

Chapter 9

Sixth Congress of the Comintern: A Blow Against the Right

The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow in July and August of 1928, was a historic turning point in the world communist movement. Early in July the first U.S. delegates arrived, anxious to get the “lay of the land” and to scout the political situation in the capital of world revolution. As I recall, Lovestone’s group staked out headquarters at the Lux Hotel, while the Foster-Cannon opposition gathered at the Bristol, a short distance further up the street.

A number of us from the Lenin School were on hand when our comrades in the Foster group arrived. We got together to talk with a number of them, though Foster, Cannon and Bittelman were not present. They were anxious to get a report on the situation in the Soviet Party: Which leaders were involved in the right opposition? What was Bukharin doing? Where did he stand?

We gave them a rundown on the situation as we saw it. The issues in the discussion included industrialization, the five-year plan, collectivization, the drive against the *kulaks* and the war danger.

We told them about disagreements in the CPSU. There was talk of a hidden right faction involving such leaders as Rykov, Tomsky and possibly Bukharin. Thus far, however, there were only rumors and speculations. The fight was not yet out in the open, but was confined to the Politburo and the Central Committee. A plenum of the Central Committee had been called on the eve of the Sixth Congress and was at that moment in session. We told them that we could undoubtedly find out at the congress if there were any new developments.

On their part, our fellow oppositionists ran down the latest developments in the inner-Party struggle at home. We already knew of the findings of a special American Commission which had been set up at the Eighth Plenum of the CI in May 1927. The commission’s final resolution had called for the unconditional abolition of all factionalism.¹ Both sides ignored the resolution, however, as the most vicious factionalism continued in the Party. At the Fifth Convention of the CPUSA in the fall of 1927, the Lovestone-Pepper bunch were able to out-manuever the Foster-Cannon opposition and win control of the organizational apparatus.

Firmly in the saddle of power and riding high, their support came from the belief on the part of the membership that the Lovestone group had the endorsement of the Comintern – a myth assiduously cultivated by the Lovestone cohorts. They were playing a deceitful game of double-bookkeeping, both with respect to the Comintern as well as to the membership at home. Their method was to give lip service to the fight against the right danger, while in practice undermining its application and attempting to pin the label of “right” on the opposition. Typical of this duplicity was their sabotage of the line of the Red International of Labor Unions’ (RILU) Fourth Congress, which had called for the formation of the new unions in industries and areas where the workers were unorganized.

In the U.S., the new upsurge in class struggle, combined with the refusal of the AFL craft-type union leaders to organize the majority of industrial workers, demanded that the communists take the lead and organize the unions themselves.

At this point in the discussion it was pointed out that Foster himself was still not clear on the question of the formation of the new unions. Other members of the grouping admitted that they had also vacillated on the question when it was first raised – after the decisions of the Fourth RILU Congress – but it appeared that they now had a better grasp of the matter.

On the question of the estimate of the international situation, they pointed out that their record was clear, whereas the leadership definitely underestimated the economic crisis and radicalization of the workers. They admitted that they were late in pressing the question of independent unions, but now they had finally decided to launch textile, mining and needle trades industrial unions. Lovestone had jumped on the bandwagon at the last minute as a loud trumpeter of the “new unions” line in an attempt to clear his record before the World Congress.

On the whole, our comrades were full of fight and optimistic at the outcome of placing their case before the World Congress. They seemed sure that they would get a favorable hearing. The strategy was to expose the Lovestone-Pepper leadership as the embodiment of the right danger in the U.S. Party and to explode the myth of their Comintern support, thus laying the basis for the victory of the opposition at the next Party convention. This strategy was pressed at the numerous caucus meetings of the opposition bloc which I attended before and during the congress.

But all was not well within the ranks of the opposition; that

much was evident at the first meeting of our caucus. Foster, the leader of the minority, came under sharp attack for his vacillation on the question of the new unions from his immediate co-workers, Bittelman, Cannon, Browder and Johnstone. Foster had not been alone in his resistance to the new policy. Most of the members of the minority had vacillated on, if not openly resisted, the decisions of the Ninth Plenum and of the Fourth Congress of the RILU on this question.

