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NOTES ON PROLETARIAN MILITARISM

by Matthew Roah

1. Today, as this is written, American conscription is a fact. The Burke-Wadsworth bill, in its essence, has been passed. This means that our struggle for proletarian control of the military machine at once assumes a higher plane. It means that basically the pacifists and idyll-spewers have been completely vanquished by the imperialist military machine and have been left without a programmatic leg to stand upon. It means that the primary struggles for control of this machine have begun. The fact is that we and we alone have now an answer to capitalist conscription.

2. It must be realized that our demand for workers control of the conscript army differs essentially from the other demands of the transitional program. This program was viewed by us as a medium of raising the general level of the class struggle through almost purely agitational means. We never deluded ourselves with the belief that these demands, as such, were accomplishable under capitalism. Rather they were intended as "bridge" propaganda. Agitation was both the end and the means of the transitional program.

On the other hand we must take full cognizance of the fact that our present demands open up much fuller vistas. The whole essence of the agitation is its realizability. In relation to the present program, agitation is merely a mean, accomplishment of the program the goal. Nor should it be said that this interpretation of the transitional demands is vulgar; we are dealing here in vital aspects, not in subtle nuances.

3. In the past our party agitation has suffered by our failure to centralize and concretize what results have been shown. In the present tactic we must not permit the end product of the agitation to be a mere dispersion of loose ends. We must see to it that wherever our agitation meets with success, the forces set in motion be utilized. Since our members in the vast majority of cases will not present resolutions concerning trade union control of conscription as members of the party the only way to harness passages or local successes of our resolutions will be through some type of trade union committee either on a regional or national scale.

4. For instance, with the passage of such resolutions by some labor body like the Minneapolis joint trade union council, follow-up resolutions of at least the following minimum should have been acted upon:

A. Provision for a committee to educate and agitate among the union members of Minneapolis through the medium of the joint council's facilities.

B. Provision to have the delegates to the Teamsters' convention raise the question on the floor as representing the Minneapolis Teamsters.

C. Provision to have the question raised at the next AFL convention by delegates of the joint council.

D. Formation of a provisional regional committee to contact and act together with other trade unions of the Northwest.

5. It is also necessary to formulate our program in the standard legal form - that is, in a general form which might be presented before Congress. Such formulation serves to give a national aspect to the agitation, enhances the intrinsic prestige of the resolution and places the struggle to a more clearly defined sphere.

6. In general we must see to it that wherever such resolutions are passed, committees are set up to contact and act in close cooperation with other organizations passing such resolutions. This will serve to centralize and concretize the agitation, and should have in mind the eventual aim of the formation of a national trade union committee for workers' control of conscription in opposition to the existing state military machine control.

7. No one minimizes the need of careful cultivation of the field as a prelude to carrying out the more concrete features. It would be an error to think that it is the work of a single day or even a single month. It may be a matter of years. Yet the fact remains that the formulation of the program into legislative form and its channelization toward a center remains imperative.

In the past our party despite its written and spoken declarations of intention to utilize bourgeois institutions, especially the parliamentary, has in fact shown an anarchistic tinge and shied clear of these institutions of the capitalist order. The Communist party has long since learned the use of petitions, legal forms and so on to aid it in its agitation. We, on the other hand, have manifested a revolutionary inferiority complex.

8. Many of the slogans of the Bolsheviks previous to October were acted on by peasants in distant Siberia who had hardly heard the name of Lenin. Their efforts were channelized into village and regional soviets and even into peasant congresses where the voice of Bolshevism served as a clarifying reagent to their struggle. Similarly, if our slogans are valid and we believe they are, we are compelled to establish the centralizing agencies.

THE STALINISTS AND A REVOLUTIONARY MASS PARTY

A reply to Comrade G.N.

by George Storen

(- 1 -)

In many articles and documents Comrade T. has referred to the tremendous problem and obstacles the CP presented to our movement. Comrade G.N., in his article "Party policy toward Stalinists", attempts to pose the problem a little more sharply and place before the party the crying need for party action in solving the question. We have read again and again in our party press that the contradictions of the CP would rock it to its foundations, that the gigantic hammer blows of history would breach its walls, that we would get a sizable section of its best elements from its convulsive death struggle, etc., etc. But what has happened and why?

