The Question of CP 'Name and Form'

Statement by Wm. Z. Foster

By WM. Z. FOSTER

AS ONE of the National Committee members who voted against the proposed amendment to the main draft resolution on the question of the "Name and Form" of the Party (published in the **Daily Worker**, Dec. 24th) and who voted for the motion of Comrade Dennis and others to endorse the Communist Party definitively and to reject the proposal for a poltitical action association, I wish to state the reasons for my votes.



The substance of the amendment adopted by the N. C. is that the question of transforming the Communist Party into a political action association, which has been discussed at length throughout the Party, should not be decided definitely at the coming National Convention, but that, following the Convention, the general Party discussion should be continued around this question. The idea behind this proposal is that the matter should not be settled until a special convention a year later.

This plan, however, regardless of the good intentions of its advocates, would work out to the serious detriment of the Party, and it should be rejected. It is of the utmost importance that a definite decision be made on the name and form of the Party at the February national convention, and not a year hence. This question touches the very life of the Party, and to delay solving it for another year would mean to court disaster. It would keep the Party in a state of tension and suspense, uncertain as to its basic orientation, confused strategically and tactfully, paralyzed in its mass work, and a prey to factional discord. To condemn the Party to such a situation would be the height of folly on our part.

The proposed association plan has been widely considered in the Party, having gradually become the very center of the whole discussion. As a result of this consideration the bulk of the Party membership has obviously already made up its mind — to the effect that it wants the Communist Party and not a political action association. The Party, therefore, should clearly express itself to this effect at the coming national convention. The most fundamental interests of the Party demand that this definite action be taken. All indications go to show that our Party membership is in favor of going ahead with the Communiist Party of the United States, based essentially upon the structure and democratic practices outlined in the draft Constitution now before use, and by incorporating in its policies the many valuable lessons learned during the long and crucial Party debate of the past several months. The Party convention, therefore, should definitely register the membership's will that it wants the Party form of organization.

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THE PARTY MEMBERS are in the main opposed to the political action association proposal because they consider it to be liquidationist. Even the proposed amendment upon the question also indicates this when it says that "the proposals for change in name and form give rise to fears amongst sections of the Party that these proposals may open the way for liquidating essential features of a Marxist organization." The Party members are thoroughly justified in these fears; for the proposed political action association would be highly liquidatory for the Party, in its numerical strength, in its tactical and strategical activities and in its influence amongst the workers. To adopt the political action association in place of a Communist Party, would be a disastrous mistake and setback for Communism in the United States.

There are many decisive reasons why the Party should definitely reject the political action association at the coming convention, and there are no sound reasons whatever why it should not do so. The argument that the decision should be postponed (with all the negative consequences this would imply) is utterly without solid basis.

The Party now has before it all the important facts and it is quite competent to act upon them. These facts prove beyond any reasonable doubt that there is nothing in the present Amer-

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Statement by Sid Stein

By SID STEIN

COMRADE FOSTER'S article on form and name dramatizes a fact of grave import to our party. This is that Comrade Foster is determined to block all the efforts of the overwhelming majority of the National Committee to unite the party around the main line of the draft resolution as expressed in the statement of the N.C. addressed to the party and conventions and in the amendments on "Form and Name," "Democratic Centralism," and "Vanguard Role."

In drafting these documents, the Resolutions committee and the N.C. tried to base themselves on the consensus throughout the party as reflected in the discussion.

The N.C. made strenuous efforts to provide a foundation for unifying the party on a principled basis and to cut through the fog of confusion and even factional overtones that have been engendered by the extremism of a few leading comrades.

I want to express my deep conviction that the party membership and Conventions as they give careful study to these documents will see in them a positive alternative to the dangers that threaten the very life of our organization.

