

Enlightenment Campaign on the Comintern Address to the Communist Party

THE Polbureau is desirous of securing the broadest possible Enlightenment Campaign on the Comintern Address and the immediate Party tasks outlined therein. All Party members and particularly the comrades active in the workshops in the basic industries are invited to write their

opinions for the Party Press. Resolutions of Factory Nuclei also will be printed in this section. Send all material dealing with this campaign to Comrade Jack Stachel, care National office, Communist Party, 43 E. 125th St., New York City.

For the Unity of the Party

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

Of profound importance in the development of the Communist Party of the U. S. A. is the Address of the Communist International to the membership of our Party. This document, which re-emphasizes the political line laid down in the Open Letter addressed to our Sixth Party Convention, constitutes a devastating attack against the right danger and against the canker of factionalism that has been eating into our Party for so many years. It lays the basis for the unification of our Party and gives it a powerful impulse in its development into a mass Communist Party.

The Address of the Comintern, which is a concrete application to the American Party of the line laid down by the Sixth World Congress, provides the means for a successful struggle against the right danger. The extent of this danger, stressed so much in the decision, was dramatically emphasized by the statement of Comrade Molotov in the American Commission to the effect that the right danger is more deeply entrenched in the American Party than in any other Party in the Communist International. This correct statement does much to explain the sharpness and incisiveness of the recent C. I. decision on the American question.

An especially valuable section of the Address is that dealing with the theory of exceptionalism. This opportunist theory, a reflection of bourgeois ideology in our Party, is the cloak behind which the right deviation almost always hides. Both former groups in the Party, the Majority and the Minority, fell victims to this insidious and harmful theory.

In substance the theory of exceptionalism holds that American imperialism, essentially sound and healthy, is developing pretty much according to its own economic laws, and is relatively exempt from the growing world crisis of capitalism. In our Party it manifests itself particularly by an over-estimation of the power of American imperialism, and an under-estimation of its crisis and of the radicalization of the workers. Its general effect is to destroy the revolutionary perspectives of the Party and to seriously hamper it in its leading role of the class struggle.

This bourgeois theory of exceptionalism, which has long afflicted our Party, has been especially active since the Ninth Plenum and the Sixth World Congress of the C. I. In these meetings the C. I., basing its conclusions upon its analysis of the third period of post-war capitalism, which is characterized by the leftward swing of the masses and intensifying class struggles, developed its line of sharpened struggle against the capitalists and their agents, the social reformists. Whereupon in the American Party the theory of American exceptionalism came into place to prove that, because of the greater strength and special position of American imperialism, this analysis and tactical line did not apply to the United States. Elaborate arguments were developed to minimize the contradictions in American imperialism, to under-estimate the role of social reformism, and to play down the radicalization of the workers, etc. The substance of all of which being to develop in the United States a different political line than the world line of the Comintern, a line to the right, a line that would paralyze the Party. The Comintern, by its explosion of the theory of American exceptionalism, the false theory that fails to understand American imperialism as an integral part of world capitalism and subject to its laws, does a major service to our Party and greatly fortifies it in its struggle against the right danger.

The Minority and Exceptionalism.

Although the former Minority actively put forth the slogan of the fight against the right danger, it at the same time was guilty of most serious right errors which, for the most part, cloaked themselves with the insidious theory of exceptionalism. The Comintern Address correctly says:

"Both factions of the American Communist Party have been guilty of right errors. Both factions show serious deviations to the right from the general line of the Comintern, which creates the danger of an openly opportunist deviation crystallized within the Party. . . not only the mistakes of the Majority but also the most important mistakes of the Minority were based on the conception of American exceptionalism."

Thus, the Minority, falling into the error of not fully realizing the integral relationship of American and world economy, made the mistake of, as the Address says, "disassociating the development of inner contradictions of American capitalism from the general crisis of world capitalism." Although on the sur-

face this error takes on a "left" aspect by giving the appearance of an over-estimation of the crisis of American capitalism, the substance of it, as the Comintern correctly points out, is exceptionalism, the tendency to look upon American capitalism as something more or less separate from world capitalism.

It has been generally agreed that the Party was slow in re-orientating towards the new line of establishing revolutionary industrial unions. The Minority also shared heavily in this right mistake. And at the bottom of it was the theory of exceptionalism which in this respect as in many others, reflected itself by an over-estimation of the power of American imperialism, an under-estimation of the possibility of building new unions, etc.