Comrade G.N. makes as his first statement that he has felt for a long time that our policy toward the CP has been defective and needs to be reconsidered and revised. I ask - what policy? Have we really had a policy that manifested itself in action? What were its results - if any? The sad truth of the matter is that we have never consistently carried on a policy toward the Stalinists that bore any fruit. We have succeeded here and there to split off isolated individuals, but that is not what is needed. We have done more than Comrade G.N. is ready to admit, however. Except for the "few leaflets and editorials" of which he speaks, we have devoted reams of paper and columns in our press in attacking and exposing the CP line in the trade unions, nationally and internationally. In fact, for a long period of time the common, vulgar attitude and knowledge of Trotskyism to the average worker - when he was aware of it at all - was merely one of anti-Stalinism. There were and are many reasons for this but I do not think it necessary to examine them here. No, Comrade G.N. the reason why we failed to do anything with the CP was not because we were lax in paying attention to it but because we never had a consistent activated policy toward it. The problem that confronts us now is: What can we do today?

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It was with this thought uppermost that I approached the article "Party policy toward Stalinists". Sad to say, it did not attack the problem, it merely posed it. Or to quote Comrade G.N., "The purpose of this article is not to present specific proposals for action but to call attention to the problem and to suggest a general solution to it." (page 11)

Comrade G.N. is correct in calling attention to the problem. He is incorrect in his 'general' solution - for what is needed is specific proposals for action. No one disagrees in building bridges to the Stalinist workers. No one has in the past or would or should in the future. The whole basis of our past policy, if we may call it a policy, has been one of 'general' solutions with the assertion that we must reach the Stalinist workers. The question that cries up for an answer is: How?

If Comrade G.N. is serious, and I believe he is, it was mandatory of him to present specific proposals, not general solutions. He states that the problem confronting us is a practical problem. Practical problems require practical answers. If we are to build the bridges of which Comrade G.N. speaks we must be ready with steel and concrete.

(- 3 -)

With the approach of the war, the rise of the petty-bourgeois opposition in our own ranks reflected the growing pressure upon the anti-war forces in the country. The effect of this pressure on the American masses has managed, at this stage, to separate them into three broad groupings: 1. the pro-war groups; 2. the pacifists (all shades); 3. the revolutionary opponents of imperialist war.

Within each of these groupings there is division and turmoil and although these differences are by no means basic within each of the groupings taken separately, as the war hysteria is accelerated the lines within these groups taken separately will become more and more sharply drawn. The effects of this upon the second grouping, the pacifists, will be tremendous and their contradictions will force them to explode and finally resolve themselves into the other two groupings. This will leave the pro-war butchers and their agents, and the revolutionists face to face as the two main forces upon the scene. This is the general perspective. The question, thereby, resolves itself around this second grouping and in one section of this grouping stands the CP today.

Propelled by the switch in the foreign policy of the Kremlin and executed by the orders of the GPU, the Stalinists have accomplished an about face once more. From their ultra-patriotic, jingoistic policy of collective security they have turned to a seemingly opposition to the war and the War Deal. We have analyzed their position as pacifist but we must realize the difference between a national pacifist group and the CP with its ties to the Comintern and the Kremlin. The CP does not stand on the pressures of its membership but whips its membership to the Kremlin. The ordinary pacifist group must bend to its own membership. Not so the CP. Its historic basis and attractive powers stem from October. This basis makes the CP an altogether different organization than any other in the labor movement.

How many times during the heyday of collective security have our discussions with Stalinist rank and filers been met with the sincere assertion that the CP is really revolutionary; that the popular front or democratic front agitation was only a front to conceal and win over the backward masses. Many times I was told, "You cannot convince the workers by a straightforward revolutionary program. You must get to him by reforms, by roundabout methods. That is why we use the tactic of the popular front to rally all the progressive forces of the country. Then we take them to the party and teach them revolutionary methods." A false theory? Of course it is! The dual position concept has always only fooled and disorientated the workers - not the bourgeoisie. But that was the psychological rationalization of the militant Stalinist during the fourth period. The switch to the fifth period, to the sincere rank and filer, was to him a logical step for what he thought was the revolutionary CP. "See", they exclaim, "we told you so! Our real policy has always been revolutionary. We have always been against Imperialist War. You told us we were jingoists and patriots but when the war broke out we turned against it. Look at our anti-war program!"

This, comrades, is the kernel of our Stalinist problem.

I do not believe it necessary to spend any time on the petty intellectuals and democrats who left the CP when that organization changed its line. Our opinion about this sort of person was crystallized by our own faction fight.

