

# On the 12-Party Declaration

By Robert Thompson

*In our December issue, we published the complete text of the Declaration adopted by representatives of Communist and Workers Parties in twelve Socialist countries, at a meeting held in Moscow, November 14-16, 1957. In our January issue appeared a Statement on this Declaration adopted December 22 by a majority vote (11 to 7; 2 absences; 2 absences) of the National Executive Committee, CPUSA. On December 23, 1957, Comrade Bob Thompson, one of the seven opposed to the majority Statement, presented a report indicating the way in which he viewed the Declaration of the Twelve Parties. This report by Bob Thompson is printed in full below—Ed.*

I am not of the opinion that there are any members of this National Executive Committee who need to be told by another member that we are dealing with very important events when we discuss the conference of the twelve leading parties of the Socialist world, exclusive of Yugoslavia, the sixty-four Party Conference and Peace Manifesto. In light of yesterday's discussion, it is clear, however, that at least initially we will have important differences in evaluating their importance for the American people and our Party.

In this connection, I would like to say at the outset that I have no illusions that my remarks represent in any way a definitive Party interpretation of these events. I should like them to be regarded for what they are: an introduction to the discussion, and in some measure, my contribution to its collective outcome.

Now, in introducing a similar discussion in the New York State Committee, I chose as my jumping off point the meaning of these events from the standpoint of the fight for peace. In view of yesterday's discussion, I would like to choose a somewhat different—but I think equally valid starting point—namely, the meaning of these events from the point of view of the competitive struggle between Socialism and Capitalism, which of course includes very centrally the struggle for peaceful co-existence.

This is a day when the competitive struggle between Capitalism and Socialism often finds expression in the form of dramatic contrasts. Sputnik Number One and Two go up, Flopnik Number One stays down. Through this contrast, a whole people almost overnight gain a new understanding of the relative achievements of Socialism and Capitalism in

science, education and technology.

A similar, although of course much more complex contrast is unfolding in the field of political relationships and politics.

In Moscow, we have a conference of the twelve leading Parties of the Socialist world, and they publish a basic policy Declaration. We have a conference of the sixty-four Communist Parties, and they publish a Peace Manifesto. In Paris, the leading imperialist powers meet, and with a great deal of fanfare publish their decisions to the world.

One event represents the face and the policies of Socialism. The other event represents the face and the policies of imperialism.

In one is mirrored the political relationships existing among Socialist nations and Communist Parties; in the other is mirrored the political relationships existing among imperialist nations and Parties.

One presents to the world the example of the Socialist way of life, a Socialist program and a policy of struggle for peaceful co-existence. The other presents an imperialist solution and a war solution to the problems of the world.

No force in American political life seriously interested in affecting the attitude of the American people towards Socialism—or towards Capitalism—can fail to deal publicly with these events and these contrasts. This is so because in these events and contrasts is the meaning of Socialism and Capitalism, their

meaning not so much as set forth in Webster's dictionary, but what they mean in terms of the political consciousness of living. Socialism and Capitalism are not abstractions—Socialism hasn't been an abstraction for forty years, and for all these forty years, the attitude of the American people towards Socialism has been shaped in the main not by the *idea* of Socialism but by the *reality* of Socialism. It has been shaped in the main by their understanding of the Soviet Union, of the way people live in the Soviet Union, by the actions of the Soviet Union as these actions affect big issues such as war and peace, in which the American people have a stake. For forty years in American political life it has been impossible to be a partisan of Socialism without being a partisan of Socialist reality as it exists on this planet. The Trotskyists, the Socialist Party and Socialist Labor Party are testimonials to this elementary political truth.

It is true that this is a changed and changing world. I'll quarrel with nobody that stands or even sits on this proposition. I will argue only on the question of the nature and the meaning of these changes. What is the nature of the change? What is the change in Socialist reality which is affecting the thinking and the outlook of the American people toward Socialism? Socialist reality is no longer a single country emerging out of a morass of economic and cultural backwardness,

but is today a whole system of Socialist states, encompassing one-third of mankind, the foremost of which, the Soviet Union, has achieved an advanced level of economy and a very rich Socialist culture and political life.