The Minority, like the Majority, also showed a decided exceptionalism in its handling of the question of social reformism. Thought not theorizing this exceptionalism to the extent that Pepper and Lovestone did, nevertheless, it was clearly in evidence in our thesis, articles, and speeches. Because of the comparative weakness of the trade unions, the socialist party and the labor party and the practices of the capitalists to use more freely the methods of open dictatorship, we of the former Minority tended to consider the American situation an exceptional one on the question of social reformism and to feel that the C. I. attacks against social reformism did not apply to America as to other countries. This led us to a definite under-estimation of the harmful role of social reformism, which came to a head in my article "The Decline of the A. F. of L." At the bottom of this mistake of the Minority regarding the role of social reformism was clearly an over-estimation of the power of American imperialism, an imperialism so strong that it did not need, as in the case of capitalism in other countries, to rely upon the social reformists for the demoralization of the workers.

The bourgeois theory of American exceptionalism, originating out of the geographic isolation of the United States and its relatively late development as an imperialist country struggling for world markets, and strengthened by the present great power of American imperialism, reflected itself in our Party and influenced in an opportunist direction almost every branch of the Party activity. The Negro work is an example. If our Party, including both Majority and Minority groups, so completely failed to understand and carry out work among the Negroes, it was principally because, in addition to subtle white chauvinist influence, of undeniable tendencies to look upon the Negro problem as one peculiarly American in character and to retreat in the face of its "unique" differences. This is clearly a case of exceptionalism and one in which the Minority fully shared. If, on the other hand, the Comintern has so clearly analyzed the Negro problem and so effectively instructed our Party in the revolutionary potentialities of the Negroes in the United States, much of its success in this respect is based upon the fact that it approached the Negro question in the United States from a world standpoint, as part of the international problem of oppressed races and nationalities, and not as an isolated American phenomenon.

Many other mistakes of the former Minority in the direction of American exceptionalism could be cited, all of which combined to strengthen the right tendencies in the Party, but the foregoing serve to illustrate the correctness of the C. I. criticism. The exposure of the theory of American exceptionalism by the Comintern has come with something of a shock to our Party. The full implications of this destructive theory are not yet understood by the Party. But already, even with the little discussion that has as yet taken place, the Party understands the tremendous importance to the Party of the C. I. analysis of exceptionalism. The present decision, especially because of its exposure of exceptionalism, bids fair to stand as a theoretical landmark in the development of our Party.

The Question of Factionalism.

In the very center of the C. I. Address stands the question of the liquidation of factionalism. This decision should make it quite clear to our Party that the C. I. is determined to put an end to the six years' long factional fight. This struggle, which is a scandal throughout the Comintern, has done much to paralyze our Party and to hinder its ideological and organizational development. The great tasks confronting our Party in the growing war danger and the general intensification in the class struggle imperatively demand the cessation of the internal struggle on its old unprincipled basis and the unification of the Party. The Comintern, in its Address to the Party membership, definitely lays the basis for breaking down the old fac-

tional walls and establishing political unity and for developing a healthy struggle against the right danger in the Party. If necessary, the C. I. will undoubtedly enforce this Party unity by drastic organizational measures against all those who try to continue the factional struggle. Significantly, the Address calls upon all workers of the Communist Party of the U. S. A. to secure the liquidation of all factions and the cessation of factional work and not to shrink "from the application in regard to factionalism of the most severe disciplinary measures, clear up to the expulsion from the Party." The leading comrades of both former groups will do well to heed carefully this warning.

Unprincipled Factionalism.

One of the most difficult phases of the C. I. Address for the comrades of both groups to accept, saturated as we have been with factionalism, is those sections of the decision which castigate Majority and Minority leaders for unprincipled factionalism. The C. I. Address says:

"Neither of the groups has carried on a proper struggle against these right tendencies in the ranks of its own faction and the factionalism of both groups has been the greatest impediment to the development within the Party of the necessary self-criticism and the political education of the Party members in the spirit of Bolshevik steadfastness based upon principle. A factional lack of principle which is also an expression of opportunism, finds its expression in the fact that both groups were putting the interests of their faction above the interest of the Party."

The correctness of this criticism is unquestionable. It applies definitely to the former Minority as well as to the Majority. As one who was a member of the former Minority, I must admit that the unquestionable tendency was to set the interests of the faction before the interest of the Party. This factional practice blurred the political line, undermined the principle of Bolshevik criticism, and generally tended to prevent the Party's mobilizing its full forces for the class struggle. Let me illustrate this by a few typical cases. Take for example the question of Trotskyism. The C. I. says that:

"The Minority of the Central Committee was unable to dissociate itself at the right time from Trotskyism and did not properly struggle against it."

