

LYL Leaders Hand Down the New Line

By SAM TAYLOR

As a result of the Russian Communist Party's 20th Congress, the CPs throughout the world are negotiating a major shift in tactics and strategy. In the United States, the ponderous effort to screech to a halt and do a 180-degree reversal is readily apparent in the pages of the *Daily Worker*. The return to the "Popular Front" is the No. 1 task before the CP today.

Just as the CP is shifting into reverse gear, its youth organization, the Labor Youth League, is following suit. The "Popular Front" strategy will be formalized at national conventions for both organizations to be held later this year.

In preparation for the convention, the National Council of the LYL met in May and subsequently issued a discussion bulletin. If the "discussion" bulletin and the prepared speeches of outgoing National Chairman Leon Wofsy and incoming National Chairman Earl Durham are indications of the future "discussion," then it is certain that everything may be discussed *except* politics.

Long articles may be written and even printed on how to strengthen the cultural life of the LYL, or on how to increase recreational activities, on how to "unite for unity," or how to sell their magazine *New Challenge*. But on politics, nothing or very little, and that by indirection and vague reference.

To eliminate the fuss and bother of electing new officers at the coming convention, the elections were settled in advance at the National Council by a simple maneuver: The old national chairman and national secretary took a leave of absence from the LYL and new officers were elected. Of course until the convention formalizes the decisions, each newly elected officer will wear the "acting" before his title. The new leadership will not be saddled with any responsibility for the errors of the old Wofsy leadership, but will be the bearers of the "new" tactics. It will also tend to thwart any "rotten elements" who may have any ideas about holding a democratic convention.

The discussion which appears in the Stalinist press at the time of a convention has a certain other-worldly quality to it. Articles appear which contain all sorts of nostrums to explain and rectify the growing isolation of the CP.

ALREADY DECIDED

After the Browder era, the attacks were centered on "right deviationists"; today we read about "left sectarianism." We may read that the reasons for their isolation from the labor movement is because "progressives" did not pay enough attention to the AFL, or that the party misinterpreted the mood of the times and thus lost contact with the masses. We read now that it was a mistake to launch the Progressive Party or to pursue policies in the CIO which led to the expulsion of the Stalinist-led unions like the UE and the Fur Workers.

Assuming for the moment that every one of the writers is sincere and honest, then there is a pathetic quality about these discussion articles. They all assume, granting our assumption, that the "mistakes" of the past were just political errors by leaders who adopted short-sighted policies, that now the party has been alerted to these "errors" and a new policy will develop out of open and fruitful democratic discussion by the ranks of the CP.

The reality of the situation is that the new policy has already been decided upon, and the only real discussion takes place on how to implement it.

Whether or not all CPers, and especially members of the LYL, realize what is going on is another question. The real

interest is to see exactly how the switch in policy takes place, at what speed the new policy is hammered home to the membership and what happens to those members who persist in their disagreements. It's like watching a whodunit when the solution is already known; only the craftsmanship with which it is carried out is in doubt.

BREAST-BEATER

The main interest at the LYL National Council meeting lies in the speech by Leon Wofsy. Wofsy, who has been a leader in the Stalinist youth for about as long as Harold Stassen has been a presidential candidate, is the voice of the CP in the LYL. He is now taking a leave of absence as national Chairman, as he puts it, "to take on other responsibilities in the working-class movement," i.e., the Communist Party. His speech is a fairly typical Stalinist example of breast-beating self-criticism for the failures of the past, an attack on the stifling atmosphere in the LYL which prevented the new line from coming into effect years ago, and the presentation of the new line.

We know that there is going to be a major tactical shift by the Stalinist youth, if for no other reason than that Wofsy announces that his "intention... [is] to do everything possible to untie our new leadership from any restraints or sense of responsibility to old methods and old approaches. The point is to open the door not only to new faces, but to new questions, new approaches."

"Our leadership has not been open enough to new ideas, new questions, differing opinions. We have stayed too much in the groove, with set ways of thinking and hard and fast answers that stifle curiosity, variety, and creative experience in all parts of our League."

Therefore the new leadership, elected before the convention to insure that Stalinists and not mere Stalinoids control the LYL, will be the bearers of the "unite for unity" line. The rank and file LYL will now be dished out the new line bit by bit until the time of the convention, at which point the new line and the new leadership will be ratified, not elected or decided upon.

SUBSTITUTE FOR POLITICS

In still another way the LYL "discussion" and the Wofsy speech is a typical Stalinist caricature of democratic processes. The door is open to new questions and approaches, Wofsy announces; he is going to discuss "the two biggest problems we have thought about and tried to answer over these past years"; he is going "to bring forward the most fundamental questions which we haven't adequately answered, or in important respects have wrongly answered. This includes questions which up to now we have shut our eyes to or have sometimes considered as off limits."

"Of course," he continues, "the big feature of the present moment in Marxist circles is that no question is 'off limits.' The present stormy discussion is challenging all those things past and present that chain the left to isolation in a period of historic test and opportunity. Surely the youth movement is and should be no exception."

After this mouth-watering introduction, one may almost be deceived into thinking that a discussion of politics will follow. The wraps are off, and nothing

is "off limits." But nothing follows.