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I feel that I must take issue with some of the assertions of Comrade G.N. on the past and present analysis of our attitude toward the CPers specifically and the other semi-socialist and pseudo-radical groups generally.

This Comrade takes great pains to point out that "From our own revolutionary standpoint, all the shades of bourgeois-democratic and social-pacific opinion have been propelled farther from us, while the Stalinists have been brought a step closer. As the official pressure of the patriots intensifies with the preparation for war, unless new factors intervene, this process will continue to develop farther." (page 11) Therefore, the logical conclusion is drawn: "We must get closer to the Stalinist workers who have been brought closer to us." (page 11)

This formulation brings up the entire problem of the relationship of the CP to the Comintern and the relationship of the Comintern to the Stalin-Hitler pact.

The Stalinists have been brought a step closer to us? How? By supporting the Stalin-Hitler pact? They have dropped their violent anti-fascist propaganda and have concentrated on the "democracies." Their opposition today to the Roosevelt administration and the War Deal has a deep pacifist coloration. Is this a step closer? That is only a superficial method of approaching the entire problem. The CP has not come closer to us in the revolutionary sense. It has merely changed its allies. From the "democracies" it has switched to the fascists. Its negative propaganda against Roosevelt and the War Deal cannot be considered an approach to a revolutionary position. It is this that we must take as our starting point. As for the farther development of the Stalinists toward us, especially "from our own revolutionary standpoint" the entire formulation is incorrect. Can we expect the CP to develop along the revolutionary road in any sense of the term? To ask this is to ask whether the Kremlin can develop along the revolutionary road, for both Comrade G.N. and I agree that "The CP's utter dependence upon the Kremlin's foreign policy gives not only a spurious and hypocritical but a transitory character to its present anti-war line." (page 11) No! revolutionary development of the CP is ruled out completely!

Comrade G.N. may protest that what he means is that the Stalinist rank and file has dropped his democratic phraseology and has been partly turned toward a revolutionary position. He has been brought a "step closer" to the revolutionary position by the turn in the CP apparatus, Comrade G.N.? You claim this was brought about by the spurious revolutionary line of the CP. You say: Meanwhile, it cannot be denied that the Stalinist campaign against Roosevelt's War Deal and their masquerade as revolutionists has diminished our power of political

attraction among the broad masses of workers. The radical worker cannot easily distinguish between the counterfeit and the genuine opponents of capitalism and its war. This includes the Stalinist workers." (page 11) Does all this mean that the Stalinists have come a step closer to us or does it mean that the radical worker and the sincere Stalinist worker believes the CP to be revolutionary? Simple English compels me to take the latter part of the question to be true. And this belief is and has been the greatest drawing card and attraction of the CP in all countries, since the October Revolution. We have said that before. In every country in the world, as the workers moved leftward the CP became the center: France, China, Spain, etc. This movement to the CP by the radical-minded worker is the result of October - the workers believe that the CP is still the old Bolshevik Party. Therein lies our task to the radical-minded worker and the Stalinist worker - to convince him that the CP is not the Bolshevik Party, that the CP is not revolutionary and that his place is with a revolutionary party of the Fourth International. In this struggle history is with us.

Under the terrific blows of history in this period and the next, we can expect more violent and sudden zig-zags of the Kremlin's foreign policy than ever before. Comrade G.N. agrees: "Tomorrow, in conformance to a switch in Stalin's policy, the CP may (??) radically shift its course again." (page 11) Not may, but must! Stalin, today, is already dickering with England through Sir Stafford Cripps and the U.S. on the question of Japan. Changes in his policy will come and each change will subject the CP membership to severer blows. That is our strength; therein lie our opportunities; there is the key to our struggle with Stalinism! Under the force of those blows, the CP of this country, and of any other country where it still exists, will crumble like dust. The seemingly impregnable fortress of the Comintern's robot machines will fly like chaff before the wind.

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Permit me, comrades, to digress a little. I had intended to take up the relationships of our movement with the non-Stalinist groupings of which Comrade G.N. so blithely and totally places within the War Deal "To a greater or lesser degree from the governmental center..." Unfortunately, I already find that this article will occupy more space than I had originally intended. Therefore, I will limit myself to one point on this important topic.