It is necessary to set the record straight on some questions of fact in relation to these documents. It should be made clear that the amendment on "Form and Name" to which Comrade Foster refers in the article was adopted with the affirmative votes of all N.C. members with the following exceptions; Comrade Foster and Davis voted against and Comrade Dennis abstained. Contrary to what Comrade Foster reads into the amendment when he states, "The idea behind this proposal is that the matter should not be settled until a special convention a year later," the amendment does no such thing. It would be far better for the party if Comrade Foster would not try to polemize on the basis of "The idea behind. . .", but would quote the actual text of the National Committee amendment which speaks for itself as follows:

"Once the principles of our organization are soundly established on Marxist foundations as outlined in this Draft Resolution, once a Party program dealing more elaborately with fundamental theoretical and programmatic questions is drafted and discussed by the Party, such proposals as deal with form and name will be seen in their proper context, as subordinate to questions of Program and Policy and can therefore more readily be discussed on their merits.

"We propose that this convention shall not undertake to change the name and form of our Party. This does not foreclose further consideration of these proposals. The National Committee recommends that the convention should instruct the incoming National Committee to explore all proposals on form and name, to consult with non-Party socialist-minded workers and leaders and to carry through properly organized discussion within the Party with the objective of reviewing this question when we adopt the proposed new Party program, or at some other appropriate time."

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IT IS IMPORTANT for the Party to know what motivated the N.C. in adopting this position. For some time now a growing division has been evident in the ranks of the Party on this question. But this division with very few exceptions has not been on the basis of the merits of one or another proposal for changes in the form and name of our party. On the one hand there have been those like Comrade Foster who have attacked as "Liquidationist" any and all expressions or proposals for such changes. On the other hand there have been some comrades in the New York district leadership and elsewhere who have taken up the opposite extreme position that such changes must be made at this convention or else the Party would in effect be "Standing pat." The National Committee amendment rejected both of these views in the following two paragraphs:

"To label generally, without regard for content, all these proposals for changes in name and form as liquidation-

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ican situation, nor in the foreseeable future, that would justify such a radical change in Communist organization and policy in this country. Those favoring this ill-advised step have had many months in which to prove their case, and they could not do it. That they have failed to do so is clearly shown by their current efforts to by-pass a convention decision on the matter.

Nor would they make any better case if the Party were so unwise as to prolong the discussion of it for another year. This is because the whole project is barren and harmful, and nothing else can be made of it. The time to settle this issue is in February, not after our Party has been seriously damaged by a further long discussion of the matter. To fail to act definitely upon this question would tend to cancel out the convention by leaving it main task undone.

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MANY COMRADES tend to favor the postponement of the decision upon the central issue of, the Party versus a political action association, in the belief that this failure to act would somehow promote Party unity. But this is a grave error. It could only create confusion, paralysis and disunity in the Party. The true way to unity in this, as in other such crucial questions, is to come to a clear decision upon the basis of the unprecedently long and penetrating discussion that the Party has been conducting for the past several months, and, then, for the minority on the issue loyally to abide by the decision of the convention. If the convention should by-pass this most important issue, this would surely be interpreted to mean that the convention was uncertain on the matter, or even tended to lean towards a political action association, which would be basically misrepresenting the opinion of the membership. To fail to act definitely at the convention upon the central question of a decisive endorsement of the Party and a rejection of a political action association, would be a confession of bankruptcy.

On more than one occasion a leader in the New York district, who is supporting the proposition of a political action association, has said that if the convention voted against this plan, he would favor withdrawing it. This position, as he has stated it, is a sound one. Our Party obviously cannot go on discussing on a general basis a project which is already defeated in the Party and which also has no prospects for the forseeable future, meanwhile allowing the activity and the very life of the Party to hang in the balance.

In this general respect, it must be remembered that the Communist Party — now more than ever — has a flexible attitude toward its theory and practice, being on the alert to adapt both to changing circumstances. Hence, should the situation so change as to make a political action association seem necessary (which is most unlikely) the comrades favoring such a step would always be able to raise the matter afresh through the normal channels of the Party.

