

# Key Problems of Party Program

By Alexander Bittelman

WHAT KIND OF A PROGRAM does the Party need? The 16th Party Convention gave a clear answer. The program has "to define clearly and unequivocally the viewpoint of American Communists on all fundamental problems of the struggle for socialism in the United States."

Put in other words, the Program has to trace the American Road to Socialism, proceeding from the theoretical positions of Marxism-Leninism and with the aid of its scientific method.

From this it is obvious that the projected Party program cannot be a program of action designed for a particular situation or even period of time. Programs of action the Party needs and formulates from time to time as occasion demands. Nor can the projected Program be a mere statement of policy whether for a particular issue or for a complex of issues. This too the Party has to produce every now and then.

Finally, the program called for by the 16th Convention is something very much different from a statement of the Party's general line and tactical orientation. The Main Resolution of the Convention is that kind of a document; and as such, it contains certain programmatic aspects, but it is not the program.

Starting out from a Marxian analysis of American capitalism, with all its national peculiarities and characteristics, the program has to define the historic stage or stages on the American road to socialism; the specific objective tasks of each stage; and the corresponding programs of economic, political and social demands.

How urgent is the need for such a Party program? Extremely urgent and pressing, according to the 16th Convention. "The Convention feels that it is incorrect to continue to function without a comprehensive and basic written program," so speaks the Main Resolution. It should be obvious by now, eleven months after the Convention, that the very solution of the Party crisis depends in large measure upon our willingness and ability to produce the kind of program the Convention desired.

In what spirit shall we proceed to work on this program? Here too the Convention gave us a clear lead. It said: "Entirely new and unprecedented problems are emerging today which were never treated by Marx, Engels or Lenin. They arise from the new world situation and its impact on all countries." Very true, as life has convincingly demon-

strated. Hence, the Convention said: "The Communist Party will have to be bolder in re-examining certain Marxist-Leninist theories which, while valid in a past period, may have become outdated and rendered obsolete by new historical developments."

In any such serious undertaking, the danger *always* exists that revisionist tendencies may creep into the process of re-examination, and Marxists will *always* be on their guard. At the same time, the Convention also said that our main danger at this time is dogmatism and sectarianism. It pointed to something very crucial when it said:

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 our Party over the past decades has contributed towards our doctrinaire acceptance and mechanical application of many theoretical propositions.

This is the state of mind with which we must approach our work on the program.

Writing on the preparation of a program for the Russian Party in the latter half of 1899, Lenin said the following:

We do not regard Marxist theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the cornerstone of

the science which Socialists *must* further advance in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an *independent* elaboration of the Marxist theory is especially essential for Russian Socialists, for this theory provides only general *guiding* principles, which, *in particular*, are applied in England differently from France, in France differently from Germany, and in Germany different from Russia (*Marx-Engels Marxism*, page 126, Lenin's own emphases).

It is, of course, true that since these words were written, Marxist theory has made history-creating advances. It has been developed further by Lenin himself for the era of monopoly capitalism and imperialism, bringing into life Marxism-Leninism. This theory has been further enriched by the epoch-making experiences of socialist transformations in the Soviet Union, in China and in many countries of eastern and central Europe. The national liberation movements in large parts of the world, and the tremendous advances of the labor movement of the capitalist countries to influence in the affairs of their nations, have contributed mightily to the still further development and enrichment of Marxist theory—Marxism-Leninism.

But the development of Marxist theory never stops. It must never be allowed to stop if we wish "to keep pace with life," as Lenin said. And this is what the 16th Convention wanted us to do. Its Main Resolution said: "To advance the struggle in the United States for peace, de-

mocracy, civil rights and socialism, the Communist Party must further develop its independent theoretical work."

In view of the foregoing, it is imperative to ask the following question: what is Comrade Foster's attitude to the decision of the 16th Convention that we begin work on the preparation of "a comprehensive and basic written program"? Why does he keep silent about the *program*? How did he manage to write a document of thousands upon thousands of words *without* explicitly discussing our new programmatic problems, *without* fully formulating any of them, without even saying that we *need* a program of the kind called for by the Convention? Shall we assume that Comrade Foster is *opposed* to the program decision of the Convention?

