
THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE PROFESSIONALS

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

ONE of the most pronounced effects of the long-continued industrial crisis and depression has been to worsen generally the economic position of the middle class, especially the professions. This fact, plus the worldwide threat of fascist reaction and war, has produced a broad current of radicalization among these strata. Not only have they become more responsive to the mass progressive, democratic movements of this period, but also many of them, accepting the socialist perspective, have become active sympathizers with and members of the Communist Party. Thus, in late years, and particularly during our recent big recruiting campaign, an appreciable number of professionals—doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, teachers, scientists, writers, musicians, artists, actors, etc.—have joined our Party,* notably in New York.

These middle-class professionals, when equipped with Leninist-Stalinist training, and a genuine Communist outlook, are of great service to the cause of democracy and socialism.

* The above is a broad definition of "professionals," including as it does the artistic crafts. It does not, however, include all white-collar elements, such as salespeople, office employees, etc., who are more properly wage-workers.

They, especially, can effectively carry the Party's message of education, organization and struggle into the vast ranks of the white-collar elements, strata from which fascists ordinarily draw heavy forces. They can go far toward transforming these elements into a powerful support of the democratic front. They also can, as general Party members, furnish valuable direct support to the industrial proletariat and the farmers in the struggle. Besides all this, they have the strong possibility, when political development among them reaches high levels, of doing serious theoretical work for our Party. Some of the leading theoreticians of the Socialist and Communist movements have been revolutionary middle-class intellectuals. In view of all these potentialities for service by Communist professionals, any tendencies in our Party to underestimate the importance of these elements should be combatted.

The entry of numerous professionals into the Party is a testimonial to our Party's growing influence among the broadest masses. At the same time, it presents to the Party new problems and tasks which we must become conscious of and take the necessary steps to solve before we can fully utilize our Communist professionals.

The Communist Party is the champion of all the toilers. Its role is to give leadership to the masses of workers, farmers and petty bourgeoisie in defense of their interests under capitalism and to prepare them for the eventual establishment of socialism. To do this our Party necessarily bases itself upon the working class. It is the advance guard of the only consciously revolutionary class, the proletariat; the class which must lead the other oppressed classes in joint struggle against the capitalist system. Therefore, the various problems and tasks presented by the entry of middle-class professionals into our Party all boil down to the issue of how to make use of the latter to further our central objective of broadening and strengthening the proletarian base and mass leading role of the Communist Party.

Before discussing in detail these questions, it may be well to look at a concrete example, in the tradition of our Party, of how they should not be solved. This example is to be found in the history of the American Socialist Party (as well as in that of the Socialist Parties of various other countries).

THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

The Socialist Party, as a party, never understood the decisive fact that to be the party of socialism it had to be a working class party, the vanguard of the proletariat. Hence, it also never comprehended its proper relationship toward the petty bourgeoisie. The S.P.'s ignorance of these fundamentals was manifested by the party flinging its doors wide open to an indiscriminate recruitment of middle-class ele-

ments. The consequence was that petty-bourgeois radicals, discontented and having no party of their own, flocked into the S.P.—lawyers, preachers, doctors, writers, small business men, etc. (as well as several millionaires). From the foundation of the S.P. and through all its years, these people, grace to their intellectual training and the support given them by skilled workers and farmers in the party, were able to occupy the key leading posts of the party and to dominate its policy.

In my pamphlet *The Crisis in the Socialist Party*,* I have shown in detail how disastrous this petty-bourgeois control was in the life of the S.P. Suffice it here to summarize briefly the conclusions there arrived at by stating that the middle class S.P. leaders were a great barrier preventing the revolutionary development of the party. With notable exceptions, they persistently fought against everything that made for a class-struggle policy; they were inveterate enemies of true Marxian education, and they played down all manifestations of working class militancy. Their aim was to make the S.P. into a party of petty-bourgeois reform, and the tragedy of the S.P. was that they succeeded in accomplishing their purpose.

