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American Stalinism and Anti-Stalinism

by JAMES P. CANNON

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PIONEER PUBLISHERS



NEW YORK

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Cover by Jean Morgan

Published July 1947

Set Up, Printed and Bound by Union Labor
In the United States of America



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AMERICAN STALINISM AND ANTI-STALINISM

I. Stalinism and Anti-Stalinism in Europe

Recent events afford us an occasion to present our point of view once again on the complicated and many-sided problem of Stalinism in the labor movement of the United States. The red-baiting drive on the one side, and the growth of anti-Stalinist sentiments in the ranks of the militant workers on the other, seem to require a re-examination of the question, and a more precise definition of the real nature of Stalinism. The blind fight against the Communist Party is unavailing. The workers must give thought to the why and how, in order to fight Stalinism in a manner that will serve their own interests. Otherwise they run the risk of falling into the trap of their worst enemies, who are currently raising a hue and cry against the Communist Party with other objectives in mind.

The Stalinist pestilence, like many other things good and bad, was imported from Europe; the American aspect of the question can be seen more clearly in its true light against a background review of the situation in the countries of Western Europe where Stalinism is now a burning and decisive question and is the subject of much discussion. For our part, we believe that a frank discussion among those anti-Stalinists who strive for the socialist goal should serve to clarify the issue and thus aid our cause.

It is known that we are and have been for a long time opposed to Stalinism, or to any conciliation with it whatever. We started on this theme more than eighteen years ago and have been hammering away at it ever since. We welcome cooperation with other opponents of Stalinism, but we believe that such cooperation can be fruitful only if there is some basic agreement as to the nature of Stalinism, and agreement also that the fight against Stalinism is part of the general anti-capitalist struggle, not separate from it nor in contradiction to it.

So that there may be no misunderstanding, let us make our position clear at the outset. We believe that the greatest and most menacing enemy of the human race is the bi-partisan imperialist cabal at Washington. We consider the fight against war and reaction in the United States to be the first and main duty of American revolutionists. This is the necessary premise for cooperation in the fight against Stalinism. Those who disagree with us on this point do not understand the reality of the present day, and do not talk our language.

An understanding of the perfidious character of Stalinism is the beginning of wisdom for every serious, class-conscious worker; and all anti-Stalinists who are also anti-capitalist should try to work together. But anti-Stalinism, by itself, is no program for common struggle. It is too broad a term, and it means different things to different people. There are more anti-Stalinists now than there were when we started our struggle 18 years ago, especially in this country where Stalinism is weak and Trumanism is strong, and they are especially numerous in New York and not all of them are phonies. But very few of the current crop of vociferous anti-Stalinists have anything to do with us, or we with them. That is not because of exclusiveness or quarrelsomeness, either on their part or ours, but because we start out from different premises, conduct the struggle by different methods, and aim at different goals.

Social Base of Stalinism

Many anti-Stalinists devote their arguments exclusively to the terrorist activities and totalitarian methods of the Stalinists. This is a rather common approach to Stalinism nowadays, but in our opinion it is an incorrect one. We believe it puts the question in too narrow a frame and provides neither an explanation of the monstrous phenomenon of Stalinism nor an adequate program by means of which the revolutionary workers can rid the labor movement of this plague.

Stalinism manifests itself in a totalitarian police state in the Soviet Union and a terrorist apparatus in the labor movement of the capitalist countries. But it is not only that. Stalinism has its social base in the nationalized property of the Soviet Union—the product of the great revolution. It is not the continuator and legitimate heir of Bolshevism, but its antithesis. The Stalinists, a privileged bureaucracy which fastened itself on the Soviet state in a period of its degeneration and decline, had to liquidate in blood virtually the whole generation of the

original Bolsheviks, before they could consolidate their power.

But despite all the crimes and betrayals of the Stalinists, great masses of radical workers in Western Europe still identify them with the Soviet Union and, in turn, identify the latter with the revolution which gains attractiveness in their eyes the more that capitalism reveals its irremediable bankruptcy. Herein is the main secret of the malevolent influence of Stalinism in the European labor movement.

Illusions About Stalinism

By far the greatest power of Stalinism derives from the illusion in the minds of the European workers that Stalinism means communism as represented by the great Russian Revolution. They want the same kind of revolution, and they will not be freed from Stalinism until they are freed from the illusion that Stalinism can help them to get it. Most anti-Stalinists, especially the professionals, identify Stalinism with communism. This only serves to embellish Stalinism in the eyes of the radical workers, to reinforce their illusions, and to strengthen the position of Stalinism in their midst.

For there is one thing that the workers of Europe have very few illusions about, and that is capitalism. In this fundamental disillusionment lies the great hope for the future. Two world wars within one generation, with their sum total of 40 million dead and uncounted wounded; the wholesale destruction of material culture in Europe; the crises, the unemployment and insecurity between the wars; and the universal hunger, poverty and misery at the end—all this has served to convince the masses of European workers in their bones that they have no further need of the social system which engendered these horrors and promises nothing better for the future.

Workers Are Looking for Socialism

The workers of Western Europe can see a way out only along the lines of socialism. They demonstrate their will to socialism at every opportunity, as in the revolutionary upsurge following the conclusion of hostilities, in the subsequent elections, etc. And when they think of socialism, they look to the East, not to the West. They have had victorious "democracy" brought to them twice already in the shape of guns and bombs from America and they don't want a third visitation of that blessing.

How explain the well-established fact that the workers follow the Stalinists in increasing numbers, while

the Social Democratic parties are more and more pushed out of the labor movement and obliged to base themselves on a predominantly petty-bourgeois composition? It is absurd to imagine that this result is simply brought about by the terrorist activities of an army of GPU agents. No, the sweeping movement of the masses is to be explained by the fact that they think the Stalinists represent socialism more truly and more militantly than do the Social Democrats. Those who do not take due note of this phenomenon and make it the starting point of their tactical struggle may rail all they please against the Stalinists, but they will not defeat them in the European labor movement.

Anti-Stalinist Struggle Must Be Anti-Capitalist

The illusions of the masses as to the real nature of Stalinism are continually nourished and kept alive by the Stalinist propaganda machines with their perfected technique of demagoguery and mass deception. Stalinism is, first of all, a political influence in the labor movement in the capitalist countries. And it exerts this influence, primarily, not as a police force or a terrorist gang, but as a political party. The fight against Stalinism is first of all, and above all, a political fight. This political fight will never make any serious headway with the radicalized workers—and they are the ones who are decisive—unless it is clearly and unambiguously anti-capitalist from beginning to end. No propaganda that bears, or even appears to bear, the slightest taint of Trumanism will get a hearing from the anti-capitalist workers of Europe. That kind of “anti-Stalinism” which is currently popular in the United States is absolutely no good for export.

We have no reason to minimize the terrorist apparatus of Stalinism, unexampled in its magnitude and monstrousness in all history. It is a bloody and fearsome thing; we have paid enough in blood to know it. This terrorism must be exposed and fought. We must keep the pitiless light of publicity shining on it. But the exposure of the terrorist activities of the GPU is only one part, important to be sure, but not the most important part of the struggle against Stalinism.

Leaving out of consideration altogether the capitalist demagogues who exploit the fraudulent slogan “democracy versus totalitarianism” for their own imperialistic purposes, there are a great number of people who sincerely hate Stalinism for its violence and terror, its bloody and awful tyranny, its utter disregard for human life and human dignity. But in their revulsion against this horror—which does them credit, no doubt—they fall

into the same basic error as that of the Stalinists themselves. They overestimate the power of naked force. The Stalinists think that violence can accomplish anything, and this fallacy will eventually facilitate their downfall. Many of their opponents likewise imagine that violence and terror are omnipotent, able to repeal the historical laws explained by Marx.

It is wrong to make a fetish of violence and terror, to see only the GPU and not the tens of millions of Communist and Socialist workers in Europe. It is fatally wrong to lose faith in the ability of these workers to overcome their illusions and take their destiny into their own hands. And it is criminal to proceed from these errors—as so many anti-Stalinists are doing in this country—to the dreadful and monstrous conclusion: The destruction of hateful Stalinism must be entrusted to Truman and his atomic bombs.

A Political Struggle

If Stalinism were merely a totalitarian police state in the USSR and a terrorist apparatus in the labor movement of the capitalist countries, then the struggle against the terrorists by publicity, exposure and any other means at our disposal would be the main, if not the only, task. But the problem doesn't end there; it only begins. The real fight against Stalinism, the main fight, takes place on the political field. That is the way Trotsky explained the question and conducted his struggle. And that is why the Stalinists have always regarded Trotskyism as their most serious and consistent enemy. Trotsky's method must be the model for the revolutionary workers of the present day.

The influence of Stalinism today is stronger in France and Italy than in the countries of Eastern Europe which have experienced Russian occupation, and stronger by far than in the Soviet Union itself. To those who are prostrated before the fetish of police and gangster violence, who see the Stalinist police machine ruling supreme everywhere, over a vast domain in the East, this may appear as an astonishing, even as an absurd statement. But it is true and can be demonstrated.

Mass Influence of Stalinists in Europe

Stalinism has a million members in the party in France, and controls the trade union federation with its six million members. In Italy the number of party members is even greater. In these two countries it appears from all the evidence that Stalinism virtually dominates

the proletarian sector of the population, along with a substantial section of the peasantry. From all reports, the Socialist Parties in Western Europe—in France and Italy especially—steadily lose their working-class support to the more radical-appearing rival. This tremendous mass influence of the Stalinists is not the result of police measures. In the main it is the product of the illusions of the masses, nourished and reinforced by the demagoguery and deception of the Stalinist propaganda machine.

Weakness of Stalin's Regime in USSR

On the other hand, reports from Eastern Europe, where the first approaches of the victorious Red Army were greeted by revolutionary uprisings and mass acclaim, indicate that the workers have already been sadly disillusioned and the moral position of Stalinism has apparently been hopelessly shattered. The conditions are maturing there for the construction of genuine Socialist (or Communist) parties — anti-Stalinist as well as anti-capitalist.

What, then, can be the real situation within the Soviet Union itself, after all the bitter, bloody years? Can the masses still believe in Stalinism? Are there any illusions left? The known reaction of the masses in the occupied territories should give us the answer. The very fact that the terror, instead of mitigating, grows worse from year to year, with the police apparatus swelling to ever more monstrous proportions—all this testifies not to the strength of the Stalinist regime within the country, but to its weakness, to its isolation and lack of mass support. The Stalinist regime in the USSR, isolated from the masses and ruling by terror alone, is weakest at the moment when it appears to be most secure. The strongest assaults of the Nazi military machine proved unable to bring about the downfall of the regime in the USSR from within. And that is convincing evidence, we think, that the Russian masses don't want liberation from accursed and hated Stalinism in the shape of capitalist restoration and the colonial dismemberment of the country. But one strong revolutionary demonstration from the outside can bring the whole regime, with all its apparatus of repression and terror, crashing down in ruins.