But Foster had been the most stubborn, clinging to the old policy based on the organized workers, rather than the unorganized, which placed main emphasis on work within the old reactionary-dominated AFL unions. This policy, which Lozovsky had caricatured as “dancing a quadrille... around the AFL and its various unions,”² regarded the organization of unions independent of the AFL as “dual unionism” – a heresy left over from the days of the IWW.

Just a month before, in the May Plenum of the CC of the CPUSA, Foster had written a trade union resolution which was supported by Lovestone. While it called for the building of independent textile and miners’ unions, it still reflected many illusions as to the gains communists could make within the AFL. Foster could not bring himself to fully criticize his earlier mistakes, which left Lovestone free to use Foster as a cover for his rightist position.

All of this was bad for the minority; it blurred the image that it sought to present to the congress – that of consistent fighters against the right danger. There was a heated exchange at the first meeting of the minority caucus. As I recall, Foster contended that he had not in principle been against the new turn, but against those who interpreted it as a signal for desertion of the work in the old unions. It was clear that at this point Foster had lost leadership (at least temporarily) of his own group. Bittelman was chosen to make the report for the minority in the American Commission of the congress.

With tempers still frayed, we passed on to a brief exchange on the Afro-American question and the proposed new line on self-determination, which they all knew was coming up for full-dress discussion at the congress. I gave a brief outline of the position and how I had been led to it by the study of the Garvey movement.

Then someone raised the inevitable question. Wouldn’t this be construed as an endorsement of Black separation? Does it not conflict with the struggle against segregation?

Foster objected to that implication, maintaining that self-determination didn’t necessarily mean separation. He drew an anal-

ogy to our trade union policy with respect to Blacks. He pointed out the necessity to fight for the organization of Blacks and whites in one union and against all segregation. But in unions where Jim Crow bars exclude Blacks, Foster said, we support their right to organize their own separate unions. In such situations, the organization of Black unions should be regarded as a step toward eventual unity and not an advocacy of separation.

It was evident that Foster had studied the question and was attempting to relate it to his own practical experience. While his analogy was oversimplified, he was clearly taking a correct stand.

Bittelman, as I recall, seemed the clearest of all. Perhaps this was us a result of his Russian revolutionary background and some acquaintance with the Bolshevik policy on the national question. He pointed out the necessity of making a distinction between the right of separation and separation itself. Separation or independence is only one of the options; there were various forms of federation as Soviet experience had shown. The central question was one of building unity of Black and white workers against U.S. capitalism and this could be achieved only by recognition of the right of self-determination.

I was happy about the support given to the position by Foster and Bittelman. As the main theoretician of the minority, Bittelman had a great deal of influence. Certainly there was unclarity among the caucus members, but by and large I was favorably impressed by this first airing of the question. After all, I reasoned, the proposed new line did represent a radical shift from past policy. There seemed to be a modesty among these people and a sincere desire to give the matter a full hearing.

I felt that on the whole my comrades were an honest lot. Despite factional considerations, they were motivated by the overriding desire to achieve clarity on a question which up to that point had frustrated the Party's best efforts.

In the caucus meetings, I had my first close-up view of some of the leaders with whom I was to work in the future. Mostly from the Midwest, with genuine roots in the American labor tradition, they were a pretty impressive bunch. Most had broad mass experience – especially in the trade union field. The roots of the Lovestone group were much more grounded among former functionaries and propagandists of the Socialist Party.

William Z. Foster, leader of the minority bloc, was also the leader in the Party's trade union work. A self-educated man, he had

worked at a number of trades, including longshoreman, seaman, lumberjack, street-car conductor and railroad worker.³ Born in Massachusetts, he spent his early childhood in Philadelphia and came into prominence as a trade union leader in Chicago.