What we are witnessing here is a stage in the competitive struggle between Socialism and Capitalism in which certain new qualitative elements are entering into the picture. The hallmark of this new situation is that the superiority of Socialism over Capitalism is now finding expression in forms that large numbers of people can much more readily understand in terms of their own living standards, their own life experiences and their own current concepts.

Now, a development of this magnitude has had to be and is taken into account by the chief ideologists and spokesmen of the ruling circles. There is not one of the main spokesmen—Nixon, Sulzberger, or Lippmann or any of the others, who does not concede that the Soviet Union is a giant in the fields of production, science and technology. They insist on only one thing, and that is that the Soviet Union and the system of Socialist states be portrayed to the American people as a political monster and as a war threat. The peddling of this political caricature of the Soviet Union has the same central importance in the war plans and war preparations of American imperialism today as the peddling of

the myth of Soviet economic and military weakness had in the war plans of German imperialism during the thirties. The test of an advanced worker, and above all, of a Communist in this period does not lie in the saying of a few good things—in a sort of eclectic fashion—about the Soviet Union or other Socialist nations, on occasion. A lot of people do that. The test of an advanced worker and a Communist is the challenging head-on of the political misrepresentations, the political big lie about the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries—the challenging of the lie that they represent an inferior political system, an inferior democracy, a threat to peace.

How does all this square with the fervent desires expressed by some Comrades in yesterday's discussion that we should become a "respectable" force in American political life? Respectability is one of those funny words that can mean all things to all men. Everything hinges on the question of respectable to whom and for what.

Long, long ago Norman Thomas and a few other gentlemen did some pioneering work in this field of respectability. They discovered how to wear Socialist clothing and at the same time be tolerated darlings of Wall Street. The formula they developed is very simple and what is more—it has worked. Proclaim that you are for the ideas and ideals of Socialism out of one corner of your mouth; out of the other corner

slander the Soviet Union and in doing so make Socialism unpalatable to the American people. For forty years these gentlemen have lived comfortable lives—or, if you will, “respectable” lives—on the basis of the simple formula of simultaneously praising Marx and damning the Soviet Union. Of course with the passing of time the praising of Marx sort of dropped by the way-side.

Now it seems we have the phenomena of Johnny-come-lately in our ranks. They too are delving into the problem of respectability. They, too, are making great discoveries. It is not so hard to become buddy-buddies with Harry Schwartz; it is not so hard to win respectful treatment in the editorial columns of the *Times* and *Post*. All we need do is tread the well beaten path blazed forty years ago by the Norman Thomases. Adopt as your own the formula that the Soviet Union should be criticized when you can—and damned with faint praise when you must. Echo in some measure the main line of political slander of the ruling class against the Soviet Union and the nations of the Socialist camp and the *Times* will gladly put its stamp of respectability on your back-side.

We need this kind of respectability like we need a hole in the head. It is a sure-fire formula for making our Party as isolated and impotent a force in working-class affairs as Norman Thomas has been these past

forty years. The real meaning of this non-partisan, stand-offish, hypocritical attitude toward Socialist reality in the Soviet Union and elsewhere is the abandonment of all serious effort to promote Socialist consciousness in the working class of our country.

The 16th National Convention of our Party was correct when it said: “Socialism is strengthened, not weakened, by the fraternal criticism of Marxists of many lands.” Fraternal Marxist criticism on occasion and when circumstances demand it is one thing. A drum-fire of criticism with the aim at disassociation from the world Socialist current is quite another thing. The first marks an advance in the understanding of our Party in the practice of working-class internationalism. The second marks a break with our proud tradition of international working-class solidarity and if not rejected will irreparably harm the cause of Socialism and the fight for peace in our country.