Task Belongs to the Workers

The salvation of the Soviet Union, or rather what is left of it, from the curse of Stalinism, depends in the first place on a strong revolutionary impulse from Europe or

America, or some other part of the world. This impulse will come, we firmly believe, and this will change everything. This task of liberation belongs to the workers. It cannot be farmed out to their class enemies, the Anglo-American imperialist gang, in the hope that somehow something good will come from the greatest evil. To assign the task of liberating the Soviet Union and the labor movement of the West from Stalinism to Truman and his atomic bombs is to renounce faith in the future of humanity, to pass a premature death sentence on civilization.

We must go back to Marx, and reassert and be guided by his affirmation that "the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself." Only on that basis can we make an effective common front against Stalinism and free the labor movement from its malign power and influence. Only on that basis can we see the future clearly and prepare for it.

In a personal letter a prominent European anti-Stalinist wrote: "I sincerely do hope that all anti-Stalinist elements of the socialist camp will be able to form a united front in the difficult days ahead." We share this hope and heartily support it as a program, with only one explicit proviso: those whom we count in our socialist camp must be real socialists and not bourgeois agents masquerading as such, not ignoble stooges of Yankee imperialism, not "Truman socialists."

The revolutionary socialist movement in Germany during and following the First World War had to reconstitute itself in mortal struggle against those traitor socialists who had led the German workers into the imperialist slaughter—the "Kaiser socialists," as they were derisively called. The best hope today for the German workers—and not only for the German workers but for all the workers everywhere, all over the world—is that they will succeed by their own efforts and their own strength in cleansing the labor movement of the influence of both the Stalin "communists" and the Truman "socialists." That is the way to victory and socialism. There is no other way.

2. The Communist Party and the Red-Baiters

The Communist Party, which served American capitalism well during the war, and in return basked in its favor, is getting into trouble again. The American Stalinists' support of the Kremlin, in the current diplomatic conflicts, is provoking retaliatory measures from the owners of America and their servitors. American Stalinism is under heavy attack along a wide front in the United States these days, and this time it is a real attack which takes on more and more the color of persecution. Red-baiting is the order of the day.

The powerhouse behind the assault on the Communist Party and its trade union positions and peripheral organizations is the National Association of Manufacturers. On the political field it is led, of course, by the Republican-Democratic coalition in Washington, as part of the propagandistic build-up to put the home front in shape for a war against the Soviet Union, which is being deliberately planned and prepared. Under this formidable leadership a broad supporting movement has been mobilized in the population generally, as well as in the labor movement. The capitalist press, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the American Legion — the three most reactionary influences in American life — speak with one voice in support of the new holy crusade for "democracy against totalitarianism."

Reactionary "Anti-Communist" Ballyhoo

Almost the whole of the non-Stalinist trade union bureaucracy has taken its place in the campaign. The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, a sinister, priest-ridden outfit which menaces the unions with a split along religious lines, is very active and aggressive in the pogrom against the "Commies." Drawing encouragement from the governmental campaign and the general reactionary trend in the country, the ACTU grows ever bolder and more brazen in its attempts to switch the allegiance of the progressive trade unions from Moscow to Rome. The rear of the anti-Stalinist united front is brought up by a vociferous assortment of New York Social Democrats and ex-radical intellectuals who do their best to supply the "ideology" for the frenzied campaign.

The current drive against the Stalinists is labeled "an-

ti-Communist" and every attempt is made to identify the two terms — Stalinism and Communism — in the popular mind. This is the result of ignorance on the part of some and of deliberate deception on the part of others who know better, but in any case it is completely false. And that is the reason why the whole campaign, while it is undoubtedly weakening some of the organizational positions of the Stalinists and dislodging them from some strategic posts in the trade union movement, and furnishing not a few Stalinist careerists an excuse to run for cover, is actually strengthening the moral position of the Communist Party.

The ranks of the sympathetic radical workers and party members are being solidified by the crude reactionary ballyhoo, and the support of new groups of workers is being drawn to the party which is made to appear as the persecuted revolutionary opponent of the big money sharks and their anti-labor plus atomic war program. For example, the CP, according to the *Daily Worker*, raised a "defense fund" of \$250,000 in less than 20 days. This important sum could properly be posted in the financial report of the party treasurer as a free donation from the associated red-baiters.

How Trotskyists Fight Stalinism

We Trotskyists, as everybody knows, are also against Stalinism and have fought it unceasingly and consistently for a very long time. But we have no place in the present "all-inclusive" united front against American Stalinism. The reason for this is that we are anti-capitalist. Consequently, we can find no point of agreement with the campaign conducted by the political representatives of American capitalism in Washington, with the support of its agents in the labor movement and its lackeys in the literary and academic world. We fight Stalinism from a different standpoint.

We fight Stalinism not because it is another name for communism, but precisely because of its betrayal of communism and of the interests of the workers in the class struggle. Our exposition of the question is made from a communist point of view, and our appeal is directed not to the exploiters of labor and their various reactionary agencies of oppression and deception, but to the workers, who have a vital interest in the struggle against the capitalist exploiters as well as against perfidious Stalinism.

The problem of the advanced and progressive workers is to learn how to fight Stalinism without inadvertently falling into the camp of capitalist reaction and thus hurting only themselves. For this it is necessary, first of all, for them to understand the question and to get a clear pic-

ture of the Communist Party, of what it used to be and how it came to be the hideous thing it is today.

Origin of the Communist Party

The Communist Party of the United States originated as an honest revolutionary organization designed to serve the interests of the working class. By degrees, over a period of years, and from causes which are known and can be explained, this same party was transformed into an agency of imperialism in the labor movement — from communist to anti-communist. That is the truth of the matter, and that is what is really wrong with the Communist Party, as we shall undertake to demonstrate. In doing so we hope to convince the militant workers that they must think and discriminate in taking their position on Stalinism and anti-Stalinism. It is a fatal error to think that rapacious American capitalism can be effectively fought under the banner of Stalinism. It is a no less fatal error for them to allow their hatred of the disruptive and treacherous methods of the Stalinists to push them into the camp of capitalist reaction.

The Communist Party of the United States is not a newcomer on the labor scene; it is already 28 years old, and in that time has gone through a curious evolution. It was originally constituted by the revolutionary left-wing section of the Socialist Party. The struggle of this left-wing for a revolutionary program, which they had carried on as a faction of the SP for a number of years, finally culminated in a split at the September convention in 1919. The new party quickly enlisted many of the most militant representatives of the IWW and other radical formations of the earlier day, and was in fact the legitimate successor and continuator of pre-war revolutionary radicalism in the United States. The party unfurled the banner of the Russian Revolution, which was the veritable banner of authentic communism; affiliated itself to the newly created Communist International founded by Lenin and Trotsky; and declared war on American capitalism.

The party from its very beginning encountered the fiercest persecution on the part of the "democratic" government at Washington. Those were the days of the notorious "Palmer raids." The members suffered wholesale arrests and imprisonments even before the new party had had an opportunity to properly constitute itself. In the fierce persecution of that period the party was driven underground and was compelled to conduct its activities illegally for several years. Under the fierce onslaught of reaction and persecution many fell by the wayside, but the main cadres of the new party stood firm, held fiercely to their revolu-

tionary convictions and gradually fought their way back into the open as a legal party.

Due to the inexperience of the leadership, numerous mistakes were made; but the early CP was an honest working-class party, carrying on an uncompromising struggle against capitalism and defending the interests of the workers as best it could. In the early and middle twenties the party attracted to itself the best, most idealistic and self-sacrificing of the advanced workers and soon became the recognized organizing center of American labor radicalism; while the Socialist Party fell into innocuous, senile decay and the trade union bureaucracy became more and more subservient to the capitalist exploiters and their governmental agencies.

Degeneration of the Communist Party

But toward the end of the twenties, while the "prosperity" boom was still riding high, the picture began to change. This party, which began with such bright promise, whose founding members had been inspired by such honesty, courage and idealism, eventually fell victim to the innumerable pressures of its hostile environment, as had happened with other workers' parties many times in the history of the international labor movement. Degeneration set in, and the party began to lose its revolutionary character. From an irreconcilable enemy of capitalism, the party was changed, by degrees and over a long period of time, into a treacherous and servile tool of capitalism.

This was shown most glaringly during the recent war, when the Stalinists became the worst jingoists and strike-breakers in the labor movement, and when Browder, then the official chief of the party by grace of Stalin, even went so far as to offer to shake hands with J. P. Morgan. The Communist Party became anti-communist, the most perfidious enemy of authentic communism.

That is what really happened. But the course of degeneration did not go unchallenged. The genuine communists, the Trotskyists, revolted against the degeneration and the betrayal as soon as it was first discerned; organized a determined fight against it; were expelled from the party in 1928 and organized a new movement on the old program, which is today known as the Socialist Workers Party. Thus the banner of communism, which the official Communist Party renounced, was not lost or surrendered to the class enemy. It was taken up and carried forward by the Trotskyist minority who believed then, as they believe now, that it is not the program of communism which has been discredited and refuted but only those who have deserted and betrayed it.

3. Why and How the Communist Party Degenerated

The degeneration of the Communist Party derives from the same source as the degeneration of their professional opponents, the labor fakers of the old school who are flanked by the New York ex-radical intellectuals and "Socialist" or ex-Socialist labor skates. This source is the pressure of the capitalist-imperialist environment which they lacked the historical foresight and the moral strength to resist. The Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists equally share an awe-stricken prostration before the seeming invincibility of American capitalism and a corresponding lack of faith in the proletarian revolution, in the power of the workers to save the world by reorganizing it on a socialist basis.

This delusion—and it is the most tragic of all delusions—is the main psychological source of all varieties of opportunism in the labor movement. It transformed one-time opponents of capitalism into its agents and servants. The opponents of Stalinism, with the exception of those who fight it from a revolutionary point of view, suffered essentially the same degeneration as did the Stalinists, from the same basic cause, and the degeneration is complete in each case, as we hope to demonstrate. This degeneration consisted in shifting their basic allegiance from one class to another.

The converted Stalinists campaign in every election, and all the year around, on their basic slogan: "Socialism is **not** the issue!" And if they have their way it will never be the "issue." The Social Democrats and the repentant ex-Communist and ex-Socialist intellectuals coyly refer to themselves nowadays as "liberals," although in truth they are not even very liberal. If they mention socialism at all it is only by way of satiric jest at those who still believe in it and still fight for it, and in sentimental recollections of the "follies" of their younger days.

