

# PARTY PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION SECTION

By W. Z. FOSTER.

Before entering into the merits of my article appearing in the latest number of "The Communist," which is now the center of such extended discussion, it is first necessary to determine whether or not the line presented in the article is new, whether or not it is simply my own ideas that I am now bringing forward suddenly to the Party.

Such an accusation is made by the Minority statement of Comrade Bittelman and others. Almost with indignation they declare, "We disagree fundamentally with the analysis and point of view expressed by Comrade Foster in the article, which sharply departs from the line developed by the Minority."

The Majority polemic, on the other hand, does not make me personally responsible but blames it on the Minority generally, saying, "The whole conception of Comrade Foster and his associates in the Party, which looks so radical at first glance, is in reality an opportunist conception, a Right deviation from the correct line of the Communist International."

Thus both Majority and Minority solemnly swear themselves loose from the line of the article, the former blaming it upon the whole Minority and the latter ascribing it to me personally. But I dispute both these contentions most emphatically. I assert, and will prove, that the general line of the article was until recent weeks the accepted theory of both Majority and Minority. These comrades are now try-

## (1) THE DECLINE OF THE OLD UNIONS.

Comrade Bittelman is especially exasperated that I should bring forth such a new conception as the decline of the old unions. He declares that it has nothing in common with the line of the Minority. But let us see what the Minority thesis says. It points out, among other reasons for the disappearance of the Labor Party movement "the general decline of the old trade union movement." This was written by Comrade Bittelman himself. In the thesis section on Trade Union Work, written by myself but gone over with a double microscope by Comrade Bittelman, occurs the following: "The old trade unions degenerate and crumble in the face of the employers' offensive." And further along in the same section, "The old trade unions continue their decline." These conceptions of the old unions were adopted without ques-

ing (rightly or wrongly we shall discuss later) to flee from it and this in an absolutely impermissible manner. They are simply seeking to put forth their new line without formally disassociating themselves from the old line, and giving the necessary analysis. This is a total liquidation of Bolshevik self-criticism. The whole maneuver comprises one of the most outstanding instances of irresponsible diplomatizing in the life of our Party.

Comrade Bittelman calls the line of the article "Foster's theory of the declining role of social reformism." (Wrong, what I speak of is its "changing" aspects, but we will pass that for the moment.) In it are two alleged general false assumptions: (1) that the old trade unions are in crisis and decline, (2) that there is a developing merger of the ideologies and organizations of social reformism and bourgeois reformism. Comrade Bittelman condemns these ideas as dangerous innovations. But it is my contention that instead of being new to us, something just developed in my article now under fire, they are very well-known acquaintances of ours. They represent a generally accepted line of the Party. The documents of both the Majority and Minority comrades, as well as official Party statements unanimously adopted are saturated with them.

tion not only by the Minority but they were also not challenged in the discussion by the Majority, who had the same idea. It is only now, when these comrades put forth a new line surreptitiously, that objection to them is raised upon their re-appearance in my article.

But this theory of the decline of the trade unions was not something that we first developed in the present Minority thesis. It also occurs in dozens of documents, articles, etc., of the past few years. So much importance did we attach to this idea that in the document "The Right Danger in the American Party" we accused the Majority of "Underestimation of the crisis in the trade unions," which they indignantly denied. They even claimed to see a bigger crisis than we did. Nor were they without ample documentary evidence of theirs on the "decline."

Thus, for example, Comrade Lovestone, in his "The Communist," May, 1928, article entitled, "The Labor Movement's Present Situation," wrote under a special sub-title blazoned as, "The Crisis in the Trade Unions," that the employers' offensive "has brought our trade union movement to the most intense crisis in its career," and much more to the same effect. In the May, 1928, "The Communist," Comrade Pepper declared, "Recent articles by Comrade Foster give a clear and thoroughgoing analysis of the present crisis in the American labor movement. Developments in the past few weeks have proven the correctness of this analysis." The Party election platform also declares that, "The result of the offensive of the bosses and the treachery of the trade union bureaucrats is THE GROWING CRISIS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT."

