

AMERICA *and the* TACTICS of the COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

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THE last plenary session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International initiated many important changes in the tactics of the Comintern. The British, French, and Chinese problems, the question of Russian and international Trotskyism and the trade union question, in connection with preparations for the World Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions, were in the forefront of the discussions of the Ninth Plenum.

The analysis of the Chinese situation and the policies of the Communist Party of China were considered in general on the same basis as outlined in my article, "After the Canton Uprising" (March issue of *The Communist*).

The Comintern considered the problems of the most important European countries in their concrete manifestations, and tried to meet the issues of each individual country in the most concrete, realistic way. At the same time we have to state that, on the whole, the policies of the Comintern showed a marked general tendency to the left—as expressed in the resolutions of the last plenum—a marked tendency to sharpen the tactics of the Communist parties of Europe.

In Great Britain an abrupt turn against the Labor Party on the whole front; in France the sharpest struggle possible not only against the petty-bourgeois left bloc but also against the Socialist Party; in Germany the intensification of the fight against the Social-Democratic Party and trade-union leadership; relentless struggle against Russian and international Trotskyism, not as an ultra-left tendency but as a right-wing Social Democratic deviation; a general sharpening of Communist tactics on the trade union field; not so much united front on the top, but all emphasis on the united front from below with the masses; not so much driving the trade-union leadership to lead the economic struggles of the workers, but rather a strike strategy by which the Communists seek to gain leadership in all economic movements and strikes of the organized workers; continuation of Communist activities in the existing trade unions, but at the same time in a whole series of countries the main emphasis on the broadest masses of unorganized workers; penetration of the old trade unions, but at the same time organization of new unions—these are the most important changes in the policies of

the Communist International in 1928. To sum up briefly: the Ninth Plenum of the Comintern represents a general turn to the left in the European tactics of the Communist International.

WHAT THE LEFT TURN MEANS

Two questions arise for us American Communists in connection with the last plenum of the Communist International:

1. Is the general turn to the left in the policies of the Communist International justified by objective conditions in Europe?
2. Does that left turn in Europe mean necessarily a sharp turn to the left on the part of the Communist Party of America?

The years 1928 and 1929 will be years of general elections in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States of America. What will be the tactics of the Communist International in the coming elections in Germany, France, and Great Britain? The Communist International will emphasize the independent role of the Communist parties in these countries, will emphasize the necessity of drawing a clear-cut dividing line between the Communist parties on the one hand and all other parties—capitalist as well as Social-Democratic or Labor parties—on the other hand. The tactics of the Comintern will be against any bloc of the Communist parties of Germany, France, and Great Britain with the Social Democratic or Labor Parties of these countries.

Up until now the Communist Party of Great Britain supported the Labor Party in its election campaigns. Of course, it was always a qualified support. The British Communists supported the Labor Party candidates as "the rope supports the hanged man."

In France, likewise, the practice of the Communist Party was to try to form a united front not only with the rank and file of the Socialist Party but also with its leaders; and there were situations in which our Party even went so far as to support the candidates of the Socialist Party and of the petty-bourgeois left bloc against the right wing of the bourgeoisie around Poincaré.

In Germany in the last presidential elections, in which the issue "monarchy vs. republic" played a big role, the policy of the Comintern was to try to form a bloc with the Social Democrats and trade unions to put up a working-class candidate against Hindenburg. The Communist Party of Germany itself (then under the ultra-left leadership of Ruth Fischer and Maslov) followed a different policy, and became in many respects isolated from the masses of the working class, due to the fact that it appeared as the disrupter of the forces of the working-class united front. It was even dubbed a helper of Hindenburg and his monarchist followers.

A NEW WORLD SITUATION

In 1928 there will be a complete break with these former policies, and the Communist parties of France, Germany, and Great Britain will not make any election alliances with the Social Democrats, with the Labor Party, and even less with any petty-bourgeois left bloc. Why? What are the reasons for this change? What were the factors in the situation which necessitated such a change in our policies? It is necessary to enumerate at least the most important of these factors:

1. Capitalism is on the down-grade in Europe. The crisis in European imperialism is especially acute in Great Britain.

2. A growing tendency towards State Capitalism is in evidence in a whole series of important countries.

3. The war danger is growing, and an increased tension is manifest in all foreign relations due to the ever greater competition for markets.