He had been a left socialist, then, for a brief period, joined with the Wobblies. He soon clashed with them on the issue of dual unionism. Foster himself opted for the French syndicalist policy of boring from within the established unions. He joined the Communist Party in the summer of 1921 and brought an entire group of trade unionists with him.

In Chicago, Foster was deeply involved in trade union work. He had served as business agent for the Brotherhood of Railroad Car Men of America; was a founder of the TUEL; initiated the nationwide drive to organize the stockyard workers in 1917; and was leader of the 1919 steel strike, the attempt to organize 365,000 steelworkers. It was in this strike that he became a nationally known left trade union figure.

The first time I saw Foster in action was at the Fourth Party Convention in Chicago in the summer of 1925. I remember him angrily pacing with clenched fists back and forth across the platform behind Ruthenberg as the latter berated him from the rostrum. Here in the caucus, he was again an angry man, but under the lash of his friends and co-factionalists.

Jack Johnstone, a Scotsman, still had the Scot's burr in his speech. An ex-Wobbly and close co-worker of Foster, he had been one of the young radical Chicago trade unionists. A member of the Chicago Federation of Labor from the Painters Union, Johnstone was a leader in the TUEL. I had met him at the Fourth RILU Congress. His name was familiar to me because of his role as a leader in the organization of the Chicago stockyard workers in which my sister had been involved. Johnstone was the organizer of the drive for the Chicago Federation of Labor and later became secretary of the Chicago Stockyards Council with 55,000 white and Black members.

On the eve of the 1919 riots, he had helped to organize a parade of white stockyard unionists through the Southside in solidarity with the Black workers. I had the pleasure of working with Johnstone later in Pittsburgh and in Chicago, where he was industrial organizer for the district. He was a quiet, unassuming guy with a wry sense of humor.

Earl Browder of Wichita, Kansas, served his ideological ap-

prenticeship as a radical trade unionist in the socialist and cooperative movements. Arrested in 1917 on charges of defying the draft law, he spent three years in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas.

I had known Browder briefly in Moscow while he was rep to the Profintern, before he went on a two year mission to the Far East for that organization. We KUTVA students would often visit him at his room in the Lux Hotel where he would play checkers with Golden, who usually won. He told us that when he was at Leavenworth, he had met a number of former members of the Black Twenty-fourth Infantry who had been involved in the mutiny-riot in Houston, Texas, in the summer of 1917. He told us that they often played baseball together in prison.

At the time, Browder seemed to me to be a quiet, modest, unassuming man. But at this caucus meeting, something had happened which seemed to have transformed him into a “new” Browder. Though long associated with Foster, he now seemed bent on not only asserting his independence, but on establishing his own claim to leadership.

At one point in the heated discussion on trade union policy, he exclaimed sarcastically: “You expect to get the support of the Comintern, but you’re all divided among yourselves! There’s a Cannon group, a Bittelman Group, a Foster Group – well, I’m for the Browder Group!”

No one seemed to take his remark seriously, but less than a year later Browder was to emerge as secretary of the Party.

James P. Cannon was also from Kansas – a tall, raw-boned Midwesterner of Irish descent. He came from the same trade union background as the other caucus leaders; he had been a traveling organizer for the Wobblies and an editor of a number of labor papers. He was a supporter of Trotsky, although he didn’t admit it at the congress. Later he split from the Party and helped form the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party.

Bill Dunne was a man of impressive credentials. Raised in Minnesota, Dunne entered the trade union movement as an electrician. Then in Butte, Montana, during World War I, he edited the *Butte Daily Bulletin* (official organ of the Montana Federation of Labor and the Butte Central Labor Council). Dunne had been secretary of a local of electricians, vice-president of the Montana Federation of Labor and a member of the state legislature (on the Democratic ticket, which in Butte was labor controlled). He helped organ-

ize the Socialist Party Branch of Butte and brought it into the Communist Labor Party in 1919.

