

THE QUESTIONS FACING THE PROGRESSIVE LABOR MOVEMENT

Will PL Deal With Its Growing Problems Politically

Or Will It Resort to the Same Methods as the CPUSA?

The coming National Convention of the Progressive Labor Movement is an event of the greatest importance not only for PL members but for all, whatever their affiliations, who sincerely desire to build a working class revolutionary movement in the United States and throughout the world. From April 15th to 18th in New York City Progressive Labor members will be addressing themselves to the task of how to transform PL into a serious Leninist party and to extend its influence among the masses. In the course of this effort PL members will have to grapple with problems which face all who seek to build a revolutionary movement. Thus their efforts are of the greatest concern to all revolutionaries and every serious revolutionary has a responsibility to contribute his or her ideas to Progressive Labor members at this time whether or not they are PL members. It is in this spirit that we are writing this article.

Progressive Labor as it has been over the past year or two cannot survive. This PL's own leadership at least partially realizes and thus their decision to call this convention with its obvious aim of solidifying in one fashion or another the cadres it has attracted over the past period. The problem is that PL has grown precisely because of its combination of revolutionary activism with a certain political and organizational amorphousness which allows people with diverse ideas and diverse purposes to exist side by side. However its organizational and political amorphousness is threatening its ability to carry out revolutionary struggle, especially under conditions of increased police persecution--itself the result of its success in carrying out meaningful struggles.

The way in which Progressive Labor has grown by recruiting all kinds of elements and not having a clear political line to act as a cadre selecting agent has brought about a serious crisis inside the organization which can when combined with the external pressures of the bourgeoisie, destroy the organization if it does not take strong action at the present convention. Thus we feel that the solution to PL's problems lies not in utopian attempts to perpetuate its unstable amorphousness but in its consolidation in a progressive rather than reactionary way.

Let us briefly look at the problems facing PL. Its central problem is that lacking a clear working class line which is based on a solid understanding of Marxist theory, PL has been subject to non-working class pressures which have distorted its political line and its concrete work and in addition have made the transformation of newer forces it

is recruiting into serious revolutionaries all but impossible.

The Phillip Luce Affair

This is reflected most intensively in the recent Luce Affair. This is a matter which goes far deeper than the individual weaknesses of one person. Phillip Abbott Luce was until recently a prominent leader of Progressive Labor from out of the student movement. He was the major organizer of two trips to Cuba and this fall was made editor of Progressive Labor, the organization's national monthly. Yet, in a statement issued on March 30, the PLM National Steering Committee has this to say about Luce: "The national steering committee of the Progressive Labor Movement yesterday expelled Phillip Abbott Luce, after a two-month investigation proved conclusively that he is a heroin user, a thief, and a police agent." We reiterate, this is no ordinary rank and file PL member or sympathizer being discussed, but someone whom the leadership itself thrust into a position of great responsibility.

Some indication of the meaning of this event can be gotten from looking at what happened to Progressive Labor under Luce's editorship. Prior to coming under Luce's domination this magazine devoted itself primarily to the American working class struggle and reflected a fine class line in its analysis of trade union developments and the struggles of the minorities in this country. Luce transformed the magazine into a petty bourgeois one. Working class struggles were given little attention. Instead primary attention was given to petty bourgeois-led struggles in the colonial countries and of course absent was any concept of working class leadership of these struggles. Thus the magazine began more and more to express a political strain which is deep inside PL -- the concept of petty bourgeois revolutionism.

Luce's prominence inside PL came at a time when middle class student and ex-student elements came into the organization in large numbers. These student elements were given no clear working class outlook as PL had no clear political and theoretical line upon which it could educate such people. Even in local clubs in the ghetto these petty bourgeois elements began to dominate.

Some of these students and ex-students were rebelling from the "establishment" in a sick, reactionary way. That is, they were separating themselves not only from bourgeois society but from the masses by living bohemian lives and through personal escapism. Such is the breeding ground for dope addiction. As long as we live in a sick society the sickness of dope will be with us. But such sickness cannot be tolerated inside a revolutionary movement. It cannot be kept out by any other way than the transformation of the organization itself into such a serious political organization that the sick petty bourgeois elements find the

organization quite alien to them. Luce's personal sickness is a reflection of a general social sickness which has found some roots inside PL precisely because of a political sickness.

