogan: Communism is 20th Century Americanism. We accepted this slogan and then accepted with equal facility the lame withdrawal of it. We failed to see that the opportunistic-pragmatist advancing and repudiation of the slogan fostered further opportunistic notions. We lost sight of the deep strategic and tactical importance of slogans as the crystallization of a firmly grounded political conviction based on class relationships.

Essentially our movement is engaged in a struggle between Marxist and bourgeois ideologies. Its outcome is of decisive importance to the world, because of the very weight of American imperialism in world affairs.

Browder's dominating thought was the leadership of monopoly capital in foreign and domestic affairs, on the ground that it was to monopoly's interest to maintain the coalition. He refuses to see that the fundamental objective of American monopoly capital is to achieve world hegemony. This objective is rooted in the very nature of its operation and cannot be eliminated by diplomatic agreements. It can be frustrated only by the struggle of the American people, led by the working class, against monopoly capital.

The belief that Teheran eliminated the normal course of monopoly's operations distorts the significance of that agreement, revises Marxism and gives carte blanche to the imperialists to pursue their anti-democratic, violent and catastrophic course.

Our movement accepted almost without demur this pernicious line because the line seemed to proceed from sound premises. Browder was correct in stating that the Anglo-American-Soviet coalition marked an unprecedented relationship between the capitalist and socialist states. But our theoretical immaturity revealed itself when we failed to see that Browder made an unwarranted leap from his correct notion to the incorrect one that the old relationship between the capitalist and socialist worlds was thereby canceled out.

Browder made it appear that Roosevelt spoke for monopoly capi-

tal at Teheran. He failed to note (a) that Roosevelt, elected by a people's coalition opposed by the bulk of monopoly capital, was a center of conflicting economic interests and, therefore, a representative (as were also Hoover and Vandenberg), not the representative of the capitalist class; (b) that FDR had no power to commit that class to any course of action, and (c) that, even if monopoly capital had given Roosevelt a blank check, its course of action would be, as always, shaped by its laws of motion, which are independent of its will and intention.

The notion that the American ruling class signed the Teheran agreement gave rise to the theory that the epoch of imperialism was on its way out; that the class struggle was no longer the driving force of social movement, and that American capitalism was a lusty, young organism with plenty of progress in its system. This led further to the idea that socialism was becoming a naughty word, to be uttered only when no one was around to listen. With socialism disappearing into the heavens, the Communist vanguard ceased to have any importance. Hence, the liquidationist tendencies.

Browder was correct in saying that certain capitalist class interests involve the maintenance of Teheran. Were this not so, the agreement would not have been made in the first place. But Browder forgot to add that it is also,

and more fundamentally, to capitalist class interests to break the coalition. This paradox is rooted in the contradictions between the capitalist and socialist worlds, between imperialist rivals and between the capitalist class and the working class. When Browder speaks, therefore, of "the true" capitalist interests, he is metaphysical. This, together with the notion that "intelligence" among the capitalists will solve contradictions, stands Marxism on its head. Marxism is not pragmatism. The actions of capitalists are determined, not by "intelligence," but by the contradictions in the economic structure.

The same mode of thinking is implicit in Browder's conclusion from his correct statement that Teheran had canceled out Munich. He tried to make it appear that Teheran had canceled out the causes of Munich, an utter impossibility, since those causes are imperialism itself.

Browder's excessive regard for the tycoons of capital has led him to combine the social-democratic notion of the reconciliation of classes with the Menshevik policy of leadership by the big bourgeoisie and to add to these American pragmatist "theories" of social engineering and "the method of intelligence" in solving social problems.

Comrade Foster presented the problem squarely when he said that Browder's revisionist views constitute a complete theoretical system. In essence, it is bourgeois ideology and specifically American bourgeois.

Browder's report to the March plenum in which he tries to satisfy the working class with talk about its high standard of living during wartime is typically bourgeois.

