

# The Challenge of the New Era

By Benjamin J. Davis

BECAUSE THE Draft Resolution\* contains a number of good features, I voted "yes" hoping, like other National Committee members who voted for it, that they would be carried out. It has a very good, but incomplete practical program; and it points up Left-sectarianism as the main danger for our Party, which, in this new world situation will undoubtedly continue to be true for a long period ahead.

At the same time, I reluctantly qualified my vote with reservations. These had to do especially with the equivocation of the resolution on the question of our Marxist-Leninist science, its inadequate treatment of the Negro question and the struggle for Negro rights, its weak stand on the role of American imperialism, and its underplaying of the role of our Party. I felt that unless the resolution was strengthened in these and other respects, the fulfillment of any of its sound proposals would be seriously jeopardized.

Consequently, my reservations remain. For I have seen an insufficient struggle against many harmful

tendencies and trends in our Party, either unencompassed in the resolution at all, or only lamely dealt with. Nevertheless, I am continuing my yes vote because of the positive features of the document and as an expression of confidence that the resolution will be considerably improved.

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In the last six or seven years, our Party has come upon lean, hard days. It is extremely isolated from the main thoroughfares of mass activity and struggle and a critical situation exists in the Party itself. The morale and fighting spirit of the Party is at an all-time low; there's a sharply critical attitude toward the leadership, which in most respects is fully justified; there's been pretty much of a paralysis in mass activities—the lifeblood of the Party; wholesale disorientation and loss of members; unnecessary tensions and strains; lack of perspectives, wait-and-see attitudes, etc., etc. In fact, the present alarming condition of the Party unfortunately is pushing into the background many vital questions raised in the Resolution.

There's a need to analyze and seize hold of this situation lest, by the time of the convention, we have

\* *Draft Resolution for the 16th National Convention of the Communist Party, U.S.A., adopted Sept. 13, 1956, New Century Publishers, N. Y., 35 cents.*

not a live, kicking organization, but a weakened emaciated body, torn apart and unable to do more than write its own epitaph. None of our members desires this.

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Although I don't agree with a certain rigidity and with various characterizations in Comrade Foster's article, "On the Party Situation," (in the October *Political Affairs*), he makes a very important contribution to the discussion. Certainly, the present condition of the Party is a perfect set-up for liquidation.

Comrade Gates' article "Time for a Change" (in the November issue), contains many positive, bold and provocative ideas. I can agree that it's time for a change in the present condition of our Party and in many of its aspects. But the Gates' article by-passes the whole critical Party situation and leaves the impression, it seems to be, that the trouble with the Party is that it has not adopted the thesis there propounded; and further, that if this were done, everything would be rosy. To me this is somewhat of a panacea approach before which all the complex problems of the Party and of life simply will not vanish. Comrade Gates' contentions may prove to be right, in whole or in part; but the question may become academic if there's no Party around to scientifically examine, study and thrash out policies in life.

First of all, we're dealing with human beings in the Communist Party—the prime consideration of

any Communist. They cannot be turned on and off like spigots, buffeted one way today and another way tomorrow. (I have participated in the "spigot" approach; but no more.) They cannot be told that they were putting up a splendid fight against McCarthyism and against reckless brink-of-war policies of U.S. imperialism one day, and overnight told that everything they've done has been a collection of blunders, stupidities, idiocies and mistakes—particularly at the height of their most heroic activity. No wonder comrades ask themselves whether the last 10 or 15 years of their lives have been wasted. My answer is: they haven't.

We have in our Party some of the most self-sacrificing Americans, who, despite the cruel persecution of the government and reaction, and despite mistakes, grew and became stronger during the last five or six years. They are our most valuable assets and their morale and spirit is of the utmost importance.

I regret that some have recently left the Party. Their place, it seems to me, is in the Party putting their ideas into the hopper, both giving to and receiving from the collective discussion. My gratitude, however, is to the bulk of our comrades who have stuck, whatever their views, and who are fighting for the kind of Party which they think necessary in this period. They are the main heroes; for they inspire hope and confidence in the struggles and victories ahead. Our Party should be quite willing and ready to work with any American

to advance the peace, democracy and social welfare of the American people. To eliminate everything within our Party that contributes to our Party's inability to do so—which means a more flexible use of our Marxist-Leninist science on the basis of our national traditions—is the challenging task before our Party.

