

LOOKING towards the convention of the Communist Party of the U. S. Feb. 9-12, numerous magazines have in the past week poured out a tremendous volume of analysis on the course the Party is likely to take. They represent every shade of opinion. Henry Luce's Fortune magazine has a spread on the subject. The Catholic Commonweal, the right-wing Social Democratic New Leader, the midwest LaFollette type liberal Progressive, Counter-attack, the unofficial FBI mouth-piece, the Reporter, New Republic and many newspapers ran extensive accounts on the discussion that has been going on in the Communist Party and in the Daily Worker for the past year.

It need hardly be said that everyone of these publications picked an anti-Communist of their choice to do the analyzing. But there is one significant common idea that runs through all of them: this was a **real** discussion and there is **ALREADY** quite a change in the Communist Party. The most vicious of the anti-Communist critics no longer try the old routine—that it's just "another Moscow-line twist," it's a "camouflage" etc.

And well they might concede this, because, in spite of all that's been said of the "totalitarianism" and "monolithism" that is supposed to rule the Communist movement, it took the American Communist Party to give America a demonstration of an all-out discussion, debate and intense struggle over differences.

THE AMERICAN labor movement, currently very much involved in a struggle over many basic issues—racketeering, political action, foreign policy, industrial vs. craft unionism, the desegregation issue—could very

World of Labor

by George Morris



Communist Convention: Everybody Interested

well mark the lesson. Few of our trade unions have discussions, and fewer still have what might be considered democratic discussions. It is rare, indeed, that opposite viewpoints are permitted in a trade union journal. And where is there a union that prints a special bulletin for discussion as did the Communist Party nationally and in a number of its districts?

The same can be said of the numerous other groups that are very critical of the Communists. They are beset today by differences over the same basic changes in the world and country that brought forth the Communist discussion. But one has to read between the lines of their printed material to detect the trend of those differences.

THERE IS another common element in all the mass of material appearing on the Communist Party. It is generally agreed that the convention of the Party has important significance. Each of the writers may arrive at that conclusion from his own special viewpoint. But no one minimizes its importance.

Since most of these writers have in the past written much to play down the influence of

the Communists and have often read funeral services over the Party or pronounced it a sect, they find it necessary now to engage in some acrobatics to justify their long pieces on a convention and development of an organization whose membership they say is 20,000 to 25,000.

But whatever their angle, they are right in recognizing that the importance of the convention runs far beyond the scope of the Party's membership.

It is true that the Party lost heavily in membership in recent years. It is also true that the Party's influence with trade union leadership is far from what it was in the first 10 years of the CIO, when organizations with more than a million members and numerous city and state councils were led by persons in the Communist Party or in varying degrees friendly to it. And at one time Communists, jointly with others, led numerous other organizations—fraternal, political, Negro, language, youth and many, many others—that are either extinct today or down to a much lower influence.

IT SHOULD NOT be forgotten, also, that through that long
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period, until the cold-war conditions set in, many hundreds of thousands of Americans went through the left-wing school.

Sidney Lens, writing in the *Progressive* observes, for example, that in the Party's three decades of history some 600,000 to 700,000 went through periods of membership in its ranks. The great majority did not become hostile to it, but for various reasons found membership and activity in it difficult or an obstacle, or they might have disliked one or another of its policies.

It need hardly be said here that a large number were literally pushed out of the ranks because more was demanded of them than most people are willing to do for an organization. In fact, one of the important elements in the current discussion by the Communists is how to effect the kind of changes that would make the Party more popular and nearer the traditional concept of a party in the U. S.

Communist membership influence and training has left an imprint on America that many on the left do not fully estimate. But the conservatives are more sensitive. They are quick to suspect at least a left background in anyone who is articulate, shows courage, initiative and even elementary organizational sense.

But direct past or present Communist membership is not the only measure. A far larger number have gone through the Little Red Schoolhouse in a more "elementary" sense, through unions, unemployed, Negro rights, peace and like struggles.

In a larger sense, what the Communists do in their convention starting next weekend may well influence the direction of the left as a whole will move. In fact the heart of the problem before that convention that has been most discussed is whether the Party will develop the forms through which it can give leadership to a tremendous potential influence.



THERE IS ONE other point that runs through most of the articles on the Communist Party. They concede that the Party is taking an INDEPENDENT course and is emphasizing an American road to socialism, based on conditions in our country.

You have the usual effort, of course, to fit developments here into a Belgrade, Warsaw or Budapest pattern. But, as Sidney Lens, who dug a little deeper than the rest says, the American Communists "will develop new forms and new approaches different from those of Yugoslavia, Poland or Hungary." Or the USSR, as stressed in the discussion, Lens adds that the socialists and liberals of America will "clearly not rush to embrace" the Communists but "will be watching with profound interest."

Most of the speculators are making the mistake, however, of looking at the convention from the standpoint of what group or or which particular proposal may carry or they hopefully look for a split. The basic fact they miss, is that the WHOLE PARTY is moving in the direction of important changes, as county and state conventions throughout the country are already indicating.