This middle-class domination provoked an inner conflict, an expression within the S.P. of the class struggle—a long and relentless fight between the revolutionary proletarians (plus a few revolutionary intellectuals) and the reformistic petty-bourgeois leadership. In this struggle, a section of the Left

* Wm. Z. Foster, *The Crisis in the Socialist Party*, Workers Library Publishers, New York. 5 cents.

wing put forth the incorrect, sectarian demand for the exclusion of all petty-bourgeois intellectuals from the party. The class character of this internal fight was clearly discernible in the big S.P. splits of 1909, 1912 and 1919. During the latter split, in many branches the cleft took place precisely between the petty-bourgeois members and the workers.

The revolutionary proletarian elements never broke the grip of the opportunist middle-class leaders (not even until today), and this is one of the most fundamental reasons why the S.P. failed in its task of becoming the mass party of socialism and why it has now degenerated into a narrow, dogmatic, semi-Trotskyist sect.

THE PROBLEM IN A NEW SETTING

It is very important for us to be cognizant of the struggle of the proletarians in the S.P. against its reformist petty-bourgeois leadership, as a sort of horrible example of what happens when this vital question of the relationship of the party to the middle class is not settled correctly. But the lessons of the S.P. experience must be studied and applied dialectically. The problem our Party faces now in this general respect is quite different from that confronted by the S.P. in its heyday. Let us examine briefly the chief reasons why this is the case:

First, the economic and political situation, and with it the viewpoint and the very composition of the middle class itself, have profoundly changed. In the pre-War days, when the petty-bourgeois leadership was entrenched itself in the Socialist Party, capitalism was still on the upgrade.

Relatively, the middle class was prospering, and its tendency to unite with the proletariat against the common enemy, big capital, was still weak. Its spokesmen, both within the S.P. and outside, were saturated with capitalist illusions and based their reformist policies thereon. But now capitalism is on the downgrade. It is already far into decay and constantly plunges deeper into its general crisis. The petty bourgeoisie, threatened with destruction (by loss of business, by being wiped out by monopolies, by being turned into low-paid salaried functionaries, by the new terror of unemployment, by the threat of fascism and war, etc.), becomes increasingly inclined toward joint action with the working class. It also raises in its ranks, especially among the youth, more and more leaders prepared to accept the revolutionary program of the Communist Party.

Second, unlike the Socialist Party, the Communist Party's membership is largely infused with the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and it has, both in the states and nationally, a firmly established proletarian leadership. It has also absorbed the lessons of the Russian Revolution and of the present-day People's Front movements.

These conditions, the changed position of the middle class and the revolutionary composition of our Party, greatly fortify our Party against possible opportunist petty-bourgeois infiltration. The danger of our Party being seriously penetrated by reformist middle-class elements is much less than was the case with the Socialist Party in its days of expansion. But although the danger is less, it neverthe-

less exists, and has evil potentialities. Especially now that our Party is taking on a mass character and is becoming an important political factor we can expect that it will attract many opportunists and careerists, including members of the professions. The present is the time to be conscious of this danger and to take the necessary measures to forestall it.

But it would be a grave political error to consider the matter of the Communist professionals simply from the standpoint of the possible danger that opportunist elements may seep in among them. That is only the negative side of the question. There is also the positive side: the task of developing the very valuable Party building and mass organizing potentialities of Communist professionals, which I have indicated already. This is the angle from which, primarily, the problem must be approached.

THE BASIS OF OUR POLICY

Considering, therefore, the question of the relationship of the Party toward its professionals from the double angle of (1) developing their full revolutionary possibilities and, (2) avoiding the danger of reformist individuals and tendencies among them, our Party tasks group themselves roughly under three general heads:

1. *Selective recruiting:* In drawing professionals into the Party, care should be exercised to select only those individuals who show by practical work that they definitely understand the Party line, are prepared to put it into effect, and especially display a thorough readiness to accept Party discipline. It is not enough that professionals should support our gen-

eral struggle for democracy and peace; they must also accept the socialist principles of our Party. There must be selective recruiting far more than in the case of miners, longshoremen, railroad workers, etc. General Party units which proceed upon the basis of a "mass recruitment of lawyers," or of "drawing doctors into the Party on a large scale," have a wrong policy.

