

7/28/31 Rm

Comrades: The National Committee is sending out to all the members of the Communist League of America (Opposition) the letter by comrade Gourov which is reproduced below. The letter, sent to us by the editorial board of the Bulletin of the Russian Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists), is for the confidential information of all comrades and should be discussed in every branch, with the results of this discussion communicated to our committee. It should be stressed that the letter which follows is strictly internal and not for publication or transmission to non-League members.

SOME IDEAS ON THE POSITION AND THE TASKS OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION.

1. The revolutionary tide is now indisputable. The Communist parties are growing stronger in certain countries. The elementary flow of forces turns aside the questions of strategy and puts them in second or third place. The workers move towards the Communists as the most intransigent party. In the same direction act the economic successes in the U.S.S.R., acknowledged by an important part of the bourgeois press and by the fact, becoming even more convincing for the workers.

2. This general political position, even though paradoxical at first sight, strikes not only at the Right Opposition but also at the Left. That is what explains, in the last analysis, the Austrian capitulations, the cessation of growth in certain countries, the weakening of the activity, etc. Over and above any local, specific and personal reason, there is a general reason: the spontaneous impulse which has not yet posed the questions of revolutionary strategy, which has not yet solved completely the contradictions in the position of the Comintern and of its sections at a new historical stage. It is evident that under these conditions, a faction which does not simply swim in the judgment of the stream but which studies the situation critically and consciously poses all the questions of strategy, must inevitably be set back, for a certain time; in the midst of this faction, there will be unrestrained feelings of impatience which, in isolated cases, take a capitulatory form.

3. In certain cases, victory is possible even with a very bad policy. With the deepening of the crisis, its prolongation, with the subsequent disintegration of the social democracy, the demoralization of the governments, the victory of the German Communist Party is not excluded, even with the policy of the Thaelmann leadership. BUT unfortunately, it is merely not excluded. The actual chances for such a victory are not great. Of course, if the battles develop the Left Opposition will take part in them as a not very numerous but as the most resolute detachment. I believe that the Left Opposition should now make a declaration, not public but official, on this subject: for instance, address to the Central Committee of the German Communist Party a letter in which it would declare that without renouncing a particle of its view, the Left Opposition as a whole, and each of its members in particular, are ready to put their forces at the disposal of the party for any mission or task whatsoever. A declaration made in this manner, regardless of its immediate consequences, would have an educational import and would bring returns in the future.

4. The victory in Germany would have a decisive international importance. We have said that it is not excluded, even with the present leadership. But there is still a long way to go to the victory.

The fundamental feature of the situation in Germany, this time too, is the extreme disproportion between the acuteness of the revolutionary situation and the strength of the party. On this point, Trotsky has spoken in his pamphlet devoted to the last Reichstag elections. The contradictions in the political situation characterized in this brochure have only become more acute since. The party, after having weakened itself for a few years by an untimely offensive, to conduct an essentially defensive and waiting policy. There rises an entirely real perspective: the objective situation may change in favor of the bourgeoisie before the semi-spontaneous flow of forces permits the Communist party to pass over to a decisive offensive.

5. In Spain, the same disproportion. During the development of the revolution, exclusively uniform and favorable to the proletariat the Comintern lets month after month escape, discloses its weakness and its bankruptcy, nurtures march-syndicalism, gives the bourgeoisie the possibility of consolidating itself and thus prepares an outcome for the revolution not in the Russian style but in the German (1918-1919)

6. I follow China very little now, but there too the crying mis- of recent years, the ignoring of the real situation of the country, the negation of the democratic revolutionary tasks, the fact of the ignoring of the proletariat, the transfer of the center of gravity to the peasant war, have prepared the tragic denouement. Chian-Kai-Shek begins with the destruction of the peasant homes while the cities remain tranquil. His victory in this case threatens the Communist with a frightful extermination and with a new weakening of the revolution for a prolonged period.

7. The economic development of the U.S.S.R. is now ~~xxx~~ visibly entering into a critical phase. The "motley picture" of the execution of the Five Year Plan (according to Stalin's expression) signifies the disruption of the proportions even within the formal framework of the plan. However, the whole question lies in whether success is obtained, and in what measure, in establishing the necessary proportions between the elements of the plan and the spontaneous and semi-spontaneous processes in economy. From the very beginning, we anticipated that the accumulating contradictions and disproportions -- in the absence of a constant and open regulation -- would break out in the third, the fourth or the fifth year. Now this stage has drawn quite near.

