

DISCUSSION ARTICLE BY A. B. MAGIL

THE NATIONAL BOARD'S resolution amended by the National Committee is a considerable improvement over the original version and shows we are making progress in freeing ourselves of the opportunist habits of thought that permeated our movement in the recent period. However, I confess myself disappointed that the latter part of the resolution, dealing with our errors, is virtually unchanged. In the light of our discussion I feel that the generalizations in section 6 are highly inadequate: they do not dig deeply enough or precisely enough into the nature and origin of our mistakes. To say that these mistakes "consisted in drawing a number of erroneous conclusions from the historic significance of the Teheran accord" is a half-truth. The fact is that the Teheran accord merely served as the occasion for transforming a gradual accretion of uncorrected errors into a full-scale revisionist system. As Marxists we cannot content ourselves with examining a phenomenon only at the point where it has reached maturity. It would be wrong to minimize the qualitative change in our opportunism that took place after Teheran; but it is also wrong to ignore the process of its growth over the course of years.

Throughout its history the Com-

munist Party in this country has had to contend with the fact that it was a relatively weak organization functioning in the most powerful imperialist country in the world and within a labor movement dominated by capitalist ideology. This situation has reflected itself in the wide oscillations from opportunism to sectarianism and back that have characterized our movement. The roots of our recent revisionism need to be traced through at least the past ten years. It was not the "intelligence" of any section of the bourgeoisie, but the impact of sharp class struggle, manifested in the great strike wave of 1934 and in the surge toward unionism of hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers, that split the American bourgeoisie and caused its liberal wing, led by President Roosevelt, to support concessions to labor and the people in an effort to shore up a capitalist system in acute crisis. And it was during those years, particularly after the 1936 election, that in executing the correct policy of the democratic front we developed a tendency to *rely* on the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie. As a result, we were caught unprepared for the tactical shift necessitated by the outbreak of the imperialist war. We then swung to what seemed like the opposite extreme: we interpreted the

diplomatic agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union as a truce between socialism and fascism and left the leadership of the anti-fascist masses to the liberal bourgeoisie, which by that time, however, had been reunited with the reigning reactionary wing.

After June 22, 1941, we swung back: the correct tactic of unity with the major big business groups, which for their own reasons and in their own way were supporting the war against Germany, was pursued in such a fashion that the errors of the past were reproduced, so to speak, on a "higher level." And for those who may be tempted to believe that one man has had a monopoly of those errors, it is well to recall that for nearly a year after June 22, 1941, Earl Browder was in jail—a fact which in itself should have warned us against the illusions which he and we so readily embraced.

I believe too the resolution tends to gloss over the fundamental character of our opportunist mistakes when it declares: "While we Communists were beginning to re-examine our postwar perspectives and to react correctly to some of the recent international developments, we were; however, readjusting ourselves too slowly to the new world developments. . . ." The science of meteorology does not consist in carrying an umbrella when it rains and leaving it home when the sun shines. And the science of Marxism does not consist merely in "reacting" and "readjusting" our-

selves to world events. Nor did the chief trouble lie in the slowness of our readjustment. The fact is that whether we reacted rapidly or slowly, so long as our reaction and readjustment were based, not on Marxist science, but on the liberal ersatz that we had swallowed, we were rudderless and therefore increasingly incapable of truly guiding the labor movement and the nation. That is why I feel a more fundamental economic and political analysis of our errors ought to be a part of the resolution, even though a document of this kind cannot discuss the subject exhaustively.

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The economic essence of the revisionism which Comrade Browder continues to uphold consists in the fact that in the epoch of monopoly capitalism (imperialism), when the contradictions of the system have been enormously accentuated — of which the war itself is gigantic proof — this theory projects a softening of contradictions and even the resolution under the present setup of the principal one—that between the expanding productive forces and the contracting market — together with the liquidation of the general crisis of capitalism. Of course, this is not explicitly stated in Comrade Browder's writings, but this is the economic meaning of his interpretation of the Teheran accord.

The political essence of this revisionist theory is the conception that

the bourgeoisie is historically the progressive and decisive class in contemporary society. I emphasize the word "historically" advisedly. For it certainly is true that on specific issues and for limited periods the bourgeoisie or a major section of it is capable of taking a position that is objectively progressive, as is the case in the present war. And in this limited sense the bourgeoisie can also be decisive in shaping the future, as was the case with the German bourgeoisie—whose fascist decision, however, lasted only twelve years, thanks above all to the working class of the U.S.S.R. But this is quite different from Comrade Browder's non-Marxist conception of the bourgeoisie, or at least its leading groups, as playing a decisive and progressive role over an entire historic epoch—the very epoch in which, as Lenin said, "the political superstructure of the new economy, of monopoly capitalism . . . is the turn from democracy to political reaction." The practical effect of this theoretical view is to subordinate working class policy to capitalist policy not only for today, but for the indefinite future.