Comrade G.N. takes great care to draw a clear distinction between "the rascals that boss the CP" and "the sincere workers within and under the influence of their organization." (page 13) This is absolutely correct. Yet he lightmindedly lumps the workers of the non-Stalinist groups into the "...one, rigid, unchangeable, reactionary mass..." that he cries out against in relation to the CP. If "We must stop treating the Stalinist movement in practice (his emphasis) as one rigid, unchangeable, reactionary mass." (page 13); why, in heaven's name, throw up our hands in despair and consider the non-Stalinist groupings' workers and sympathizers lost forever and ever? No, Comrade G.N. Many workers of these groups will also travel the revolutionary road and come to us. And it is of extreme importance that we be prepared to receive them.

The phrase 'Conditions have changed' has been slightly over-worked during the past few years. To meet it in an article at this time immediately arouses a suspicious attitude on the part of a great many of our comrades. The mere statement is "loaded". The comrades remember that it was the chief battlecry of the petty-bourgeois opposition and of the Stalinists when they attempted to answer our points. Its use by Comrade G.N. does not allay any of this suspicion but on the contrary brings it to the surface with the questions: How? and Show me where?

Just what objective conditions have changed? The US government is preparing for war? That is an old story. The New Deal became the War Deal long ago. The war in Europe? That is more than a year old. What Comrade G.N. means by "Objective conditions have changed," is the change in the line of the CP - by no means a basic change in the objective conditions!

Fundamentally, the CP has not changed one iota! The switch in line does not mean a change in objective conditions! What has happened in the US is that the War Deal has been accelerated and that the CP and the Comintern have become the tail of Hitler with the Stalin-Hitler pact as they were the tail of the "democracies" after the Franco-Soviet pact! No, conditions have not changed, but have been speeded up!

There is another point. Comrade G.N. states, "Our past policy (to the Stalinists - G.S.) has been one of uniform opposition. The most elementary attempts at united front actions were considered out of the question... because they (the Stalinists - G.S.) were practically political impossibilities." (page 11) Comrade G.N. has become bewildered. Our past policy to the CP has not been one of uniform opposition. (I am not sure just what G.N. means here by policy. If he means political opposition he has already forgotten the faction fight and the Professor's characterization of the majority and Comrade T. as a left cover for Stalin.) We are not merely anti-Stalinists. Comrade G.N. has adopted the theory ad hominem. Neither were united front attempts and appeals on our part considered out of the question. We have made such appeals before; the one that jumps immediately to mind is the appeal for the united front to various organizations and especially to the CP in the anti-fascist demonstration at Madison Square Garden. Our opposition to the Stalinists has in the past and will in the future be based on political considerations - as it is toward any non-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary organization. We make no organizational or political concessions of any sort to an enemy in the ranks of the working class or to the bourgeoisie. Appeals for the united front is one of our basic policies and one which we always employ. We have never refused to utilize certain non-party organizations in order to strengthen the influence of our organization over the working class and to consolidate our movement. That is the basis for the united front tactic.

In the case cited above at the Garden, it was the Stalinist leadership that turned down the united front appeal by attempting to ignore it. Despite this policy of the CP bosses, many rank and file members of the CP answered the call to picket the Garden. In this instance we were able to go over the heads of the CP leaders and reach the members of the CP. In this manner, we achieved a united front

"from below" - not in the mechanical manner of the third period Stalinist line, but in life. In the future we can expect many more such united front actions if we handle the situation correctly. Here is one bridge to the sincere Stalinist militant rank and file! Here is one method of striking a blow at the CP machine! We must show in action that it is we, and not the CP, who are the real, genuine revolutionary force! Conciliatory organizational maneuvers can never accomplish this task for us. It is necessary to act in life; to utilize each and every blow life delivers to the solar plexus of the CP machine and those blows will come more frequently and more severely as the tempo of the war develops and the contradictions of the Kremlin bureaucracy are posed more and more sharply. That is the road! Appeasement of an irreconcilable enemy, and that is what the CP is to us, will never accomplish the aim of Comrade G.N. - elimination of the greatest obstacle to building a mass revolutionary party.

No, objective conditions have not changed; the tempo has increased and the dialectical process will soon bring about a change. It is for that change that we must prepare, and the preparation for the change in the CP line as the Kremlin desperately tries to maneuver between the imperialists to stall off attack is the greatest weapon we have in our struggle with the Stalinist machine.