This is the most important discussion in our Party's history. It is also the best. Despite rough overtones and exaggerated characterizations here and there, it has never been equalled in freedom, in assailing dogma and doctrinairism and in the sharp clash of opinion. None of us are accustomed to this new-found freedom and we are still amateurs at it. The next discussion ought to be even better.

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Among the main causes of the crisis facing our Party are: firstly, the objective situation, the extreme persecution and difficulties imposed on the Party, beyond anything in its entire history; secondly, the long sectarian history of the Party culminating in serious, avoidable errors growing out the difficulties of the last years; the slowness of the Party in making necessary adjustments to a new situation; the profound shock suffered by the Party over the brutal injustices committed during the latter years of Stalin's leadership; and the somewhat hysterical reaction to this situation on the part of some of our leaders.

Our Party is engaged in the class struggle and, as in any other battles,

somebody gets hurt. It is not a pink-tea party—there has never been struggle without injury, and no Party can guarantee against that. Our comrades have been operating under the handicaps of a protracted series of defeats imposed by the most powerful capitalist system in the world. It did well to remain alive. The damage inflicted upon our Party should not be underestimated.

The Party membership should be proud of the contributions made during the height of the McCarthyite war hysteria, under the most severe repression. Instead of deprecating virtually everything done during this period and a good number of years before, a few examples of what was good should have been commended, in order to inspire confidence in our Party's ability to correct errors. This would have helped to immunize our Party against pessimism and demoralization. And it would have been fully in accord with the truth. To speak of only one such example, there was the pioneering work of our Party in theorizing on the question of the peaceful transition to Socialism, from which however, we drew few political and practical conclusions.

The Party did not forget the main enemy or the main issue, although some staunch labor and progressive forces in the country did. American history is strewn with the wreckage of leaders and organizations who forgot the enemy.

The main approach of Comrade Dennis' report at the April plenum

of the National Committee was correct. Yet in underestimating the positive role and achievements of the Party over the last years, it opened up a veritable Pandora's box. The search for errors by our Party almost became vulgarized into a spree, with the line between indictment of mistakes and indictment of the Party becoming very thin.

The Soviet Marxists made many bold and profound contributions at the 20th Congress of the CPSU to the struggle for peace and the relaxing of international tension, to the strengthening of Socialism in their own country, and to the necessity of each country to find its own national road to Socialism. The Congress contributed to the common sense proposition that proletarian internationalism—the bedrock of world peace and friendship between nations—will be strengthened by relations of mutual criticism among Marxist parties of the world on the basis of equality and comradeship.

Although serious mistakes were made by the Soviet Marxists in connection with the Stalin devaluation, this too was an unprecedented example of self-criticism. I believe, however, that considerable mischief was done to the morale of our Party by attempting to apply mechanically the lessons of the devaluation, namely to downgrade our Party as Stalin's mistakes and crimes were downgraded. The purpose of the Stalin devaluation was to get rid of Stalinism; and whether our comrades who applied this mechanical

parallel meant it or not, the downgrading of our Party in the same manner could only imply—getting rid of it. The aggressive piling of error upon error, as if this alone characterized the last decade of the Party, laid the basis for liquidation and dissolution.

The Stalin revelations constituted a blow from an entirely new direction—from within the Marxist Party hitherto enjoying more prestige than any other in the world socialist ranks. While Communists are accustomed to the most savage blows from the class enemy—which blows ultimately strengthened them—they were unprepared for such shattering disillusionment from such a highly respected idol. This presented an unprecedented problem of morale and perspective—which was not grasped by the National Committee as a whole. As a result the Party drifted.

Credit however must be given to those individual comrades among leaders and members generally who sought to exercise some initiative—and this certainly includes the *Daily Worker* which tried to grapple with the new situation and its unprecedented problems. I say this although I think the *Daily Worker* fell into certain panicky excesses in the course of its prompt reactions to events. The National Committee as a whole, in my opinion, shares a responsibility for this, and it is absolutely wrong to dump, or to permit to be dumped, the whole blame on the editor of the paper, Comrade Gates.