"Labor Lieutenants" of Capitalism

As for the old-line labor fakers, if they didn't "degenerate" it is only because they have always been "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class," as De Leon called them, and didn't have to change much. But even many of them, if not the majority, began better than they ended. Not a few of them started out as trade union militants and pick-

et captains who showed energy and courage in defending the immediate interests of the workers in struggles against individual employers. Lacking socialist consciousness and any broad and comprehensive view of the class struggle as a whole, they succumbed to the pressure of the class enemy even more easily than did the ex-Communists and ex-Socialists, but the end result is essentially the same: the transformation of working-class militants into conservative bureaucrats who view the conflict of labor and capital as a struggle without a goal.

Two Currents in the Labor Movement

It may be maintained that we overstate the case or oversimplify it by thus seeming to identify two currents in the labor movement—the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists—who appear to be always at each others' throats in the fiercest antagonism. But this contention can be granted only conditionally, and within very narrow limits which do not encroach upon the essence of the question.

It is not even correct to say without qualification that the two quarreling factions of traitors to the working class serve different masters. True, the immediate allegiance of the anti-Stalinists is to America's imperialist government of the Sixty Families, while the Stalinists are indubitably the direct agents of the Stalin regime in the USSR. But the Kremlin gang is itself an agency, and the most important agency, of imperialism in the world labor movement. That is its most essential role. The Stalinists hate and fear the proletarian revolution more than anything else, and their unbridled demagogy, their lies, their organized terror, their assassinations, and their organized mass murders have been employed to prop up decaying capitalism, not to overthrow it.

Both Serve Imperialist Master

The Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists serve the same master—world imperialism—in different ways. Every labor bureaucracy has a contradictory nature. The Stalinist bureaucracy has its own special interests and seeks to serve them first of all, and this frequently brings them into conflict with the imperialists, as is the case at the present time. But the anti-Stalinist bureaucrats also seek to serve first their own interests, and they also frequently come into conflict with the capitalist class which they serve fundamentally. The opposition of the entire American labor bureaucracy to the pending anti-union legislation in Congress is a case in point. But in the essence of the matter, in the great fundamental and irreconcilable conflict

of historical class interests between the workers and the imperialists, both the Stalinist bureaucracy and the other bureaucracy fight on the side of the capitalists and against the workers. The fierce struggle between them is a clique struggle, and not a principled struggle.

The anti-capitalist "ideology" of the radical intellectuals and the "Socialist" labor leaders and functionaries was scarcely more than skin-deep to start with. Their transformation from fellow-travelers of the proletariat into fellow-travelers of the bourgeoisie was accomplished so quickly and easily and smoothly, under the first squeeze of real pressure with the approach of World War II, that it was hardly noticed by anybody. They hardly noticed it themselves.

The degeneration of the Communist Party along the same lines, however, was a far more serious matter. Here it was a question of changing the fundamental nature of a party that was genuinely revolutionary into its counter-revolutionary opposite. This took a much longer time and was unavoidably accompanied by the most violent and bloody convulsions.

How Stalinism Originated

Stalinism originated in the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin, when the retardation of the expected European revolution on the one hand, and the subsequent temporary stabilization of capitalism on the other, raised doubts of the revolutionary perspective. These doubts soon crystallized into a complete disbelief in the capacity of the workers in Europe and the rest of the world to overthrow capitalism. The privileged bureaucracy in the Soviet Union made this disbelief the basis of their policy. These Soviet bureaucrats felt impelled at all costs to secure their own privileges, enjoyed at the expense of the Russian masses, and decided to call that "socialism in one country." Like every other crystallized labor bureaucracy, they wanted above all to be let alone in peace and comfort regardless of what happened to the masses of the people in one country or another, or in all countries put together. A conservative program of narrow-minded nationalist imperialism, was evolved by the privileged bureaucrats to express their moods and serve their special interests.

The same doubts and sentiments infected a section of the leading staffs of the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries at the same time and from the same cause. The stagnation of the movement and the apparent—though only apparent—recovery and resurgence of the capitalist system from its wartime and postwar shocks and disloca-

tions, seemed to empirical leaders to postpone the realization of the socialist program to the distant future. They mistook a temporary situation for a historical epoch. This created the conditions for the dry-rot of bureaucratism to set in, even among the leading staffs and the paid party functionaries and trade union officials of the most revolutionary parties had ever known. They began to visualize careers for themselves as functionaries of a party machine which existed for itself, that is, for them, and not for the purpose of organizing and leading a proletarian revolution.

Struggle of the Authentic Communists

But the transformation of the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries, as well as in the Soviet Union, could not be easily or smoothly accomplished. A section of the leading staffs everywhere, supported by the most militant proletarian elements in the parties, retained the long view; they remained faithful to the revolutionary program and tradition and resolutely fought the course of degeneration. They were the first to stigmatize Stalinism, to analyze and expose its real tendency and to declare irreconcilable war against it in the name of communism. And they have been its most consistent, most uncompromising opponents ever since.

This struggle, organized and led by Trotsky and supported by other authentic communists in every country in the world, against the degeneration of the Communist Parties was a stubborn struggle, long drawn-out and irreconcilable, conducted with unexampled energy and courage. How could it have been otherwise? The fate of a revolution was at stake, and the leader of the fight was the greatest man, and the best man, of our troubled and stormy time.

Before they could succeed in substituting an essentially reformist program for the original program of proletarian revolution, and transforming the nature of the Communist Parties accordingly, the Stalinist bureaucrats who had seized the apparatus of the Russian state and of the Communist Parties had to resort to every kind of method alien to socialism and alien to the means required to serve the socialist end. They misrepresented everything, turned every question upside down, pictured the Left Opposition of Trotsky as counter-revolutionary and themselves as defenders of the Leninist doctrine. They slandered the Oppositionists in the press, which they had monopolized, and deprived them of the opportunity to answer. They abused the principle of party discipline, designed by Lenin to insure united action against the class

enemy, and turned it into a trap for the Communist workers, a device to suppress critical opinion and free discussion within the party. They corrupted the parties by advancing subservient careerists and removing the independent-minded revolutionists from party posts. They abused the good faith of the Communist workers everywhere by confronting them with accomplished facts, and then compelling them to ratify the actions under penalty of expulsion as counter-revolutionaries and enemies of the Soviet Union.

Expulsions and Purges

All this did not suffice. The Opposition could not be terrorized and could not be silenced. One step followed another on the reactionary course with a fatal logic. Next came the wholesale expulsions of the leaders of the Opposition in Russia and in all the parties of the Comintern. After the struggle had raged for five years, the great majority of the original leaders of the Communist Parties in almost every country, those who had founded the parties and carried them on their shoulders through their most difficult years, had been expelled. In place of the independent-minded revolutionary fighters who had created the movement in struggle, a new type of leader was installed, the type of functionary who looks to some power for instructions and does what he is told.

All this was not enough to complete the degeneration and transformation of the Communist Parties. The revolutionary tradition was so strong, the Marxist logic of the Opposition so powerful, that opposition groupings kept rising anew. The parties had to be purged again and again. But the struggle did not end. The Stalinists then turned the fatal corner on the road of counter-revolutionary infamy from which there could be no turning back: the physical annihilation of the Communist Left Opposition. The Oppositionists in the Soviet Union, with Trotsky at their head, were arrested and imprisoned by the tens of thousands. When that failed to quell the Oppositionist movement, Trotsky was deported from the country in which he, side by side with Lenin, had led the greatest revolution in all history.

But the ideas of the Trotskyists were correct, and therefore could not be destroyed. The imprisonment of tens of thousands of the best Bolshevik fighters in the Soviet Union, the deportation of Trotsky from the country, and the expulsion and isolation of the incorruptible communists from the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries, did not end the struggle of the Left Opposition (the Trotskyists) to correct the policy of the Comintern

and turn it back on the Marxist road. They continued to fight as an expelled faction; and some of the richest Marxist literature in the entire history of the world labor movement was produced by the Opposition in that period, primarily by Trotsky himself.

Banner of the Fourth International

In 1933, after ten years of unceasing struggle, came the great and final test, and the turning point in the tactics of the Trotskyists. The Stalinists surrendered the German working class to the Nazis without a fight—the greatest and most criminal betrayal in all history. Then it became finally clear beyond dispute that the Stalinist Comintern was corrupted to the core, and that its reformation was impossible. The Stalinists had gone over into the imperialist camp, as had the bureaucracy of the Social Democracy in 1914, only even more shamefully, more brazenly and more criminally. The Left Opposition thereupon raised the banner of the Fourth International. The mortal struggle still goes on, no longer as faction against faction but as party against party. Since 1933 the Trotskyists have conducted their struggle on a worldwide scale as a completely independent movement, irreconcilably hostile to Stalinism as well as to capitalism. This is the most important struggle in the world, for its goal is nothing less than the socialist reorganization of the world.

4. The Crimes and Betrayals of American Stalinism

The Stalinist bureaucracy proceeded from its abandonment of revolutionary internationalism, and thereby of the most basic principle of Marxist politics, while still basing itself on an economic system created by a proletarian revolution. Beset by contradictions at every step, it gradually began to take shape as the greatest monstrosity the world has ever known.

The Stalinists raised the technique of falsifying, lying and slandering to a degree unknown or unimagined by any precedent or contemporary political grouping based on privileges, none of whom have been strangers to these techniques. Obsessed by the mad delusion that ideas count for nothing and that physical force decides everything, they embarked on a campaign of bloody violence, mass murder and assassination that has already taken its toll not in thousands or in tens of thousands, but in millions of human lives.

The whole generation of the original Bolsheviki were murdered in cold blood under cover of the Moscow Frame-up Trials. The whole of Russia was converted into a prison and a torture chamber where terror rules supreme. Many of the best leaders of the Fourth International outside of Russia were assassinated by the agents of Stalin, including the leader and founder of the movement, the companion of Lenin, L. D. Trotsky.

Stalinism, through its reactionary policy executed by a murder machine, was mainly responsible for the defeat of the Spanish revolution. And this same Stalinism has acted as the gendarmerie of capitalism in suppressing by bloody violence every attempt at revolutionary uprising in those territories where its army penetrated in Europe, and by deception and demagogy in the other countries behind the Anglo-American lines.

The American Stalinists have not gone so far in violence only because they have lacked the power. But they have endorsed and defended all the crimes and betrayals of Russian and international Stalinism, and therefore fully share the guilt for them. The apologist and defender of assassins is himself an assassin.