It is much more difficult to answer an article that one is in agreement with partially, than an article with which one disagrees entirely. The basic line of Comrade G.N.'s article is: We must find new roads to approach the militant, sincere CP rank and file. I agree wholeheartedly. He says, "we must be on the alert to seize every occasion in a locality, the trade unions, or on political issues, to build bridges toward the Stalinist workers". I agree although the mixed phrasology is disconcerting, for in what respect does he use the phrase "political issues" in conjunction with localities and trade unions? My opposition turns on the vague formulations of these political issues.

To attempt to effect a cure without first diagnosing the disease correctly is the methodology of the quack doctor and the medicine man who have an "explanation", but that explanation is worthless. We cannot expect any measure of success in our attempts to break the CP machine unless a diagnosis is correct. Comrade G.N., to my estimation, has a correct perspective coupled with an incorrect diagnosis. This incorrect diagnosis reveals itself in every attempt he makes in his article to expound on the "step closer" theory. Once and for all we must make this point clear. When he says: "We must show them (the CP militants) that although we are implacable enemies of all Stalinism stands for, we are at the same time willing to support them in every struggle against the capitalists and to hail every advance they make along the revolutionary road." (page 14). This formulation revitalizes the entire question of the "step closer" theory. The fact remains that the Stalinist cannot advance along the revolutionary road and remain a member of the CPI. A worker can progress by becoming class conscious, by joining a working class organization, after following the bourgeois organizations but he can only advance along the revolutionary road in a revolutionary organization. The C.P. stands as a trap to the leftward moving worker, for he believes the C.P. to be revolutionary, and the C.P. cannot, I repeat, cannot advance along the revolutionary road! It is our task to show the worker the revolutionary road!

How?

The fundamental tactic we must use in this struggle with the CP is the tactic of the United Front. This policy will convince the CPer in action of what we really are, and where we are going. United front appeals for freedom of speech, against attacks by hoodlums and vigilante groups, against governmental attacks on the trade unions, for the freedom of class war prisoners, etc. In the trade unions we must defend the Stalinists from attacks by the government and the union bureaucrats - but our defense must point out that we are defending the worker, not the Stalinist, that we have nothing in common with his party or his principles, that our defense is one of the entire working class. This means that we do not give any political or organizational support to the Stalinist machine in any way. The cry of "fifth columnists" raised against the Stalinists by the bourgeoisie and echoed by the petty bourgeoisie and the labor fakers, also some workers, places the CP under political attack. Our attitude to that must be one of explaining to the worker what this hue and cry means, why it is raised, the purposes behind it. To defend the CP organizationally against such attacks means to tie ourself to the CP chariot and to weaken ourself in the eyes of the Stalinist workers as well as the entire working class. The Stalinists know that they are not fifth columnists. There is no need for us to tell them they are not. We must point out to them, their sympathizers, and the backward workers the meaning of such attacks and the relationships of their organization to the government and the Kremlin's foreign policy. In this manner we can begin to weaken their ties to the C.P.

To be more concrete.

The party must begin to concentrate on the Stalinist line in the party press. Perhaps a small column on the front page can be used for this. A special series of one cent pamphlets and leaflets for CP meetings can be drawn up and distributed at their meeting consistently. We must be up to the minute on all CP affairs and the contents of our literature to the Stalinists must be on the subjects that he is being agitated about by the CP. We must at all times counterpose our analysis and our method to that of the CP line. We can be more bold in our predictions as to CP policy. That will become the psychological break for the Stalinist. If we had utilized our prediction of the Stalin-Hitler pact more boldly and made sure that the Stalinists had received our literature their sarcastic laughter at first would have turned to bitter realization that perhaps the Trotskyists knew what they were talking about.

It would be folly for us to draw up a blueprint. Experience and constant studying and working on the problem as it develops will show us the way. The main thing right now is to begin.

(- 7 -)

One word more. Objections that will arise from our enemies will not deter us. Neither will those rising from our "friends". A well directed and executed plan of operations will reveal soon enough to all who have eyes to see, that the Trotskyists have not become Stalinists. To our sincere sympathizers we must point out just what we are doing and explain to them our position.

I end on the same note as Comrade G.N.: Despite the dangers and difficulties involved we must begin our work on the Stalinists. Not because the Stalinists are moving "closer to us" but because "Fundamentally, the CP is the greatest hinderance to our task of building a mass revolutionary party in the U.S. We aim to destroy this obstacle and eliminate it from the labor movement."

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