Working Class Gets Lost

This political sickness finds expression in other ways. There exists within PL a number of dedicated working class Marxists who understand the absolute central and critical necessity of developing now a revolutionary cadre within the trade unions. However, their work has generally been given weak support within PL. Not only is nothing done to infuse the student elements with an understanding of the importance of developing roots in the class, even the community work done by branches in the ghettos lacks this understanding. In these clubs the ghetto poor are seen as an undifferentiated mass and there is little recognition that the organized working class must give leadership to the more diffuse and disorganized sections of the masses. Young Negroes and Puerto Ricans who join PL are not being properly encouraged to root themselves in industry no matter how hard this is and to organize their shops into unions if they are in unorganized shops, as so many of the small shops in New York are.

This classless "community" approach is precisely what lies behind the growth of deep pro-nationalist views on the Negro question by the members of the Harlem branch of PL. If these comrades really understood that the American capitalist system was already in a crisis which in time would bring about the mass radicalization of the working class as a whole -- Negro, white, Puerto Rican, Mexican -- they would be able to resist succumbing to the temporary dominance today of nationalist moods in the militant Negro masses. They would understand that by raising class issues today inside the ghetto they would be preparing for a common struggle of the class as a whole against the capitalists instead of aiding in any fashion the capitalists in pitting one section of the class against another.

The growth of nationalist tendencies within the Negro cadre of PL is a sign of the political and theoretical confusion of the leadership as a whole. Thus we see petty bourgeois student elements, rather than being transformed into serious working class revolutionaries, bringing with them into PL some of the greatest sicknesses of bourgeois society. We see fine Negro cadres, rather than bringing a working class outlook to disoriented but revolutionary pro-nationalists, succumbing to that nationalism. We see trade union cadres feeling themselves not really at home in the organization, not getting proper encouragement, their national monthly being taken over by the petty bourgeois elements, etc. No matter from what angle one looks at PL one is struck by this growing disorientation of the organization brought about by the political confusion of its leadership.

PL's International Line

The international line of Progressive Labor cannot help but encourage its disorientation. Maoism internationally is essentially a reflection of a petty bourgeois revolutionism. The Chinese pay little attention to the development of a working class movement in the advanced countries. Their whole perspective is one of support to petty bourgeois national movements in colonial countries. Of course they are for giving such tendencies real support while the Brezhnevists do not do so, but at the same time they lack a clear class line. Just recently the Maoist CP in Ceylon switched from semi-opposition to open support of the bourgeois Madame Bandaranaike slate in the Ceylonese elections. In Japan where the Maoists are in the majority they oppose a clear class struggle on the part of the Japanese working class for power. In Indonesia they support the bourgeois Sukarno government -- and so on and on.

There is a grave danger that with its growing internal problems and the growth of external police pressure PL will seek more than ever to tie itself to the Chinese tail. This may well be the cause of its current rash of "anti-Trotskyism" which we will discuss shortly. But the PL rank and file has to realize that the solution to its problems lies in actually confronting these problems politically here in this country. To seek to circumvent them through an international tailing of the Chinese could quickly transform the group to one no more significant than "Hammer and Steel" or the POC.

On Factions, Tendencies and Groupings

Milton Rosen's discussion article on the organization question in the January-February issue of Progressive Labor is a danger sign that the Progressive Labor leadership will seek to "solve" its internal problems in a reactionary way -- a way which could well lead to the destruction of the organization as a revolutionary instrument. Instead of groping with the political and theoretical problems in a political and theoretical way, Rosen is reverting to the method of those who expelled him a few years back -- the leadership of the Amercian CP. Factions, tendencies and groupings are to be barred inside PL if Rosen has his way. "Trotskyites" are forthwith dismissed as "counterrevolutionary" without so much as a sentence devoted to documenting this pretty damn serious charge.

