

'Political Affairs' Editorial

Reviews C. P. National Convention

At the suggestion of the National Administrative Committee of the Communist Party, we are reprinting the editorial on the party convention which appeared in the April issue of Political Affairs. The Administrative Committee suggested the editorial be reprinted in view of "expressions of divergent estimates of the convention" which appeared recently in the columns of the Daily Worker. The Committee added that "the viewpoint expressed in this editorial corresponds with the unanimous collective judgment of the National Committee on the convention."

Text of the editorial follows:

THE RECENT National Convention of the Communist Party was undoubtedly one of the most critically important gatherings ever held by the Communist movement in this country. Paradoxically, this convention—held at a time when the Communist Party is weaker organizationally than it has been in many years—received infinitely more spotlighting and publicity throughout the country than almost any of its conventions in history. Such publicity is not accorded by the politically-competent capitalist press of our country to a movement that no longer has any impact upon the scene.

The challenge that faced this convention was, in a new form, the same general one that has been met by the Party at other critical moments in the past—the challenge of responding to major changes in conditions.

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THE FOUNDING convention of the Communist Party met in 1919 under the influence of such tremendous events as the first socialist revolution, the end of the first World War, and the failure of the socialists in Germany. The founding of the Workers Party in December, 1921, unified the various Communist groups and marked the Party's emerging out of the worst infantile sectarianism and the state of illegality brought about by the Palmer raids.

The Seventh Convention of the Party in June 1930, following the defection of the Trotskyite-Cannon group and the Right-opportunist group led by Jay Lovestone, took place at a time when the economic crash had already unmasked the false theories of the "new capitalism," "permanent prosperity," etc., and had demonstrated the Party's ability to give leadership to the masses as exemplified in the historic March 6th demonstrations of the unemployed. And though the Party had been reduced to only 7,000 dues-paying members, the morale of the Party was high and it confidently faced the future, more consolidated ideologically than ever before in its history. Its subsequent growth of influence and numbers justified this confidence.

In July, 1945, the Party found it necessary to adjust its line to the realities of the situation immediately following World War II, correcting errors of revisionism put forward by Browder. The Party emerged from the situation with its organization and the bulk of its membership intact, with strong ties

to important sections of the labor movement, the Negro people, intellectuals and others.

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THE PRESENT Convention in its turn was faced with the necessity also of adjusting to a new situation, a situation resulting basically from the great changes following World War II. This situation has perhaps best been summed up in the proposition that the emergence of socialism as a world system is the chief feature of our present era.

Within the country, the atmosphere has likewise changed considerably from that at the height of the Korean war when the last convention took place. Since then McCarthyism reached its peak and was driven back by the American people. Geneva has raised the hopes for peaceful coexistence as a practical goal. The AFL and CIO have been reunited after nearly 20 years of chronic split and the liberation struggle of the Negro people has taken on a new dimension.

Yet, in contrast to the past conventions referred to, the Party this time found itself facing a most severe crisis. This crisis was described in the words of the convention resolution as follows:

"It is necessary for all members of the Communist Party to face up soberly to the fact that in this period the Party suffered heavy organizational losses, declined in political influence in many areas of work, became dangerously isolated from important sectors of the labor and people's movement, is confronted with the jeopardizing of the Marxist press, and that in general the Party is faced with a serious crisis of a political, ideological and organizational nature."

It seems to us that the gravity of the crisis was occasioned largely by the fact that this time the Party was exceedingly late in coping with the changed situation. For years its most authoritative leadership had been in jail or scattered, and the Party as a whole subjected to the most massive and brutal attack by every agent of the capitalist class and government.

Inevitably when the Party reassembled its leadership at the beginning of 1956, not all sectors, either

in the leadership or among the membership, fully or immediately realized the gravity of the situation. To be sure there were exaggerations as regards some errors, and under-estimation of the Party's past achievements and positive role, but in time the overwhelming majority of the Party, despite its pride in its great contributions and many achievements, had to face up to the crisis. The above section of the resolution adopted by overwhelming vote of the convention shows that the Party was ready to meet the situation.

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WITHOUT recognition of the seriousness of the situation it would have been impossible to seek out its deeper roots and to lay the basis for overcoming it. In the year-long discussion and at the convention here were wide differences of emphasis as to the causes, some laying the stress on the objective situation and the attacks against the Party, others on the Party's sectarian errors. The resolution of the convention summed it up as follows:

"Was it inevitable that the Party should become so isolated and suffer such organizational and political losses as it did? The answer must be NO. Against the background of the objective situation and its consequences, the errors and long-standing weaknesses of our Party had a particularly damaging effect. . . ."

In correcting such errors, the Resolution points out:

"In our struggle for a mass policy we base ourselves on the following Marxist-Leninist propositions:

"a) that both Left-sectarianism and Right-opportunism have objective roots in reality—in the system under which we live;

"b) that the struggle must be conducted on both fronts, with the main emphasis against that which threatens the Marxist line of our Party at the given moment.

