

The American Road to Socialism

A Special Section Devoted to Discussion of the Past and Perspectives of the Communist Party and the American Left

Edited by Discussion Committee,
Communist Party

How Left's Ties with Labor Were Weakened

By BEN DOBBS (Cal.)

It is a matter of deep concern to all that our national committee can now characterize our party as isolated and with decreased influence. This is especially true in the trade union movement. There is physical isolation as expressed in our size and composition and a deep-going political isolation that must be broken if we are to be a Marxist party.

The last 10 years were marked by the most intense efforts of reaction to isolate us from all walks of public life including special efforts to drive us out of the labor movement. This was done by red-baiting and hysteria, the passage, use and extension of the Taft-Hartley Act anti-communist clauses, the screening and loyalty and security check programs in unions and industries, the widespread use of congressional committees and in some cases physical violence against left wing militants.

It is during such a period that our policies should have been based above all on one overriding principle—the maintenance of ties, connections and relationships in and with the labor movement. Our aim should have been to work even closer with the workers by developing even broader coalition policies and tactics. We did just the opposite by developing left-sectarian tactics.

It is my opinion that for the last 10 years or more we have oriented our policy and tactics on subjective narrow partisan factors rather than a careful study of the labor movement and the factors that influence it and its leadership. We allowed our judgment and estimates to be colored by what was happening to us, on what only we were able to influence and as we alone judged events and on what we wanted to see happen rather than on what was objectively possible.

NEGLECTED AFL

Since the founding of the CIO, for instance, with the exception of isolated examples, we did not have a positive program of orientation toward the AFL. Our whole policy was based on the more advanced coalition and program developed in the CIO. The AFL represented the majority of organized workers and yet was not taken fully

Statement of the Committee

Some weeks ago, this committee announced the opening of a public discussion on the report of Comrades Eugene Dennis, and Claude Lightfoot and Max Weiss to the National Committee of the CPUSA and urged the fullest participation of all Party members and organizations.

We print in this issue the second articles that have been received.

The discussion now being initiated is, of course, not entirely new. For some time now, there has been intense debate in the

into account when we formulated our overall labor policies.

Instead of ignoring the problem, our isolation should have forced us to assess the moods, currents, impact of events and policies on this sector of organized labor and its relationship to our program. This approach is essential for a mass policy. Had the mass of workers and leadership of all levels of the AFL been taken into account when mass policy and estimates were made these certainly would have been different.

Another example of this sectarian approach in the AFL was to pattern our work, program and tactics on what might have been possible in the CIO. As a result tactics were followed that led to isolating individual leaders and individual locals from the mainstream of the AFL.

Experiences in the CIO show in another way the same type of sectarianism that determined some of our policies. We oriented our policy on what we judged to be our influence on leaders of certain unions in the CIO. We thought that leaders of certain unions could exercise influence and leadership over their membership on advanced questions such as the Marshall Plan and the Third Party just by being the titular heads or officials of these unions. We did not see that the level of political consciousness was the key problem. We overestimated the radicalization of the membership because of our contact and influence with the leadership.

It was this approach to our influence on the leaders of the

ranks of the Party on all phases of our work. A profound process of re-examination is going on. There are differences of opinion within our ranks on a whole host of questions. There is nothing alarming about this. For only an open, frank and vigorous discussion in which every member honestly and frankly states his or her position, can guarantee that we will emerge with a stronger party and one more capable of truly serving and advancing the welfare of

the American people and the cause of Socialism.

We trust that this discussion will mark a new stage; in that it will help further deepen our understanding of the past, both in its positive and negative feature, as well as increasingly bring forth much more thinking with regard to future perspectives.

We urge upon everyone fullest participation in this discussion.

DISCUSSION COMMITTEE
COMMUNIST PARTY

left-led unions that directed our policies in the CIO. From this sectarian approach we compounded our errors of judgment and tactics. We estimated that a mass base for the Third Party existed because of the number of workers in the unions under left leadership rather than on the attitude and thinking of these workers. We started, for instance, our estimate of the struggle against the Taft-Hartley Act and the effect of this law on the labor movement from where we sat—from what it would do to us and our friends.

REFORMISTS

Our sectarianism is further shown by our approach to "reformists" in the labor movement. It is obvious and for good reason that we oppose reformism as an ideology. We seek basic reforms—improvements—in wages, hours and working conditions, in the struggle for civil liberties and civil rights and yet our tactical approach to winning these reforms—to uniting the workers for struggle for improvements—has been confused by the necessity of the struggle against reformism as an ideology.