We should face up to mistakes,

courageously and frankly—learning the hard way, it would seem, the price of long neglect of the Leninist weapon of self-criticism. Only in this way can the Party overcome mistakes, get into the main arteries of social development, and grow stronger and more influential. Self-criticism is to destroy weaknesses in order to build and educate the Party membership. Our aim should be to search for the key errors which, when made, affected the whole orientation and subsequent activities of the Party—such as our narrow electoral policy of '48, the extreme security measures instituted, our failure to investigate the new and peculiar features of the capitalist economy in our country, the Party's and my individual lagging on the theory of the Negro question.

The Stalin devaluation was of historic value to Marxists all over the world—and certainly not any less in our country. It tore away in one fell swoop the inhibitions that thwarted a more basic examination and acquaintanceship with national traits of our own country. It also revealed another major sin under Stalin: the serious drag which the "cult of the individual" had on the creative development of the science of Marxism-Leninism the world over. With this dead hand of the past gone, we should be able to move forward by leaps and bounds, with boldness but with soberness.

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The supreme problem before us, I should think, is the contradiction between the historic forward move-

ment of labor and the people—particularly the unprecedented upsurge of the Negro movement—over recent years, and the extreme isolation of our Party. Undoubtedly, the fierce persecution of the Party had a great deal to do with this, while the tremendous growth and influence of the Socialist camp, the neutralist countries and the colonial liberation movements, were a powerful ally of the limited Negro and labor gains.

But adverse objective factors alone cannot account for our isolation. Back in '52, the Party had already begun to examine the sectarian nature of weaknesses reflected in the self-critical note on our '48 electoral policy, subsequently by the recognition of "Left" distortions in the struggle against white chauvinism, the re-examination of certain errors in trade-union work, etc. Now we need a qualitative improvement in this process of review—which is what the present pre-convention discussion is attempting to do—and this process must needs take place as a constant feature of our work and for a considerable period of time. Fruitful it will be, because for the first time subjective roadblocks in the thinking of our Party are now removed. More than ever, it seems to me, do we need our science, in helping us to navigate uncharted seas.

The resolution, it seems to me, does not put the question of our science—of Marxism-Leninism—squarely. I don't subscribe to the view that unless one uses the specific term Marxism-Leninism that our science

is being abandoned. But I am very much disturbed by the excessive hostility to the term, from certain of our leaders, who want to ban it from usage in our Party, under the misconception that the term itself is the source of our dogmatism. This coincides with certain trends in the Party that the Party should be Marxist and not Leninist, and with certain wrong practices and concepts in the Party that are harmful and that have nothing in common with Leninism, particularly on the Negro question.

I believe that the placing of our science could be expressed in such terms as "scientific socialism," Marxism, Marxism-Leninism, etc. Flexibility and a loosening up in this regard—in fact, the getting away from all stereotyped jargon—is radically necessary for our Party's ties with the American workers and masses. It is necessary, too, in terms of the improvement of thinking among Party members.

Neither do I believe that our Party should hold on to dead formulae, outmoded principles and practices that no longer apply in our country or that never did. It is the essence of Leninism—based upon concrete conditions and circumstances — to shed all outmoded formulae and to create new ones as experience and the needs of the people require. Certain rigid aspects of our theoretical position on the Negro question fall into this category; the draft resolution correctly lists a few more.

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But it is a sign of franticness when some comrades insist that this and that be scrapped forthwith all over the place—as a test of one's willingness to change—and before there's been the sort of independent examination such as our Party has never before had. Some comrades in their just concern for bureaucracy and inner Party democracy demand that democratic centralism be junked out of hand—and certainly no fetish should be made of it. On this and other such questions, how can one be so cocksure one way and then overnight be so cocksure in just the opposite direction? The main thing, it seems to me, is that the Party should have a form of structure and functioning that will provide guarantees for drastically improved inner-Party democracy, curtailment of bureaucracy particularly on the part of the leadership, majority rule and right of dissent, which will unleash the creative capacities of the entire membership in the making and effectuation of policy. These measures would add new strength to the Communist Party in our country and, I submit, that we should never forget that organization is the strength of the working class and people. To me, this would be a modification and application of the principle of democratic centralism to our country. *Some comrades, it appears, wish to reduce the Party to some kind of loose federation without the power of united action and will. To that I'm opposed. Besides, few American organizations exist*

