

The 'Great Cleavage' in the CP

By Morris Stein and Harry Ring

The discussion in the American Communist Party which was sparked by the 20th Congress of the Soviet CP last February is distinguished by an absence of any serious contributions by the Party's central leadership. In all the voluminous writings in the Daily Worker, Party Voice, etc., one finds an occasional article by Wm. Z. Foster, mostly aimed at stifling the discussion, but that is all.

The failure of the top leadership to participate with the ranks in a genuinely democratic discussion of the causes and solution for the crisis which now grips the party has become one of the major grievances of the Party membership. (See article in Sept. 3 Militant). The ranks had hoped that with the collapse of the Stalin myth there would be a new kind of regime and that the junior Stalins in the American party would mend their ways. They looked to an end of petty dictators barking orders to the membership.

The discussion reveals that the ranks are awakening to their elementary rights. They want a voice in determining the policies of an organization to which they have devoted their lives. They want to participate in the election of the men to whom they are to entrust the leadership of the party. And throughout they are demonstrating that they want an expression of confidence in them from the leaders before they extend confidence to the leaders.

TWO PARTIES

These sentiments are graphically expressed in a letter from the Communist Party steel workers in the Gary, Ind., area published in The Worker, Sept. 2. Describing the shameful state of the inner-party regime, it says in part: "... for the past many years there has been an absence of conventions, of democratic selection of leading people, of the ability of the members to disagree, and most important of all, an absence of leaders consulting with the comrades of the branches and learning from these comrades who are in daily contact with the people.

"From where we sit, we see a cleavage in thinking between the full time leadership and the rank and file which is so great as to give us in effect two parties."

The problem of how to overcome the cleavage between the bureaucratic leadership and the ranks, one of the dominant themes of the whole discussion, is the concluding point in the steel workers letter. "Some of our comrades say frankly that we need a complete overhauling of our present leadership. . . Most of us feel, however, that organizational changes must be made first. . . We feel that some of the present leaders can adjust to the new thinking but many will not. Those who are so

steeped in the bureaucratic methods that they cannot change cannot be allowed to continue in leadership."

That the leadership is intent on maintaining the "cleavage" between itself and the ranks and still hopes to cheat the membership of the right to participate in a meaningful way in settling party policy is demonstrated by the National Committee meeting which concluded in New York, Aug. 26.

FOSTER'S EXPLANATION

As is now widely known, the National Committee has been split three ways. The Foster group, to the extent that it can, is standing pat. It claims that the primary reason for the Party's isolation is the objective situation (cold war, witch hunt, prosperity, etc.). It dragged its feet on admitting Stalin's crimes or the crimes and blunders it committed in this country as a result of carrying out his line.

Those around Gates and Max of the Daily Worker staff ascribe the party crisis to the slavishly uncritical acceptance of the Kremlin line. Dennis stands cautiously in the middle, borrowing a bit from both viewpoints.

Yet with three positions on the main questions confronting the party, a draft resolution, according to the Aug. 28 Daily Worker, has already been agreed upon. The Worker reports that this preliminary draft has been turned over to a committee "to consider the various points of view and amendments advanced in the meeting." The National Committee will meet again in mid-September to vote on the final draft and then present it to the membership for discussion, with action on the resolution scheduled for the national convention which will be held Feb. 9-12, 1957.

The Worker also reports that the National Committee will "make known the trend of the discussion" in the Committee and that "individual party leaders will make known whatever differences they may have with the resolution."

'THE SUMMARY'

From the description of this very elaborate procedure it is clear that the committee's main concern is to patch together a resolution that would hide their differences and make it possible once again to confront the membership at the convention in "united" fashion.

A pre-convention discussion will be held. The members will have the opportunity to blow off steam. Some individual leaders may voice their "criticisms." Then delegates to the convention will be confronted with a single resolution.

What will happen when the

resolution comes up for action? We can get an anticipation from an article by Robert Mann in the June Party Voice. He explains the phenomenon of the "summary." He writes: "We're all familiar with the summation. A meeting takes place. A report is delivered. . . Controversy over the report may be sharp. . . After the discussion is finished the reporter will 'sum up.' . . . If he is totally objective, he will try to synthesize the discussion . . . or indicate the approach which seems to be the majority point of view. Or he will merely repeat what he said in the first place. In any case, the meeting will be left . . . [with], at worst, a sterile debate and at best a general awareness of agreement unsupported by any specific action of the participants."

When three distinct viewpoints are covered over in a single resolution, the "summary" is the only way to deal with the problem. The membership will discuss. The "summation" will be made by the reporter. And then the members will once again be left with the choice — either vote for the resolution or vote with your feet by leaving in disgust.

NOT A SOLUTION

The convention also will probably make some changes in the statutes of the organization to meet the demands for an end to the bureaucratic setup. But none of this can resolve the division in the leadership or establish the confidence of the ranks in the leadership. And it certainly cannot overcome the Party's isolation.

The demand of the previously quoted Gary steel workers for an overhauling of the leadership expresses in the main the sentiment of the rank and file throughout the country. The hostility to the leadership is general in the party and it is of course justified. The membership has been abused and intimidated for many years. It has genuine grievances to settle with the arrogant and unprincipled men heading their party. But can the party, as such, be rehabilitated by merely removing some of the most despised leaders, by a change in the organizational procedures in one respect or another?