Because we disagree with reformism as an ideology we often singled out the reformists as the main enemy of the union instead of the boss. The selection of our political foes as the main enemy of the workers in the trade union has caused us to have a narrow oppositionist approach to coalition and united front tactics.

The overall point I am trying to make by giving these general examples is that our overall policies and approaches and

estimates have stemmed from our selection of issues, our attitude to the leadership of the labor movement and basically influenced by narrow partisan interests and not from the objective study and objective estimates.

The overall effect has been a narrow sectarian definition of the role of the left in the labor movement as a major source of our errors in policy. It is from this that a narrow sectarian approach to the united front and coalition tactics has flowed. Our coalition tactics have thus been largely based on forming coalitions with non-communists who agree with us in the selection of issues and approach to problems. Our attitude, for instance, to the elected leadership of unions has never been objective. We essentially look upon them not from the attitude of the rank and file but as the main obstacle to our policy and program. How often have our tactics led to oppositionism by saying that we cannot support them because we "don't want to build them up" and indeed our attitude to some unions has been non-support in building them because of their "reformist" leadership.

By the placing of these problems in the overall sense I am not overlooking some of the fine work and excellent relationships that do exist in certain unions but generally I would say that this basic sectarian and subjective approach did much to isolate us from the labor movement.

UNITY AGAINST BOSS

We must take a hard and thoughtful look on reformulating

our overall approach to the labor movement. Our starting point is that we must never forget the basic reason for which workers join unions. Regardless of all kinds of differences they agree on one thing—that they must unite against the boss. Starting with this they are in the front line of the class struggle—the unions are the basic vehicle built by the workers to conduct the class struggle for their needs.

Our basic approach then, must be to advance class struggle policies against the class collaboration policies found in every union. Our examination of the relationship of forces, the tactics and program must be based on this standard. Our coalition must be based for this purpose, and the special role of the left is to advance class policies, class ideology and class consciousness and within that area of struggle to bring forward our program.

Had this been our starting point we would not have sat idly by and wondered what the merger would do to us. Starting from that point we would not have so repeatedly advanced left centers alone as the vehicles for activity on peace, civil liberties, civil rights, and legislative and electoral activity. We would have selected the most basic issues of self-interest of the workers in order to build our base among them—in order to influence them to seek higher forms of struggle and unity. To help build mass movements, to take part fully in union life, to help perfect the vehicles in the unions such as the press, the committees, the stewards systems as the base of maintaining ties is the first task of the Communists.

Within the struggle to establish such a base each party member and party organization would have been closer to the workers, listening and learning from them, finding the way to correctly assess the possibilities of relating the specific struggle of a union to the general struggle of the working class of relating local issues to national issues and economic issues to political issues.

It is through this relationship that we can bring socialist-consciousness to the workers so that they can be "the gravediggers of capitalism."

The Need for a New and Broader Party of Socialism

By W.E.S. (San Francisco)

I would like to make the central point of my contribution to the discussion the need for a new, broader, left political party in the United States, and, concurrently with such development, the formal dissolution of the present U.S. Communist party.

I recall that a new party was held out as a perspective which might at some future date, materialize at the recent national plenum of our party. But it was placed in such a way as to mean that someday such a party might appear and, if and when it does, we will consider it, but at the present time the only course is to "build and strengthen" our party as it now exists, which, it is implied, will in some way help such a perspective to materialize.

My opinion is that we should not only not wait upon such a development, but take every step possible to help bring it about, including the opening up of informal discussions with numerous non-Communists who are pro-socialist and moving in a leftward direction.

The purpose of such discussions would be to find a common ground and a common program, with socialism as its base, around which all the left elements in the country could unite.

Such a party should struggle for ballot status, and run candidates in selected races. But its main orientation would be in a coalition direction. Its ultimate program would be the establishment of socialism by the election of a socialist Congress and Administration. Its immediate program would be a

broad defense of civil liberties, Negro and minority rights, for a curb on monopoly, for peace and trade and a progressive economic program.

There is no question but that numerous struggles over line and policy would take place within such a party, and it would not be the tightly knit group such as the recent Communist party.

This is not necessarily bad. This would not be the mass farmer-labor party of which we have so often spoken. That must await the ripening and political maturing of the labor movement. But it would be a Marxist-socialist party with a more flexible organizational form adapted to American conditions and American conditions and American thinking.

BASIS FOR NEW PARTY

Such a party would be in a better position to carry on the

struggle for a legal existence than the present CPUSA. It would be met, with no question, by the same ferocious attack of reaction. The Attorney General and J. Edgar Hoover would bark as usual. But it would be far more difficult for them to achieve the successful isolation of such a new party and far more difficult to "prove a case" with the American people.