The Twelve Party Declaration defines the meaning of working-class internationalism in this period in the following way: “Today the vital interests of working people of all countries call for their support of the Soviet Union and all the Socialist countries who, pursuing a policy of preserving peace throughout the world, are the mainstay of peace and social progress.” This basic proposition in the Document has the same importance for the Amer-

ican working-class and people as it does for the people of any other country. That is why the Document defines the main content of our epoch as being the transition from Capitalism to Socialism and states further that in this epoch world development is determined by the course and result of the competition of two diametrically opposed social systems.

Now, I said that no serious force in American political life interested in affecting the attitude and thinking of the American people in relation to Socialism or Capitalism could fail to speak out and act publicly on the American political scene in relation to developments such as the Twelve-Party Declaration and the Sixty-Four Party Peace Manifesto. And very few serious forces in American life have failed to act. Within three days after these events, Nixon gave his official ruling-class interpretation of these developments to the American people. Sulzberger has given his interpretation; Lippmann has given his; so has Max Lerner, as well as a host of editorial writers throughout the whole of the capitalist press. The Trotskyites and the Socialist Labor Party have given their interpretations. But the leadership of one Party has not spoken out in relation to these developments—that's the leadership of our Party. It has remained mute.

Now, muteness, of course, is a political position, but I leave it to the comrades that have imposed this

position on the leadership of our Party to defend its merits before our Party.

What is the reason for the silence of our Party as a Party—the leadership of our Party as a leadership—in relation to these developments? Well, a lot of reasons have been given. The reason has been given that it's a matter of procedure within our Party. Well, I don't want to brush aside the considerations of proper procedure within our Party. If it is true that the National Administrative Committee has been explicitly denied the right by a higher committee of the Party, such as the National Executive Committee, to speak out in relation to events of this kind, publicly, as political leaders—as a political body—well, that's a fact, if it's so—and the only thing that I can say about it is that I think that should be changed, and changed very quickly.\* You can not have a political Party that acts as a political Party, and plays a role as a political Party in America without that Party having a leadership that can act as a daily political leadership in relation to developments of this kind. But I don't think that the main rea-

\* The author here has reference to the fact that the National Administrative Committee, on December 3, 1957, sent a letter to all members of the National Committee positively assessing the 12-Party Declaration and recommending "that all party members and party organizations be encouraged to discuss and analyze the views embodied in the Declaration and to forward their opinions." This letter was adopted by the NAC, 4-3; voting for: Davis, Dennis, Jackson, Lumer; opposed: Fine, Gates, Stein. Subsequently, as already pointed out, the National Executive Committee, by majority vote, adopted a differing statement on this Declaration, published in our January issue.—Ed.

son why our Party has not reacted to this development lies in any reasons of technique, or proper procedures. I think that the main reason for this lies in the fact that, as a leadership, we do not as yet have a clearly defined position towards developments in the Socialist world. I think that our problem is that we have a considerable section of our leadership which interprets the 16th National Convention to mean that our Party is free to speak out whenever there is something negative in the Soviet Union or in any of the other Socialist countries that can be properly criticized, but that this does not provide the basis for our Party properly speaking out, and seizing on and utilizing the enormous positive developments in the Socialist world.

I think that one of the most important problems that is posed before our Party for definite settlement by these positive and very big developments such as the Twelve Party Conference and the Sixty Four Party Conference is the defining, on the basis of our 16th National Convention, of an attitude that enables our Party to properly utilize in its work such developments. I think that we should do that on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist approach which is set forth in this Twelve Party Declaration towards the problems of working-class internationalism in this period.

Now I think that there are some comrades who may perhaps say that

there is a contradiction in this. I don't think that there is any such contradiction. I don't think that there is any such contradiction because, in my opinion, generally, the Resolution of our 16th Convention laid a correct basis for our Party's work in relation to this problem of fighting in this period for working-class internationalism. And I would like to read the entire section of our Resolution dealing with this problem:

The Soviet Union, People's China and the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe are Socialist countries. The system of capitalist exploitation has together with this, the cause of poverty been abolished in these countries, and together with this, the cause of poverty, fascism, war, national oppression and race discrimination. From the beginning, the Communist Party has greeted and supported the efforts of the working people of these countries to build a new life for themselves on Socialist foundations. Big business tries to vilify these countries, to slander and defame them, to incite hostility against them. In the interests of the American people, the Communist Party is concerned with nailing these lies and exposing these slanders. The attitude of the Communist Party to these countries reflects its devotion to the great principle of working-class internationalism, which has deep roots in our country's history. This tradition of international solidarity is a proud one. The Communist Party continues it and considers it a badge of honor. At the

same time, the Communist Party recognizes that, over the years, it held certain wrong and over-simplified concepts of what its relation should be to other Marxist Parties. The Party tended to accept uncritically many views of Marxists of 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.

And further, it says, "Socialism is strengthened, not weakened, by the fraternal and constructive criticism of Marxists of many lands." I think that is a sound basis for the work of our Party; it does not justify a negative and essentially hostile attitude towards Socialism in the world. On the contrary it lays the basis for a positive attitude towards developments in the socialist nations.

Now, I want to say a few words about certain other aspects of the general significance of the Twelve Party Conference and Declaration and the Sixty-Four Party Conference and Peace Manifesto. The large meaning of these events for the course of future world developments arises primarily from the fact that they testify to the establishment of

a new, advanced unity in the socialist camp and world communist movement. They mark the overcoming of the very difficult problems and sharp dissension within the Socialist camp that more than once during these past few years has made it vulnerable to imperialist attack. This unity, the new advanced unity established in the Socialist camp, and among the Communist Parties, is of a special quality, a quality quite different from the unity that imperialist circles find it possible to arrive at in a given moment. It is a unity solidly based on the bedrock of identity of interests of the nations and peoples of the Socialist world and of the working class of all countries.

It is a unity that is not based on the reconciling and compromising of conflicting tendencies in Communist ranks. It is a unity that grows out of a period of sharp ideological debate and struggle, in which powerful tendencies of a revisionist character, constituting the main danger in the world Communist movement, were isolated and defeated. Also, powerful tendencies of a dogmatist character were isolated and defeated. The unity that is represented in the Twelve Party Statement, and in the Peace Manifesto, is a unity that is based on the defeat of these tendencies, and not on the reconciling of them. This in itself contains a very important example and lesson for Communists everywhere, including in our country.

The idea has been expressed by Comrade Gates in some of our initial discussion that the Twelve Party Declaration marks a departure from the policy line adopted at the Twentieth Congress—that it marks a step backward in relation to the policies adopted at the Twentieth Congress. Reality is the exact opposite of this. The Policy Declaration is firmly based on the main line of the Twentieth Congress, on the main political estimates and theoretical concepts of the Twentieth Congress. In certain important respects, it advances this line and these concepts on the basis of the experience of the last two years—the big advance of the Soviet Union, of China, the great experiences of the national liberation movements in this period throughout the world, and the diverse and rich experience of all the participating parties in this period. The Policy Declaration does not in any way represent a departure from the Twentieth Congress, but it does lay a very firm basis in Communist ranks for putting a stop to some very free-wheeling interpretations of the meaning of the Twentieth Congress and of its decisions.

Now a few words with respect to a number of the political estimates and theoretical propositions set forth in the Declaration. Certainly our Party is not called on to endorse the Twelve Party Declaration, and it should not so endorse as its own that Declaration. But our Party certainly should adopt a clear-cut at-

titude towards these historic developments and vigorously explain to the American people their great significance in furthering the fight for peace and social progress. Furthermore, we should, as a Party leadership, formulate an evaluation of the main political estimates and the main theoretical concepts that are contained in this Declaration. We should do so with no misconception that this in some way substitutes for the political and theoretical initiative that must be displayed by American Marxists in relation to the problems that we confront in this country and the shaping of our own basic Party program of an American path towards Socialism. It does not in any way substitute for this task confronting us as a Party. But what it will do, in my opinion, is help provide us with a sharpened understanding of the main content of our theory, which must be the basis of our approach and of our program.