But the question remains: How did the Marxist-Leninists accept this bourgeois theory? There are many answers: Speaking for myself, I was oppressed by the idea that my doubts, reservations, and even opposition, to numerous aspects of the line were due to an inability to apply my knowledge to the present situation. Browder falsely stated that "Teheran" was the product of an organized movement of Marxists, of the United States and the world. This in itself stifled opposition. Secondly, we were in the habit of tolerating adventurism in theory as the reverse side of a disparagement of theory. This was due to the nature of American life which, because imperialism is so strong in it, breeds opportunism everywhere—in politics, trade unionism and in social life. "Success," "doing things" "bigger and better" "make a record," "ideas are true if they work"—such prevalent notions did not spare our movement. How powerful a hold this pragmatism with its fetishizing of practice has upon our thought may even be seen in the original draft resolution where it is stated: "The opportunist errors which we were committing did not dominate our wartime policies." Theory and practice are so separated here that practice is held to be beneficial, while theory may be detrimental.

ALL MEMBERS of the CPA are urged to attend their meetings and participate in the discussion and vote on the Draft Resolution and on delegates to the State Conventions.

We call upon all members to immediately pay up their dues through the second quarter and convention assessment.

Actually, our theories did dominate our wartime policies to the extent that these policies were specifically vanguard policies, as the discussion abundantly proves.

The party must eliminate the moods that provide a breeding ground for opportunism. This will be done if (1) theory is given its proper place in our life; (2) if we study American history and ideologies as Marxists, and not as conciliators; (3) if we establish inner democracy; (4) if we strengthen our leadership with basic industrial elements; (5) if we reject leftist sectarianism, which is a reaction to opportunism and, in turn, gives rise to opportunism.

Fortunately, the National Board and the National Committee reveal a readiness to counteract revisionism and opportunism. Though self-criticism in the real Leninist sense is still lacking in the resolution, a beginning has been made. Self-criticism is a political act; it is not a breast-beating confessional. It does not appear overnight, for it is the product of long and arduous thought, eventuating in correct policy. This process is now under way.

Negro Struggle Weakened by Revisionism

By GEORGE LOHR
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Since the general theoretical postulates of our errors have, in my opinion, been quite well examined by other participants in the discussion, I want to direct my remarks to a few specific aspects of the question. Our revisionist estimation of the changed relationship of class forces in our country has also inevitably led us into some gross misconceptions regarding the integration of the Negro people into American life. As a result, we committed many tactical errors which, in my opinion, hampered the struggle for the rights of the Negro people. On this front, too, we had become smug and complacent.

Let me quote a few passages from "Teheran." On page 97 Comrade Browder says: "Our American democratic principles and morality which were denied application to the Negroes on their own ground, thus gain their revenge by reappearing as military necessity." And again on page 96: "It required the harsh realities of war to blast America out of its smug acceptance of the poison of racialism." That is

precisely it. The gains that have been made were, in the main, the result of war time necessity, that is to say, Negro workers found employment in defense industry in large numbers. The bourgeoisie, which had a war to fight against an imperialist competitor, found it necessary to temporarily shelve its prejudices. Now that the war in Europe is over, monopoly capitalism is again reaching for its divisive weapon of race chauvinism. Witness the large scale lay-offs of Negro workers in many war plants, in some instances with a total disregard of seniority.

The bourgeoisie was even able to swallow its prejudices against women sufficiently to employ large numbers of them in their "wartime necessity" and now the capitalists are again trying to chain them to the kitchen stove. (By the way, the board resolution is silent on the question of women workers, and I believe this weakness should be corrected).

But aside from employment in war plants, very little can be recorded on the balance side of the ledger in furtherance of the in-

tegration of Negro people into the life of our nation. Restaurants and other public places throughout the state of California violate the law every day by refusing service to Negroes; "restrictive covenants" flourish; swimming pools in or near army posts are for "White only" and managers of federal housing projects follow the "community pattern" and segregate Negro families into some corner. It must also be pointed out that not a single Negro was appointed to serve as a delegate representing America on any of the numerous international conferences which have taken place lately.