Is there a basis for such a new party? I think there is. There are tens of thousands of progressives who are politically homeless today. There are other pro-socialist currents operating, such as The Guardian and Monthly Review forces.

This is not a proposal to merely change the name of the present CPUSA. It would mean a new structure, a new press, a shared leadership. It would mean a host of new problems.

But I think it would also create the possibilities for growth and development, and a broadening influence of the American socialist left—which I do not see as a perspective for the present CPUSA.

I believe that reaction, given the favorable situation of the cold war and using our own past errors to enormous advantage, has done such a job on the CPUSA that ten years won't undo the damage.

I do not ignore the fact that certain liberal circles are now waking up to the fact that the attacks upon the party were aimed at them too and are now speaking up, nor the fact a slightly less rabid atmosphere now exists nationally. And this will tend to improve in the coming period of co-existence. With all this might make it possible for us
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Democratic Centralism Apply to U.S. Today?

By B. S. (New York)

That section of Comrade Dennis' report which deals with collective leadership, democracy, criticism and self-criticism, is, in my opinion, an important opening to an area of our thought which needs much further development. Perhaps it was Comrade Dennis' intention to provide the opportunity for such development and for a more fundamental probing into the essential features of democracy. I hold that where we have failed in inner democracy cannot be simply laid to the attacks of the past years or to the fact that our Party's mass ties have seriously diminished. Nor can we simply exhort our people to be more democratic in their ideas and their ways. We must trade any failures in democracy to the important left ideological concepts that we have lived by for the last 20-30 years.

The determinant for us, in the U. S., as to the scope of our inner democracy must be based on a clear outlook as to what we want to be on the American scene.

For myself, I prefer to be a part of an important trend in the labor and mass movement rather than a purist sect. It is sufficient to say that all we have to do is to show and develop skill in our approaches to the mass movement that we will become such a trend? This does not conform to an analysis of the worst features of our undemocratic practices which ultimately had to lead to one broken mass tie after another, to the resolution of internal differences, by vilification, slander and expulsion, to the ideological purification processes which were literally brainwashing, and to the cardinal crime of all, the extreme stultification of our Party membership and a certain level of our cadre.

Perhaps Comrade Dennis, by virtue of the limitations placed

on him in the last five years, does not see the extent of stultification and the present extreme reaction to it. It is my opinion that we cannot simply say that we will improve the situation by a more balanced development of democratic centralism with a greater emphasis on democracy. We must know what democratic centralism is—does it apply to the American scene today? Just as we are examining the effect of a certain kind of application to the Soviet scene, it can't be denied that one of the worst, if not the most important reason for the Soviet criticism taking the form that it did, was the wide awakening that the Central Committee faced, when it examined the extreme stultification and lack of enthusiastic support for the aims and objectives of the Soviet party for the building of Communism.

MONOLITHIC UNITY?

What has been the main ideological weapon that has militated against the practice of democracy in our Party? Each "prosecutor" at an expulsion knew full well that there were a series of standard charges that had to be put into each case in order to make it stick: anti-leadership, undisciplined, anti-working class, and for the poor soul who would dare to attempt to argue his or her case, the cardinal crime of breaking the unity of the Party and in reality wanting it to degenerate into a debating society. It is the concept of monolithic unity which we must examine.

In the name of monolithic unity we have learned to stand by while important dissent was expunged from our ranks. Most members today understand and agree that Comrade Foster conducted himself adroitly in his opposition to Browder. But they would honestly like to see a situation in our Party in which important dissent could be ex-

pressed without our falling apart at the seams. Isn't it true that we borrowed literally from the CPSU on this question of monolithic unity? There will certainly be some who say that they believe in monolithic unity and that there is no difference between that and the concept of majority rule. I note that Comrade Dennis eliminates any reference to monolithic unity and sees as the process of achieving unity and discipline, the establishment of the right to dissent from the majority, abiding by majority rule and warns against our turning into a debating society.

I think we have to add to this, precisely because of stultification, precisely because we don't have a cadre which is trained in the most democratic methods, because scientific thinking and measurement can only take place in an atmosphere in which ideas flow and reflect wide mass experience, we must stress the value and importance of dissent and difference. As long as we have a section organizer or a club organizer, or anyone who, when unable to convince a member, a sympathizer of the correctness of a line, can take recourse to the need for monolithic unity, then you must run the risk that the Party's ears are closed to the masses. As long as our Party committees consider it an important principle to submerge differences in unanimous reports so that neither the membership nor the masses can know what we are debating, then we must run the risk that the line of our Party is the property of the few.