The "two biggest problems" which still remain unanswered because "the leadership [i.e., Wofsy] has not been open enough to new ideas, new questions, differing opinions," we discover on reading the next sentence, are: "the problem of youth unity, and problem of the perspectives of the League itself."

The "most fundamental questions which haven't been adequately answered" and which were "sometimes considered as off limits" will now be dealt with in the most forthright manner. Open for free-for-all discussion are the following burning and decisive issues of the day:

"Is the League the wrong kind of youth organization? Is there any basis for a youth organization with a Marxist educational program? Is there a need for something broader, which young people will be more willing to join?"

"Has the League hurt itself by trying to pay attention to the activities of progressives in the major youth organizations? Should that be left to others? Are some of our ideas on youth unity too grandiose and based on wishful thinking?"

The two paragraphs are italicized in the original. Wofsy wants to make no mistake that anyone will think that the real Stalinist politics of the LYL will be discussed. From here on in, everything is, in a sense, anti-climatic—the whodunit has been solved.

"SECTARIAN?"

Of course, what is happening is a typical Stalinist discussion. The mistakes of the past are laid at the doorstep of short-sighted policies, narrow-minded bureaucratic leaders, ministerial interpretations of the political situation in the U. S. and isolation from the working class (or in the case of the LYL, "not knowing" what youth are thinking about).

All of these may be true to one extent or another. However they are all irrelevant as an explanation for the crisis and isolation of the Stalinist movement. They have nothing to do with the reasons why the CP and the LYL adopted policies which are today criticized as "left sectarian."

The hard or "left sectarian" line was pursued because it flowed inevitably from the particular period of the cold war. The Stalinist movement was defending the policies of the Russian and Stalinist bloc elsewhere in the world in a period which reached the most dangerous point during the Korean War.

How relevant is it to discuss the fact that the LYL has been "much too narrow and rigid" or failed to understand what young people were thinking about, when the reason they adopted the past tactics stems from world Stalinist politics? How supple and non-dogmatic can you be while defending the Stalinist armies and politics in the Korean War and automatically repeating the germ-warfare stories? How can you properly interpret the thinking of young people when the starting point of the CP's (and thereby the LYL's) politics is to defend Russia's politics and political directions at every twist and turn?

Any honest discussion of the real or alleged tactical failures *should* have as its starting point: what is the politics and theoretical basis behind these tactics?

The Wofsy line is designed to preclude this kind of discussion, while going as far as possible in the direction of appearing to discuss fundamentals and taking the "off limits" sign from areas of discussion. LYLers can discuss what Wofsy calls "fundamental" questions for a month of Sundays without coming any closer to understanding or touching upon the real politics of the LYL.

The basis for the new tactical turn

has very little to do with domestic political considerations. The reasons are to be found in the pronouncements of the 20th Party Congress in Moscow calling for a new "Popular Front" and the changing international situation. As against the previous period Stalinist tactics now place in the forefront the fostering of neutralism and "peaceful coexistence."

It still remains to be seen how far the new tactics will go. The question has been raised as to whether or not the LYL will disband in favor of a newly organized youth front.

The main reason, it would appear, that no definite answer can be given is that the CP has not yet decided whether to dissolve the LYL and set up a "broader" youth organization. For when Wofsy hints around the idea of dissolving the LYL, he does not give his views; he merely brings up the subject and then lets it hang in mid air.

CP VOICE

But whether or not the LYL is dissolved, the LYL will be "broadened" into an AYD-type organization. Early in his report to the National Council Wofsy goes out of his way to engage in a bit of self-criticism in which he all but comes out and says in so many words that he is the CP leader in the LYL and the transmission belt for the CP line:

"By the language of our programs and reports—I cite my own as the primary example—by the pattern of our leadership, by our approaches to activity and organizational set-up, we seem to make it almost principle to champion and in many ways imitate the Communist Party at every turn. Thus despite the fact that we definitely do not want to be and are not a junior Communist Party, that is just how we often appear to others." [Italics added.]

This type of criticism is also repeated in the Durham report at the same meeting. The CP line for the LYL is to make the LYL appear to be more independent in the future. But this does not mean that it will not be the CP's youth organization—a charge which is now admitted to be true.

Another way in which the LYL will be "broadened" is the emphasis on work in other youth organizations with special interest in the Young Democrats. The repeated emphasis on "youth unity" does not mean that they want to unite the LYL with any other organization but that they want to operate in other groups while placing less stress on pushing for specific Stalinist political slogans.

In this sense the CP has given up on the LYL. The National Council was told that the LYL must "stop thinking simply in terms of how to bring about THE Youth unity center, THE united Negro youth movement, and so on." (Emphasis in original.) But what will take its place isn't clear.

What does appear more certain is that the LYL will become a more diffuse political organization in the immediate future. There will be less emphasis on politics and more on rock-and-roll; less on issues which would point out Stalinists, more on issues that would make it difficult to distinguish an LYLer from an SDAer. And in the name of finding out what youth are thinking, the LYL, although perhaps not officially, will be supporting Democratic and even Republican candidates in the coming elections.

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