Comrade Browder himself has given us the best evidence that this is the political essence of his theory in his article in *The Worker* of June 10. It is no accident that this article is preoccupied with the question of what the American bourgeoisie will or will not do, to the virtual exclusion of everything else. Only near the end does Comrade Browder remember to say: "It is, of course, un-

derstood in all this argument that the decisive force for realizing a lasting peace is a powerful labor movement with a clear policy at the head of all the democratic masses." But this is a kind of ritualistic formula and has, in fact, no organic connection with Comrade Browder's thesis. For his entire argument is designed to show that unless the main groups of the bourgeoisie take a certain course, the peace envisaged in the Teheran-Yalta accords is doomed. He therefore wants us to direct our major efforts toward influencing the bourgeoisie. And in the course of his argument he abandons Marxist materialism for philosophic idealism, insisting that the subjective consciousness or "intelligence" of the bourgeoisie can override the contradictions inherent in its class position.

Comrade Browder's approach would in reality make impossible a successful fight for the fulfillment of the Teheran and Yalta objectives because it is oriented, in the words of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, "on the strata of society which are no longer developing, even though they at present constitute the predominant force," rather than on "those strata which are developing and have a future before them, even though they at present do not constitute the predominant force." (Since those words were written, the whole relationship of world forces has in fact shifted in favor of "those strata which are developing and have a future before

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them.") It is no wonder that with such an approach Comrade Browder is no longer able to think clearly about national and international events, as witness his statement at the March meeting of the C.P.A. National Committee: "The reactionary coalition [in the United States] is melting away." (*America's Decisive Battle*, p. 19.)

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In combating the revisionism which permeated our movement there is always the danger of committing new errors of over-correction. One error of this type is writing and speaking as if our movement had achieved nothing at all; the fact is that even in the recent period our practical work, despite the harmful effects of our revisionist theory, adds up to a plus.

More serious is the danger of sectarianism against which Comrade Foster warned in his article in *The Worker* of July 8. Let us not ignore the fact that there is a powerful pull in that direction. One of the principal forms it takes is that of obscuring the differences within the bourgeoisie. In practice this means rejecting the Leninist policy of taking advantage of "every antagonism of interest among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries," of utilizing "even the smallest opportunity of gaining a mass ally, even

though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional." I feel that in this respect the amended resolution is still not entirely satisfactory, for it practically obliterates all conflicts of interest and policy among the monopolists. It is true that section 3 says that "labor should cooperate with those capitalist groupings and elements who, for one or another reason, desire or endeavor to promote democratic objectives." This, however, stands in contradiction to section 2, where the present role of the bourgeoisie is described as if it were a homogeneous unit. Missing from section 2 is not only some indication of the real cleavages that exist, even though they are subordinate to the basic reactionary drives, but also recognition that these alignments are not rigid, that shifts are taking place, and that particularly in this period, after the defeat of Germany, bourgeois policy is transitional and fluid. I think we need a richer and less one-sided analysis if we are to function most effectively in an enormously complicated situation

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It is of course relatively easy to beat someone else's breast. I am not part of our national leadership, but there is no reason why the thousands of readers of *New Masses*, of which I am an associate editor, should for that reason overlook the fact that I too helped lead them astray. It was none other than I who in June 1944 wrote two articles in *New Masses* on

cartels, in the first of which I ridiculed the bourgeois and Social-Democratic theories after World War I that cartels would be instruments of stability and peace—and in the second article defended this idea in regard to cartels after the present war. And my arguments were very “plausible”—even if untrue. When I ask what led me to such folly, I must note that, apart from the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois pressures that affected the movement as a whole, in my own case habits of lazy thinking were a contributing factor. I regarded myself as an interpreter rather than a formulator of policy and hence

felt free of the responsibility to grapple with basic problems. Lazy thinking also manifested itself in a tendency to seek in the Marxist-Leninist classics not illumination on the problems of today, but apt quotations to corroborate ready-made solutions. I know it will not be easy to rid myself of all vestiges of the opportunism which corroded that which for every Communist must be his dearest political possession, Marxist-Leninist science. But this is a battle I must wage together with our entire membership until it is won for myself as well as for our organization as a whole.