So long as we place major emphasis on the danger of our becoming a debating society and the danger of the influx of bourgeois ideas, then we must run the risk that somewhere honest and correct opinion will be characterized as an effort to do that.

For many years now we've cultivated a contempt for bourgeois democracy, unable to separate those aspects of bourgeois democracy which the people struggled for and won from the practices of the bourgeoisie, the distortions and the effort to go back historically on it. We fail to consider that rules were very often advanced for the labor and mass movement are rules which we somehow think do not apply to us. We are supposed to be the possessors of a science which eliminates the need for trends in finding the path toward socialism. Yet life has shown that where you have a hard-fisted, iron-bound line, you can't seriously have a market place of ideas. This under the theory and the fear that bourgeois ideas will infiltrate into our ranks. Aside from the dangers of classifying dissenting ideas prematurely and incorrectly as bourgeois ideas, we reflect a great lack of faith in the masses both within and outside our Party to reject ideas that are harmful to labor, the Negro people and farmers.

I want to cite as an illustration a number of such ideas:

1—The characterization of the slogan "Free by 63."

2—The struggle for a guaranteed annual wage.

3—Labor's interest in Point 4 of the foreign aid program.

4—The legal struggle of the NAACP and allies on the school issue.

NEW ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

Lenin's development of Party of new type and the rules of democratic centralism was based on conditions that applied in an estimate of a period of civil war and revolution.

Let me restate. The rules of democratic centralism were developed by Lenin in an era of wars and revolution, when the possibilities of peaceful transition were not on the order of

the day. The rules had then war-military character. The Russian people had created and perfected the means of struggle against an autocracy and were demanding Bread, Land and Peace. They not only had no long experience in bourgeois democracy but were advancing the one democratic feature they wanted—the end of the autocracy and the control of their destiny. In such a situation monolithic unity was vital. However, even there it was dependent on the overwhelming voluntary support of the Russian people. Lenin never forgot that. On the American scene monolithic unity which I contend is far different from majority rule is alien. The people first are testing many, many ideas and are not buying a single line. They are even suspicious of ultimate or "ulterior" objectives. Those who have had contact with us are also repelled by our inability to stand dissent and differences. As soon as difference arises we get panicky and must expunge it.

Democratic centralism on the American scene must be based on the type of political organization we will be. The "party of the new type," in my opinion, will not be suited to the American scene. We will have to provide guarantees for democracy which can compete with any organization in America. We will be impelled to establish rules which will protect dissent and prevent by design simplified expulsion methods. We need not delude ourselves about the degree of unity in our Party today. We must adjust to the idea that a minority, not understanding or agreeing with a line, may very well choose not to apply it too well. By proving in life and struggle that a line or a leadership is largely correct, then we will win voluntary unity and the fullest acceptance of the rule of the majority.

Sees Labor Entering Struggle for Negro Rights

By AL T.

NEW YORK CITY.

Dennis' report did not deal decisively with the question of the main error in the field of Negro work. We cannot correct our weaknesses in this field if we do not establish clearly what the main problem is. I think our failure to do this has led to an incorrect placing of the question. Sure there is a lag in the struggle for Negro rights. If there were not this lag there would be no problem.

When the white workers in America fully understand their historic responsibility in the fight for Negro freedom, together with the Negro people they will settle the problem. However, the thing that is important for us to see is whether the lag is increasing or is being overcome. And I think that the latter is true. One of the most remarkable features in the present day situation is the manner in which the labor movement has entered this struggle.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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to live more comfortably and with less pressure and heat, it does not mean that our party will necessarily be in a position to open avenues to mass growth and recruiting and to becoming a political force again.

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A more important development was registered at the Textile Workers Convention yesterday where segregation in the South was decisively rejected. In the period of "Operation Dixie" precisely the opposite tack was taken by this union. I want to refer to an experience closer to home—in Local 6 last week. Two members of Hotel (a Negro couple), had their home stoned. Within five to six hours after this the Business Agent and Staff were assigned to the home, stood guard and white workers came—Wagners office intervened—organizations gathered to take up defense of the family. Such a thing was unthinkable in the city two years ago or one year ago.

Focusing attention on the weaknesses however can only have the effect of weakening the confidence of progressives on what can really be done among the white people and if taken into the Negro movement can only have the effect

of increasing suspicion and weakening the alliance that is essential to the further progress of the Negro people. To see the real state of affairs is to imbue the movement with the greatest confidence, and here I would just like to indicate something new developing. That is the entry of masses of Catholic people and their organizations into this struggle, which can in a state like New York have the most important consequences.

