

Left Writers on American Themes

By WILLIAM. Z. FOSTER

AT THE PRESENT time, among certain comrades in our Party, it has become the fashion to condemn as left-sectarian all the Party's policies of the cold war period, good, bad, and indifferent. The fact is, of course, that although the Party made certain mistakes during these hard years (and what Party would not have done so under the heavy government pressure?) the general line of the Party, especially regarding the fight against the war-fascist danger was in the main correct.

One of the favorite charges of those who see left mistakes wherever they look is that during the past decade the Party virtually cast aside all consideration of our national traditions. Especially the newly-fledged pro-Browderites in the Party make this accusation, which usually is accepted offhand as true. Yet it is a misreading of Party life of the period.

On the contrary, it is safe to say that never in its history has our Party and the left forces as a whole taken a stronger and more correct interest in the traditions of the working class, the Negro people, and the American people in general than during the past several years notwithstanding the extreme difficulties and persecutions under which these forces had to work.

★

THROUGH these hard years there have been a great many fine historical articles appearing in our press and that of the left generally, bringing out various

aspects of working class and general American history. There were also a number of very good pamphlets of the same character published during this time. These include Aptheker's Laureates of Imperialism, Elizabeth Lawson's The Reign of Witches, Lincoln's Third Party and the People's Almanac. Then there were the pamphlets on Samuel Adams and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In this space it is possible to list only some of the more important of these historical studies.

As far as books, there were a number of them with a strong historical bent produced in the past several hard years. These include Our Hidden Heritage, by John Howard Lawson, the well-known books, Robert Minor by Joseph North, The Enemy Forgotten by Gil Green, I Speak My Piece by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Labor's Untold Story by Boyer and Morais, Gene Debs by Morais and Cahn, and The Education of John Reed by John Stuart, all of which books heavily stress American labor and democratic traditions. M. U. Schappes also wrote his basic Documentary History of the Jews in the U. S.

A notable achievement on this general score also was the production by Philip Foner of two volumes of his monumental history of the American trade union movement, as well as his four volumes of Frederick Douglass' writings and speeches. Of very great importance is the fact that Herbert Aptheker, in line with the sharp historical trend of the Party during the cold war years, got well started on a badly-

needed two-volume Marxist-Leninist general history of the U. S. It is now about half-finished. When done, it will certainly represent one of the top efforts ever made by the Party in the field of history. Aptheker also produced his splendid Documentary History of the Negro People.

★

IN ADDITION to all these excellent historical writings and various others that I have not mentioned, I, also, during the past eight years, produced five full-scale histories (550 to 650 pages each)—on the Americas, the Communist Party, the Negro People, the Three Internationals and the World Trade Union Movement.

Under the fierce attacks from the government, the distribution problem in general was a baffling one; nevertheless some 45,000 of these large historical works, not to mention others, were sold. These books, I may add, have been widely translated in the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, as well as in People's China, India, Japan and other lands.

In view of the intense interest shown by our members in writing and reading labor historical works over the past several years, it is entirely misleading to assert that the Party, during the cold war, has ignored the traditions of the working class, of the Negro people, and of the American people. The plain fact is that never has the Party and the Left generally paid so much attention to American history as during the past decade, despite all the extreme difficulties of the period.