

SHORTCOMINGS IN STRUGGLE AGAINST RIGHT DANGER

By SAM DARCY.

A SINCERE and united struggle against opportunist tendencies in our Party began over one year ago. To date we have made considerable advances in that struggle. But the shortcomings in this phase of our work were and still are so great that they have prevented a decisive defeat of "right" tendencies. At this moment, not in our trade union work alone, but in many fields of our activities, opportunist approach, methods of work, etc., characterize the activities of our Party organs.

This situation demands of the Party as a whole, and of the Party leadership especially, a careful examination of its fight against opportunism and such correction as is necessary to make more effective the work of Bolshevization.

The Roots of Opportunism.

We must put the question: In the right danger simply the problem of a few leaders who have developed bureaucratic tendencies and the "conservatism of officials," or is it the failure to win large sections of our Party to the correct line which flows from the Comintern analysis of the present historic moment?

Were it simply the problem of a few individual leaders, as some comrades claim, it would be a comparatively easy task to defeat the "right." But when opportunist tendencies are militantly defended by whole or large sections of Party fractions (as is the case in the shoe, needle, printing, building industries, etc.), or when defeatist analysis and consequent opportunist tactics are proposed in many Party units, then we must beware of the superficial answer that merely a few leaders in mass organizations have developed "office conservatism" or bureaucratic hesitancy and thus created "right" tendencies.

For Example—The Shoe Workers' Situation.

The fact is clear that we have not yet won the entire Party membership to a complete understanding of our Party line and the consequences in the new tactics, new methods, etc., which must be adopted in order to carry through that line. Let us take for example the situation which developed during the shoe workers strike: The comrades there developed the theory that the situation became difficult for them because the union grew too fast. This rapid growth, according to certain comrades, provoked the attack of the bosses and the Department of Labor. Had we moved slowly, we could have avoided or at least have lessened the attack. Out of this theory there naturally followed an open and hidden resistance to the main points of strategy in the Party line; the rapid spread of the strike, concentration on big Board of Trade shops, the demand for the 40 hour week, connection with the general political struggles, etc. Against the Party line the comrades attempted to win a few shops at a time, not to call out others until the few that were already out were settled, to make demands which the bosses "were in a position to grant and which," according to them, "the workers were willing to fight for," to eliminate every trace of political character in the struggle, etc., etc. The organization of the strike suited these wrong tactics. There were, for example, no broad committees on a united front basis in the shops for more rapid mobilization than was possible with the existing union machinery. This line was followed not merely by a few comrades at the top but was aggressively championed by the entire Party fraction.

What do such errors show? Inherent bad nature of a few leaders? Rather they show that very many of our comrades do not understand the nature of our struggles in the present historic moment; the interests of big banks and investment trusts in even small strikes and the rapid mobilization of the state by the banks against workers in struggle no matter how few. They do not understand that every small strike has the potentiality for rapid transformation into a major political action of the working class, and that our organization for strikes must be such as to give play for mobilization of elemental forces which in this period are frequently unleashed in the struggle. They do not understand that strike leadership at such a moment cannot be limited to "pulling committees" from the union office. The comrades above all do not realize the necessity for reaching the big shops and chain shops to which basic production is rapidly shifting. And finally there isn't even a glimmer of realization that the failure to link the local struggle with the major political issue means that the bosses through the very introduction of the state into the struggle have weapons which we in the spirit of the A. F. of L. fail to use.

Destroy the Poisonous Roots.

We are citing these examples in order to show that the basic source of these errors is the failure of our comrades to understand the character of the present period and to draw necessary corresponding conclusions as to tactics.

If we examine the nature of the fight that we made against the "right" with facts such as cited above in view, then we can see our shortcomings much more clearly. Our fight against opportunist tendencies was not conducted so as to undermine the basis for right errors. Instead of concentrating on the winning of the membership to an understanding of the analysis of the current historic moment which was the basis for our tactics and criticising each "right" error from this angle, we tended to treat every error by itself.

