

# Was CP's Course Left Sectarian?

By Morris Stein and Harry Ring

A dominant theme of the present discussion in the Communist Party is that "left sectarian" policies are the source of the party's isolation and of the crisis which now grips it. Many of the contributors to the discussion in the Daily Worker and in Party Voice date this "left sectarianism" back over the last ten-year period. Some carry it back even further. And there are those who now see the "leftist errors" as going back to the very inception of the party.

For example, one speaker at a meeting of the New York District Committee expressed his sentiment in the following words:

"I feel like many here that the analysis of the left sectarian errors in the work of our party does not go back far enough and that it is not enough to confine this to the last ten-year period. We have to dig deeper than that. It is my opinion that these errors go back to the very formation of our party." (Ralph, Party Voice, June 1956.)

Only William Z. Foster and some of his followers maintain that the party's general line has been correct. But Foster has not as yet made any attempt to prove his contention by a concrete examination of the party line through the years. He confines

## The Early Years of the CP

Despite many errors and blunders, the CP in the early years basically pursued the goal of winning the American working class for the program of socialist revolution. It made no compromise with capitalist politics. The party also began to learn how to combine an intransigent class-struggle programmatic line with the necessary tactics to facilitate winning the working class to that program. Thus the CP set itself the task of organizing a left wing inside the existing union movement in opposition to the capitalist-minded AFL bureaucracy. It championed the idea of a labor party. One of its most effective activities was the International Labor Defense, which mobilized widespread working class and civil libertarian support for class-war prisoners.

At no time did the CP in its early years commit the abomination of endorsing capitalist politicians or of setting up "peace fronts" in which the working class would be subordinated to bourgeois liberals. The early CP was an honest organization. And if it erred at times either in the direction of left-sectarianism or opportunism, the inner mechanism of party democracy plus the advice (not commands) of the Comintern leaders — especially the Russians — helped to overcome the mistakes.

Stalinization (a process that began in 1924 and was completed in 1929) transformed the char-

acter of the party. The ranks of the CP continued to give self-sacrificing service to what they sincerely believed to be the needs of the class struggle. They fought militantly on picket lines in unemployed demonstrations, for the freedom of Tom Mooney, Sacco and Vanzetti and the Scottsboro boys. They have continued to give such service to this day.

But the Stalinist course increasingly pursued by the leadership used for sordid ends all the ranks' hard work, devotion and readiness to act in disciplined fashion. It was with the triumph of Stalinism in the American CP that cynical flip-flops replaced the principled revolutionary line on which the party had been founded.

For example, there was the period of the early 1930's when the party's line could justifiably be characterized as left-sectarian. That was when it was based on the ultra-left theoretical conception, promulgated by Stalin, that world capitalism and U.S. capitalism was in the final and immediate stage of collapse. The Leninist conception that world capitalism had entered into the epoch of its death agony and that this was an epoch of revolutions was distorted into a bureaucratic caricature according to which every single capitalist country in the given, immediate period of months would founder.

Thus the American CP (along

with the CP in every other country) proclaimed the seizure of power as being on the order of the day—right now.

"Preparation" for this "task" consisted in ultra-left phrasemongering. The CP advanced the concept that the trade union bureaucracy and the social democracy were "social fascists" — that they and the fascists were twins. They rejected as "opportunist" the tactic of the united front as a means of struggle against fascism or any other capitalist evil.

During this period of rampant adventurism, the CP transformed the Trade Union Educational League, founded in the mid-1920's for the building of a left-wing in the existing unions, into

## The 'Popular Front' Days

In 1935 the line was turned inside out. Stalin at that time made a "mutual security" pact with Laval, the then prime minister of France and angled for a similar pact with U.S. imperialism. As a consequence, the American Communist party, like the Stalinist parties the world over suddenly discovered new virtues in democratic imperialism. The Leninist line of uncompromising opposition to imperialist war, even when waged by "democratic" against totalitarian imperialist states, gave way to the slogan of "collective security." This meant as events later proved, the unconditional support of those powers which happened to find themselves in temporary alliance with the Soviet Union.

The united front with the Social Democracy, yesterday rejected as a matter of "principle," was replaced by the people's front line which called for a coalition not with the social democracy alone, but above all with the "progressive" bourgeoisie.

The "revolutionary" unions were liquidated. But there was no return to the correct policy of building a left wing challenging the class-collaborationist course of the bureaucracy in the existing unions. Subserviency to this bureaucracy became the guiding policy. The CP became the com-

## Stalin-Hitler Pact; World War II

This line lasted for a little over a year and a half. With Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the CP entered a period of disgraceful jingoism and social patriotism (rationalized on the grounds of "defense of the Soviet Union"), the like of which has never been seen in the American labor movement. That endured throughout World War II and right up to 1946 when the Western imperialists unleashed the cold war against the Soviet Union.

During this period, the CP was instrumental in creating the

Trade Union Unity League which broke with the existing unions and set out to build dual "revolutionary" unions. Thereby they left the unions completely under the dominance of the AFL fakers.