The answer should be self-evident. The problem of the terrible bureaucratization of the American Communist Party is not a "national" one. The identical process of bureaucratic degeneration has taken place in the Communist parties throughout the world as the result of their total domination by Stalin. Such a development was inevitable.

In order for Stalin to convert the Communist International into a pliant tool of the foreign policy of the Kremlin bureaucracy it was necessary to destroy not only its Leninist program-

matic foundations but the inner-democracy of the national parties as well. A democratic movement cannot serve a bureaucratic master.

The Gary steel workers aptly describe "the cleavage in thinking between the full time leadership and the rank and file, which is so great as to give us in effect two parties." This cleavage is the product of the conflicts in interests of a bureaucracy which owes its position of power not to the party ranks, but to the masters in the Kremlin. This is why the problem of bureaucratism in the American CP cannot be solved without an understanding of the problem of bureaucratism in the Soviet Union.

Within the Soviet Union, the same cleavage exists but in a qualitatively more profound way. There the division is between a bureaucratic caste which has usurped political power from the masses and built a police state rule in order to protect the enormous material privileges which they wrested for themselves at the expense of the masses.

The surest sign that the leadership of the American CP has no intention to reform itself is that it stubbornly refuses to undertake an analysis of the relations in the Soviet Union which produced 30 years of Stalinist tyranny and which corrupted the world Communist movement.

The discussion thus far has revolved around the question of whether the present crisis is the result of objective conditions or of the mistakes of the leadership. While Foster blames the objective conditions his critics attribute the present isolation of the Party to the "left sectarianism" which they claim prevailed since Foster took the helm after the downfall of Browder. Neither group has undertaken an examination of the responsibility of Stalinism as a political system for the present condition of the party.

SUPPORT SOVIET WORKERS

Stalinist tyranny in the Soviet Union, which both the capitalist propagandists and the leadership of the CP identified with socialism, has done more to alienate the workers from socialism and to isolate the Communist Party than all the capitalist witch hunting and blundering tactics of the Party leaders combined. And this is true not only of America.

Internationally the crimes of Stalinism have done incalculable damage to the very idea of socialism among the workers. They have served to keep the anti-Soviet Social Democracy alive. A clean break with the Kremlin bureaucracy and the open championing of the Soviet workers in their struggle against the bureaucracy is therefore test number one for a change of the

Communist Party in a revolutionary direction.

But that section of the leadership which today is attempting to shake off the curse of the Party's reputation as an agency of the Kremlin either by protestations of "independence" or by open abandonment of Leninism certainly does not have the answer. Nor will it accomplish any genuinely socialist aim by shouting from the roof tops that the October Revolution was a purely "Russian" experience which has no validity for the United States.

The great historic significance of the Russian Revolution lies in the fact that it is the first stage in the world socialist revolution. Without grasping this fact it is impossible to understand the objective situation in the U.S., which cannot be explained in national terms. By the same token it is impossible to outline the perspectives of a revolutionary party in the U.S.

The Russian Revolution was the first great verification of Marxist theory and it had a profound effect on socialist regroupment throughout the world.

In this country it accomplished the first major regroupment of the radical workers movement. Association with the Soviet Union when Lenin and Trotsky stood at its head was not a curse but major political capital. The young Communist party in this country emerged as the dominant section of the radical movement, winning to its banner

many of the best cadres of the IWW and the Socialist Party of Debs, precisely because it stood on the program of the Russian Revolution.

The millstone around the necks of the present CP leaders is no association with the Russian Revolution but the fact of their service to its treacherous negation — the Stalinist counter-revolutionary caste. This blot can never be wiped from their record.

While the present discussion reveals the pent-up desires of the ranks for a thoroughgoing discussion of all issues, it must be noted that it also shows that the long years of Stalinist practices have thwarted the political development of the Party's ranks along Marxist lines. Most of the contributions to the present discussion are distinguished by a pre-occupation with organizational questions and problems of tactics in the mass movement. These are important, legitimate questions, but derivative ones.

It is the basic political line from which these problems flow that must now be grappled with. Such major questions as the degeneration of the first workers state, the line of "peaceful coexistence" with the capitalist world and such derivatives of that line as "coalition" politics (support of capitalist parties), must become the subject of searching examination. It is only on that plane that the fundamental solution to the crisis can be found.

Guillotine, Ho Mark Algeria

By George Lavan

(The following is part of an interview with a French socialist and active trade unionist who is well acquainted with the movement of the Algerian people for independence.)

Question: Are the stories about terrible French repressions and reprisals in Algeria true or are they the usual wartime atrocity stories?

Answer: I don't know what stories you have in mind but there is an unbelievably barbarous repression being carried out by the French military and police in Algeria.

Some 15,000 Algerians are in prison. This includes almost all the known leaders and militants of the Messalist movement [the Algerian National Movement, so-called after its leader Messali Hadj]. The prisons are overflowing and in the concentration camps there are old men and women of 70 and 80 years as well as children from five to 15.

Q: Don't these repressions of the French imperialists affect only those active in the independence movement or those whom the French police and military mistakenly believe are active?

A: Not at all. The repression is not only against the militants of the independence movement but against the whole Algerian people. This is because the imperialists know the Algerian people are almost wholly in sympathy or support of the movement. Consequently collective repression and mass terror are the official policy.

PUNISHING WHOLE TOWNS

In the villages where the peasants are believed to have given money, food, etc. to the guerrillas the French police or troops shoot the villagers in the fields. When a French soldier is killed, hostages are taken from the nearest village and shot.

In one village all the people were ordered to assemble in the