*without some form of democratic centralism.*

The resolution says: ". . . Basing ourselves on these Marxist-Leninist principles as interpreted by the Communist Party of our country. . . ." I am not opposed to our Party's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism or anything else. But when tacked on in this manner, it is not only a denial of the universality and objectivity of our science, but it legislates the infallibility of a majority at a particular time, and equates a majority vote with correct Marxist science. Now I hope that will be true, but it is wholly misleading to think correct science can be guaranteed by fiat. It seems to me that the real test of Marxism-Leninism is its verifiable experience in life and events themselves all over the world, including, in the first place, our own country. The resolution, it seems to me, sets up a new, but wrong, test.

Certainly, those leaders who support this phraseology, and who have pressed almost exclusively on the errors of the Party, should be a little modest about "our interpretations" of Marxism-Leninism. I surely am and I'm not one who feels that the last ten years of my life have been wasted.

We have been "interpreting" our science all along, hence the phraseology of the resolution adds nothing but equivocation and uncertainty as to the future. Something new, however, does need to be added to our placement of the question of Marx-

ism-Leninism, and I would propose it for the resolution instead of its present phraseology: Our Party bases itself on creative Marxism-Leninism as applied to the national characteristics and traditions of our country.

I understand and fully agree with the necessity of making clear to the world that we interpret Marxist science, and not someone else for us, and that in this particular sense, especially, we are an independent American Party. We have to establish this proposition both by precept and deed. But in order to establish this fact we do not need to deny the objectivity of this science just to prove we're not looking over our shoulder at the Russians or Tito or some other international Marxist personages. The formulation in the resolution over-corrects our past weakness in this respect, and actually makes conditional our acceptance of this basic science. I never heard of a biologist saying he accepts the science of biology "according to his interpretation." Communists may argue over the meaning of Marxist science—and that they're doing quite extensively now—but not over the existence of the science. Where the correct solution is not obvious, events have to settle the debate—but never by a mere interpretation. Since the science is universal, we must learn from experience and events not only in our own country, but all over the world. That we should exclude foreign experience is isolationist, dangerous and unscientific.

The onesided approach to Marx

ism-Leninism of saying what is only outworn, without saying what is still valid and universal, is a peculiar way to adhere to a science. Such features of Marxism as dialectical and historical materialism, the leading role of the working class in the transformation to socialism, the principles of the class struggle, of the national question, are, in my judgment, valid universal principles of scientific socialism. It is regrettable that many comrades regard the formulation in the draft resolution as unimportant, and opposition to it as quibbling.

A Communist Party is built upon principle, not upon some individual's pet speculations and crystal ball gazing of what's happening in the world. The Party should freshly adapt its principles to new situations, and not in panic and hysteria fall into the quagmire of momentarily attractive and opportunist expediencies.

I don't wish to see our Party built upon the quicksand of any comrade's—however bright—particular interpretation of the world. The present formulation in the resolution makes that possible. I do not want built into our Party, its documents and procedure, an arrangement whereby whoever gets the most votes is the new Marxist-Leninist, before whom all others must bow.

The position of Comrade Gates' article on Marxist-Leninist science, and the implementations of his views in the *Daily Worker* are, to me, incorrect. If that is Marxist science, I want no part of it, even in this Party, to say nothing of a brand-

new organization—a Political Action Association—which would enthrone and codify Comrade Gates' misconceptions of Marxist science. Yet, if anything, I feel indebted to Comrade Gates' wrong views for stimulating a new and more concrete look at Marxism-Leninism, and its supreme value.

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An especially disturbing situation exists in our Party on the Negro question and on the mass struggle for Negro rights. This is true in varying degrees throughout the country. One leader of the Party in N. Y. State has persistently held the position that "Negroes come into the Party with more nationalism than whites come in with chauvinism," a position overwhelmingly rejected by our National Committee. Its obvious meaning is that in the struggle for Negro rights we should concentrate our main fire against the Negroes, an implication so preposterous that it needs no comment. We should welcome and note the diminution of the level of white chauvinism in the country. At the same time, we should keep firmly fixed in mind that white chauvinism is still the main ideological weapon of American imperialism in the oppression of the Negro people.