4. The general trend of the European working class is to the left. The workers of Great Britain, robbed of all their privileges of the previous period, are suffering from unemployment and general insecurity of living conditions, and have learned much from their experiences in the General Strike, the Miners' Strike, etc. The working class of Germany went through a whole series of economic crises and unemployment periods; and now after a brief period of capitalist prosperity, is again experiencing a new, sudden wave of unemployment. The French working class has been suffering all the tortures of inflation and deflation. There is a growing discontent developing among the masses throughout Europe. At the same time the whole leadership of the European Social Democratic parties, as well as of the Labor Party, is showing a marked tendency to go further to the right. There was never a more treacherous period in the whole history of reformist leadership than at the present time in Europe.

5. The working class of Europe has had a great deal of experience during the last few years with all kinds of Social-Democratic, petty-bourgeois left bloc, and Labor Party governments. All of these governments without exception betrayed the working class, did not accomplish anything towards improving the material conditions of the masses, in every respect served the interests of the bourgeoisie, were unable to relieve the tension in the international situation, and continued the imperialist policies of the capitalists against disarmament and for economic and military competition.

6. The Social-Democrats in France and Germany, as well as the heroes of the Labor Party in Great Britain, are promising the

workers "left-wing" victories in 1928 and 1929. They are bragging already that 1928 will be a "left year." They are trying to create the illusion that in France the elections will again sweep into power the petty-bourgeois left bloc, which will form an alliance with the Social-Democrats. In Germany they forecast the defeat of the present bourgeois coalition and the victory of the Social-Democratic and so-called democratic-bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties. The whole policy of the British Labor Party consists today in promising the victory of the Labor Party in the next general elections and the cleaning-out of the Baldwin Government through parliamentary means. There are possibilities of a new "lib-lab" situation, of a McDonald-Lloyd George coalition movement, as the outcome of the next elections.

In earlier situations it was necessary that the Communists should "support" the Social-Democrats in Germany, the Socialists in France, and the Labor Party in Great Britain in their attempts to get into "power." It was necessary because that was the only way to show the masses—the masses never can learn through propaganda alone but through their experience—that all these heroes of reformism, upon attaining power, do nothing for the working class and betray the interests of the masses in every respect. Today there is no need to repeat that demonstration, because all these Social-Democratic, Socialist, and Labor Party leaders have already been in power once and have unmasked themselves to a great extent in the eyes of the masses.

THE GROWTH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTIES

7. A few years ago in most of the European countries we had only small Communist parties, which did not have the possibilities of reaching broad masses, which were not able to gain the attention of the working class. It was necessary at that time for the Communists, if they wanted any connection with the masses, to appear before the working class as "supporters" of those reformist, Socialist, and labor parties which at the time had the confidence of the workers. Today there is a marked change in this respect. The Communist Party of Germany is already a powerful mass party. In France our Party has become a mass party in the last few years. Even in Great Britain, though the Communist Party is still numerically weak, the Communist Party plus the Minority Movement represents a sufficient mass basis to go forward against the Labor Party on the whole front. The more likelihood there is that there will be a so-called "left year" in Europe, the more important it is for the Communist parties to establish themselves as independent

forces, as the only revolutionary forces, as the only true revolutionary parties of the working class, as the revolutionary opposition to all these future sham working-class governments. The more likelihood there is that there will be a so-called "left year" in Europe, the more necessary it is that the Communist parties should see clearly that their struggle must be directed against two enemies: not only against the parties and governments of the bourgeoisie but also against the parties and governments of the various Social-Democrats and laborites.