I am referring here to his article "The Party Crisis and the Way Out" (*Political Affairs*, Dec.-Jan.). This article, according to Foster, "indicates the chief means by which this crisis may be overcome." But one would look in vain among these chief means for the task of preparing a basic and comprehensive Party program. Comrade Foster simply ignores this task. The truth, however, is that one of the very key and chief means of bringing the Party out of the crisis is precisely the preparation of a basic and comprehensive Party program.

Comrade Foster speaks of "the earliest and most intensive cultivation of our mass work upon all

fronts" as one of the chief means out of the crisis. Very well. This we must try to do; but can this be done successfully *in the old way*? The Party has been trying for many years to do mass work but that did not prevent the crisis from arising nor did it bring the further development of the crisis to a stop. Obviously, the effort to do mass work in the old way does not work. The Party needs a *new way* of doing mass work. What is this new way? One of the reasons for the continuing Party crisis is precisely the fact Comrade Foster continues totally oblivious of this major fact in the Party's life.

New ways of doing mass work require a comprehensive and basic Party program of the kind called for by the 16th Convention; a new relationship between the Communist Party and the labor movement, the movement of our class; a new relationship between the Party and the Negro national liberation movement and all other progressive movements of the people; a new tactical orientation based upon this new relationship; and a perspective of a leading mass party of socialism—a united party of socialism—inspired by the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

This does not mean, of course, that no mass work of any kind is possible until all these requirements have been fully met. No, that is not the idea. But it does mean that successful mass work of a scope and

nature that will pull the Party out of the crisis will become possible only *in the process of meeting these basic requirements* for the new ways of doing mass work.

Comrade Foster's article shows no awareness of the crucial needs of these requirements.

He speaks of the need "to liquidate the continuing theoretical confusion in the Party." All right. Wherein lies the confusion? About what specific and concrete theoretical problems are we confused? Is it enough merely to restate Marxist-Leninist principles, and to restate them inadequately, "to liquidate the continuing theoretical confusion"? If that were enough, the confusion would be liquidated by now since we have had many and repeated "restatements" of fundamental principles. But Comrade Foster himself finds that the confusion is still here. Why?

Comrade Foster makes no effort to answer this question except to say of the confusion that it is "not only our traditional sectarianism and dogmatism, but also the Revisionism which has almost wrecked the Party." This only tells us that we suffer from both tendencies—dogmatism and revisionism. That is true. But it tells us nothing at all about the specific *problems* we are theoretically confused on and *wherein* the confusion lies. It is as though Comrade Foster was deliberately avoiding these questions; but they cannot be avoided. Life is seeing to that.

What we suffer from theoretically

is not just confusion; although, God knows, there is plenty of that in our midst, and also theoretical disorientation. But what is the chief source of all that? *It is the appearance and accumulation of a whole series of new and major problems, calling for fundamental programmatic and political answers, but which our Party has not yet found or even clearly and adequately formulated.* The accumulation of *unsolved* major theoretical problems and the protracted delay in arriving at a solution of these problems—this is the source of the theoretical confusion and disorientation in our midst. He who does not see that, sees nothing at all in the Party crisis.

Hence, "to liquidate the continuing theoretical confusion in the Party," we must begin to face and tackle the new and major theoretical problems confronting us. This means to formulate and solve a number of key problems of Party program, "entirely new and unprecedented problems," as the 16th Convention said. We must prepare a program that will "define clearly and unequivocally the viewpoint of American Communists on all fundamental problems of the struggle for socialism in the United States."

#### CAPITALISM IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE AMERICAN ROAD TO SOCIALISM

The social system existing now in the United States is capitalism. It

is governed by the same economic laws as the capitalist system in England, for example, or France, or any other capitalist country. It is governed by the economic laws discovered and formulated by Marx.

Our program must demonstrate the truth of this proposition and also of the Marxian conclusion that *socialism in the United States is inevitable*. This is the basic task of the program.

How do we propose to fulfill this task? What theoretical problems must we formulate and solve in order to realize this basic programmatic task?

A key problem facing us here is to define scientifically, in a Marxist-Leninist way, *the nature of the national peculiarities and characteristics of American capitalism*. It is unquestionable that capitalism in the United States, beginning with its very origin and continuing through its present highest stage, that of monopoly and imperialism, is displaying a number of distinct and important national peculiarities and characteristics. What are they? How important are they from the standpoint of struggle for socialism in the United States?