If the C. I. has to make this sharp criticism of us, it is not because the Minority group as such had sympathies with Trotskyism, but because we wrongly permitted the factional considerations to weaken the initiative that we should have properly shown in the matter. The fear on our part that the Majority group were making or would make factional use of the Trotsky issue against us by crippling our initiative in the matter undoubtedly placed an obstacle in the way of mobilizing the Party fully in the fight against Trotskyism. Such was the baneful result of the factional struggle.

The Minority showed a similar unprincipled factionalism in connection with the California situation: We should have been the very first to criticize the right errors committed in the California district. But typically of the factions in our Party, we did not. We shielded those errors. Such a wrong policy we fell into through factional considerations of maintaining the group solid, and with the factional argument that the Majority were covering their right mistakes in other districts and making a goat out of California because it was a Minority district. This was a real factional blurring of the political line and it is characteristic that it was carried through by us under the slogan of the fight against the right danger.

The C. I. Address sharply criticizes the Minority where it declares that we, as well as the Majority, were "engaged in inadmissible, unprincipled speculations with questions of the situation in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in its struggle against right deviations." This is true. Had there been a normal Party life it is certain that we would not have precipitated the Russian question in the manner that it was done but would have worked in close collaboration with the Comintern with this extremely important and delicate question. The net result of our factional handling of the whole matter was to make more difficult the clarification of both the Russian and American questions.

One of the very worst features of the unprincipled factionalism in the Party has been, as the C. I. Address says, the tendency to cover up political differences existing within the respective groups. This amounts in substance to shielding the right deviation. Of this the Minority has done its full share. I have already cited some instances. Many more

could be brought forward to still further emphasize the correctness of the C. I. criticism in this respect. Thus for example in the former Minority, sharp group differences developed over the questions of the apex theory, the reservations, the "No more cruisers" slogan, etc., but the comrades holding these different views instead of bringing them openly before the Party, yielded to factional tendencies and kept them within the group. Typically, such bridging over of political differences which make our real struggle against the right deviation impossible, were made under the slogan of fight against the right danger. Characteristically, in the faction the tendency was not to see right errors in one's group, but only in the opposing group. Such practices, deeply engrained in the groups as a result of the long inner Party struggle, constitute unprincipled factionalism. They are the negation of self-criticism and stand as a deadly barrier in the way of the Bolshevik development of the Party.

The Question of Self-Criticism.

In order to unite the Party on the line of the C. I. Address by the liquidation of the factional walls within the Party and also to liquidate whatever opposition there may be, open or concealed, to the C. I. line, it is fundamentally necessary that the practice of self-criticism be introduced fully in our Party. The C. I. Address shatters politically the old factional groupings. The task now develops upon us to follow up this heavy blow by wiping out the old factional practices and thereby really unifying the Party. For this purpose the frankest Bolshevik self-criticism and the admission and explanation of errors is fundamentally necessary. In this way, the double purpose is served of at once learning the lessons from these errors and of removing them as objects of factional controversy in the Party. The C. I. Address correctly lays the utmost stress upon the question of self-criticism, a necessary Bolshevik principle which has been almost entirely absent in our Party, in the old Minority groups as well as the Majority.

It will be no easy task to eradicate deep-seated factionalism in our Party, despite the devastating attack the C. I. decision has made upon this pernicious system. During the long years of inner-Party struggle, many unprincipled practices have grown up. Factional loyalties, covering up most serious political differences, have developed. Factional enmities have separated, as in two different parties, good Communists who should be working in closest harmony; capable comrades had been excluded from Party work, etc. These and many other factional practices will require drastic treatment for their liquidation, but the central evil to be attacked is the factional lack of self-criticism, the inability or refusal to see the mistakes made by oneself or one's former group. The degree of success in applying the C. I. Address will be measured by the extent to which we develop self-criticism. The very heart of the Enlightenment Campaign must be self-criticism. Only in this manner can the whole import of the decision be understood by the Party and the Comintern accomplish its purpose of uniting the Party.

Some Mistakes of the Minority.

In previous paragraphs, I have dealt with some of the serious errors of the Minority, especially with regard to exceptionalism and unprincipled factionalism. All these have tended very much to prevent the development of the Party and must be ruthlessly eradicated. Many more could be cited here. A few of these are very important in the present situation and must be dealt with.