In view of this widespread acceptance of the theory of the decline of the old unions, which Comrade Bittelman never in the least challenged until January 6th, it is impermissible to state that I am bring-

## (2) THE MERGING OF SOCIAL AND BOURGEOIS REFORMISM.

What Comrade Bittelman incorrectly calls "Foster's theory of the declining role of social reformism" I put forth in most complete form a year ago in a series of articles entitled "Capitalist Efficiency Socialism."

This analysis, which I shall deal with at length later on, points out that big capital in the recent period has depended more upon its own bourgeois reformist apparatus to spread illusions directly among the workers in its industries than upon the A. F. of L., that this bourgeois reformism has been developed into a whole system (company unions, welfare systems, group insurance, employe stock-buying, etc.), which I ventured to call, because of its role in rationalization and its pseudo-revolutionary perspectives, capitalist efficiency socialism, and that there is a growing tendency for social reformism to merge itself ideologically and organizationally with this bourgeois reformism and

## REPLY OF COMRADE FOSTER TO CRITICISMS OF HIS ARTICLE IN THE JANUARY-FEBRUARY NUMBER OF "THE COMMUNIST"

This is the first of several articles by Comrade Foster relating to criticisms of his article entitled "The Decline of the American Federation of Labor," published in the current number of "The Communist," monthly theoretical organ of the Workers (Communist) Party. The first criticism—by the editor of "The Communist"—accompanied the original article in "The Communist." The second criticism was published in Monday's issue of the Daily Worker and was signed by Comrades Bittelman, Browder, Aronberg, Hathaway, Wagenknecht, Costrell, Gomez and Grecht.

A statement by the Central Executive Committee of the Workers (Communist) Party, dealing with the Bittelman Opposition's declaration against Comrade Foster and also with this reply by Comrade Foster, will appear in an early issue of the Daily Worker.

ing it forth as a new line in the article under consideration. The plain fact is that Comrade Bittelman, as well as the comrades of the Majority, have very recently changed their opinions on this whole matter without frankly telling the Party. The how and why of this I shall discuss further along.

to develop a system somewhat akin to fascist unionism. The concentration of this merging process, so far as the unions are involved, was summed up in the slogan, "the company-unionization of the trade unions."

Here I do not propose to enter into an examination of the correctness or falsity of this proposition, but only to point out (1) that this general analysis, of which my article, in spite of a number of imperfect formulations, is a concretization, was quite generally accepted by the Party, and (2) that the present critical statements of the Majority and Minority are attempts to get away from this line without the formal acknowledgment and self-criticism they must make if they believe the line wrong.

As for the Majority, it has clearly endorsed the theory of capitalist efficiency socialism and included it in the Party platform (P. 19) and in their present thesis. Likewise, the

Minority also endorsed it. Comrade Blankenstein, without opposition in our group, declared it to be the most important theoretical contribution made to Communist analysis by any comrade outside the Russian Communist Party. Comrade Bittelman now finds himself in Opposition to this general proposition, even declaring that it "liquidates everything connected with Communism." But during the year that this matter has been before the Party, and Comrade Bittelman says it is vitally important, if he carried on any opposition to it, or made any attempt to clear the Party up on it, it has quite escaped my notice. Even in the present Minority statement he does not specifically challenge it.

The fact is the Minority, as well as the Majority, accepted this general line, although both took exception to the name. It is found in our Minority thesis, not only where we speak concretely of the "company-unionization of the trade unions," but in a general theoretical sense where, after listing various aspects of bourgeois reformism (company unionism, fake unemployment scheme of Hoover, Tugwell's and Carver's illusions, etc.), we declare:

"Social reformism has adopted these illusions and movements developed by American imperialism in its rationalization and war programs, thereby making itself more directly than ever a capitalist instrument for the exploita-

tion and demoralization of the workers. Through the petty bourgeois and labor agents of big capital the poison of bourgeois reformism finds its way into the working class. There it appears in the garb of "class collaboration," "the higher strategy of labor," "LaFolletism," petty bourgeois socialism and reformism, pacifism, etc. The labor bureaucracy, the socialist party, the so-called liberal churchmen, the liberals and progressives in the republican and democratic parties, the host of bourgeois economists and efficiency experts—all these constitute the channels through which bourgeois and petty bourgeois reformism—the servants of big capital, are attempting to break the developing resistance of the masses to capitalist rationalization and war preparations."

