

The Sad Logic of Ultra-Leftism

by Herbert Zam

This is the second and concluding article in the series by Herbert Zam "On the Communist Election Program."—Editor.

The second cardinal shortcoming in the Communist election platform is the complete absence of any indictment of the capitalist system. This may appear very strange in a platform which calls for a struggle for the proletarian dictatorship—but it is one of those contradictions which exists invariably in all ultra-leftist minds. Surely now is a good time for such an indictment! The language of it can be read by the masses themselves in the unemployment, hunger, misery, which is in every house. It is the meaning which must be supplied by the Communists. Everybody is talking about unemployment. Everybody is talking about starvation. Everybody is talking about war and peace. But it is up to the Communists to trace these sores to their source and show that they arise inevitably from the capitalist system, which at the present time is already rotten to the core, and which, in its death struggle, is causing untold suffering to the toilers of the entire world. That these things are said in theses is not enough, for the masses do not read them, and most certainly do not understand them. But an election platform, which is likely to be more widely read than any other Communist document, is the place to say these things in language which the masses will understand, but which will nevertheless contain no illusions and no cheap, vulgar popularizations.

In the Communist election platform "capitalism" is referred to only twice; once in connection with the building of socialism in the Soviet Union and the uprooting of the remnants of capitalism, and the second time as follows: "Capitalism has shown its inability to feed the people."

This sentence is the only form in which an indictment of the capitalist system appears. For the rest, the platform speaks "capitalist politicians," "capitalists and their political henchmen," "the Republicans and Democrats, who control the National and State governments," etc. The use of such expressions is not in itself wrong, but when they are used as a substitute for an indictment of the capitalist system, then the users sink to the level of muddle-headed liberals. Indeed, there is nothing in the entire analysis of the situation to which a half-baked liberal cannot subscribe—it consists almost exclusively of an enumeration of evils and a damning of those responsible. Only by implication, in discussing what a workers government in the United States would do, is there any effort to bring out some of the basic characteristics of capitalism.

Two Examples

It is quite possible that this error was brought in by a desire for popularization. But the real result has been to vulgarize the program without in any way adding to its simplicity. Two particularly striking examples can be cited.

"The political parties of capitalism which rule the country . . . have exposed their complete bankruptcy in this period of severe crisis."

This is quoted from the platform and not from Professor Dewey's manifesto! Bankruptcy for what? For serving the interests of the capitalist class? For this they are far from bankrupt! For oppressing the workers and shifting the burden of the crisis to their shoulders? They are doing a pretty good job of this, too! Bankruptcy for doing something in the interests of the working class? They never had this as their task and for the Communists to make such statements is to help maintain dangerous illusions among the workers.

And here is the way in which the platform handles the question of imperialism:

"In their greedy desire for greater profits the capitalists set out to wrest new markets from their imperialist rivals by armed force and to further oppress the people . . . and rob them of their territory and natural resources."

Again it must be remembered that this is not quoted from either Professor Dewey or from the **New Republic** but from the Communist election platform. So imperialism is caused by **greed**, by a desire for greater profits, and results in further oppressing the people of the colonies. Presumably the original rates of profit and the original oppression of the colonies were all right; it is only the evil greed of the capitalists, which prevents them from being satisfied with a "justifiable" profit! And all this is an election platform in the "third period," when revolutionary theory has been enriched by the addition of "Stalinism"!

What Is The Communist Party?

Anyone who reads this platform will have to become convinced that it is the product of political illiterates, who have converted a street-corner speech into an election platform, but whose ignorance oozes from every sentence. In fact, the very first sentence of the document exhibits what in a serious, Marxian document would be considered the grossest error of all. The platform declares:

"The Communist Party is the political party of the oppressed masses of the people—the indus-

trial workers, the persecuted Negroes, the toiling farmers."

The present leaders of the Communist Party, the authors of the platform, are hereby challenged to produce a single authoritative quotation supporting this formulation, either from the works of Marx or Lenin, or from any of the important documents of the Communist International. They are challenged to produce a quotation from Stalin on this question which is in accord with the viewpoint expressed in the above sentence. If this formulation is a serious description of what its authors consider the Communist Party, then it is false and un-Leninist. If it is intended only as a "simplification," it is very dangerous and can create bad illusions. The Communist Party is not the party of the oppressed "people." It is the party of the proletariat, a one-class party. It also fights for the interests of other classes, of the oppressed people, but does not for that reason cease being the party of the proletariat. The Communist Party is, in short, the party of the proletariat which leads other toiling classes. The common struggle of the proletariat and other classes is expressed not thru one common party but thru the fact that, whereas the Communist Party expresses the immediate as well as fundamental (historic) interests of the proletariat, it can represent, at certain times, only the immediate interests of, let us say, the farmers and not their fundamental interests, which are based on private property. This is just as true for other classes. A Communist Party cannot, therefore, be a many-class Party; it cannot be a mere representative of "oppressed"; it cannot exist in a country where

there is no working class, because the Communist Party is the representative of the proletariat. The Program of the Communist International declares that the "Party is the vanguard of the working class," that it "unites . . . the revolutionary workers, who lead the millions of oppressed and exploited against the bourgeoisie," that the Communist International is the "international organization of the working class, the embodiment of real unity of the revolutionary workers of the whole world." Nowhere in these careful and precise expressions, do we find any justification for the absurd formulation in the present platform.