First, there is the error and danger in claiming a group victory in the present C. I. decision. There has been a distinct tendency on the part of some Minority comrades to do this. In the case of past C. I. decisions, one of the very worst manifestations, which did much to perpetuate factionalism, was the practice of both groups to claim the victory. These factional claims, when they were not put forward for the whole decision, were even figured out on the basis of percentages. This deadly practice must be avoided. The line of the Address is not the line of either group. This must be thoroughly understood. It criticizes the serious errors of both groups. It is the line of the Comintern. It does not mean a victory for either group, but the correction of the serious mistakes of both groups and the liquidation of these groups into a unified Party. It is the very height of factionalism to consider the decision in the sense of a group victory. Any comrades who make efforts in this direction are raising the most serious bars to the unification of the Party. Such tendencies must be eradicated.

Akin to this serious error is the claim that the Comintern through

this decision gives the Party to the former Minority. Lovestone used this argument as one of his principle means for mobilizing opposition to the C. I. line. And many Minority comrades gave him direct aid, making exactly the claim that the C. I. proposed to give the Party to the Minority. For this the Address very sharply and correctly condemns us. Our mistakes in this direction were especially deadly during the convention. Our factional activities at the convention unquestionably made vastly more difficult the task of the C. I. in handling the already extremely difficult situation.

We must distinctly understand that it is not the intention of the C. I. to give the Party to the Minority but to liquidate both groups and unite the Party. Claims to the contrary by Minority comrades are not only incorrect and opposed to the line of the C. I. but they also tend to discredit the C. I. and to make its work of unifying the Party much more difficult. They are the most extreme manifestations of factionalism, and factionalism must now be recognized as a serious right deviation.

Now, a few words as to other mistakes of the former Minority. In addition to its openly right opportunist errors, most of which were based on the insidious theory of exceptionalism, the former Minority made a number of serious opportunist errors which covered themselves up with "left" phraseology. The C. I. Address correctly says:

"The Minority of the Central Committee of the American Communist Party was committing, in regard to questions dealing with the crisis of American capitalism and the swing of the masses to the left, 'left,' but in reality right opportunist errors."

The errors of this type made by the former Minority originated for the most part, out of its confused efforts to fight the right danger in the Party. Thus, in trying to combat the gross over-estimation of the power of expansion of American imperialism, signaled principally by the writings of Comrades Pepper, Lovestone and Wolfe, the former Minority fell into the serious error of practically trying to argue away the growth of American imperialism and exaggerating the tempo of its crisis. This wrong tendency was expressed most clearly in the Minority theory that American imperialism was about to reach the apex of its development, and in efforts to fight against the Pepper-Lovestone theory of the "Wave of Prosperity," by exaggerating the extent of the immediate economic depression, by "left" interpretations of the Smith vote, etc. Such errors, instead of weakening the tendencies in our Party to over-estimate the power of American imperialism and to under-estimate the mood of the masses for struggle, clearly strengthened these right tendencies. Among such "left," but in reality right opportunist errors" of the former Minority were the famous reservations made by us to the thesis of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern. The Minority had differed with the original draft presented by Comrade Bukharin, but we made the serious "leftist" error of developing this opposition to the point, with our reservations, of putting ourselves in the position of practically challenging the line of the Congress thesis. We went to the extreme of believing it necessary to make these reservations in order to carry on the struggle against the right danger. This course was wrong. It not only violated elementary procedure of the Comintern but it had the additional bad effects of raising the issue of the reservations to the central point of discussion in the pre-convention period and thus obscuring other serious right errors in the Party.

Resistance to the C. I. Line.

Although the C. I. Address is very sharp in its political analysis and criticism, it will unquestionably be understood and accepted by practically the entire Party, but there is a definite opposition, some of it open and some concealed. First, let me say a few words about the open opposition led by Pepper, Lovestone, Wolfe and Gitlow.

It will be recalled that Lovestone and Gitlow, arguing at our convention against the C. I. line, declared that the C. I. had made its "error" simply because it did not understand the American situation; that the Party would send a delegation to explain matters and that then, after this discussion with the C. I., the delegation would accept the ensuing decision regardless of its sharpness. But Lovestone and Gitlow, arrived in Moscow, forgot the pledge to the convention, even as they forgot their Communist principles generally. And although the C. I. set up an American Commission consisting of the most outstanding leaders of all the Parties then represented in Moscow, and held hearings which Comrade Stalin declared to be the most extensive ever held on any similar occasion, nevertheless Comrades Gitlow, Lovestone, Pepper and Wolfe categorically rejected the present C. I. Address, which was the result of these thorough-going hearings, and declared emphatically that they would not put it into effect. In substance they declared their judgment to be superior to that of the Comintern. Their opposition went so far as to develop definite proposals to split our Party and to set up an anti-Comintern Party on the Brandler model.