Does all this mean that we should have counterposed the slogan of "Victory abroad" with "Victory at home" as it was done by A. Phillip Randolph and other anti-war elements? Of course not. But as Marxists, we should have recognized that the logic of a People's war becomes fully operative only if the working class does not abdicate leadership for the advancement of Democracy to the liberal bourgeoisie. Fear of disturbing relations with the employer sector of national unity, for instance, is in my opinion greatly responsible for the fact that the excellent proposals advanced by Comrade Hudson in relation to jobs for Negroes in the postwar period have not received serious attention from union leaders. In addition to that, of course, no mass educational campaigns were carried out on the Negro question within the trade union movement. This, too, could wait until after the war. To the extent however, that the building of Negro-white unity on the basis of the struggle for democratic rights was neglected, to that extent has the struggle for the realization of the Teheran perspective been weakened. This is where our dialectics failed us.

One other matter before I conclude this point. I realized with a sudden shock the other day that it has been years since we have carried through a thorough discussion in our ranks on white chauvinism. Instead of a scientific understanding of the class nature of this

virulent poison, thousands of our new members have gathered their "understanding" from liberal or humanitarian sources. And we old timers had become so complacent that we did not think that a periodic self critical examination on this question in leading committee meetings was necessary any more.

This brings me to the question of our errors and the present discussion. I have no doubt that thousands of veterans like myself have asked themselves the question, "as I have asked myself; 'How was it possible to go along with this opportunistic rot?' All of us especially who have served our class and movement in one or another leading capacity must assume a heavy share of the responsibility. In place of scientific investigation and communal vigilance I had substituted hero worship and sophistry. This holds for the national committee as well and I am therefore not in agreement with that body's statement which, in the main is not self-critical and which shifts the major blame to Comrade Browder.

If Comrade Browder was the main architect, there were many of us (and especially the national committee members) who helped to elaborate the blueprints for this structure built upon the sands of opportunism, with the exception of Comrades Thompson, Williamson and Ford, there has not as yet been, in my opinion, the kind of Bolshevik self-criticism which we must expect. A leadership which, in the interests of a formal "unity," did not insist upon the publication of Comrade Foster's viewpoint, has a lot to re-learn about communist methods of work.

I say "Re-learn" because every one of our national leaders has been tried in struggle in the past and not found wanting in communist firmness and integrity. Today we are listening to the voice of our membership, the voice of the best sons and daughters of our class. This voice speaks frankly and critically but it also speaks with tremendous confidence in our ability to quickly eradicate our mistakes and move forward as a united organization.

CP Dissolution Hurt Roosevelt Vote

Comrade Browder attempts to justify the dissolution of the Party on the ground it was a necessary step to help reelect Roosevelt. Such a view is, at least, highly debatable, and in my opinion the dissolution had the contrary effect. Browder offers nothing but firm conviction in support of his view, which seems an arrogant way to cope with this question. But the record will show that in certain mining and industrial areas (where we lost prestige through the policies we followed concurrently with our dissolution) the Roosevelt vote suffered, and, in addition, the official red-baiting strategy of the Republican Party was intensified after the dissolution. We should not underestimate the susceptibility of the American public to red-baiting.

question of dissolution can be considered an independent one. As I see it, organizational form can only be a reflection of fundamental theory. If the basic reasons for dissolving the Party are not sound I do not see how the dissolution can be sound.

If the Party was dissolved on the long term concept of waging political struggle through the parties of the bourgeoisie (the Democratic and Republican parties) that could only be in deference to the belief that the leadership belongs to the bourgeoisie. If you do not subscribe to that view it is impossible to be for a dissolution of our Party and the liquidation of the working class struggle which such a step necessarily entails, no matter what Marxist terms you couch such a change in.

I would like to add two comments about the amended Resolution. First, I think the Resolution should speak more fully of socialism as the only social and political form to resolve the evils of our society today. I think this is particularly pertinent in view of the type of mistake we made, whereby we ourselves fostered illusions to the contrary.

Secondly, in the section dealing with the reasons for our mistake I think we should set forth in clear, unashamed terms that the mistake was due in part to bureaucracy of the leadership, one man decisions and fear and disrespect of the masses. Let us have this very pointedly on record as a warning against similar mistakes in the future.

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