A fresh look is needed at nationalism which is at a world all-time high. Soekarno of Indonesia placed it well when he stated that the nationalism of the Asian and African peoples was for equality, human dignity and mutual respect from their oppres-



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sors. This is progressive. This, it seems to me, is what the Negro people of the U.S. want. It should be sharply differentiated from the nationalism of oppressor nations, based upon racial superiority, jingoism and chauvinism. The routine fashion in which our Party reacted to the historic Bandung conference should have forewarned us of the diminishing sensitivity of our Party on the national and colonial questions.

Sentiments were expressed at our recent national election conference by at least one comrade to the effect that we should tone down the condemnation of disfranchisement of Negroes in Mississippi because it might "embarrass" the government. In addition, the apparent downgrading of many of our most experienced Negro leaders, with scarcely any Negroes in over-all state leadership of the Party, except in one state, the tendency toward a "hard" and re-criminatory attitude toward dissenting Negro comrades—all must give our Party a deeper concern than is noted in the draft resolution. We are lagging behind the mass struggle for Negro rights, which is the principal concern of our Party on this question.

In certain areas, the situation of Negro women in the Party is disgraceful. When they should be among the mainstays of the Party leadership, they're nowhere near this position. Our Party has badly retrograded on this question. It should boldly integrate the staunch leaders among the Negro women into all

levels of Party leadership.

This state of affairs has nothing in common with Leninism or with the application of our science to the specific conditions of our own country. Too much cannot be done to establish the equality and dignity of the Negro people—and that is the duty of the workers and all democratic forces against the common foe, American imperialism. The situation deeply disturbs the Party membership, especially the Negroes—who are justifiably insecure about the science and direction of our Party.

If, as our Party correctly says, the democratization of the South and the unconditional enfranchisement of the Negro people constitute the key to unlocking the door to the further progress of the entire nation, then we should act that way. The whole draft resolution should have been built around this question. The nation is pulsating to the Negro question today, under the new conditions of 1956, as it did under other circumstances 100 years ago.

The Negro question is a many-sided one, and should be approached in a many-sided manner. It is also a special question, reflecting the special oppression of the Negro people. The difficulties of our Party in this field are complicated and will not dissolve on the basis of a sloganized, over-simplified approach. Sectarianism has, assuredly, been the most damaging weakness in this field; and we never wish to return to it. But today our Party is characterized by a bitter resistance by some comrades

an energetic discussion and ideological campaign against white chauvinism to strengthen our Party's participation in the mass struggle for Negro rights. The examples of promotion of Negro cadres set by our own Party never were a private matter, and are even less today. We are peaceful and public competition with all other American organizations in recognizing and implementing the dignity and contributions of Negro Americans to the democratic advancement of our nation. One of the healthiest signs of the vigorous new democracy in our Party is application to Party organizations in Negro communities, where, in at least one instance to my personal knowledge, it has been flagrantly violated by upper levels of Party leadership. The N. Y. State leadership of the Party has made many good contributions on the fight against sectarianism in the organization in recent years. But the present state of Negro affairs in the state and relations with a host of our most experienced Negro cadres is shocking.

This results, in my opinion, from basic lack of understanding in our Party as a whole of the national and colonial questions, on both a world and domestic scale. Our Party needs a whole new and bold approach on this question comparable with its massive importance, nationally and internationally.

Our Party has properly apologized to various individuals over the last months for wrong judgments

upon them which were unjust. It needs to make a different kind of apology to the great Negro artist Paul Robeson, to the illustrious scholar Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, whom reaction has confined to this country, while we have not joined with millions of concerned Negro and white citizens, in an all-out challenge to this imperialist racism. Such men as Robeson, Du Bois and Howard Fast—also denied the right to travel—are by any and all national standards of achievement distinguished Americans, who belong to all humanity.

A few routine improvements here and there by our Party on this question are insufficient for the challenge of the New Era. We need a sweeping new dramatization of our Party's changes and reforms on this question.

If our Party cannot straighten out itself on the Negro question—which, in our country, is the very heart of the struggle for democracy—and if our Party cannot arrest certain disintegrating trends in our Party on this question, then it will founder on every thing else. If all the fundamental, and even sweeping, changes are not in the direction of re-establishing the Communist Party as a militant, fighting organization—with a clear and correct outlook on this question—then these changes are not going to strengthen the Party nor the struggle for the integration of the Negro people on the basis of full, immediate, first-class citizenship. Nor will such changes strengthen the working-class, socialist perspective

of our Party as a whole.