I would like to just indicate for the purpose of our discussion some of the important questions that I think should find a place in our thinking. I'd like to first call the attention of all the comrades to the estimate of the world situation contained in the Declaration, to the very profound analysis that the Declaration makes of the accelerating process of disintegration of the imperialist system, of the increasing and sharpening contradictions within the capitalist system, of the clear perspective that



is set forth there of mounting class and people's struggles. We can agree or disagree with the correctness of this estimate of the world situation as set forth in this document,, but I think that we must recognize that there is no picture of a world imperialist system approaching a point where it will gain a new lease on life through a process of collaboration with the Socialist sectors of the world. There is no picture here of a new era opening up for imperialism.

I think that we should pay attention to the manner in which the Document, and the Peace Manifesto as well, estimates the prospects of the growing struggle of all peace forces imposing a prolonged period of peaceful co-existence on the imperialists. Within this context, it deals with the war danger not as something that belongs to a past period but as a war danger that is real and grave. However, war can be averted—given a heightened unity and activity of the peace forces.

I think that we should give attention to the central way in which the Declaration deals with the role of the national freedom and independence movements, and their meaning from the point of view of advancing the entire fight for peace and Socialism. We should note, I think, that the manner in which this is dealt with in the Declaration has an important meaning for our evaluation of the somewhat similar role in relation to the general problems

of the working class in this country that is being played by the unfolding struggle for integration and the development of the Negro people's movement in our country.

I think that the elaboration beyond that done by the Twentieth Congress of the possibilities and forms of a constitutional, non-civil war path to power by the working class in a number of countries also provides us with additional and very important theoretical assistance in the further elaboration of this same concept for our country that we began in 1949.

Further, I think that a very important place in our discussion should be occupied by the manner in which the Declaration sets forth that which is universal in the science of Marxism-Leninism, while at the same time giving due weight to the importance of national peculiarities. With respect to the universal aspects of Marxism-Leninism, the propositions that are universally valid, I would like to say a word with respect to one, and that is the question of proletarian dictatorship. Claude [Comrade Lightfoot], in the discussion yesterday, posed the question of whether a discussion of this makes a person a revisionist. I think that any such attitude would be just plain stupid on our part. Of course, we should discuss this concept and any other concept in our leadership. I know that in the State Committee in New York there were some very

stimulating discussions by George Watt, Blumberg and Blake and several other comrades with respect to the proposition that this question inevitably must be regarded in a somewhat different light by virtue of the fact that we are speaking of a transition in a different period. We are speaking of the possibility of the assumption of state power by the working class not by violent revolution and civil war, but due to the transforming of parliaments and other such bodies. We are speaking here of an assumption of power that involves not the violent smashing so to speak, of the bourgeois state apparatus and its complete destruction, but its being taken over and transformed by the working class from an organ of bourgeois power to an organ of working-class power. Now I think that there is much that is new and interesting in this general concept, but I think the comrades are wrong when they think that this in some way throws into question the validity and necessity of a state in which the working class is the dominant, ruling force, which is the essence, of course, of proletarian dictatorship. This has to do with the form in which the working class assumes this position of the leading force in the state. However it does not in any way, in my opinion, throw into question the necessity of any transition from capitalism to social-

ism being carried out under the leadership of the working class occupying a position of state power. I consider this, or any other question, a legitimate question for discussion and debate without any atmosphere of revisionist labels in the leadership of our Party. I think that we should also, in relation to this and other questions, give careful attention to the way in which the document lays stress on the fact that creative Marxism demands equally a recognition of both that which is new in any given period, and that which is fully valid from the past. Neither one without the other constitutes Marxism.

With respect to the manner in which the Declaration places the question of estimating the dangers of revisionism and dogmatism, well, that was the subject of our discussion yesterday, and I don't want to repeat it now. But I think that the placing of the question in the way that it is done, the necessity of concretely defining both the dogmatist and revisionist trends, and the placing of the necessity of the simultaneous, two-front struggle against these trends, while evaluating revisionism in this period as the main danger in the international working class movement, also represents—and will represent for our entire Party—a very helpful framework within which to approach the problems that confront us here.