2. *Intensive education:* There must be special attention paid to the Marxian education of professionals entering our Party. This should have the definite goal of thoroughly Communizing their outlook and reorientating their previous intellectual training, so that its full value may be utilized in a revolutionary sense by our Party and the masses.

3. *Systematic mass work:* It is necessary also that care be exercised to draw the professionals into mass work in an organized way, both in their respective callings and in the general class struggle. Let me expand this point in some detail under a separate heading.

MASS WORK OF COMMUNIST PROFESSIONALS

(a) The foundation of the mass work of our Communist professionals must be a systematic defense of the economic and political interests of the rank-and-file membership of their respective callings. They should participate in all the many association, guilds, unions and struggles in their professions and take an active part in shaping and carrying out their programs of betterment for their members.

(b) The fight of our professionals must also be linked up with that of the masses generally. Professionals,

properly organized and with a Communist outlook, as already stated, are in a position to lend powerful aid to the masses in struggle—by speaking and writing, giving financial backing, developing the moral and electoral support of their groups, etc. They can become a strong pillar of the democratic front. The forms of such collaboration with the masses should be carefully worked out and applied.

(c) Under present-day conditions professionals, in their capacity as producers, serve chiefly the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. The workers are largely denied the possibility of procuring their services. Hence, a vital part of the work of Communist professionals must be to bring the vitally necessary services of their respective professions to the needy masses. Thus, our doctors must be the first-line champions of an adequate government health program, our lawyers must fight for free legal aid for the masses, our teachers must still further popularize education, our actors must democratize the theater, our writers must find ways to bring good literature and effective political writing to the masses, etc., etc.

(d) Communist professionals also have the very important task of advancing, and even revolutionizing the techniques and theories of their respective professions. They must take up the intellectual cudgels against the reactionaries on all front. Thus, our teachers must write new school textbooks and rewrite history from the Marxian viewpoint, our scientists must organize more effectively the battle of the materialists against the idealists in every branch of science, our doctors must introduce new methods into

medicine (the American Medical Association is not only reactionary politically, but also medically), our lawyers must challenge prevalent musty capitalist legal conceptions and rewrite our legal history, our writers must bring forward class-struggle themes in literature and the theater, etc. In short, our Communist professionals must develop a powerful Marxist-Leninist ideological front against the reactionaries and their Trotskyite-Lovestoneite stooges in every field of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

THE PARTY'S WORK TO DATE

Our Party has already done very considerable work along the foregoing general lines among the professions. Communist professionals are beginning to make their influence felt in their various associations, guilds and unions, as well as in society generally: our writers, artists and actors have long since been doing effective work in their respective spheres, our doctors are playing a more and more important role in the developing great struggle of the masses for adequate medical care, and our other professional groups are increasingly active.

This constitutes a good beginning, but it is only a beginning. The work in this general field must be much further theorized, systematized, organized and intensified. This is made all the more urgently necessary by our Party's rapidly expanding mass contacts with the petty bourgeoisie and by the entry of increasing numbers of professionals into our Party.

Special organizational forms must be developed for this work. We now have many professional units and, in some instances, sections of professionals. We

are also cultivating various mass organizations of professionals. The validity of these new forms must be studied and they must be adapted to the special tasks in hand. The National Committee of our Party requires a sub-committee to supervise the work generally in this whole field.

The question of the role of the Communist professionals, in our Party and in the class struggle generally, has

become a live one. It is cropping up in many Party districts in one form or another. It is timely that the problem as a whole should be studied carefully. Any tendency to underestimate or neglect this important task would play directly into the hands of the reactionaries and fascists, who are making strenuous efforts to win the professionals and the petty bourgeoisie generally.

Marxist Education

“Nowadays there is no longer even the semblance of excuse that it is difficult to spread Marxism and Marxist education. Our Party has already demonstrated that it is possible. Comrade Browder has given us object lessons. He has given us the object lesson of how to take our Marxist-Leninist theory, from the simplest idea to the most complicated one, and to bring them to the American worker, to the American farmer, to the American middle class person, so that he can recognize in these ideas something of his own and in this way bring Marxism closer to the masses and the masses closer to the Party.”—Alex Bittelman, *The Communist*, July, 1938, p. 628.