This causes me to have very serious doubts about the thesis advanced in the article of Comrade Gates. And I feel that Comrade Gates, as my white comrade, should be even sharper on this question than I. Otherwise, the Negro question has lost its distinctive special and national aspects in our country. With nationalism seething all over the world, and with the cause of freedom and a higher social order moving forward under its banner, it seems to me that Comrade Gates' article does not place this question centrally, and further, profoundly underestimates it. We must not be so quick to label large numbers of our staunchest and most experienced Negro cadres as "die-hard Left sectarians"; but should judge them in terms of this new nationalism, the brand under which all formerly oppressed peoples are insisting upon and realizing their just aspirations for human dignity and equality. Just as there is a spirit of Bandung, there is a spirit of Montgomery!

The world focus of the national and colonial liberation movements today is in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. The contributions of the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and others were enormous and historically unprecedented in connection with the brutal imperialist aggression against Egypt. The tragedy of it all is that the terrible events in Hungary—and the colossal slowness of the Soviet Marxists and the crimes of the Rakosi-Gero regime

involved in these events—greatly deformed and obscured the massive role of the socialist states in assisting the national and colonial liberation movements.

This makes vastly more difficult but no less necessary, the responsibility of American Marxists to bring to our nation the far-reaching significance of these events for our own working class and people. These difficulties will, in my judgment, prove to be transient.

All of this should sharpen, not lessen, our sensitivity to Montgomery and to the anxieties of Negro members concerning the direction of our Party. At the same time, our Party has a unique task in helping the Negro people in finding and marching along their own American path to full and immediate citizenship in the South and over the country.

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The *Daily Worker* has been making commendable efforts with boldness and initiative to adjust to the new era. Naturally, in the effort to adjust, the *Daily* as well as our Party will make mistakes, one way or another. The going is rough. At the same time, this attempt must, in my opinion, take in consideration the condition and thinking of our Party membership. Mistakes must not become so fundamental that they challenge the most basic principles of our science and our role, in helping the working class, Negro people and the mass of Americans in realizing the fruits of this new era against the bitter and treacherous

opposition of our own ruling class.

On some matters, like the Hungarian situation and the Mid-Eastern events, the *Daily Worker's* outlook in my opinion proved seriously incorrect. For several months in the *Daily Worker* there has appeared no positive discussion of the world socialist system nor of the achievements of Socialism in the Soviet Union, China and the People's Democracies. One-sided positions have been taken which leave doubt as to who the real enemy of peace, progress and national liberation is—world imperialism led by the Wall Street monopolies or the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. I certainly don't agree that this is the case, but do not exclude even this from legitimate debate. For then we can better define the difference between necessary criticism of the Soviet and other Marxists—which at times needs to be very sharp—and changing our whole basic attitude toward the role and meaning of the Soviet Union. To me, basic change in a long held orientation of our Party should be accomplished by the Party as a whole operating as a convention. That is the essence of inner-Party democracy.

Comrade Gates' article ought to be thoroughly debated in our Party, in the fullest freedom. I believe that the best interest of the Party lies in the rejection of those views, on such essentials as the character of our Party and the meaning and definition of our science. Moreover, I consider that Comrade Gates' outlook and its implementation in the

columns of the *Daily Worker*, and the manner of that implementation is one of the sources of the political disorientation among our members. In implementing those views too little care is taken for the condition and unity of our Party, and too little consideration for the prerogatives of the convention for making fundamental changes of policy, theory and orientation of the Party.

The resolution is correct in rejecting liquidationism, in specifically opposing the idea of changing to a Political Action Association at this time. Its weakness is that it fails to give any arguments on this question, underestimates its fundamental importance and approaches the question as if in a vacuum apart from developments in life and in the Party, and divorced from the fact that there is not a word in the resolution about building the Party.

I strongly oppose any change in the name and form of our Party at the forthcoming convention, although I don't regard either as a question of principle. I support fundamental changes, within the framework of our present name and form, designed to strengthen our ties with Negro and white masses and enhance our scientific principles and which will firmly establish our organization as a fighting independent American Communist Party. Many of these basic changes can be established at the convention, others need the verdict of experience.