Comrade Bittelman and I disputed a little over this paragraph, which is manifestly the same general line as my article. Almost at the end of our task of writing the thesis I proposed to list the words "capitalist efficiency socialism" together with "the higher strategy of labor," etc., but Comrade Bittelman demurred, stating that a paragraph would be

## 3. Off With the Old Line, On With the New (Sub Rosa).

Now it is perfectly right for comrades to correct their position when this is necessary, and especially is it proper to do so in response to Comintern decisions or known currents of opinion. But when this is done the comrades concerned must speak frankly to the Party about it, particularly when such a basic question is involved. Unless this is done Bolshevik self-criticism is negated and the Party thrown into confusion.

But instead of coming to the Party and stating their new line and the reasons for accepting it, together with an explanation of past mistakes, they bring forth the new line as though it were simply the old. Comrade Bittelman, in the Minority statement, handles it in the following improper manner. He simply denies that the Minority ever stood for the theory of the decline

necessary. I did not insist. He made no objection, however, to the present inclusion of the general theory in the paragraph. In fact, he wrote four-fifths of it himself.

That both the Majority and Minority subscribed to the general line upon which my much-attacked article is based is incontestable. In fact, Comrades Bittelman and Hathaway actually went over my article with me in detail. Nor did they find any objection to the so-called decline theory contained therein, and why should they, seeing that it was their own line? But now both Majority and Minority reject it. What, then, has happened in the meantime? It is that a draft of the proposed Comintern decision has been received. This document greatly concentrates the attack against the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, far more than either Majority or Minority have hitherto done. And now these comrades, fearing they have made a serious mistake in the past by underestimating the role of the bureaucracy and social reformism generally, are making haste to re-orientate themselves. The new line presented by Comrade Bittelman in his article of Jan. 6 directly flows from the Comintern draft decision. It is not the old line of the Minority. My article, written before the draft decision came, is the old line.

of the old unions. He ignores and leaves out the theory of company-unionizing the trade unions, which is now being discarded by the Minority. And as for the so-called merger of social reformism and bourgeois reformism, he gets rid of that by torturing and wrenching the Minority thesis in its key paragraph from the old line to the new one through butchering its text. In the Minority statement criticizing my article he quotes from our thesis. The following is the quotation, together with those vitally important parts of the original text, which he left out. I have inserted and capitalized them:

"Through the petty bourgeois and labor agents of big capital the poisonous bourgeois reformism finds its way into the working class. There it appears in the

garb of 'class collaboration,' 'the higher strategy of labor,' 'LaFolletism,' petty bourgeois socialism and reformism, pacifism, etc. The labor bureaucracy, the socialist party, THE SO-CALLED LIBERAL CHURCHMEN, THE LIBERALS AND PROGRESSIVES IN THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, THE HOST OF BOURGEOIS ECONOMISTS AND EFFICIENCY EXPERTS—ALL THESE CONSTITUTE THE CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH BOURGEOIS AND PETTY BOURGEOIS REFORMISM—THE SERVANTS OF BIG CAPITAL—are attempting to break the developing resistance of the masses to capitalist rationalization and war preparations. . . . Hence the Party WHILE WAGING A STRUGGLE AGAINST JINGOISM AND MILITARISM must concentrate its main attack upon exposing and defeating reformism and pacifism among the working masses."

Here is a studied attempt to change the line of the Minority thesis, in the dark of the moon, to speak. In the original text, never wrongly, the main attack of the Party in exposing and defeating reformism is directed, not only against the labor bureaucracy and the socialist party, as the text tortured by Comrade Bittelman would have it, but against the labor bureaucracy and the socialist party PLUS the liberal churchmen, progressive engineers, etc. This is a vital matter. It is exactly the thing which so violently criticized in my article touches the heart of the who controversy. Only by slaughtering off the liberal churchmen, progressives, engineers, etc., by simply cutting them all out of the text and putting four dots in their place, can Comrade Bittelman make the thesis concentrate the main Party attack on the labor bureaucracy and socialist party in the struggle against reformism. Such manipulation is of course totally impermissible.

In this article I have made two things stand out clearly (1) that both the Majority and the Minority theses contain the same line as my article, (2) that the comrades are now using impermissible means to change their line. If, as they say I have grossly underestimated the role of social reformism, they are equally guilty. But we shall examine all this later. In further articles I shall deal with the merit and defects of my article in detail.