

SPEECH BY CARL WINTER

I HAVE NOT prepared a manuscript, nor have I a long list of quotations to "prove" my understanding of the present situation and tasks. I did read many books and cite many quotations during the three years that I worked in the California district in an effort to convince the comrades there of the correctness of our policies and in an effort to interpret, as I understood it, the line of Comrade Browder's books which were the basis of our Party's policy. The question now is not how well we can echo the line which we are together hammering out; the main problem is how we got there, how we got to our present correct policy which we are formulating, and how we got off into the swamp of opportunism before.

The answer to the bad phrase which became popular before, that "it is not in the books," is not simply to say now that "it is all in the books and you only have to read them." What we will find in the books are the conclusions from past experience which give us general laws of social development, invaluable as a guide to future action, without relieving us of the necessity to learn from our own practice how to apply these laws concretely. I am trying to think this question through seriously in a responsible way, as I think we all are trying to do, to discover how we could have misread these books and how we could have forgotten all we

learned before and so contributed to the misleading of our Party and our followers.

Yesterday Browder cited a long list of quotations from his writings and speeches in "refutation" of the charge of revisionism. With many of these selected quotations we can still agree. In fact, without some of them—at the time they were written—it would have been impossible, in my opinion, to carry the Party and our supporters so readily along the wrong path which we followed. It is necessary to remember also—and it will help us locate the source of our errors—that wrong conclusions often contain a fragment of truth and are frequently a result of a one-sided over-development of that single fragmentary aspect of the whole truth.

In his speech Comrade Browder referred approvingly to his writings about the hub of world relations being located in American-Soviet relations and in the Teheran and Crimean accords. He referred to the liberation character of the war and the consequent democratic advances to be expected from victory. He referred to the need to strengthen national unity and to work for the election of Roosevelt in 1944. Yes, he even referred to the importance of building an independent Marxist organization in the United States. It is true that these references and ap-

peals were all present in his statements of our policy during the period under discussion. But they served, it seems to me, as a sort of covered bridge by which we moved and mistakenly led our followers over to a wrong and harmful opportunist position without seeing where we were headed.

I support the Draft Resolution of our National Board. I agree with its characterization of our errors and its general conclusions. I should like, however, to see it further developed to include a more rounded out analysis of international and class relations as well as to trace the root sources of our opportunist and revisionist mistakes. Even after we have done that, we shall still face the reasonable and important question: how did our whole leadership (except Comrade Foster) and our whole organization make these errors unanimously?

I submit that if Browder had presented us with his speech of June 2 of this year in January, 1944, his whole position would have been rejected outright. Yesterday Browder said that he offers this speech for the record as his reply to Comrade Duclos' criticism. He said that it gives his "basic view of the relation of forces in the world which must serve as the starting point of any discussion of the charge of revisionism."

That invitation is very easily accepted. Browder's speech of June 2, which appeared in the June 10 issue of *The Worker*, is itself the most

fully developed example of revisionism. It openly reduces the role of the working class to one of trailing behind the bourgeoisie. The role of driving force for social progress is assigned to the very class whose social and economic position gave rise to, and continues to be the very source of, fascism. That is the meaning of the appeals to the "intelligence" of the bourgeoisie to save itself from its folly so that all the rest of us may be saved thereby.

From this idealization of the role of the bourgeoisie there follows inevitably the practical liquidation of any independent vanguard party of the working class. It is now clear to me that the seeds of this speech of Browder's were present in his original position at the time of the January, 1944, Plenum. But the seeds were not recognized by many of us until they bore fruit. However, the responsibility of leadership entails ability to identify before others can the inherent errors, to recognize the seeds before the fruit is ripe, and to warn and lead others away from these consequences.

I feel deeply my responsibility as a National Committee member and as a delegate from California to the National Convention which dissolved the Party and formed the C.P.A. for my part in the course we adopted there. I feel responsible to the members who elected me as a delegate to the Convention. I want therefore to help trace back and understand how we made these

mistakes, to correct them and guard against any repetition or any distortions in the future.