But aside from mass violence and murder, from which the American Stalinists have been restrained only by their weakness and incapacity, they have committed enough crimes and betrayals in the United States on their own

account to damn them forever in the eyes of the advanced workers. And these crimes, like the crimes of Stalinism everywhere, have not been directed against the capitalist exploiters, as many erroneously believe, but against the workers and the masses of the people. Their conspiracies have not been dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism, as stupid reactionaries allege against them, but to propping it up and striking against the genuine revolutionary movements aiming at the socialist goal. Roosevelt understood this much better than those color-blind aborigines, such as Bilbo and Rankin, and others of similar mentality in the labor movement, who see "red" whenever Stalinists are mentioned.

Why Roosevelt Relied on Stalin

Roosevelt knew what he was doing when he made the war alliance with Stalin, and made no mistake in relying on him not to promote the proletarian revolution in Europe but to crush it in blood or balk it with demagoguery. The suppression of Trotsky's book on Stalin during the war, by the pressure of the State Department on the publishers, was a tacit recognition of the counter-revolutionary services of Stalin. So, likewise, was the production, under quasi-governmental auspices, of the monstrous movie, "Mission to Moscow," a vulgar glorification of the Moscow Frame-up Trials and a defamation of their victims.

The betrayals of the American Stalinists began, as betrayals of the workers always begin, with the revision, perversion and eventual renunciation of the theory of Marxism, the only revolutionary, the only truly proletarian theory there is. Trotsky warned that the theory of "socialism in one country," first enunciated by Stalin in 1924 to justify the policy of national reformism, could only lead to social-patriotism in the capitalist countries. His warning seemed to many to be far-fetched at the time, but it had a tragic verification in the United States, as everywhere else.

The new revisionist theories espoused by the American Stalinists, following the Moscow lead, ran so counter to the tradition and the socialist consciousness of the party membership that they could not be imposed on the party under conditions of free and democratic discussion, which had characterized the party in its early years. Party democracy had to be suppressed, and the Marxist dissidents who could not be silenced had to be expelled. Following the expulsion of the Left Opposition, the Trotskyists, in 1928, the right wing, led by Lovestone, who criticized the policy from another point of view, was expelled six months later. Thus the party was disrupted and converted into a bureaucratic

caricature of the democratic revolutionary organization it once had been.

From the disruption of the party, the Stalinist bureaucracy, as one who says "A" must say "B," was obliged to carry disruption into the mass organizations and trade unions where dissidents and critics, including those who had been expelled from the party, also appeared. The Stalinists sought not to serve the mass organizations but to establish an iron-bound control over them, by any and every dishonorable means, in order to manipulate them at will. The Communist Party came to appear in the mass movement as an organization with special interests of its own to serve, and which served them ruthlessly and brutally against the interests of the mass movement. The Marxist axiom which says that "The Communist Party has no interests separate and apart from the interests of the working class as a whole," was turned upside down and made to read: "The working class has no interests separate and apart from the interests of the Communist Party."

A Destructive Force in Unions

The destructive weapon of expulsions and splits was carried over from the party into the mass organizations and the trade union movement. The Stalinists became hated and feared as **disrupters** who would stop at nothing to serve party aims dictated by the momentary interests, or supposed interests, of the Kremlin bureaucracy, which regulated the day to day policy of the American Communist Party as imperiously and automatically as a business firm directs the activities and policies of a branch office. Apart from everything else — and there is much else — the American Stalinists wrought untold damage in the trade unions and mass organizations of the American workers by their policy of ruthless disruption and suppression of workers' democracy.

The ultra-radical policy of the American Communist Party, carried out from 1928 to 1933 by Moscow command, prompted the Stalinists to lead the advanced workers under their influence out of the established conservative trade unions to form separate, isolated "red" unions of their own. This insane policy, which had been so tragically refuted in life so many times in the past history of the American labor movement, was a crime against the working class, and especially against its progressive vanguard.

Following that, when Stalin began to seek a bloc with the bourgeois democratic imperialists after Hitler came to power in Germany, the American Communist Party immediately followed suit with its infamous policy of the "People's Front." The slogan "class against class," which is the basic

slogan of the workers' emancipation struggle, was discarded in favor of the treacherous formula of class-collaboration between the workers and their exploiters. The good and correct slogan of the united front of the workers was replaced by the slogan of an all-class political combination. The movement for an independent labor party, which had gained such a wide response in the progressive labor movement, was sabotaged and strangled.

Stalinists Sold Out the American Workers

The Rooseveltian Democratic Party, the other half of the bi-partisan political mechanism of American capitalism, was recommended to the workers as their means of salvation in the struggle against this same capitalism. The CP bureaucrats did everything to dragoon the workers into supporting the capitalist Democratic Party, by hypocritical indirection in 1936, openly and directly in 1944.

The earlier crimes of the Communist Party became swollen into betrayals, and the betrayals increased in magnitude and cynicism. After some obscene gestures at ultra-radicalism, in accord with the Kremlin policy during the Soviet-Nazi pact, the American Stalinists promptly jumped onto the democratic imperialist bandwagon with the start of the Soviet-Nazi war. And after the entry of American imperialism, they became the most blatant jingoes in the American war camp. In return for Roosevelt's lend-lease to the Kremlin, the American Stalinists sold out the American workers in the most shameless and cynical fashion.

They were the loudest shouters for the no-strike pledge which shackled the workers and kept their wages frozen while prices rose during the war. In the strategic situation created by the labor shortage during the war, they viciously fought every attempt of the rank and file of the workers to use their organized strength to improve their conditions. They became militant advocates of "incentive pay" plans by which the workers could be speeded up more efficiently, while their solidarity in the shops was undermined. They became the most unabashed finks and strikebreakers in every labor dispute that flared up during the war; and they put the stool-pigeon's finger on every revolutionist and every militant, howling for their arrest and prosecution.

The record of American Stalinism is indeed a record of crimes and betrayals. But here is the important point for militants to get clear in their heads: These crimes and betrayals have been directed against the interests of the American workers. It is on this ground and no other that the militant workers who are conscious of their own class interests must expose and fight them.

5. The Stalinist Bureaucrats and the Other Bureaucrats

Some people, who carry their understandable and quite justified hatred of the Stalinists to the point of phobia, seem to overlook the fact that there are other evils in this world, and in the labor movement. They tend to limit their political program to the single simple formula: United front of everybody against the Stalinists. This does not state the problem correctly. And, moreover, it doesn't hurt the Stalinists. They can live and thrive on the indiscriminate campaign of "red-baiting" directed against them, and even gain a certain credit in the eyes of radical workers which they by no means deserve.

We define the Stalinists as a bureaucracy in the labor movement, with special interests of its own to serve. This bureaucracy seeks to gain, and does gain, special privileges at the expense of the masses of the workers, tenaciously holds on to these privileges and fiercely defends them, and is ready at any moment to sell out the workers to maintain them.

Privileged Labor Bureaucrats

But the Stalinists are not the only bureaucrats in the labor movement. There are others, and in America the others are more numerous, and stronger. By the same token they constitute a far more useful instrument of the capitalists in preventing, restraining and sabotaging the emancipation struggle of the workers. We refer, of course, to the old-line, conservative, trade union bureaucracy and its "progressive" and "Socialist," or ex-Socialist, appendages. This bureaucracy is also based on special privileges which differ from those of the American Stalinists mainly in the circumstance that their privileges are more extensive, more firmly established over a longer period of time, and more secure.

A vast horde of these privileged bureaucrats, ranging from the overfed business agents of a good many of the local unions to the high-salaried International officers, have raised themselves up on the backs of the workers. They enjoy standards of living which the workers cannot even dream of, and think and act more like businessmen than like workers. Most of them feel more at home in a conference with bosses and capitalist party politicians than in a meeting of rank and file workers.

The pickings of the conservative American labor bureaucracy are the richest in the world, and their consciousness is determined accordingly. When they fight it is always mainly for the defense of these privileges. Whether it is a fight to smash a rank and file revolt one day, by any and every dirty means of demagoguery, expulsion and brutal violence; or another day against anti-union legislation which threatens the existence of the unions and therefore their own basis of existence; or a third day against another union in a jurisdictional quarrel — their primary motivation is always the same: the defense of their pickings.

Similarity with the Stalinists

The good-standing members of this corrupt and reactionary gang are fierce Russophobes and red-baiters; and superficially they appear to be diametrical opposites of the Stalinists, whom they are attacking with exceptional energy at the present time in response to the Washington tuning fork. In reality, however, they are essentially the same type as the Stalinists. They are motivated by the same kind of privileged special interests and defend them with very much the same mentality. There are differences, of course, between them and the Stalinist bureaucrats, but the points of difference are superficial and secondary. The points of similarity are fundamental.

That is why they attack the Stalinists not for their crimes and betrayals of the workers but rather for their virtues; more correctly, what would be their virtues if the accusations were true. Leaving aside the stupid allegation that the American Stalinists are promoting and planning to organize a workers' revolution to overthrow capitalism — a "crime" which they are not in the least guilty of — there is not much substance to the furious bluster of the reactionary red-baiters in the labor movement against the "Commies." These anti-Stalinists are guilty of the very same crimes as the Stalinists, and in every crucial test they find themselves allied with the Stalinists in the commission of these crimes against the workers. Strange as it may seem, that is what the record says, and the record does not lie.

We have already recounted the most important crimes and betrayals of which we accuse the Stalinists in the American labor movement. We cited their disruption, class-collaboration and support of capitalist political parties, leading up to the crowning infamy: support of the imperialist war. On top of that, strikebreaking activity to keep the workers in shackles during the war, and stool-pigeon collaboration with the capitalist government for the prose-

cution of militant and revolutionary workers. That is a "criminal record" if there ever was one. And where were the noble red-baiters while all this was going on? The anti-Stalinist labor bureaucrats were committing the very same crimes, point for point; many times in intimate collaboration with these same Stalinists with whom unbalanced Stalinophobes imagine them to be in irreconcilable conflict.

Attempts to Restrict Unionism

The old-line trade union bureaucracy has always sought to restrict the trade union movement to the more or less skilled trades that constitute the aristocracy of American labor. They did more to hinder than to help the organization of the great mass of the unskilled. Prior to the thirties, whenever they entered the unskilled and mass production field, it was hardly ever to organize the unorganized, but nearly always to disrupt the organizing campaigns of rival organizations, such as the IWW and the independent unions. In this field, where the most exploited workers stood most in need of the benefits of organization, the old-line labor skates have always done ten times more union-busting than union-building.