The irony of it all is that Rosen is proposing that PL adopt the very same provision by which his group was expelled from the CP! While inside the CP Milt Rosen and his supporters like Mort Scheer, Jake Rosen and Fred Jerome raised a serious political criticque of the CP and its revisionist policies. The CP leadership was unable to answer Rosen's criticisms so it summarily expelled him and his supporters for -- "factionalism".

Of course Milt Rosen had a faction, or a tendency, or a grouping -- call it what you like. He had deep differences with the leadership and this forced him to form a grouping to fight within the organization for his views. Now Rosen is proposing to bar such groupings within his own organization. Is this not a repetition of the organizational errors of the revisionists, and a clear sign that Rosen and others in the PL leadership have not yet really broken from the revisionism of the CP?

Rosen seeks to justify his ban on factions by stating: "No revolutionary movement triumphed over a powerful enemy divided into such formations." But this simply is not true. We can think of one such example which is at least worthy of noting -- THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY. From the moment of its birth in 1903 to long after its triumph in 1917 the Bolshevik Party had numerous factions. In fact on the very eve of the insurrection one such faction, led by Kamenev and Zinoviev, actually broke discipline and revealed the plans of the insurrection to the public. Despite this indiscipline, which Lenin correctly opposed, Lenin did not propose the expulsion of these comrades but rather re-integrated them into the leadership of the party. A good deal of Lenin's writings were in fact factional writings. We are not saying that a party riddled with factions and thus paralyzed as far as external action is concerned is a healthy party. We only say, and here Lenin is completely with us, that the growth of factions is a sign of a deep political disorientation within a movement. This disorientation must be straightened out politically and not by organizationally outlawing factions themselves.

A truly cohesive party is created precisely through a process of internal struggle -- yes, factional struggle, combined with external struggle. If all we ever had to do was fight the enemy head on the building of a Bolshevik movement would be easy indeed. However, we must fight the enemies' views as they are expressed within our own movement at times through factions or tendencies. Nor is it always the case that the majority faction is the working class one. We found quite the opposite to be the case in our own struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party and Milt Rosen had a similar experience in his struggle inside the Communist Party. No party, no matter how well-intentioned the leadership, is immune from revisionism. The only guarantee of a healthy party is a healthy internal life, the right to organize factions.

Slanders Against Trotskyism

Now we come to this totally unsupported and unsupported charge that we Trotskyists are "counterrevolutionary". First of all no PL member can take this charge seriously as long as the leadership which makes the charge refuses to back it up by any attempt to prove this to be the case. Have we not had enough of such slanders from the CP? There must be a break with this kind of undocumented namecalling if we are

to build a serious revolutionary movement in the United States.

Our positions are clear for all to see. On every and all occasions we have fought for a working class revolutionary line. On every and all occasions we have defended the workers' states against imperialist attack and have broken with anyone who has refused to do this. Of course we have criticisms of the leadership of the workers' states. But so does PL.

This leads us to a most interesting point. The Progressive Labor leadership now considers the leadership of the USSR and a number of other workers' states and parties to be revisionist and even counterrevolutionary. Here in the U. S. it sees the American CP as revisionist and sees this revisionism as going back to the 1920s. But when the present leadership of PL was inside the CP supporting the CP and supporting the line of the USSR who was it that opposed this line and clearly exposed its revisionist character? It was the Trotskyist movement. So how can the PL leadership today simply dismiss our movement and our ideas as counterrevolutionary when we saw before they did the revisionist nature of the Krushchevites and their supporters in this country?

We urge Progressive Labor to reverse the present trend of the organization towards petty bourgeois politics. We urge Progressive Labor to reject any attempt to organizationally deal with political problems, to discuss seriously with us, and to bring together in common action all serious revolutionaries. Only such a course can save Progressive Labor as a revolutionary organization. It is these internal problems of PL and not the external police pressure which can destroy it. A theoretically and politically strong movement can stand up to police persecution and can in fact grow qualitatively in the process of struggling against the persecution.

In the meantime we intend to continue as we have in the past to aid PL in its struggles and to defend it from persecution. We also intend to continue to make our political criticisms of PL for we feel that this political process is as essential to the defense of PL as any concrete aid we can and will offer.

--American Committee for the Fourth International

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