In other words: *are the national peculiarities and characteristics of capitalism in the United States of such a nature that they raise before our Party programmatic problems bearing on the American Road to Socialism?*

This is not only a basic theoretical

problem whose solution is the starting point for the preparation of the Party program. It is also a major political problem. The struggle against various bourgeois theories that capitalism in the United States is either no capitalism at all or is governed by entirely different economic laws than capitalism elsewhere is both a theoretical and political struggle. The exposure of the monopoly fraud of "People's Capitalism," which Comrade Foster unpardonably confuses with the aspirations of the American people and its labor movement towards a Welfare State, is also both theoretical and political.

To struggle effectively against all bourgeois theories that American capitalism is "exceptional," and to expose the monopoly fraud of "People's Capitalism," our program must define clearly *the nature* of the unquestionable national peculiarities of American capitalism. It must proceed from that to the necessary programmatic conclusions on whether these peculiarities have a bearing, and the kind of bearing, on the American road to socialism.

Comrade Foster speaks in his article about "national characteristics" but he continues to shy away from the programmatic problem facing us here. He refers to the fact that "the United States is the largest of all capitalist countries." In what respects? What, if any, programmatic conclusions must we draw from that? But we find no answer from

Foster, not even the recognition that an answer is called for.

Comrade Foster also speaks of "the particular qualities of U.S. monopolies." What are these particular qualities? Do we have to find out what they are and what their nature is from a theoretical and programmatic standpoint? No answer from Foster; not even an intimation of an answer. Had he taken the trouble of analyzing in a Marxist-Leninist way "the particular qualities of the U.S. monopolies," he might have discovered that the modern strivings of the American people towards a Welfare State, which he confuses with the monopoly fraud of "People's Capitalism," are promoted and stimulated by the irreconcilable conflict and contradiction between the monopolies and the mass of the American people. He might have learned that the full and far-reaching objective significance of this conflict stems from the fundamental contradiction *between the monopolies and the general capitalist environment of free competition and commodity production.*

This contradiction, as analyzed by Lenin, which he defines as "permanent and insoluble," is the attribute of monopoly capitalism and imperialism in all capitalist countries. But in the United States, as every thoughtful student of the American scene knows, this contradiction came to play an extraordinary role. Why? Comrade Foster does not even see this question, let alone answer it.

The answer is found in a study of the chief national characteristics in *the origin and development* of capitalism in the United States. Some say this is a historical approach. Of course, it is; this is a Marxist theory and method. If the problem as formulated is real, and if the way to the answer lies in the origin and development of American capitalism, then the approach has to be historical. Isn't that so?

American capitalism, as is well known to every student of the country's economic and general history, originated and developed in the process of conquering a continent, with a frontier in continual motion for many decades, not only the geographic frontier but also and especially the *economic* frontier. As a result, capitalism in the United States was developing in width and depth at the same time, *and still continues to do so.* It was developing extensively through the continual rise of new capitalist relations in new parts of the country; and it was developing intensively through the concentration and centralization of capital and the subsequent rise of monopoly and imperialism.

Important here is the role of the moving frontier (with which bourgeois historians have dealt much but one-sidedly), the simultaneous extensive and intensive development of the American economy, *and the continual reproduction of new capitalist relations as well as new monopoly groupings.* These factors,

which still operate though in new and changing ways, *tend to reproduce continually and in ever sharper form "the permanent and insoluble contradiction" (Lenin) between the American monopolies and the general capitalist environment of free competition and commodity production and the contradiction between the anti-democratic tendencies of the monopolies and the democratic tendencies of the American people.*

It is precisely here that we find the main explanation for the fact that the chief and basic contradiction of capitalism, the contradiction between the capitalist class and the working class, has found and continues to find its sharpest expression in the contradiction between the monopolies and the mass of the people. *Anti-capitalist sentiments and movements tend to assume an anti-monopoly edge and character.*

Lenin attached tremendous importance to the contradiction between monopoly and the general capitalist environment of free competition and commodity production. He wrote:

Kautsky's theoretical critique of imperialism has nothing in common with Marxism—precisely for the reason that it evades and obscures the very profound and radical contradictions of imperialism: the contradiction between monopoly and free competition that exists side by side with it, between the gigantic "operations" (and gigantic profits) of finance capital and

"honest" trade in the free market, the contradictions between cartels and trusts, on the one hand, and non-cartelized industry, on the other, etc. ("Imperialism," Vol. XIX, *Collected Works*, p. 1876).