The opposition of Lovestone and the others cannot be ascribed to personal subjectivity, to mere resentment at the sharp criticism of the C. I. It is political in character. It is resistance from the right to the political line of the Comintern. These comrades, during the C. I.

hearings, stubbornly persisted in their political errors. Not only did sentiment at the sharp criticism of the power of American imperialism, and under-estimation of the workers' radicalization, but they even theoretically defended the theory of exceptionalism itself. They went out of their way to lend active support to the rights in the Russian Party during the recent Plenum. Lovestone's theory of the "running sore" and that the Comintern leadership is revising the Sixth World Congress, are the arguments of the rights and conciliators throughout the C. I. The speeches and statements of these comrades at the C. I. hearing constitute a definite right platform. These comrades tried to cap their entire tendency by organizing a split against the Comintern and by definitely repudiating their defeat by the Party membership in its overwhelming acceptance and endorsement of the C. I. Address.

Dangerous also, in addition to the open splitting tendency of Lovestone and Gitlow, is the attempt to build up a "concealed" opposition to the line of the C. I. Address. The policy of this concealed opposition is to make a formal acceptance of the C. I. Address and then to organize a factional opposition against it. This covert opposition, if not checked, may lead to the perpetuation of the factional struggle under new forms. The opposition must energetically be liquidated in the extensive campaigns of enlightenment regarding the C. I. line now being initiated by the Polbureau.

Unite the Party.

The time has now arrived to put an end to the long factional struggle. The C. I. Address lays down the necessary political line for this and it deals a shattering blow to the old factional line-up. It is now up to the sincere Communist elements to complete the task by eliminating the factional remnants and really uniting the Party. As I have already indicated, this will not be an easy task. The factional tendencies and impediments in the way of Party unity are stubborn but they can and will be eliminated. We have to say that our Party is now entering upon a period of the most complete Communist unity it has yet known. The campaign of enlightenment now being carried on by the Polbureau will serve to clarify the Party as to the fundamental implications of the C. I. Address. It will unify the membership ideologically against those, who, by open or covert methods, would split the Party or continue the factional struggle. It will go far towards isolating the right danger and uniting the best Communist elements, of both former groupings, to fight against this danger. It will undermine the factionalism that has done so much to confuse the membership of our Party.

Our Party is already learning the tremendous importance of the C. I. Address. The members understand that the exposure of the theory of exceptionalism is of the most vital importance for the Party. They also realize that the C. I. Address has smashed the old factions, something that every Party member must welcome as of tremendous benefit to the Party. Moreover, the members see from the articles and speeches of leading comrades, that the Address has been the means of introducing real self-criticism in the Party. This new self-criticism comes as a refreshing shock to the Party membership. The whole Party is beginning to breathe in a new atmosphere of Communist clarity and unity.

Great tasks stand before our Party. We must fight as never before against the war danger. We must struggle for the leadership in the multiplying battles of the workers against their employers. We must build the new unions and make the T. U. E. L. convention of historic importance. We must redouble our work among the Negroes. We must defend the Gastonia workers on trial. The program of action being presented by the Polbureau, further concretizing the C. I. line, will further outline the next steps in these Communist tasks. But to bring all this work into life we must have a united Party. The basis for such unity has been laid by the C. I. Address. Already the new spirit of unity is manifest in all sections of the Party. The Party is about to become ready for work as never before in its history. Let us therefore put an end to the long factional struggle and take up the great Party tasks ahead of us.

Correction on Article by Comrade L. Kovess

As a result of faulty proof-reading, the second paragraph in Comrade Louis Kovess' article "Towards Sharpening Class Struggles," published as part of the Enlightenment Campaign in Monday's issue of the Daily was incorrect. The following is how the paragraph should have read:

"By the wrong analysis of the strength and role of American imperialism, we were heading in a wrong direction. The Open Letter and the Address of the Communist International opened the eyes of the membership as to the meaning of the third period of capitalist post-war development. The Comintern has pointed out the sharpening contradictions, mighty waves of class-struggle, colonial revolts, imperialist wars, revolutions in which we are partly in and partly heading for. The Comintern has shown us that exceptionalism, unprincipled factionalism, are intolerable, especially in the 'third period.' The Communist International has pointed out that the right danger existed in both groups."