"The most important mistakes made in the period under review were Left-sectarian in character. These Left-sectarian mistakes, in the context of sharp attack against the Party, are the main reason for the unprecedented degree to which it was possible for Big Business and its political representatives to isolate the Party.

"To end its isolation and expand

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Friends Legislation Comm. To Act On Peace, Rights

CHICAGO. — The Organizing Committee for the Illinois-Wisconsin Friends Committee on Legislation last week announced a drive to influence both federal and state legislation on the issues of peace, civil rights and civil liberties, and welfare issues.

The state issues that were singled out by the newly formed committee are: "Defense of civil liberties, including continued opposition to the loyalty oaths; abolition of capital punishment; improved mental health programs and judicial and legislative reforms necessary to good government."

On a national scale the committee singled out the issue of "universal enforceable disarmament," in-

creased support to the United Nations, for a foreign aid program "based on moral rather than military consideration," and for "civil rights legislation, including insurance of the right to vote for all eligible citizens."

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OTHER issues of concern to the committee deal with a "sound and humane immigration policy" and for "reasonable federal aid for public housing, education, low income health insurance, and state welfare programs."

It was announced that the committee will attempt to affect legislation in keeping with the religious convictions of the Friends (Quakers) and those with similar views. It

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its mass work, the main task of the Party today is to overcome completely the influence of Left-sectarian estimates, policies and tactics in all fields of work.

"In the process of carrying out the main task, the Party must struggle against existent Right-opportunist tendencies, combatting them at all times. This is especially necessary in view of the extremely sharp turn which the Party is now making in many of its basic policies. The necessary struggle against Right-opportunist errors must be carried on in such a way as not to weaken the main task."

The impact of the Khrushchev revelations was a major factor throughout the year-long discussion that culminated in the convention. These revelations of the harmful effects of the Stalin policies over a long period of time, only served to emphasize what was becoming clear to many in the Party—the need to put an end to uncritical attitudes towards the views of Marxists of other countries. Needless to say, the shocking disclosures also had—if only temporarily—a tendency to disorient some, at the same time that they caused many to deepen their thinking.

The heart of the convention's analysis as to the causes for the "serious crisis of a political, ideological and organizational nature," that which constitutes the basis for the "new course" and without which the crisis could not have been met, is contained in the following passage of the resolution:

"The roots of these errors are not to be found in the events of the past ten years alone.

"The Marxist movement in our country has suffered historically from dogmatic application of Marxist theory to the American scene. The Communist Party inherited these weaknesses. Insufficient development of the independent theoretical work of the Party over the past decades has contributed towards our doctrinaire acceptance and mechanical application of

many theoretical propositions.

"Our Party also suffered from an oversimplified approach to and uncritical acceptance of many views of Marxists and Marxist parties in other countries.

"Bureaucratic methods of leadership, failure to develop inner-Party democracy and a frequent intolerant attitude to the people we worked with have been in large measure responsible for our inability to correct mistakes in time as well as for much of our sectarianism. All these factors are interrelated; each helped to reinforce the other."

This is far from a routine or superficial analysis. A careful study of these conclusions and a review of the Party's past experience will show that here are some fundamental, new propositions. They serve to explain why the Party has repeatedly made the same mistakes and not corrected them in time, and at the same time provide the key to the successful outcome of the convention and a substantial basis for facing the future with confidence.

This new approach is already embodied in the Convention documents. All the major decisions of the Convention reflect this new thinking. As regards the approach to theory this can be seen in the Preamble to the Party Constitution which states:

"The Communist Party bases its theory generally on the democratic heritage of mankind and particularly on the principles of scientific socialism as developed by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and V. I. Lenin. These universally valid principles, the Communist Party of the U.S.A., interprets, applies and strives to develop further in accordance with the requirements of the American class struggle, democratic traditions and customs."

As regards relationship to Marxists of other countries, the resolution declares:

"... The Communist Party recognizes that over the years it held certain wrong and oversimplified concepts of what its relations

should be to other Marxist parties. The Party tended to accept uncritically many views of Marxists in other countries. Not all these views were correct; some did not correspond to American conditions. The Party also viewed uncritically developments in the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries. It mistakenly thought that any public criticism of the views or policies of the Marxist parties of these countries would weaken the bonds of international working-class solidarity or bring comfort to the enemies of peace and socialism."

In abandoning the earlier idealistic and uncritical attitude toward the lands of socialism, while recognizing their historic role and achievements, the Party has strengthened its ability to promote true proletarian internationalism.

This new, creative approach and broader understanding of theory has already resulted in the elaboration of many policies in a new way. The new emphasis on peaceful coexistence as a practical possibility has broadened the approach to the struggle for peace. The American Road to Socialism, while put forward in earlier years, including the idea of peaceful transition, likewise takes on more content and reality. The Party now places the struggle for an anti-monopoly coalition as its main strategic aim along that path. And from such a coalition which could break the power of the traditional enemies of the American people—the monopolies—it believes the American people could advance in a constitutional, democratic and peaceful transition to socialism.

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