What our Party needs fundamentally now is unity and mass activity, and all this must be advanced at the coming convention. During the long months of the discussion, our Party, despite many sharp internal differences, has achieved real progress and substantial political unity on many questions, including a more democratic regime for the Party, a more realistically critical attitude towards the countries of Socialism and other Communist parties, and various other erstwhile matters of sharp dispute. This is increasingly true also regarding Hungary, with the bulk of the Party, in the main, arriving at the same opinion as that of Communists in other countries, particularly with regard to the "grim necessity" for the Red Army to enter that country to prevent a very serious growth of reaction and war danger. By the same token, the Party membership, as indicated above, has also gone far toward achieving a unified position regarding the project of a political action association. Clearly, it wants no such organization. This unifying process must climax at the Party Convention in an unmistakable and decisive reaffirmation of the Communist Party. Then our Party will be fitted to go forth to battle again in the class struggle, with an effective program of action which, in the main, is already pretty much formulated in the various draft documents for the convention.

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ist is wrong and violates the spirit of free discussion of all issues called for by the Draft Resolution. All proposals deserve to be studied and discussed on their merits.

"It is equally wrong and divisive to insist that a change of form and name must be made at the February convention. It is wrong and harmful to insist that a change in name and form at this convention is a pre-condition for effecting other major changes called for by this resolution."

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COMRADE FOSTER continues to insist that "Form and Name" is the decisive question before this convention; he states, "To fail to act definitely upon this question would tend to cancel out the convention by leaving its main task undone." Here it is decisive to see the basic difference between Comrade Foster and the N.C. on two questions. First it is apparent that Comrade Foster does not consider the action proposed by the N.C. as "Definite." At the N.C. meeting where this question was debated Comrade Foster made it clear that he wants to foreclose any further discussion on such proposals. But this is precisely what the N.C. does not agree with. The N.C. believes that the action of this convention in retaining our present form and name MUST NOT FORECLOSE FURTHER ORGANIZED DISCUSSION ON THIS SUBJECT.

Such discussion does not mean a continued anarchistic debate. It means that the incoming N.C. should in a sober way explore this question further, consult with others, solicit expressions from the Party organizations and report on it at such time as it presents the new Party program.

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Second, and even more important, Comrade Foster apparently considers the main task of the convention to be a dramatic, definite and foreclosing action against what he has chosen to call "the John Gates political association" proposals. But it is apparent from the votes in the N.C. including the vote of Comrade Gates and the comrades from New York, that this is a false issue. There are no such proposals from these leading comrades pending. These comrades, in the spirit of the N.C. statement on unity and in the spirit of the amendment on form and name, are ready to help focus the attention of the Party and the convention on the issues as described in Paragraph 6 of the N.C. amendment on form and name as follows:

"The basic changes that are urgently needed and which this convention must settle have to do with our approach to theory, the content of our policies, and the correction of bureaucratic methods in the inner life of our Party, and the development of our mass work and ties. What must be settled are the basic Marxist organizational principles, the organizational stability and unity of our organization must be guaranteed."

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COMRADE FOSTER'S continuing efforts to make form and name the main issue of this convention can have but one result, the obscuring of the real main issues which are outlined in the National Committee statement as follows:

"Our discussion began with the recognition of the necessity to overcome our long-standing left sectarianism. The Resolution found the main roots of this sectarianism in: 1. The dogmatic and doctrinaire manner in which we had been attempting to apply Marxism to the American scene. 2. Our oft-times uncritical acceptance of the views of Marxists of other countries. 3. Our bureaucratic system of organization and lack of internal Party democracy. Since then the National Committee has presented a new Draft Constitution which declares in its Preamble:

"'The Communist Party bases its theory generally on the cultural heritage of mankind and particularly on the teachings of the giants of scientific socialism, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and V. I. Lenin, as interpreted by the Party and creatively applied and developed in accordance with the conditions of the American class struggles, traditions and customs.'

"We are living through a period of great changes in which the world socialist movement must review its policies, program and tactics, re-study long-held theoretical positions and bring itself fully into line with the basis of adopting one or another set of ideas from abroad but must work out its own course based upon the discussions of our own party, our particular conditions, and our own use of Marxist science. In so doing, we should examine the discussions and proposals, the points of view of Marxists in all countries in a friendly, critical and open-minded fashion."

These are the issues that the N.C. sees as decisive for consideration and action by our coming convention. I am convinced that the party conventions will find in the proposals of the N.C. and in the spirit of these documents the basis for unity and the means for breaking out of isolation and becoming a more effective force in the American labor and Socialist movement.

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