The policies pursued during the period had long been repudiated by the CP in its healthy, authentically revolutionary days. The "Third Period" ultra-leftism stemmed from the Stalinist disease and no other source. Had the struggle for power genuinely been on the order of the day as an immediate task in America, the tactics pursued by the CP would have guaranteed smashing defeat. Indeed, in Germany, they led to the victory of Hitler.

pletely uncritical servant of the Hillmans and Dubinskys.

The traditional principled socialist struggle for independent working class political action was abandoned in favor of support for capitalist candidates. The party's apparatus, resources and membership were mobilized for the election of Roosevelt, La Guardia, O'Dwyer and countless others.

But just as the Stalin-Laval pact reverse the CP line in 1935, the Stalin-Hitler pact once again reversed it in 1939. Democratic imperialism became again an enemy. Indeed, it became the main enemy. (Molotov even declared for the benefit of the Nazi ally that "Fascism is a matter of taste.") The central activity of the American party was turned to a campaign against U.S. entry into World War II under the slogan "The Yanks Are Not Coming." And during this period, the CP took another whirl at independent political action by running Browder for President in 1940.

However, the line never featured return to an authentic class-struggle policy. The opposition to Roosevelt's war drive was a pacifist concoction. Capitalist candidates were supported in individual instances. The CP dubbed them as "peace candidates."

breach in the CIO's traditional opposition to piece work, speed-up and incentive plans which the giant corporations had sought to impose on the workers. The CP became the most vociferous champions of the no-strike pledge and the wage freeze.

It disgraced itself in the labor movement by vigorously supporting Roosevelt's unsuccessful effort to smash the mine workers who were on strike for a living wage. It played a treacherous role in breaking the Montgomery Ward strike. It betrayed the Negro people in their struggle

for equal rights as citizens and workers.

The Communist Party was the only force in the labor movement that dared speak out against the March on Washington movement which sought to bring pressure on the Roosevelt Administration for the creation of an FEPC. The CP supported the prosecution of the Trotskyists in the first use of the Smith Act in the 1941 Minneapolis labor trial.

In 1914, even while the cold war was being unleashed, Political Affairs, the CP's "theoretical" magazine published an article under the heading, "Oust the Trotskyites from the Labor and Progressive Movement." The government's witch hunt drive against the CP had begun and so had red-baiting in the CIO, culminating in expulsion of CP influenced unions. But this did not stop the CP leaders. The author, Max Weiss, devoted 19 pages to a rehash of Stalin's Moscow Trials frame-up slanders against the American Trotskyists who had maintained a consistent revolutionary policy throughout the war. In

## The Last Ten Years

Instead of being the architects of a line that could be designated as "left sectarian" the CP leaders only executed a line handed down to them by the Kremlin.

The last ten years from the view-point of line, and its derivation, were in no way different from the previous periods. With the collapse of the wartime alliance between the Kremlin bureaucracy and the "democratic" imperialists the moment of "glory" the CP enjoyed when it marched at the head of the jingoist parade and when it was accepted in "respectable" society, was at an end. The labor fakers and the liberal capitalist politicians no longer needed its services in helping to stifle the struggle of the workers and the struggle of the Negro people.

But the main line of the CP in this last decade of cold war, has not been different. It continued to pressure U.S. imperialism to re-establish the broken alliance.

All that has taken place in these ten years has been part of a pressure campaign on Washington for a deal with the Kremlin. This includes the Wallace debacle. Considerations of space do not permit us to deal with this period in detail in this article. We will return to a more extensive examination of the last ten years at a later time.

Such an analysis will demonstrate that during this period — in which Foster contends that the general line has been "correct in the main" and in which

this article Weiss again attacked the coal miners' strike and defended the no-strike pledge.

The CP has repeatedly violated the time-honored socialist principle against crossing class lines in politics. It defiled the cherished concept of class solidarity with workers on strike for improvement of living standards. It acted as strike breaker! It trampled underfoot the precept, solidarity of working class organizations regardless of political differences, in the face of capitalist persecution. It urged on the prosecution of the Trotskyists!

The line, in every one of its tortuous twists and turns, was determined by the tyrant in the Kremlin. Its aim was to serve the needs of a self-seeking bureaucracy trying to perpetuate itself in power. The methods employed were not calculated to win the support of the international working class in defense of the Soviet Union but of using the CP's and their influence in the working class for pressure on the capitalists for a diplomatic deal.

his critics contend the catastrophic turning point to "left sectarianism" was reached — the policies of the CP remained consistent only with the foreign policy demands of the Kremlin bureaucracy. The opportunist course, which had attained its most revolting form during the course of World War II, changed only in tactical expression but not in essence.

To attempt to discuss the "errors of the past period," and in fact of the past three decades, without taking the real nature of Stalinism and the party's subservience to it as the starting point promotes a "discussion" which is a sham in character and designed only to further deceive the membership. The membership senses this. This is why the CP crisis is becoming aggravated.

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