The movement of the mass-production workers for unionization surged forward mightily in the thirties, and its driving impulse came from below, not from the top. The shameless and cynical fakers feared the entrance of these great masses into the organized labor movement as a possible threat to their bureaucratic stranglehold, and consequently to their privileges. The heroic rank and file efforts to attain effective unionization were disrupted again and again by the AFL bureaucracy. The auto workers and the rubber workers, especially, can tell a tale about that; to say nothing of the electrical workers who, in order to create their own union, had to break out of their "Class B" prison in the AFL union, where they had the right to pay dues but not to breathe or to vote. It required a split with the AFL bureaucracy before the mass-production workers could finally break through and secure for themselves the protection of organization under the banner of the CIO.

Rank and file militants in many a local union know from experience that every attempt to take advantage of a favorable opportunity to improve their conditions by strike action must take into account not only the bosses and the cops, but also the top officers of their own organization. There is always the danger of their interference, which does not stop at gangsterism and strikebreaking. These bureaucrats would rather bust up a local union

any time than allow it to come under an honest militant leadership that might endanger their control in the International organization and the emoluments and perquisites appertaining thereto and accruing therefrom.

Approximately 40 percent of the local unions of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, for example, at the present time are under "receivership," i.e., deprived of all their constitutional rights to elect officers, etc., for precisely these reasons. It was the attempt, by the way, to impose such a "receivership" on Minneapolis Local 544, in order to get rid of its militant leadership and line the union up for the war program, that led to the big fight and the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of 18 of the union and SWP leaders—all Trotskyists. Tobin, the president of the Teamsters International, appealed directly to Roosevelt and directly instigated the prosecution. And he worked hand-in-glove with the Stalinists, first to put us in prison and then to prevent any union under their control from aiding our defense committee. These cynical labor skates couldn't learn anything about disruption, union-busting, stool-pigeoning, or violations of trade union democracy, from the Stalinists; they are past masters at all these dark and evil arts.

Both Serve Labor's Enemies

When it comes to class-collaboration on the political field — another crime we charge against the Stalinists — it cannot be said that the Stalinists taught this scheme of class betrayal to the conservative labor bureaucrats. On the contrary, they learned it from them. The labor leaders of the old school operate in every election as procurers for the capitalist parties, urging the trade unionists to "reward their friends," who almost invariably turn out in every real showdown to be their enemies. Witness the present Congress, a large percentage of which, if not a majority, sailed into office with the "endorsement" of the labor leaders; not to mention the strikebreaking President who was recommended as labor's "special friend."

We have cited the especially abominable record of the Stalinists during the war — their support of the war, their support of the no-strike pledge, and their collaboration with the employers and governmental agencies to frame up and break up every attempt of the hard-pressed rank and file to get through it or around it. We denounced the Stalinists during the war for these real and heinous crimes against the interests of the working class. But the red-baiting anti-Stalinist labor bureaucrats, who are making so much noise today in synchronism with the governmental drive against the Stalinists, had absolutely noth-

ing to say against these crimes committed by the Stalinists during the war. And for good reason. They were engaged in the same dirty business. They were, in fact, united with the Stalinists in the conspiracy against truth which was required to drag on the workers into the war. They jointly put over the "no-strike pledge," and jointly fought the militant rank and file whenever they tried to assert their right to strike during the war.

And this applies to the so-called "progressive" labor leaders of the CIO as well as to their more stolid brethren of the AFL. Visualize once again the unforgettable picture, drawn by Art Preis in *The Militant*, of the convention of the United Automobile Workers in 1944. Thomas and Reuther and Addes and Leonard, the whole administration in all of its factions, were lined up solidly on the platform in fraternal unity with the Stalinists to beat down the rank and file revolt against the no-strike pledge.

The transitory leaders thrown to the top of the first great wave of the new unionism represented by the CIO are showing a marked inclination to imitate the AFL fakers and a tendency, like them, to grow fat, especially around the ears. They strive constantly to consolidate their positions in official machines, permanent and secure, and independent from all control, on the pattern of the AFL — and to constrict the membership in a bureaucratic strait-jacket. If they have not succeeded — as they have not and will not—it is by no means owing to the lack of ambitions in this respect, but primarily to the power of resistance that resides in the rank and file of the new unions of the mass-production workers; to the alertness of these workers, and their mighty striving for democracy and for an aggressive, militant policy.

Both Line Up Against the Workers

The closer you look at the dubious program of united front with the conservative and "progressive" labor bureaucrats against the Stalinist bureaucrats, the clearer it becomes that in practice, wherever the vital interests of the masses of the workers are concerned, the "united front" usually takes a different shape, with or without a formal agreement. When it comes to the fundamental conflict of interests between the classes, the burning reality which serious workers must take as their starting point, the Stalinist bureaucrats and the anti-Stalinist bureaucrats find themselves lined up on the same side, and it is not the side of the workers.

"But," say the AFL fakers, and the CIO "progressive" red-baiters, and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, and the ex-radical Stalinophobes—"but," they all say

in chorus, "there is one crime of the Stalinists you have not mentioned, and it is the greatest crime of all which should unite all men of good will in opposition to them: They are the servants of a foreign power." That is true. The official leaders of the Communist Party of the United States are indubitably the hired agents of the Stalin regime in Russia; and they servilely carry out its instructions and serve its interests with every twist and turn of Kremlin policy, no matter how such conduct may contradict and injure the interests of the American working class. For that we condemn them and denounce them, and wage war against them.

But not under your leadership, Messrs. Labor Fakers and Russophobes! You are just as much the agents and servants of the capitalist government at Washington as the Stalinists are the agents and servants of the Stalin regime. What kind of a government is that, if you please? Didn't it drag the people of America into two wars of imperialist conquest under the fake slogan of "democracy," and isn't it now plotting and planning a third? Didn't it preside over the ten-year depression of the thirties with its terrible toll of broken lives and broken homes, and isn't it heading the country straight into another depression, and a still worse one? Isn't it the cynical instrument of the monopolists and profit hogs, serving their interests against the interests of the American people? Isn't it an anti-labor, strikebreaking government, owned lock, stock and barrel by the Sixty Families of monopoly capitalism?

The main enemy of the American workers is in their own country: and as far as their most basic interests are concerned, this government at Washington is also a **foreign power**. It is a far mightier, and a far more immediate threat and danger to the American working class than the government of Stalin, as the experience of the past year has amply demonstrated once again. It is not the Stalin government that is breaking strikes and threatening the rights of unions in the United States at the present time. It is the bi-partisan capitalist government at Washington. That is a foreign power, workers of America, and those who serve this foreign power cannot be your allies in the struggle against Stalinism.

The united front the workers of America really need is the united front of the rank and file, who have no privileges, who serve no foreign powers, who have nothing to lose but their poverty and insecurity, and have a world to win. This united front must be directed at the capitalist system, and thereby against both of its servile agencies—the Stalinist bureaucrats and the other bureaucrats.

6. Is the Communist Party a Working-Class Organization?

Stalinism, like every other force obstructing the emancipation struggle of the workers, thrives on confusion and assiduously disseminates it in the labor movement. The Stalinists also profit not a little by the confusion in the heads of some of their bitterest and most conscientious opponents. The misunderstanding of the question by these opponents arises in part from an emotional approach to the question. Hatred is permitted to obscure reason, and no good ever came from that.

Nothing is better calculated to lead the opponents of Stalinism in the United States astray than the simple description of this monstrosity as the agency of a foreign power, and in turn, the designation of this foreign power as an exploiting class, imperialistic to boot, which dominates more than one-sixth of the earth and is reaching out for the rest of it.

This conception, which would put the Communist Party in the same category as the unlamented German-American Bund, clashes with reality at every step and leads to tactics in the struggle against Stalinism which are futile and self-defeating every time. It bars a tactical approach to the masses of workers under the control and influence of the Communist Party, and thus inadvertently aids the Stalinist bureaucrats in consolidating and retaining this control and influence.

False Conceptions of Stalinism

Such a theory would be absolutely fatal in Western Europe where the Stalinists dominate virtually the whole working-class movement. And it certainly is of no help even in the United States. Stalinism is relatively weak here, and for numerous and weighty reasons can scarcely be expected ever to play the dominating role it plays in Europe. Nevertheless, it is a serious obstacle to the development of a genuinely revolutionary movement, and consequently to the mobilization of the masses for resolute action in the class struggle which would lead objectively to the socialist goal. For that reason we should fight it. But in order to achieve success we must fight Stalinism with a correct understanding of its nature and role.

—If the Communist Party were merely a "Fifth Column" and terrorist gang operating in America as the agency

of a foreign "imperialist" government, then the problem would be considerably simpler and easier for the working-class movement. And it would be no problem at all to the government at Washington, which is indeed imperialist and has the means to cope with foreign agents and spies. This was shown in the case of the German-American Bund. Fritz Kuhn's sorry "Bund" — equipped with "storm troopers" and all—was easily isolated and could gain no serious influence in the American trade unions. The FBI and other governmental agencies had no difficulty in liquidating this fantastic Hitlerite agency when they got ready to do so. And it never once occurred to any working-class tendency, faction or party to come to the defense of the "Bund."

Different Foundations of Stalinism and Fascism

The same prescription does not work, however, and will not work in the case of American Stalinism. Fascism and Stalinism, although much similar in their methods and practices, have entirely different social foundations on their home grounds where they wield state power, and this applies to their foreign extensions too. The rather widespread conception that the Communist Party is a formation similar to Hitler's "Fifth Column" and can be treated accordingly, is profoundly false. The Stalinists make the labor movement the main base of their operations, and it is there that they must be fought, and fought, moreover, with working-class means.

The analogy which can best aid our thinking on this question is provided by the experiences of the Russian Bolsheviks and the early Comintern in the struggle against the Social Democrats. The German Social Democracy betrayed the proletariat in the First World War; and following that, after they came into control of the government, they employed the police and the army to slaughter tens of thousands of workers in suppressing the proletarian revolution. Besides that, the noble Social Democrats were accountable for a substantial number of "unofficial" murders of revolutionary leaders, such as the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

Despite these crimes, the Social Democrats retained a strong organization and influence in the labor movement, as do the present-day Stalinists—despite their crimes. A strong tendency arose among the revolutionary workers to regard the Social Democratic party as no longer a workers' organization, and to reject any kind of tactical approach to its members. This characterization proved to be one-sided; too simple, and therefore false and harmful to the further development of the workers' revolutionary

movement. This attitude had to be radically changed before the young Communist Party of Germany could make any real headway in the struggle against the Social Democratic traitors.

