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Report from New Zealand

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WELLINGTON -- Victor G. Wilcox, general secretary of the Communist party of New Zealand, recently received world-wide publicity. This was not due to any particular achievement in the class struggle in this country, but to a speech he made on February 18 in Canton. A month later, the Chinese news agency Hsinhua, singled out certain sentences for general release, and the March 20 Peking Review published the entire text.

Wilcox's speech was a strong declaration in favor of Peking and against Moscow and his main point was that "at this stage open polemics cannot be stopped."

A certain sensationalism was added by his revelations about the pressure which Suslov exerted in Moscow on a delegation from the New Zealand Communist party in an effort to get them to line up behind Khrushchev. "When in discussion we said, as we see it, your concept is by exploiting the rest of the socialist world you are going to advance to communism. In other words, they are going to advance to communism on the backs of the socialist world and the people and Communist Parties of other countries. When we said that, no effective reply. But what was the answer that came after a little while: In effect it was, Comrade Wilcox, we are very perturbed at the position of the Communist Party of New Zealand and your position in leadership. You are little-nation chauvinists."

The rank and file, however, are not solidly behind Wilcox. In Christchurch, for instance, two party members have been expelled (Sturt and Lygate) and one report estimates that one-third of the party membership there have resigned in sympathy.

The rebels take the position, in essence, that the leadership is pro-Peking in words, but pro-Moscow in practice. While Wilcox is feted in China for opposing revisionism and adopting a "no compromise" attitude towards the Social Democracy, party members are cast out here for applying precisely that line in the Lyttleton electorate.

To put things in proper perspective, the political situation in New Zealand should be borne in mind. The elections of last November offer a convenient reference point:

The poll was high, 90.47% of the electorate turning out (as compared with 89.79% in 1960). The National party (the Tories) stayed in power, their vote declining 0.54%. New Zealand's second strongest political formation, the Labour party, gained one seat and a microscopic increase in the over-all percentage (from 43.42% in 1960 to 43.76%). The Social Credit party again failed to win a seat and its vote dropped from 8.62% to 7.95%. The misnamed "Liberal" party, an extreme right-wing grouping, which contested the elections

for the first time, won 0.86%. The vote for the Communist party was 3,167, an increase from 0.21% in 1960 to 0.26%.

From these figures, it is self-evident that the main axis of the problem of creating an effective working-class political leadership centers around the Labour party, however interesting in itself the present dispute in the Communist party may be. A few observations about the kind of campaign waged by the Labour party leadership may, therefore, prove of use to fill in the background.

The Labour leadership strained mightily in the election to give the party a "modern" image. They stressed the need for incentives to "everyone" so as to achieve greater productivity and to boost export earnings. Appeals to the workers on a class basis were specifically rejected, such things as nationalization being characterized as "old-fashioned."

In New Zealand the share of national income going to wage and salary earners has dropped relatively in the past decade and the rather high standard of living has been maintained only by ever-increasing numbers of married women taking up full or part-time employment, while the pernicious practice of long overtime has been extended among all sectors. The Labour party leaders, however, neglected to make this an issue.

They promised a three-week annual paid holiday for all. (At present two weeks annual holiday on full pay is mandatory.) They also promised that if productivity increased, then wage rises would follow on a proportionate basis.

In opposition to the proposed testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific area by France, they promised to take steps to convene an international conference.

When the disappointing election results were known, Nordmeyer, the Labour leader, attributed the "no-change" result to the atmosphere of prosperity created by wind-fall high export prices, accruing to New Zealand farmers, on overseas markets.

There is merit to the explanation but the basic reason for the present standstill is the total inability of the Labour party leadership to pose problems facing rank-and-file party members and sympathizers in terms of the class struggle.

This is felt among sectors of the working class. Indirect evidence of this came on March 23 when the leadership of the industrial labour movement called on the political leadership to return to the pre-1955 party constitutional objective of the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange."

The report of the Federation of Labour bitterly reproached the "New Look" leaders for obscuring the "irreconcilable conflict of

interest between capital and Labour" and "thus departing from the working class and the trade unions."

These bold words are from men who have soft-pedalled the class struggle in the trade-union field. With harsher prospects for the workers now looming, they feel compelled to move left -- in terminology if not, thus far, in any significant actions.