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First, I feel that there was a lack of real opportunity to share adequately in the thinking of our National Committee, a lack of opportunity which limited the understanding and ability of many comrades to recognize the seeds of revisionism. The lack of information on the part of members of the National Committee, of whom I am one, as to the contents of the Foster letter and (as we learn today) of other sharp differences in the National Board, retarded our understanding. And so too, in the districts, we in turn observed—in essence—only the barest forms of democracy in the discussions we held with our members. This led to other similar practices. Thus, we refused to heed the rank-and-file criticism which came from members in the trade unions and other fields where they encountered difficulty in attempting to put our policy into practice.

It has already been pointed out in this discussion that we should pay attention to the history of bourgeois influences contributing to the distortion of our line—for example, the years of labor's experience with Roosevelt's bourgeois-democratic reforms. I see where that has contributed to pushing us in the opportunist direction in which we were going.

In addition, similar contributing

factors were the exceptional profits derived by American imperialism in the course of this war under conditions in which our nation was spared the horrors and costs of direct involvement as a battleground. We participated in this war under conditions of full employment, rising wages, comparative safety from the battlefields. Therefore all kinds of illusions were fostered among the people and among ourselves as well. These illusions readily gave rise to the desire to continue this lush sort of thing indefinitely.

As a consequence, it seems to me we contributed to the idealization of the very strength of American imperialism—which was the specific form of American "exceptionalism" in this period. We failed to struggle against the ideological and material corruption exerted upon sections of the working class by American imperialism. Thus, we fell under its ever-active influence.

The basic question, it seems to me, that was distorted and led to revisionism in Comrade Browder's position is *the question of who must lead whom*. The working class has the historic task of completing the "unfinished business" of developing the democracy left uncompleted by the bourgeoisie. Instead of emphasizing that, Browder leaves leadership in this job to the bourgeoisie itself.

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When I first read Duclos' article, although I shortly afterward recog-

nized the criticism as fully merited, I was greatly disturbed by the unprecedented sharpness of tone. Yet, it seems to me, we fully deserved that kind of sharpness. We not only were guilty of disorienting the workers of our own country, but we presumed to dictate from this safe vantage point to the liberation movements of Europe—in the midst of their bitter struggle—that the form of their social system must in the future be capitalist. Linked with this, we forgot our international responsibility, leaving the liberation movements of Asia and Europe to cope alone with the threat of U. S. imperialism without the support of struggle by the American working class against reactionary imperialist aims on the part of our own bourgeoisie.

I agree with Comrade Foster's warning about the need to guard against over-correction in trying to achieve a correct line. We must be very careful about not swinging over to sectarianism. I would like in this connection to make an observation about what may appear to be only a small detail. That is, about the question of style in our work.

I had the feeling on reading the National Board Resolution that in making a correct breakaway from a wrong line, it unnecessarily scrapped many of the things our movement learned in the past few years about popular forms of expression, avoidance of clichés and little-understood terminology, speak-

ing the language of the people, and so on. Part of our present new and correct line must be the further improvement of style in presenting our position to the masses. The practical program of work in the draft resolution is our guide for the period ahead. The correction of our past theoretical errors puts this program of action on its feet at last.

A word about one question raised in the discussion, that of liquidationism. This is a matter of political content and not of technical forms. The change of form and name from C.P. to C.P.A., *in the concrete situation of prevailing revisionist premises*, is now revealed to have been wrong and harmful. But now no magic organizational formula such as mere change of name and reorganization of clubs will change the situation. What will be decisive is clarification of the leading role of the working class and the leading independent role of the Marxist political organization, and demonstrating this in practical struggle, even if for a time we retain the name and many forms of organization we now have.

On the basis of the resolution before us and the discussion we are having, I am confident we will have nearly unanimous conviction and agreement. Aided by our present position, our organization will surely grow and, making the necessary organizational adjustments on the basis of a correct political line, will contribute more effective leadership to the American working class.