What has been the problem? As it has been everywhere else, we had a Left-sectarian estimate of the organizations of the Negro people, of their leadership, and an indifference to the struggles they have been developing. While we were very often sitting around throwing spitballs at the Randolph, the Whites, Bunches, etc. they were leading real struggles and strengthening their leadership.

Even as we began to change our estimates of the social democratic forces in the labor movement in '53 and '54, even if

only for tactical reasons (a full understanding of many of these forces has yet to come), this was not true in our relations to the Negro leaders. I remember being particularly struck by the way these forces were dealt with in the Bradley report, with the main fire directed at the integrationists.

LABOR MOVEMENT

I want to spend a few moments on some of our errors in the labor movement. Firstly, I would like to register my opinion on the CIO break. While I agree with the way Dennis put the question, I do feel it would have been possible for us to remain within given a realistic policy of concession and struggle. The fact is that the Left was able to remain alive in other unions.

It should be noted that while the report correctly places the overstating of the fascist danger, as one of our major errors the break with many forces in the labor movement came from an opposite reason.

I know that in some cases our differences arose over the estimate of the general situation. These forces were making the point that reaction was gathering strength and that we would have to follow a policy of retreat and maneuver. I am not now concerned with the merits of the argument although history has proved them right, but about why none of the views of these people who were quite capable leaders were treated with the respect they deserved. It was not just that we were fighting right opportunism in this period, but I believe the question has deeper and longer roots in our movement.

We have viewed trade union leaders in our Party as right opportunists for a long time, and even when many of these forces could be brought into leadership, it was never as first class leaders, but always as people who were tacked on to the main leadership.

This attitude flows from a general approach to trade union (Continued on Page 14)

The Need for a New and Broader Party of Socialism

(Continued from Page 9)

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civil liberties only to be free to agitate for a government that would end civil liberties.

That not a single pronouncement from the Soviet Union did not find its immediate echo here helped not a whit to destroy this gross delusion. These are liabilities which would be enormously difficult to overcome. Marx said that an idea "becomes a force when it grips the masses." This also works in reverse.

We have been through a lot in the past ten years. We have

made a lot of mistakes, and we have done a lot of good things too. It would be a serious mistake to underestimate the savagery of the McCarthyite attacks against us, and the objective situation created by a bourgeois hell bent for war.

The purpose here is not to discuss whether we might have not been a great deal better off organizationally and politically today had we not made some of the major mistakes in estimating the war fascist dangers which we did.

The point is: we are where we are, and it's time for a long hard look at where we are headed.

PERSPECTIVE NEEDED

I believe that the exercise of energy and initiative on our part toward the formation of a new broader left political party, even if not immediately successful, will open the door to a greater working unity of the left, and will create the basis for the development of such a party in the near future.

As we have learned, we do not necessarily have all the correct answers and a monopoly of ideas on how to fight for a better America. There are tens and hundreds of thousands of others who are also looking for and finding answers. Is it not possible that with patience, some humility and a lot of effort, the best of all these can be drawn together into an effective political party prepared to carry the working class and socialist banner forward in an effective mass way?

Labor in Negro Rights Fight

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leaders that has plagued our movement from its birth. Even as the party war born of the two currents, the S.P. grouping and the labor grouping, the latter while entering with great traditions of militancy and deep ties with the workers, also had strong Wobbly tendencies and approaches.

This helped to set us up as an opposition grouping in the labor movement, the TUEL, etc., and with the exception of a short period of time, that has been one of our chief characteristics. The attitude of looking at the leadership of the labor movement one-sidedly as labor-fakers, pie-cards, sell-out artists, etc., in time affected our attitude even towards Communist trade union leaders. And this became particularly pronounced in the '48-'51 period. Given this outlook, it was easy to justify before the membership our lopping off these people as our differences sharpened. I believe that in the examination now shaping up we have to re-define

our relationship to the labor movement in the most fundamental way.

Just a word on the outlook for the Party.

We have to basically re-examine our relationship to the labor movement in a fundamental way. In the fight to rebuild the left movement, prime attention is to be given to recementing relations with these forces. We look to the McManus', Huberman's, Sweezy's, etc. While these are honest people, I don't think these people are going to bring very much to the Marxist movement. Their ties with the labor movement are small. Their attitude has been even more leftist. The only thing they can say for themselves is that they were not blind followers of the Soviet Union. We have to begin to make public all of what we are discussing. Certain apologies are long overdue. There are ways and means of indicating what we have to do in relation to these forces. We will thus clear up in a greater way the attitude of our forces in these unions.