LABOR PARTY TACTICS IN AMERICA

Now as to the situation in America: Do the new policies of the Communist International for the European countries mean necessarily the application of the same policies to America? Can we apply in a mechanical way the European policies of the European Communist parties to American conditions? Is it necessary to make a general shift in the policies of the Communist Party of America to the left? In other words, to put the question more concretely, shall we abandon the present Labor Party policy of the Communist Party of America or not?

The only way to give a correct answer to these questions is to analyze the present American situation. If the present American situation is on the whole the same as the present European situation, then certainly there should be no marked difference between the above-outlined European policies and the policies we should follow in America. But if there is a basic difference between European and American conditions at present, then it would be a major mistake to apply thoughtlessly, in a mechanical way, European policies to basically different American conditions.

An analysis shows that conditions in America are basically different from those in Europe. It is not necessary for me to give a detailed analysis of the American situation, because that was given in the last thesis of the Comintern on America and in the careful and detailed analysis of the thesis of the February plenum of the Central Executive Committee of the American Party. Here I shall point out only some of the fundamental differences between the present European and American situations:

1. American capitalism is still on the up-grade as compared with European capitalism.
2. American imperialism is still increasing in power on almost every front of world politics—a striking contrast to the status of British imperialism.

3. The American working class as a whole is in a privileged position compared with the European working class. America has the largest stratum of labor aristocracy. In no other country is there such a gap between the upper stratum of the working class and the true proletarian masses.

4. The American working class has not yet any mass political party of its own; its bulk still adheres to the capitalist parties. The working class of America has not yet reached that stage of class-consciousness and homogeneity which is the prerequisite of constituting itself as an independent political factor.

5. There is no marked tendency of a left trend on a national scale in the American working class.

The five factors enumerated above are fundamental factors of the present American situation. Not to see them would amount to political blindness; to be afraid to face them would amount to political cowardice. If these five factors alone constituted the situation which serves as a basis for all the activities of the Communist Party of America, then we should be compelled to draw very definite conclusions in shaping our policies. Such a situation would greatly restrict the activities of a Communist Party in America. To meet such a situation the main policy of the Communist Party of America would have to be the carrying out of Communist propaganda (at the same time, of course, participating in all activities of the working class wherever possible). To express it boldly: in such a situation the Communist Party of America would be able to exist only as a mere propaganda society. If such were the case, then certainly there would be no place for any Labor Party slogan. We should not forget that the Labor Party policy, as carried out in the years 1922-24, was based on two conditions:

1. The general political backwardness of the American working class. The Labor Party slogan had the function of a bridge between the backward masses and the Communist Party.

2. The general fermentation of the American working class in the war and post-war period, which manifested itself in the big strikes of 1919 and 1922 as well as in the mass Labor Party movements of 1922-1924.

It would be a mistake to think that the political backwardness of the American working class alone served as the basis for our Labor Party policy. It is quite true that the Labor Party slogan would have been useless, if there had been any possibility of getting the masses of the working class directly into the Communist Party; but we should not forget that the Labor Party slogan would have been equally futile, if there had not been already a deep-going fer-

ment in the broad masses of the working class, if these masses had not already begun to orientate themselves away from the capitalist parties. No Labor Party slogan is necessary in those countries in which the bulk of the working class has already left the camp of the capitalist parties. No mass Labor Party organization is possible under conditions in which the confidence of a broad stratum of the masses in capitalist parties has not yet been shaken. In the period of 1925-27 there was an almost general depression in the American labor movement. Therefore, the slogan of the Labor Party remained correct as a *propaganda slogan*, but it could not fulfill its function as a *slogan of action*.

NEW FACTORS IN AMERICA

The five factors listed above do not constitute a complete analysis of the present American situation. In addition to them there are other important factors determining the situation in the United States which create sufficient possibilities for real mass work on a large scale on the part of the Communist Party at the present time. Without trying to analyze them fully, I shall enumerate these additional factors:

1. The aggressive imperialist policies of the United States are creating many complications in world politics, and it is inevitable that these complications will reflect themselves in the internal situation of the country as well. United States imperialism is becoming ever more the dominating factor in Latin America, pushing out Great Britain to a growing extent in the Latin American countries; but the very success of the United States calls for a growing resistance on the part of the Latin American countries against United States imperialism. The increasingly aggressive participation of the United States in world politics makes necessary the building up of an extensive navy and merchant fleet at the expense of the State. The increasing export of capital is creating a tendency to break down the present high wall of "protective" tariff. A lowering of the tariff would have as a necessary sequence the breaking down of the present prohibition of immigration of labor, which would mean taking away the most valuable privilege of the American labor aristocracy. There is already a marked tendency of large strata of workers, farmers, and petty-bourgeois elements to resist imperialist aggressiveness.