Comparison with German Social Democracy

By their program and their policies the Social Democratic parties then, as now, were petty-bourgeois and not proletarian parties. But by their tradition and composition, by the fact that they made their main base of operation the working-class movement, and by the fact that the workers considered them to be workers' organizations — they had to be designated as such: more precisely, as an organized tendency within the labor movement which the revolutionary party had to combat by tactical means as well as by frontal principled struggle. The Leninist policy of the united front followed inexorably from this basic analysis. This opened the path of the revolutionary party to the Social Democratic workers.

There are many differences between Social Democracy and Stalinism, especially in the domain of methods, but in our view they are differences of degree and not of principle. The Social Democrats substituted the program of class collaboration and reform for the program of class struggle and the proletarian revolution. The Stalinists do the same thing, on a far greater scale. The Social Democrats lied and slandered, murdered and betrayed. The Stalinists do the same thing, also on a far greater scale. Both confuse, disorient and demoralize the advanced workers and disrupt their struggle against capitalism. And they are able to do so precisely because they work inside the labor movement and demoralize it from within.

Traditional Social Democracy doesn't amount to much in the United States. Its place and its essential function is taken over by the official trade union bureaucracy. This bureaucracy also represents a tendency, although an alien tendency, within the labor movement, which also serves a foreign power—the government of the capitalists—and it is more firmly rooted, more influential, more powerful, and therefore a more formidable enemy, at the present time at least, than the Stalinists.

Our method of fighting this formidable bureaucracy in the American labor movement is and must be the method worked out by the Russian Bolsheviks to combat the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries, and later taught by them to the young Communist Parties of the early Comintern. We oppose the reactionary bureaucrats in principle, and the main burden of our irreconcilable struggle against them must be devoted to denunciation and ex-

posure of their perfidious role. Subordinate to that, but inseparably connected, goes the tactical approach to the vast masses of workers under their influence and domination.

This is the Leninist tactic of the united front. We demand of the bureaucrats that they break their alliance with the capitalist political parties and follow an independent class policy on the political field. We give critical support to the bureaucrats in all cases where they find themselves obliged to lead the struggles of the workers for the improvement of their conditions or the defense of their rights. We defend the unions and the individual labor leaders against any attack or infringement from the side of the government. The workers learn more from experience than from propaganda. It is only by participating in the struggles of the workers along these lines that we will win them over to an aggressive class-struggle policy and eventually to a socialist consciousness.

On the ground that the Communist Party is not a working-class organization and not a tendency in the labor movement, a contention is advanced that we can have a different attitude toward the Communist Party, or to those trade unions or other workers' organizations under its control, when they find themselves in clashes with the capitalist class or its governmental agencies. To think so requires an absurd, subjectively-motivated denial of reality. Such a mistake can only lead its proponents, if they follow out the logic of their analysis, into the bourgeois camp. Unfortunately, that is precisely what has happened to the great majority of American anti-Stalinists.

Internal Problem of the Labor Movement

Stalinism is a new phenomenon of the last quarter of a century, and is unique in many ways. But this does not change the essential fact that it is a tendency in the labor movement. It is rooted in the trade unions and wields influence over a section of the progressive workers. That is precisely the reason that it is such a great problem and such a great obstacle to the emancipation struggle of the workers. In our opinion, it is impossible to wage an effective struggle against Stalinism without proceeding from this premise. Stalinism is an **internal problem** of the labor movement which, like every other internal problem, only the workers can solve.

The gist of the matter, let us repeat, consists in the fact that the mis-named Communist Party makes its main field of activity the trade union movement; wields a certain influence there; and by a combination of demagoguery, machination, bureaucratic repression and gangster violence — aided no little by the stupidities of its opponents—

has gained the controlling position in numerous unions and represents an influential force in others. And these unions, just like the unions under the control of the anti-Stalinist conservatives, by the logic of the class struggle frequently come into conflict with the employers and even with the government and find themselves involved in strikes.

Class Analysis Determines Tactic

Shall these strikes be supported on the general principle of class solidarity, or should support be withheld because of the circumstance that the official leaders are Stalinists? And should these leaders, in case they are arrested in the course of strike activities, be defended — also on the general principle of class solidarity against the class enemy? And should the legal rights of the Communist Party be defended against the red-baiters?

Those who say no, end the debate so far as we are concerned. By that fact they take their place in the camp of the class enemy. Those who say yes, thereby recognize implicitly the falsity of the contention that Stalinism is not a tendency in the labor movement, to be contended with as such. There is no getting around this question. It must be squarely faced and answered.

This question arose very acutely in last year's strikes of the Stalinized UE against Westinghouse and General Electric. And again in the long drawn-out strike of the auto workers at Allis Chalmers, which was indubitably dominated by a Stalinist leadership. And again in the recent strike of the National Maritime Union, which had been completely under Stalinist domination for years, and was still partly so. And it is sharply posed right now by the movement to pass legislation outlawing the Communist Party.

A clear understanding and recognition of the class nature of the Communist Party as a workers' organization — as a tendency in the labor movement — determines the tactical approach of the revolutionary workers to the problem. Stalinism cannot be disposed of by reliance on police measures of the bourgeois state — the very idea is ludicrous — nor by anathema and excommunication from the labor movement, when the power to enforce it is lacking. Nothing will do but an uncompromising principled fight, combined with a tactical approach which will enable the revolutionary party to win the workers away from its perfidious influence. From the revolutionary point of view, that is the heart of the problem of fighting Stalinism in a way that will lead to its elimination from the working-class movement, not in fancy but in fact.

7. The Working-Class Fight Against Stalinism

The preamble of the old IWW, on which a whole generation of worker-militants was raised and taught the class struggle, began with the declaration: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." This is certainly true as far as social interests are concerned.

The struggle between the classes never ceases and cannot cease until the workers are completely victorious. The social evils which plague the world today, and even threaten the continued existence and future development of civilization, are due fundamentally to the fact that the international proletarian revolution, the necessary precursor of world socialism, has been unduly retarded and delayed. Outlived and decadent capitalism is stretching out the period of its decline — or rather, its death agony — for too long a time. Capitalism is the root of the evil.

ERRATUM: The paragraph underneath should read as follows:

The overthrow of capitalism is the historic mission of the working class, and all of its daily struggles are instinctively directed to this end. When this struggle becomes conscious and properly organized and led, the downfall of capitalism and the beginning of socialism will be equally assured. Power is on the side of the workers, thanks to their numbers and their strategic social position. They cannot fail to be victorious once they get a clear view and understanding of the central requirement: that their policy be anti-capitalist, and that their organizations and their activities be independent, free from capitalist influences and agencies. This is the core of what Marxism teaches us about the politics of the working class.

Stalinism, Agency of Imperialism

The foregoing considerations fully apply to the problem of Stalinism, which is one of the agencies of capitalism in the labor movement, and the fight against it. The advanced workers above all must give thought to this problem and work out their policy from an independent class standpoint. Stalinism helps the capitalists by introducing disruption, confusion and demoralization into the labor movement, and sells its services to the capitalists in this destructive capacity. To be sure, Stalinism tries to drive a hard bargain with the imperialists. The bargaining over the terms of betrayal sets up conflicts and irritations, as at the present time in the United States, which give the ~~stinctively directed to this end. When this struggle be-~~ false appearance of a revolutionary struggle.

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This, however, does not change the basic fact that Stalinism is essentially an agency of world imperialism in the labor movement of the advanced countries, as well as in the colonial world. But for Stalinism, all of continental Europe would long since have been united in a Federation of Socialist Republics. Even today, after all that has happened, after all the harm that has been done and all the destruction that has been wrought, not a single capitalist regime would stand up for a month in continental Europe unless it was propped up and supported by Stalinism, the "loyal opposition."

It is from this point of view that the fight against Stalinism must be conducted—as an integral part of the general fight against capitalism. It should be clear that the advanced workers need a class policy for this fight as for all others, and one that is completely independent. For this fight the workers need and can expect no help from the capitalists; it is stupidly incongruous to speculate on it for a moment. The workers need rather to get rid of the agents of capitalism — and that means all of them. "Class against class" must be the guiding line for the fight against Stalinism, as for all other fights of the workers.

Meaning of Red-Baiting Campaign

The current red-baiting campaign is inspired and directed by the exploiters of labor. They are more class-conscious than the workers and always try to keep their class interests in mind in elaborating any policy. Ostensibly directed against the Stalinists alone—or the "Communists" as they falsely label them, partly through ignorance and partly through the design to confuse—the witch hunt is in reality directed against labor and the rights of labor in general. Notice how intimately it is tied up with the program of war preparation and anti-union legislation now being railroaded through Congress. That is no accident.

In part the red-baiting campaign is designed also as a diversion to distract attention from the ripening disturbances of the American social system and the mounting inequalities, injustices and deprivations inflicted upon the mass of the people. "Don't look at the harsh realities of American life. Don't think of your real troubles. Look at Russia and the 'reds'." To fall for this transparent fake requires a rather high degree of gullibility. For the American militants and trade unionists to join in a "united front" with the American exploiters for the prosecution of the red-baiting campaign would simply be to adopt a severely efficient method of cutting their own throats.

Some labor leaders who understand or partly understand the truth of the matter are taking part in the red-

baiting campaign stemming out of Washington, in the hope of buying immunity for themselves. Besides being unprincipled, that tactic is sheer folly. The campaign is aimed at all the organizations of the workers and will strike them all with increasing violence as it gathers momentum. The appetite of the red-baiting reactionaries grows by what it feeds on. They become more aggressive with every attempt at unprincipled appeasement offered to them by one section of the labor leaders or another.

Workers React Against Anti-Red Drive

Evidence is accumulating that the rank and file workers in the more progressive and democratic unions are getting the pitch. They are taking a somewhat reserved, and in some places, even a hostile attitude toward the anti-red campaign, to the consternation of some short-sighted "progressive" labor fakers who thought they could easily dispose of their rivals and get themselves elected simply by raising the red scare.

In the recent election in Ford Local 600 of the UAW, the largest local union in the world, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists; the Roman Pope's foreign legion in the American labor movement, led a well-organized, boastful and confident "anti-Moscow" campaign. They suffered a completely unexpected disaster. The Thomas-Addes slate backed by the Stalinists swept the elections by a majority of 3 to 1. In the last convention of the CIO Electrical Workers, likewise, the red-baiting office hunters got a brutal and well-deserved beating.

The workers in the plants apparently took a more serious view of their problem as a whole than the red-baiters counted on. They apparently linked the anti-red drive with the drive against labor in general, and decided by their votes to give a rebuke to the opportunist labor politicians and reactionaries who tried to fish in the troubled waters without bothering to present a serious program on union issues.