The result was superficiality and eclecticism. In the shoe workers situation, for example, the nature of the Party position in the mind of most workers is that if one was for the 40-hour week then one was true to the working class, but if one was for the 44-hour week then one was a "right winger." Similarly if one was for endorsing the C. P. in the election campaign then one was loyal to the working class; if one was against the action possibly because it was not prepared, then one was a right winger. The reasons for these slogans and the relation of these slogans to the entire program and analysis was never made clear to them. In other words, the Party line which was correct was not carried through politically. The results were disastrous. No attempt was made by the Party fraction to win the workers to an understanding of the political class forces at play in the shoe strike and the strategic value for the outcome of the shoe strike in endorsing the C. P. platform and ticket and thus bringing working class political strength against the bosses' use of the State. Instead in a purely mechanical manner, by the use of

a majority the ticket was endorsed in the leading committee of the union by a narrow margin. The impression was created among the workers that the action of the Leading Committee actually weakened the strike, because the endorsement of the Communist Party brought nothing to the cause of the shoe strikers and created more enemies. Every demagogue and social fascist was able to use the argument that the Communists are not interested in winning better conditions for the workers but are only interested in using the union for certain gains for the Party, not in a class sense but in the narrow organizational sense. The District Executive Committee of the Party in New York did not pay sufficient attention to this situation and therefore overlooked these mechanical methods used by the leaders of the Party fraction in carrying out Party decisions.

It failed itself to carry these issues, in this as well as other struggles, to the mass of workers. The result was that immeasurable harm was done to the Party and the union in the entire situation.

This same failure to watch the situation closely, brought on certain left errors which though of a minor character hindered the struggle against the "Right." Thus the District Executive Committee did not realize, early enough in the struggle, that the ground was not properly prepared for the 40-hour week slogan. The resulting failure to change the slogan at a certain point in the struggle was an error. The opportunist elements in the union tried to use this error to cover their own wrong line.

The above cited points are only examples, they are sufficient to show that it is a fact that we did not succeed in defeating the right danger as Leninists should—basically and fundamentally—by winning the workers to an understanding of a Leninist analysis of the features of the current historic moment and the tasks which dialectically flow from this analysis for our Party and class.

The present Party discussion should serve this purpose. If, however, one judges by the discussion in the units in such districts as New York and Philadelphia (of which we were able to inform ourselves) then one must say it does not. In many cases the discussion consists of vague generalizations about the world crisis and the third period. Or it consist of criticism of details of organization. The relation of one phase of our Party program to another must be made clear. Tactics to analysis; organization forms to political tasks; slogans to political objectives; the proper understanding of these relations is a basic weapon in the struggle against the right danger.

In this discussion also right tendencies are manifest which are not so easily recognizable—which are therefore even more dangerous. Right tendencies which are pronounced on the floor of the discussion are comparatively easy to fight against. These are tangible. In our current discussion there is a right danger which expresses itself in a passivity towards the discussion. In part at least this passivity reflects a certain defeatist spirit among some comrades. In one section where we held a discussion, out of a full meeting of functionaries only an insignificant handful participated. After much urging one comrade arose and spoke as follows:

"Well, if we must speak, let us speak frankly. You speak of radicalization. Where is it? It is true we had some big demonstrations, but where are the results? We have been concentrating for many months on certain factories. We do not even have one contact. This shows the workers are not responding. There is no use of making radicalization out of thin air."

In another section, one comrade who finally arose (in the spirit of putting her head in the guillotine for the sake of truth) spoke along this line:

"The workers are only responding to agitation in a general way. They do not want to organize with us because they feel the moment is not here. This is no radicalization."

In some units the right tendencies were more bold. Expressions were heard about "moving to the left too rapidly," "isolating ourselves," etc. It is not impossible that many of the comrades who do not speak have ideas running in this direction but do not speak because they are conscious that the Party recognizes such expressions as part of the right danger. The discussions in the units are abnormally lacking in liveliness. Some comrades say that it is a reaction to the verbosity of the factional fight. This is, only a superficial answer. Passivity towards the discussion, especially by the older members who are at present the greatest offenders in this respect must be fought as part of the right danger.