It is painful to record that Comrade Foster and other American Communists have been and are trying "to evade and obscure the very profound and radical contradictions of imperialism" of which Lenin writes. As a result, they are arriving, or tend to arrive, at false conclusions on many important matters of theory and policy, including the Welfare State.

In combatting the bourgeois theories of the "exceptional" nature of capitalism in the United States, American Marxists must demonstrate, by convincing proof and not by mere assertion, that (1) American capitalism is governed by the same economic laws as capitalism in other countries; (2) that all general economic laws are modified in their working and operation by many circumstances (Marx); (3) that the national peculiarities in the origin and development of capitalism in the United States tend to give birth to popular illusions about the "exceptional" nature of American capitalism which the monopolies seek to exploit against the people by means of such fraudulent fictions as "People's Capitalism"; (4) but that these same national peculiarities are creating the objective conditions for a Welfare State, an anti-monopoly

form of democracy as a stage of social progress, and for a peaceful and constitutional transition from the Welfare State to the Socialist State in a revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism.

The foregoing four points are suggested as an answer to the key programmatic problem formulated above, namely, whether the national peculiarities of capitalism in the United States are of such a nature as to have a direct bearing on the American Road to Socialism.

It follows therefore that the American working class must accomplish a major historic task of radical economic and political change in the United States *before* it can proceed to head the advance of the American people to the socialist transformation of American society. It is the task of curbing the powers of the monopolies in the economy and government of the nation. It is the task of establishing an anti-monopoly form of democracy, within the confines of the capitalist mode of production and the existing bourgeois state system, in which the chief function of government will be the realization of the welfare clause of the Constitution and the full implementation of the democratic liberties of the Bill of Rights. It is the task of realizing fully the equal rights and national liberation of the Negro people, completing the process of bourgeois-democratic transformation in the South.

*It is the historic task of establish-*

*ing the Welfare State.* It is a historic task of a *general democratic nature* to be accomplished by an anti-monopoly coalition of labor, the farmers, the Negro people, the middle classes and sections of the non-monopoly bourgeois, a coalition of which labor is the backbone and driving force.

Viewed in the light of Marxist-Leninist theory, we can conclude as follows: the successful struggle for the fulfillment of the objective tasks of the Welfare State—curbing the economic and political powers of the monopolies—will create the conditions for the coming of the next stage of social progress—the peaceful and constitutional transition to socialism.

It follows from the above that (a) the peaceful and constitutional transition is not an automatic process but must be fought for; and (b) only the struggle for the Welfare State will create the conditions and realize the objective possibilities for the peaceful transition to socialism.

The emergence of two world systems—the socialist and capitalist—and the approach of the period of peaceful coexistence and competition are ushering in a new phase of the general crisis of capitalism. As a consequence, the reactionary imperialist and aggressive drives of the monopolies are bound to come into irreconcilable conflicts *with American national interests*. These will dictate a policy of peaceful coexistence and competition, the applica-



tion of the Bandung principles in relations with other nations, and policies of people's welfare and democracy at home.

Hence, in this emerging new period of the present historic epoch the people's struggles for curbing the powers of the monopolies in the economy and government of the nation are bound to rise to new heights of achievement. The advance to the Welfare State will gather power and momentum. The American people will reach a stage of historic progress in which conditions will mature for the democratic, peaceful and

constitutional transition from the Welfare State to the Socialist State.

These are only some of the key problems of Party program. They must be discussed freely, earnestly and objectively. They must be discussed in the same spirit in which Lenin invited the Russian Marxists to discuss the preparation of their own first program in 1899. He wrote: "We shall therefore gladly afford space in our paper for articles on theoretical questions as we invite all comrades openly to discuss controversial points" (*Marx-Engels Marxism*, p. 126).

From the Land of Barbarism . . .

*"In no city in the world can one see so much Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilde, Schiller, Ostrovsky, Chekhov, and so on, in one week as in Moscow."*

Ossia Trilling, vice-president, International Association of Theatre Critics, in *The New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1958.

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*"The Russians have realized for some years the necessity of guiding every child as far along the educational path as he is qualified to go, of identifying talent early and cultivating it to the utmost, of rewarding scholarship and research, and making teaching a reputable, dignified profession."*

Claude M. Fuess, former headmaster, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., in *The Saturday Review*, Feb. 1, 1958.