Correct Basis for the Fight Against Stalinism

Unfortunately, the Stalinists profited by the confusion in these cases. That is not to be desired, for they are a real menace to the trade union movement and must be fought tooth and nail. They try to stigmatize every criticism of their wrecking activities as "red-baiting," but this dodge is playing out. There is no reason why we should take their definition and refrain from the struggle against them just because some stupid reactionaries are also fighting them, from another point of view.

The thing is to put the fight on the proper basis and conduct it from the standpoint of the interests of the working class. That means to fight the red-baiters without covering up or shielding the criminal record of the Stalinists. It means, no less, to fight the Stalinists without falling into the booby-trap set by the reactionary red-baiters. This discrimination is not so difficult as it may appear. It has been done. From all indications it is being done right now with very good results in the National Maritime Union.

Stalinist Treachery in the NMU

The Stalinist machine has controlled the NMU since it was first organized ten years ago. They have run things there, as they do in every union that falls under their control, with brutal disregard for the wishes and interests of the workers. The union was converted into a political instrument of the Communist Party, and made to serve every zigzag of policy in conformity with the interests and demands of the Kremlin. At the same time, the union apparatus was converted into a happy hunting-ground for careerists and bureaucrats. The chief qualification required to secure their places on the swollen payroll was that they be always ready to carry out any and every policy dictated by the Stalinist machine, regardless of how it might affect the interests of the workers who paid the dues.

The treacherous policies and bureaucratic brutality of the Stalinist machine in the NMU provoked more than one revolt in the ranks in the past, as has been the case in all other Stalinist-dominated unions and will always be the case in the future. But these previous revolts, inspired in the main by the justified resentment of honest workers, fell under the leadership of ignorant, reactionary, red-baiting place-hunters. They simply made good punching-bags for the Stalinist demagogues in the "ideological" struggle, and couldn't even hold their own in the physical struggle which they, like so many of their breed, imagined could accomplish everything. They found out that muscle-stuff is a game that more than one side can play at, just as the Stalinists, who are addicted to the same theory, are finding out now and will find out increasingly, as the tide of revolt rises against them.

Revolt in the Ranks

The Stalinists, following their regular procedure, manipulated the expulsion of their leading opponents. All opposition was driven underground. For a long time the CP stranglehold on the union seemed to be absolutely unshakable. But the logic of the class struggle proved to

be stronger than the bureaucratic machine of Stalinism. The anti-worker policy followed by the leadership of the NMU during the war went to such monstrous lengths of cynicism and betrayal that it stored up a tremendous reserve of resentment in the ranks. Finally, this brought about a split even in the Communist Party fraction which dominated the union. With that, came a split in the union apparatus and the creation of conditions for the real sentiment of the rank and file to assert itself.

The new opposition attacked the Stalinist machine not for its radicalism but for its conservatism, for its betrayal of the interests of the workers in the trade union fight against the shipowners. President Curran, who had long been a fellow-traveller of the Stalinists, took the leadership of the fight; and to his credit it must be said that on the whole he has led it wisely and effectively, abstaining from stupid and reactionary red-baiting, and fighting on issues of vital concern to the seamen in their daily struggle. The rank and file of the union were only waiting for the signal, and have rallied around the anti-Stalinist leadership in what appears to be a very substantial majority. If the fight is continued along these lines, there is every reason to be confident that victory will be assured and that an important union with a great future will be cleansed of the Stalinist pestilence.

Lessons of the NMU Experience

Two important lessons can be drawn from the experience of the NMU: (1) The masses are stronger than any bureaucratic apparatus, whether it is a trade union apparatus or any other kind, and demonstrate it every time they find an opening to break through and have proper leadership. (2) The workers who mistakenly follow the Stalinists are also their victims, and by the logic of the class struggle must come into conflict with the bureaucratic betrayers. Many of them can be counted upon as reserves for the future in the victorious struggle against perfidious Stalinism — provided they are approached with a worker policy, not a pro-capitalist one.

Stalinism can and will be defeated and cast out of the labor movement. But the workers themselves must do it.

8. The Prospects of American Stalinism

The most reactionary power and the most formidable enemy of the workers in their struggle for a better life is American imperialism. This holds true on a world scale; and it is 100 times true as far as the direct struggle of the American workers is concerned. It is unpardonable to overlook this simple truism, and to see the main enemy in the person of the discredited, hounded and harried, and numerically weak Communist Party of the United States.

The strength and influence of the Communist Party here is in no way comparable to that of European Stalinism. There the Stalinist parties command the support of millions and are the chief prop of the decadent capitalist system, which could not maintain itself anywhere on the continent without their support. Here the role played by the CP is a minor one, and most probably will remain so.

Historical reasons in the main account for this disparity. The socialist consciousness and tradition of the European proletariat attracted them very strongly to the Russian Revolution from the first. Since then, as the Soviet Union demonstrated its strength and viability, they transferred their sympathies to the Stalin regime, seeing behind its shoulders the image of the Soviet Union, and not noticing or not taking full account of the frightful degeneration wrought by this usurping bureaucracy.

Moreover, the European workers, who in their vast majority are anti-capitalist, recognize American imperialism as an irreconcilable enemy of their socialist aspirations, and feel the need of alliance with a power to counter-balance it. They turn more and more to the Soviet Union since the latter demonstrated its power on the field of battle against the Nazi war machine.

In America the situation is quite different. Due to a number of historical conditions peculiar to the country, the great masses of the American workers never attained a socialist consciousness, not even to the extent of independent political action on a reformist basis, such as even conservative Britain has experienced now already for several decades. In addition to that, the American workers have shared the isolationist provincialism which dominated almost the whole population up until the most recent years. Except for a very thin stratum represented by the class-conscious vanguard, they saw Russia as a far-away country in which they had little interest; and such

interest as they manifested was more hostile than friendly. Besides all that, beneath all their apparent conservatism the American workers have a not inconsiderable feeling of independence and of confidence in their own power. They see no need of the help of any "foreign power."

All these circumstances have operated up till now to restrict and limit the growth and influence of the Communist Party, which appeared in the popular mind as the most radical party. On the other side, Stalinism has perhaps been more thoroughly exposed, and subjected to more effective criticism from the revolutionary point of view, in America than in any other capitalist country. The forces of genuine communism, as counterposed to Stalinism, have made more headway with the development of their independent organization and the extension of their independent influence here than elsewhere. Thus for reasons which may appear to be somewhat contradictory, Stalinism in the United States has been stunted in its growth. And, if we continue to follow a correct policy, there is good ground to believe that American Stalinism cannot hope to attain the present powerful position, and thereby the capacity for evil and betrayal, of its European counterparts.

Main Danger of Stalinism in U.S.

The main strength and danger of American Stalinism lies not in its numbers and its popular influence, nor in its apparatus, its money and its terrorist agents—although it disposes of considerable forces in all these fields and departments — but rather in its demagogical capacity to deceive, demoralize and disorient the more radical elements who have attained a conscious anti-capitalist attitude, or are awakening to it. These forces of the class-conscious vanguard are as yet not very numerous in comparison to the size of the American working class as a whole. But they are the most decisive for the future, for it is their destiny to lead the others. Once the class struggle in America is posed in its sharpest and most irreconcilable form, they alone can lead; and they will then represent the greatest power in the world.

It is primarily on this ground, in the fight for the minds and souls of the awakening militant workers of the class-conscious vanguard, that the real fight against Stalinism must take place. Here we can already record considerable success; and we confidently count on more because we are gaining right along, steadily if slowly, thanks to our correct approach to the question.

Stalinism was a much more formidable danger when we first opened up the irreconcilable fight against it in 1928, and in the ensuing decade or so, than it is today, even

though its numerical forces and its apparatus were smaller then than now. At that time the Communist Party dominated virtually the whole radical labor movement in this country. In the first years of the depression the party drew into its train a supplementary army of radical intellectuals, disillusioned in capitalism by the crisis, who rendered them great service in propagandizing and popularizing the lie that Stalinism was true communism.

In those days also the economic progress recorded by the Soviet Union under the Five Year Plan, while capitalist world economy, including its American sector, was plunged into the greatest difficulties, gave a new attractive power to Stalinism and its myth of "socialism in one country." The critics from the Left Opposition, the Trotskyists, appeared to be refuted by events and were pushed into isolation on the sidelines. Thanks to this, the American Stalinists were able to vastly expand their propaganda mediums; to dominate the movement of the unemployed in the first years of the crisis; and then later to play a big role in the organizing of the unorganized, and to intrench themselves in various unions of the newly created CIO.

Decline of Stalinist Influence

But since the late thirties, both the organizational position and the influence of American Stalinism have declined rather than advanced. The Moscow Trials, which were so thoroughly exposed in the United States, dealt powerful blows to the moral position of American Stalinism and alienated a large section of its intellectualistic periphery. The great majority of the latter, now disillusioned in Stalinism, acquired a new faith in capitalism coincident with the temporary improvement of the economic conjuncture, and have since become professional red-baiters who damn and expose Stalinism on every occasion as assiduously as they once praised it and glossed over its crimes.

A smaller section of the former intellectual fellow-travelers of Stalinism carried their criticism through to its logical conclusion and joined the Trotskyist movement, and have contributed fruitfully to its ideological work. So also, numerous communist workers, who had mistakenly believed that Stalinism was communism, drew the necessary conclusions from the new events and revelations and transferred their allegiance to the genuinely revolutionary and communist party, the Socialist Workers Party.

Each turn and twist of American Stalinist policy, in consonance with the zigzags of the Kremlin on the world diplomatic field, produced new defections, desertions and splits. The signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact brought with it the desertion of a small horde of careerists and muddle-

heads who had mistaken Stalinism for the champion of bourgeois democracy, pure and undefiled. At the next turn the Stalinist support of the war, and their anti-worker jingo policy in support of American imperialism, steadily alienated increasing numbers of honest workers who had mistaken Stalinism for communism.

The betrayals, bureaucratic abuses, gangster methods and false policies inflicted by the Stalinists upon the unions which had fallen into their control are now beginning to bear fruit in widespread and violent revolts against the Stalinists. Increasingly numerous and militant oppositions are rising up against them from two sides: on the one side, from reactionary red-baiters who want to displace the Stalinist bureaucrats in order to take their places and appropriate their plums; on the other side, from militant workers, some of them former Stalinists, who want to throw out the Stalinist bureaucrats in order to provide the unions with a militant policy and an honest leadership.

The Communist Party has to face these increasing troubles with a leadership of very low caliber.