Sharp Self-Criticism But No Pessimism.

Our point of concentration in the discussion must be to win our comrades to the tasks outlined by the Central Committee on the basis of an understanding of these tasks in the light of the objective situation. A sharp struggle must be carried on against expressions of defeatism and passivity, some of which we have just cited. We can point to the facts:

Where we made the correct approach to the masses of workers we obtained unprecedented response;

That the failure to achieve greater organization is not caused by lack of militancy on the part of the workers (although the generally low political level of the American working class, as compared with, let us say, the German workers is a factor), but the disproportion between our influence and organizational strength is brought about largely by our own inner organizational weaknesses.

That even in this respect there has been considerable progress. Thus, for example, where a year or so ago we could speak only of about 15 per cent of our membership really active, this year we can show 35-40 per cent active.

That the shortcoming of the moment does not lie in any factual retrogression of the revolutionary movement but on the contrary the lagging of the revolutionary organizations of the working class behind the speedily growing will of the masses of toilers to struggle. In other words while making progress we still fail to set the pace at the head of class struggle but in many instances arrive on the scene long after struggles are well under way.

This very important weakness can be corrected, if the whole Party is galvanized into action. And if the sharpest self-criticism is

ON WITH THE FIGHT FOR



Building of Food

By S. WISEMAN.

THE building of the Food Workers Industrial Union is one of our greatest tasks. It necessitates a complete understanding of the present period of capitalism, with the development of trustification of finance capital. The food industry is one of the most important in time of war, and at the present time the capitalist class is placing essential parts of the food industry on a war basis. There are over two million workers in the industry, which takes in packing houses, large food factories, canneries, flour mills, etc. In the packing sections of the industry, tens of thousands of workers are undergoing the most intense exploitation at the hands of the employers. In the larger factories employing hundreds of thousands of workers, there is no organization.

practiced. In this self-criticism no minimizing of progress is necessary. However a complete understanding of the paralyzing shortcomings must be had. Minimizing progress can only feed the pessimists. But failure to comprehend our weaknesses and understand our errors hinders the awakening of the Party to the possibilities of the moment.

One of the most important shortcomings of our fight against the right danger is the lack of concreteness in criticism and the failure to follow up criticism. The result is that activities, revolutionary in phrase but opportunist in practice, become a chief obstacle in our Party's progress. It is not uncommon, for example, that the greatest bearers of right tendencies in the trade union fractions are also the greatest mouthpieces of revolutionary phrases in the street nuclei. Thus some comrades in the printers fraction, are against issuing shop papers and industrial bulletins which carry forward the T.U.U.L. program. These comrades have even prevented the issuing of a shop paper in Hearst's plant because the district insisted that an attack on shop conditions be included and the situation in Typo Union No. 6 be exposed. But amongst these comrades are many who in the sections speak most glibly and with blissful vagueness about "revolutionary overthrow" of capitalism.

Breast Beating Is Not Self-Criticism.

Opportunism in practice has another expression, especially among the functionary cadre, in a tendency to accept every criticism made, even foolish criticism, but to correct nothing. Comrade Amter in his article "Not Only Self-Criticism But Self-Correction" pointed this out clearly. Thus the entire Party, from the Central Committee through the District Committee has been criticizing itself for failure to pay proper attention to the keeping of our new members. To date, several months after the membership drive closed, no systematic and checked up program has been followed to correct this grievous error. Such self-criticism is useless. It is only for the record. Concrete measures to correct every proven shortcoming is the only way to fight opportunism in practice. The gap between the decisions in our resolutions and the failure to carry out the decisions must be eliminated. Better to budget our work, undertake less and achieve more, than to undertake with great bombast and achieve almost nothing.

Bolshevize the Party.

Since the elimination of the organized right elements from our Party we have made some progress towards Bolshevization. We have far to go yet. This convention can make a tremendous contribution to the political progress of the American revolutionary movement by serious attention to this paramount problem of the struggle against the right danger, of eliminating the shortcomings in that fight and thereby hastening the Bolshevization process in our section of the Communist International.