The self-corrective process our Party is now engaged in will, I trust, not be an over-simplified one-shot

affair, but in the future will be a way of struggle for American Marxists. That in the long run will prove to be the most valuable of all the lessons we learn from this painful period—namely, the continuous interpretation and application of our Marxist-Leninist science in a creative and fully American way.

The resolution, I think, was correct in recommending no change to a Political Action Association. Comrade Gates, who supported the resolution without reservations, has seen fit to depart from the resolution on this score. That is his right, and that of everyone else—everything in the resolution is up for debate. At the same time, Comrade Gates' article has invested this question of the proposed political action association with a content, from which I most strongly disassociate myself. This fact makes it difficult indeed to discuss this question on its merits. But even on its merits, I oppose it. Among other reasons, it looks backward, not forward. The previous experience of our Party with an association, during the leadership of Browder, tainted our Party's record with a major retreat on the fight for Negro rights, about which our Party has not yet fully allayed non-Party as well as Party, fears. Nor do I disassociate the association form of the organization adopted under Browder, from the anti-Marxist content of Browder's outlook, its surrender of the class struggle to reliance on the liberal capitalists.

It seems to me further that the whole history of our country re-em-

phasizes the Party form of organization; and recent developments point the labor movement and its allies to the necessity of political action which is inseparable from the Party form of organization. I do not think our Party is today that organization, but I do not think our Party should haul down the banner of governmental power now of all moments, when others are hoisting it. The electoral front is more important today, not less. I think our Party as a Party has a tremendous role to play in helping to bring about, through struggle and experience, an eventual mass united Party of Socialism in our country. It is utterly utopian to think that our Party at the present time, by a simple reshuffling of personnel and the addition of a few individuals, here and there, can solve the oppressive problem of legality or can, by itself, bring a new united Party into existence. We should do everything possible to establish conditions and relationships which will facilitate such a united Party of Socialism as early as circumstances permit.

Otherwise, we shall end up with no Party at all in the interim period while such conditions are maturing. The attitude will have been cultivated in and outside our Party that our present party is worthless. The membership will tend to disperse and the working class, Negro people and others will have been left without any conscious instrument whatsoever in the quest for peace, and social progress. We will have entered into liquidation by the back

door, instead of the front labeled entrance—but liquidation just the same.

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I certainly do not share the view apparently entertained by many that we need an association or some other fish-nor-fowl form of organization because the Communist Party has committed so many "crimes" and idiocies—and that the whole world Marxist movement is discredited. How, then, will the change of name or form re-establish such credit? Political content is the principal question and that must be established not only by internal changes in our Party arbitrarily instituted, but by winning our spurs in struggles and leadership in cooperation with the movements of labor and the people today, in helping to chart and inspire mass confidence in the potentialities of this new era. I must say, however, the view that our Party is hopeless and worthless—and ought to be gotten rid of—has been the inexorable logic of well-entrenched opinions which viewed our Party's past as an unbroken series of blunders. I'm not saying such an approach either as an example of self-criticism, or as an exhibition of native Americanism. I do not know of any American who is a member of even a Rotary Club or a Chamber of Commerce or any other organization, who would self-abasingly and hysterically proclaim

that his organization has made no contribution to the community. That is not a characteristic of Americans as I know them. Spirit and morale is a native ingredient of all American organizations; and struggle is the life-blood of the organizations of labor and the Negro people as never before.

It is upon these dynamic American traditions our Party should build.

This very discussion in our Party is unique. No other organization as large as ours, and as vital as ours, has its entire membership engaged in such a free and untrammelled debate in an effort to find our own national path to socialism. Such an organization is not to be handled lightly. Each of its members and leaders are of essential importance in contributing to the pool of our thought, in participating in this inquiry. The present debate will advance this inquiry. Despite sharp clashes of opinion, I am confident this will be done without vindictiveness and recrimination, but with generosity and comradeship.

This convention, I submit, should preserve our Party, as an independent American Party firmly based on the science of Marxism-Leninism, applied to our own country's national customs, fully equipped with a fighting spirit and program to meet the challenge of opportunities and struggles facing labor and the American people—Negro and white.