The sterile bureaucratic regime of the Stalinized party prohibited any normal renewal of the leadership. The seed of talent could not sprout and grow. Independent-minded revolutionists could not breathe in that poisoned atmosphere. The party has to rely for leadership mostly on old hacks who know nothing but to do what they are told and lie to order, and characterless careerists who frequently desert them for greener fields. Budenz is only the latest of this unsavory crew, but by no means the last.

The present prospects of American Stalinism are not very bright, all things considered. Only one thing could rescue them from their difficulties and give them a new lease on life. A great wave of labor radicalism is in the making in the U.S. If the Stalinists are allowed to appear as the persecuted champions of the workers, instead of the cynical betrayers they are, there is danger of the radicalization being diverted to Stalinism. Therein is the tragic error of red-baiting, especially if the progressive workers go in for it. That error must be avoided.

The American workers will turn toward communism, and they will move swiftly and massively once they start; of that there can be no doubt. Will Stalinism be able to seize upon this great movement, pervert it and demoralize it, and turn it aside from its goal? That depends on us. If we explain things correctly and work with the necessary energy, the American workers will embrace communism in its genuine form and reject the Stalinist counterfeit. In the struggle for the American working class, Stalinism will be defeated by its revolutionary nemesis—Trotskyism.

9. Workers' Revolution and Bureaucratic Degeneration

Will the American workers lose the revolution after they have won it? Will they overthrow capitalism with all its power only to fall victim to a new bureaucracy and be subjected to a new form of slavery?

The people who ask these questions — and there are many of them — have in mind the post-Lenin developments in Russia. Rashly concluding that the revolution has already been completely destroyed there — which is far from the truth—and taking the Russian experience as a universal pattern—another serious mistake — they fear that Stalinism or something like it, with its totalitarian police state, forced labor camps and terroristic suppression of all democracy, will be the eventual outcome of the workers' victory in any case. This line of thought and speculation has led not a few people to conclude that the revolutionary cure for capitalism will turn out in the end to be worse than the disease. It is the perfect formula for passivity leading up to capitulation and renegacy.

Those who take this gloomy view of the ultimate outcome of a victorious proletarian revolution sound something like the worker who refuses to join a union and prepare a strike for higher wages because of previous bad experiences with bureaucratic sell-outs and betrayals. "How do I know the leaders won't sell us out as the others did? If the strike is lost we will be worse off than we are now. How do I know the union will not fall into the hands of racketeers and be more a detriment than benefit to us?"

Those who demand guarantees as to the eventual outcome of a strike — or a revolution — ask more than we can give. Defeats and setbacks are always possible in every struggle. Naturally, as revolutionists we should look ahead and take into account the possible difficulties and dangers of the future and consider how to deal with them. But we must do this without exaggerating them and without permitting ourselves to be diverted from the task of the day. That task is the struggle against capitalism, and with that, the struggle against the reactionary labor bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is a powerful obstructive force.

It is this bureaucracy, as it exists today, which must first be dealt with and overthrown. Only then will we confront the possible danger of a new bureaucracy of the future, which no longer has any privileged section of the working class to lean on and no capitalist government to

support it. In our view this problem will be much simpler and easier to cope with in the United States.

The real danger of bureaucratism with which we must concern ourselves first of all is not one that will arise on the morrow of the workers' victory. Rather, it is the burning reality of the present day, and of the whole period between now and the American workers' revolution. The break-up of the bureaucracy in the labor movement and the freeing of the working masses from its strangulating grip is the indispensable condition for the overthrow of American capitalism. Can this be done? Those who doubt it, or those who skip over the problem in favor of gloomy speculations about the dangers of bureaucratism **after the revolution**, are no good for the struggle.

In the early years of the Comintern some extremely interesting and instructive discussions took place on the trade union question between the Bolshevik leaders and some "Left" Communists. The specific point at issue was posed as follows: Should Communists accept the reactionary trade unions controlled by the reformist bureaucracy as they were and work within them to overthrow the bureaucrats, as the Bolsheviks said; or should they abandon these unions to the bureaucracy, withdraw from them and build new unions of their own, free from the presence of the bureaucrats, as the "Lefts" maintained? This was also the position of the American IWW, and was one of the reasons for its failure.

The "Lefts" of that time were unquestionably serious and sincere revolutionists—that is why Lenin took the trouble to debate with them at great length and with the utmost patience. They were confident that the workers could overthrow the capitalist regime and reorganize society on a socialist basis. But they seemed to be equally convinced that it was impossible to "reform" the reactionary trade unions—that is, to win over the majority, throw out the bureaucrats and transform the unions into militant organs of the class struggle.

Lenin pointed out that the "Lefts" lacked the sense of proportion. Look, he said, you are confident of being able to defeat and overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie concentrated in its state apparatus, its army, its police force, etc.; but you consider it impossible to overthrow the reactionary trade union bureaucracy, which is only one of the agencies of this bourgeois power which you expect to defeat in its entirety. This, said Lenin, shows a glaring inconsistency on your part; an overestimation of the power of the bureaucratic rabble which has seized control of the trade unions and an underestimation of the power of the masses of workers who make up the union membership.

The same inconsistency, on a thousand-fold greater scale, is today manifested by not a few people who have been demoralized by Stalinism and horrified by its crimes. The same doubts and fears formerly advanced in support of the discredited theory of the "Left" Communists with respect to the trade union bureaucracy under capitalism — based on the foolish belief in its invincibility — are here expressed again in connection with the broadest problems of socialism, with far more dangerous implications than when they were first revealed in the limited field of trade union tactics. These people underestimate the mass power of the workers — the motive force of every revolution — and surrender the field to a possible future bureaucracy before it has even made its appearance.

Confidence in American Working Class

Genuine revolutionists who have confidence in the ability of the American working class to overthrow capitalism do not and cannot have the slightest doubt of the ability of the workers to dispose of the conservative bureaucracy, which serves as an agency of capitalism in the labor movement. The struggle of the rank and file workers against this bureaucracy is one of the surest expressions of their instinctive striving to settle accounts with capitalism and solve the problems of poverty and insecurity which haunt their lives.

As far back as 1931 Trotsky directly linked the coming radicalization of the American workers with a determined and irreconcilable fight against the trade union bureaucrats. He wrote: "With the first signs of a rise in the (economic) conjuncture, the trade union movement will acutely sense the necessity of tearing itself loose from the claws of the despicable AFL bureaucracy." This was written when the bureaucracy seemed to have an unshakable grip on the existing unions, which then had less than three million members, and an unlimited power to prevent the organization of the unorganized outside of their control.

There were many croakers who scoffed at Trotsky's "optimism." But within the brief space of less than a decade, the movement of the masses proved itself to be strong enough to break this bureaucratic grip and achieve the organization of the unorganized in the mass production industries under the independent auspices of the CIO. The "new unionism" took shape in struggle against "the despicable AFL bureaucracy." This example shows how ridiculous it is to make a fetish of the power of the labor bureaucracy — or any other bureaucracy. The bureaucracy can dominate the masses only when they are passive. But the masses in motion can smash any bureaucracy. This

is the law demonstrated in every great revolution. It will be demonstrated once again, and finally, we think, in the greatest revolution of all — the coming American revolution.

This magnificent movement of the CIO, which has wrought such a profound change in the whole labor movement and in the position and outlook of the American working class is only the beginning. So far we have seen only the first tentative steps of the American workers on the road of radicalism and class militancy. Considering this, it does not require much imagination to foresee what a genuine, deep-going revolutionary movement of the working masses will do to the bureaucratic barricades still standing in their path.

The American workers can and will make their revolution; and, as is quite obvious, they will smash the present trade union bureaucracy in the process. "But," say the defeatists, "what then? After the victory, after the expropriation of the capitalists and the consolidation of a workers' government and the organization of socialist production — will not then a new bureaucracy arise? What guarantee do we have that power will not be usurped by a new bureaucracy, as happened in Russia, which will oppress and enslave the workers and rule by totalitarian terror?"

Such a thought indeed opens up "a perspective of the profoundest pessimism," as Trotsky once remarked, and is all the more to be condemned because it has no real justification. It can only debilitate the movement of the revolutionary workers by robbing them of their will to struggle, which must presuppose the prospect of victory and the emancipation of the workers. An aversion to the Stalinist regime in the USSR is quite justified, for it is indeed a horrible monstrosity, but the fear of its duplication here, after a victorious revolution, has no basis in reality.

There are profound differences between America and Russia, and these differences create different problems both before the revolutionary victory of the workers and afterward, when the problem of consolidating the victory comes to the fore.

Russia was the most backward of the big capitalist countries. The proletariat, although highly concentrated, was numerically weak in relation to the population as a whole. Its industrial development and technique lagged far behind. On top of all that, the victorious workers' revolution inherited from Czarism and the destruction of war and civil war, a devastated, ruined, poverty-stricken country and a frightful scarcity of the most elementary necessities. The disrupted productive apparatus taken over

by the revolution was incapable of turning out a volume of goods sufficient to overcome the scarcity in a short period of time.

The Russian Revolution was not an end of itself and could not build "socialism" by itself, in one backward country. It was only a beginning, which required the supplementary support of a revolution in more advanced Europe and a union of the European productive apparatus and technology with the vast natural resources of Russia. The delay of the European revolution isolated the Soviet Union, and on the basis of the universal scarcity a privileged bureaucracy arose which eventually usurped power in the state and destroyed the workers' organizations—Soviets, trade unions and even the revolutionary party which had organized and led the revolution. A horrible degeneration has taken place, but for all that, the great revolution has not yet been destroyed, and its ultimate fate has not yet been decided.

Socialism can be constructed only on the basis of a highly productive economy capable of producing abundantly. Where there is scarcity, with the consequent scramble for the meager necessities, the fight for privileges takes place; the material basis for a privileged bureaucracy appears, as was the case in Russia. We cannot see any prospect of such a situation in richly productive America once the power of the capitalist class is broken and production is organized, under a workers' government, for use and not for profit. America is a much more advanced country than was the Russia of the Czars, and consequently the American bourgeoisie is much stronger than was its Russian counterpart. Because of that, the overthrow of the capitalist regime in the United States will be much more difficult. But for the same reason the consolidation of the workers' victory, once it has been attained, will be all the easier.

Thanks to the extraordinary development of American industrial technique, its vast resources and skilled working class, the organization of production on such a scale as to ensure plenty and thereby economic equality for all, can be assured almost immediately after the consolidation of the victory. This is the main point to keep in mind; it is the greatest assurance that neither capitalist counter-revolution nor bureaucratic degeneration can find a firm material base here. Once the American workers have made their revolution, the decisive factors of American resources and technology will provide the material basis for the broadest workers' democracy, leading to the fulfillment of the revolution in the classless socialist society. The thing is, to make the revolution.

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