8. According to the objective conditions, we have entered into the period of revolutions and of revolutionary wars. In these conditions. The Red Army is an historical factor of enormous importance. On the scale of the historical balance, the Red Army could prevail considerably not only over German Fascism, but even more over Polish. The general situation of Europe entirely justifies a revolutionary offensive. But here is posed with exceptional acuteness the question of bread, of meat, of horses, of oats and -- after that -- of the feelings of the peasantry and also the feelings of the working class. The disharmonious and bureaucratic planning and regulation lead, a critical moment, to a state of affairs where economy, powerful according to its abstract possibilities, is extremely feeble according to its actual resources.

9. In a long range policy, one must also foresee the worst variant, especially if the likelihood of it is as great as it is in the present conditions. What is this worst variant? The German proletariat does not take over the power in the next period. The Spanish Communist Party does not succeed in time in growing to the role of leader

the working class. Capitalism benefits by a respite. Under the Fascist or the "democratic" or a combined form, it draws itself out of the crisis. To be sure, the declining character of capitalism cannot be overcome. But already only the temporary pacification of China can open up a parade ground for operations in grand style. A new industrial upswing can in no way be considered as theoretically excluded in advance.

10. The period passes is characterized by the fact that capitalism has slipped down ever more deeply into the quagmire of the crisis while the Soviet Union has yielded ever greater percentages of growth. The danger consists of the fact that the world can present in the coming period, a picture of a contrary character up to a certain point. More particularly: capitalism will draw itself out of the crisis and in the Soviet Union there will come forward all those disproportions and contradictions driven in by bureaucratic pressure and whose echo is the last speech of Stalin.

All that is said above naturally has a hypothetical character. Just as in economic planning one must have maximum and minimum variants, so in political prognoses, one must take the best and worst variants. Above is analyzed the worst possible variant. The reality will pass somewhere between the best and the worst variant, even though it may be feared, closer to the worst than to the best. What does this signify from point of view of development of Communism itself? A period of deep internal crisis, of criticism, of the verification of past experience of discussion of the past. What has the Left Opposition done effectively up to now? Very little. There is a certain quantity of critical works and of platforms which the Western proletariat, even its vanguard even the vanguard of this vanguard, has not assimilated and has not tested by its own experience. In various countries there existed for years Opposition groups which sometimes never had anything in common with Bolshevism and which only compromised the Left Opposition by their sympathy for it. Our work in this last period reduced itself in large measure to the purging of the ranks of the Opposition from chance, alien and really pernicious elements. With this, we ourselves committed not a few mistakes which are quite inevitable, being the price of learning. There is nothing astonishing if the workers did not rush headlong to the call of the Left Opposition groups in the various countries. The present revolutionary tide by itself brings to the advanced workers the natural satisfaction which permits them not to be of strategical problems. All this, as is said above, entirely explains why the Left Opposition, in a series of cases, feels itself pulled from the main stream of the movement. But this is to be explained as a temporary situation. The questions of revolutionary strategy will be posed in a short time in a series of countries, first in Germany or in Spain, with an exceptional acuteness. A large part of what was said by the Opposition in the past, and which now appears to be forgotten (which is forgotten in part by the Opposition itself) will rise to the surface tomorrow, come to life again and will once more acquire an extraordinarily timely character.

We defend absolutely correct ideas and methods with the aid of feeble, of primitive means. The Comintern defends false ideas with the aid of "American" technique. But in the long run, it is the correct idea that triumphs.

From this flows still another conclusion. Our strength at the given stage lies in a correct appreciation, in a Marxian conception, in a

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correct revolutionary prognosis. These qualities we must present first of all to the proletarian vanguard. We act in the first place as propagandists. We are too weak to attempt to give replies to all questions, to intervene in all the specific conflicts, to formulate everywhere and in all places the slogans and the replies of the Left Opposition. The chase after such a universality, with our weakness and the inexperience of many comrades, will often lead to too precipitate conclusions, to imprudent slogans, to wrong solutions. By false steps in particulars we will be the ones to compromise ourselves by preventing the workers from estimating the fundamental qualities of the Left Opposition. I do not want in any way to say by this that we must stand on the side of the real struggle of the working class. Nothing of the sort. The advanced workers can only test the revolutionary advantages of the Left Opposition by living experiences, but one must learn to select the liveliest, the most burning and most principled questions and on these questions, to engage in combat without dispersing oneself in trifles and in particularities. It is in this, it appears to me, that now lies the fundamental rule of the Left Opposition.

G. Gourov

Paris, July 28, 1931.