2. The first violent stage of the agricultural crisis has been liquidated by the ruining of hundreds of thousands of farmers and the driving of a farm population of one million into the cities, but it would be wrong to say that there is no agricultural crisis in

America today. The basic reason for the agricultural crisis is the existence of the most monopolistic trusts in the world on the one hand and the unorganized, atomized status of the technically backward masses of farmers on the other.

3. The very technical and organizational progress of industries calls for partial crises (textile, shoe, mining, needle trades), which stir up broad strata of workers. The industrialization of the South, which tends to create a new industrial center in the southern part of the United States, spells unemployment, wage cuts, and general insecurity of living for hundreds of thousands of workers in New England. The crisis in the mining industry serves as the basis of a general fomentation among the 800,000 coal miners, bringing about such a radicalization of the workers in the coal mines that it can become the starting point of a general radicalization process of the workers in other basic industries.

4. The present economic depression has already created mass unemployment on a large scale. The unemployed workers are living today on their savings, but these savings cannot last forever, and prolonged unemployment will mean more suffering to the bulk of the unskilled workers here than in any other country due to the lack of any kind of social insurance. Not only the whole industrial life but the private households of millions of workers are based on installment buying, and an industrial crisis and a prolonged period of unemployment would mean not only the stopping of wages but the shaking of the very foundations of each working-class household.

5. The centralization and bureaucratization of the United States Government is making headway all the time. The Government apparatus is in a growing degree and ever more frankly becoming merged with the apparatus of finance capital and big business. Every strike movement tends to bring home to the workers the strike-breaking role of the Government, which uses its full power (and that power is today the most powerful State apparatus in the world) to crush the simplest, most modest and insignificant strike movements of all categories of workers. Manifest tendencies of a special type of State Capitalism manifest themselves in America to an increased extent.

The five decisive factors just enumerated represent tendencies which counteract the first five factors analyzed. If we attempt to summarize the effect of all these above-analyzed tendencies and counter-tendencies of the situation in the United States, we must come to the following conclusions: On the one hand, there is no need to push the Communist Party back into a mere propaganda

stage, because there is a sufficiently broad basis for immediate mass work of a revolutionary working-class political party. On the other hand, there does not exist such a marked general trend to the left on a national scale in the working class which would create the immediate possibility of getting really large strata of the working class directly into the Communist Party.

We are now going through a period of transition. The Labor Party slogan will, in all likelihood, not be transformed into a slogan of action in 1928, but it certainly will play a central rôle as a propaganda slogan this year, and it has prospects of fulfilling the functions of a slogan of action in the not far distant future. At present we have a period of transition. On the one hand, our analysis cannot be based only on the fact of imperialist prosperity in America; on the other hand, we cannot yet speak of any general left trend of the working class. In this period of transition the Labor Party will play all the more important a role, because there are no signs now of the setting up of a petty-bourgeois third party as we had in the form of the LaFollette movement in 1924, and because it becomes more and more clear that a Labor Party in America can be built only against the opposition of the American Federation of Labor and Socialist Party leadership. There is no need to revise the policies of the Comintern or the Communist Party of America on the Labor Party. The only political issue of the ruling Republican Party today is "Prosperity." Economic life as it exists—not in the propaganda sheets of the capitalists but in reality—has already replaced prosperity by depression. If the present depression is deepened into a prolonged crisis, it will mean the creation of a broad mass basis for a Labor Party, a Labor Party behind which the Communist Party will be the driving and organizing force.