In 1928, the Communist Party had an election Platform. If one were to examine it, he would undoubtedly find errors and shortcomings, but not the enormous ones contained in the present one, in spite of the fact that the 1928 platform was written by the "opportunists" who have been expelled and replaced by the politically empty but obedient "leaders" today at the head of the Party. And it is quite characteristic that, whereas the present platform begins with a bombastic (and wrong) declaration on the Communist Party, the 1928 platform very correctly begins with a current issue, carries thru a competent indictment of capitalism, and leads the worker to the conclusion that only the Communist Party offers a way out. This difference is quite characteristic of the change which has taken place in the Communist Party since 1928 and expressed in the current platform, a change which has brought great damage in our movement, and which it will take a long time and much effort to counteract.

Medicine And The Workers

COMPENSATION LAWS AND WORKER

by Medicus

This is the last article in the series, "Medicine and the Working Class," by Medicus.—Editor.

The various workmen's compensation acts were enacted as a result of long struggle of the labor movement and they are supposed to be for the benefit of labor. Yet many of the provisions of the workmen's compensation acts have turned out distinctly to the benefit of the bosses—with the help of unscrupulous doctors.

First, the worker gets his disability benefit only after a week's illness. This was done with a purpose, because the greatest majority of accidents are small ones and cause disability of from one to four days a week. This immediately robs the worker of a week's pay.

Second, the disability benefit is very small, usually between \$10 and \$15 a week, generally the former.

Third, whenever the boss is not insured (an offense against the law) or when the insurance company refuses to pay, you can appeal to the compensation board. But the board is so composed that, from my own experience as a physician, and from the experience of other doctors I have spoken with, the worker almost always loses his case.

Fourth, and this is very important, the greatest majority of the insurance companies have the right, according to law, to compel the injured worker to get treatment from the doctor employed by the company. The company employs doctors, keeps up clinics and even a number of beds in certain hospitals. If a worker needs an operation as the result of an accident, he must be operated by the doctor hired by the company and in the hospital kept up by the company. The significance of this may not be obvious to everybody, but it is important. By not permitting another doctor to step into the case the company makes it hard for the worker to get medical support if the case ever comes to court. Furthermore the companies employ the "greatest" professors, men with professional chairs in medical universities and big chiefs in hospitals. These medical brains are hired by the insurance companies, car companies, electric and gas companies, and railroad companies; they are paid high salaries (\$7,000 to \$10,000 a year) for doing very little work but simply for the use of their great names in beating every case which comes to court. What chance remains for a worker whose case is taken to court when a great authority, the author of medical books and a professor of a medical college, steps out against him? None at all!

It is these company-employed professors who treat the injured workers like dogs, insult them, browbeat them, threaten them and send them back to work.

In this connection I well remember some incidents which have left an indelible imprint on my mind.

For about 2 years I was connected with a hospital in the coal region. In that hospital the coal companies, the Hudson D & L, and others, not only had their surgeons but also had special beds which were always filled with torn-up miners and treated only by company doctors. When an injured miner was brought to the emergency ward, the nurse was to call the doctor on the payroll of the coal company, and no other doctor was

allowed to touch him even tho the patient be in pain.

I well remember the scenes in the clinic where the company doctors used to torture, laugh at and browbeat the injured miners. I still see with my mind's eye the half-starved coal diggers, suffering from miners asthma, pressing their fists against their chests to control their pain during an attack of cough which would bring up quarts of expectoration mixed with coal and blood. The company doctors would threaten these miners with arrests "for faking disease" and "playing sick" and then send them back to work, probably with the thought in mind that the work would kill them off quickly and the company would not have to pay them any more, as they would have died a natural death.

Another incident I'll never forget. A very intelligent young miner, resembling Pat Toohey. His leg had been torn clear to the knee and could not be found. The company doctor trimmed it around and put him to bed. I ventured to suggest to the doctor the administration of tetanus antitoxin, to prevent lock-jaw. But the company doctor probably wanted to save a few dollars for the company, and replied that it was not necessary. Within twenty-four hours the young man died in agony from lock-jaw. It probably paid the company better to have him dead.

So serve the high priests of the medical arts. To the sacred healers the alluring sound of gold is very powerful.

When you look at our medical profession you see the chaos and the breakdown of the capitalist system. The capitalist system not only starves the worker and throws him out of the factory but also lets him die from scores of diseases without offering him medical aid and medicine. The body of the working class is bleeding from a thousand wounds and no help comes, while 80,000 doctors are sitting in their pigeon-hole offices waiting for patients, their mental and physical powers stagnant, atrophying with disuse, working at about 10% or less of their ability. Between the idle, unemployed doctor and the sick worker who needs care, stands the ruinous capitalist system.

Over 80,000 doctors all over the United States are starving in spite of all their rackets, rackets forced upon them by circumstances.

Look at our hospitals: the same devastating hand of the capitalist system is seen here. Beautiful structures, highly expensive marble, fixtures and rugs, fitted up to stir some idle rich to give donations. Spacious buildings and entire floors used for job-holding administration offices and "social work." The hospital should serve the needs of the masses. But what do we see?

Here is my hospital with a capacity of 380 beds and only 80 beds for surgical and medical ward cases. Entire floors of private and semi-private rooms luxuriously furnished are vacant all the time because the leisure rich are not sick frequently or long enough. At the same time the doctors burst with indignation at his inability to place a poor patient in the ward. The hospital was built with money collected mostly among the poor masses and allowances from the city and State governments under the pretense of helping and treating