

Locating Position of the Communist Party on May 1, 1928

By JOHN PEPPER

It is difficult to navigate in the deep and stormy waters of politics. Waves of events follow one upon another. Winds suddenly change their direction. It is easy for a Communist Party to get lost, if it does not use instruments of orientation, if from time to time it does not carefully locate its position.

What is our exact position at the present stage of development? We must localize our position, if we want to avoid two dangers. One is the danger of missing opportunities; the other the assumption of tasks beyond our strength.

There are two extreme mistakes committed by our comrades in the estimation of the present position of our Party. One is to see only the strength and power of American imperialism, forgetting all its weaknesses, complications, and contradictions; the other, to see only our own revolutionary goals, to get drunk from our own enthusiasm, and forget the enemy, which is the most powerful imperialism in the world and still on its upward grade. Both of these erroneous locations of our position lead to erroneous navigation. The first leads to the conclusion that there is no place at present for a Communist Party in America in a political sense, that we have to go back to the stage of

a mere propaganda society. The second leads to policies calling for premature actions, and tends to disconnect us from the masses of the working class. The first would transform us into mere observers and commentators of the class struggle instead of active participants and leaders of the mass struggles of the working class. The second would lead us to adventurous "putschism," and it might lead us to unrestrained opportunism, such as participating in any kind of mass action, appealing to any sort of masses, merging ourselves completely with the masses.

Ideology and Leadership Crystallized

What is our exact position today? The Communist Party of America has already passed through the stage of a mere propaganda society and the forming of the first Communist cadres. Nine years of struggle have not passed into history in vain. The struggles against the socialist party, the trade-union bureaucracy, and the I.W.W., and the inner-Party fights on basic issues of the American labor movement have helped in crystallizing the Communist ideology and the leadership of our Party. There was much useless factionalism in the history of the American party, but it would be a very shallow interpretation of the history of the Party, if one did not recognize the political

and ideological significance and usefulness of those inner-party discussions which helped to clarify fundamental issues.

Not a Revolutionary Situation.

This is one fixed point of our orientation. The other fixed point is the following: There is no revolutionary situation as yet in the United States. American capitalism is not yet facing its decline in the same sense that British imperialism is in its basic crisis. There must be no misunderstanding or uncertainty on this point. But it is not enough to state that. We must be more accurate in locating our position. We must clearly face the fact that we are not yet a mass party in the sense as the Communist Party of Germany or of Czechoslovakia or of France is a mass party. The basic task of the Communist Parties of Germany, France, or Czechoslovakia is to fight for the conquest of the majority of the working class. The Communist Party of America has not yet reached this stage of its development. Our task today is still more moderate, more limited. Our task today is to intrench ourselves in the masses, to get a foothold in all those sections of the masses which are stirred up by the present depression and by those partial crises which manifest themselves in certain sections of the economic life of this country. The

workers in the needle trades, in the textile mills, and in the mining fields are engaged in a desperate, defensive struggle, and it is the basic task of the Communist Party of America to participate in these struggles, to be the organizing and driving force in the struggles of these sections of the working class.

Must Not Forget Basic Struggle.

We are not a mere propaganda society. But that does not mean that we should neglect Communist propaganda. At times a tendency manifests itself in our ranks to restrict ourselves too much to agitation for immediate demands, to be "practical," to fight only for wages and hours, and to forget our basic struggle against capitalism and for a Communist society. On the other hand, our comrades often complain about "too many campaigns," and ask the question: "Is our Party strong enough to throw all its forces into the mining, textile, and needle trades' campaigns?" There is in some sections of our Party a certain skeptical attitude towards the question of organizing the vast millions of unorganized. There is sometimes a too stationary attitude of certain sections of our Party, comparing the numerical weakness of the Party with the bigness of the country and the millions of the working class. But we should never forget the power which lies in an ac-

tive, conscious minority. We should not forget that we are a part of the powerful international movement of Communism and that even the mighty American imperialism has its contradictions and difficulties, and already manifests certain signs of decline (export of capital, undermining of the home market, rapid increase of the rentier class).

The correct location of our position on May 1, 1928, gives us a firm course for our future navigation, for our policies, and for our basic problems.

There will be no national Labor Party in 1928, but our Communist election propaganda must concentrate on the Labor Party issue.

The decrease and diminishing significance of the existing trade unions should not lead us to reverse our Labor Party policy. Our basic conception remains: the Labor Party must be based on the trade unions and other labor organizations; but we should add the following: We should directly approach the unorganized workers in the factories; we should try to create a second basis for a Labor Party in the form of factory committees and shop councils.

Must Organize Unorganized.

The main emphasis must be on the organization of the unorganized. It is the historic task of the Communist Party to organize the un-

organized. But that does not mean that we should abandon to the bureaucracy the three millions of unorganized workers. A powerful left wing must be formed and must serve as an auxiliary instrument in carrying out the task of the organization of the unorganized.

Mass work should not be placed in contraposition to Party work. The Party is our weapon. Extensive mass work will not lead to any revolutionary goal, if we neglect intensive Party building.

Not less but more Communist propaganda for our final goal should be the slogan of the day.

The Communist Party of America finds itself in a difficult position. It is passing through a period of transition. It is out of the stage of a mere propaganda society, and it is not yet in the stage of struggle for the conquest of the majority of the working class. In a period of transition it is easier to commit mistakes than to shape correct policies. But correct policies are never more necessary than in such a period. And we shall find the true course for our navigation, if we use our three main instruments to locate our position and to determine our direction: the Leninist method, the concrete analysis of conditions in this country, and the complete unity and unanimity of the Party.