I got to know Bill quite well; he was in the Soviet Union for some months before the Sixth Congress as a Profintern rep. I first met him through Clarence Hathaway, and both were associated with the Cannon sub-group. Bill was familiar with the emerging line on self-determination and supported it. He had written a number of articles on Black workers in the mid-twenties.

To me, he was the most colorful figure in our caucus and a man of unusual brilliance. Keen-witted, sharp in debate, he had an extraordinary sense of humor. Of Irish and French-Canadian parentage, Bill was short and heavy-set, with black bushy eyebrows. He cut a romantic figure on the streets of Moscow in his Georgian *rabochka* and sheathed dagger at his waist. I had a close friendship with Bill which lasted over a number of years.

Alexander Bittelman was a Russian Jew who had emigrated to the United States when in his early twenties. A little fellow, Bittelman was both ascetic and scholarly. He had been in the socialist movement in Russia and continued on in his political work in the U.S. A serious Marxist student, Bittelman was the main theoretician for the Foster group.

THE LOVESTONE CAUCUS

The Lovestone-Pepper caucus was meeting at the same time. They too were mapping out plans for the battle on the floor of the congress. Lovestone also had his troubles – most involved the shedding of his opportunist reputation for that of “crusader against the right danger.”

Most of the “big guns” were on the scene: Lovestone, Pepper, Weinstone and Wolfe. Gitlow, Bedacht and others were left at home as caretakers; Gitlow ostensibly to carry on the Party’s election campaign (in which he was vice-presidential candidate).

While I was the only Black in the minority caucus, the Lovestone-Pepper caucus claimed the allegiance, if not the ardent support, of a number of leading Black comrades. In the nine months since the convention, the Lovestone-Pepper leadership had attempted to patch its fences in the work among Blacks. Otto Huiswood, now a member of the Central Committee and district organizer in Buffalo, was the first Black district organizer. Richard B. Moore was assigned to the International Labor Defense, and Cyril P. Briggs was editor of *The Crusader* News Service, which was subsi-

dized by the Party.

But none of these could be called ardent supporters of Lovestone. They were all dissatisfied with the status of Afro-American work, which was reflected in the small number of Black cadre in the Party. In general, it was still difficult to draw a hard and fast distinction between the factions on questions concerning Afro-American work.

Blacks in the Lovestone delegation included H.V. Phillips and Fort-Whiteman (both directly from the United States) and students from the graduating group at KUTVA – Otto, Farmer and Williams (Golden had already left for home). The group also included William L. Patterson, the young attorney who had worked with the Party on the Sacco-Vanzetti case and who had been sent to KUTVA just before the congress.

James Ford, who worked in the Profintern and was to become an outstanding Party leader in the thirties, stood aloof from both groups as I remember. His sympathies seemed to be with the Foster-Cannon opposition, however.

Among the Blacks attending the congress, I was the only one supporting the new line on self-determination. The others insisted that “it was a race question, not a national question,” implying that the solution lay through assimilation under socialism. Probing deeper, I found that most were hung up on a purist and non-Marxist concept of the class struggle which ruled out all strivings towards nationality and Black identity as divisive, running counter to internationalism and Black and white unity.

It was an American version of the “pure proletarian revolution” concept; a domestic manifestation of the old deviation in the socialist and communist movements against which Lenin, Stalin and others had fought in the development of the Bolshevik policy on the national and colonial question.

Recalling that I myself had held the same view just a few months back, I felt that the resistance of Blacks in the Party to self-determination would be overcome through exposure in the discussions at the congress of the proposed new line. I had no doubt that they would come to see, as I had, the grand irony of a situation in which we Blacks, who so vociferously complained about our white comrades underestimating the revolutionary significance of the Afro-American question, were guilty of the same sin. For the revolutionary significance of the struggle for Black rights lay precisely in the recognition of its character as essentially that of the struggle of

an oppressed nation against U.S. imperialism.

At this point, the opposition to the idea of Black self-determination was to receive theoretical support from an unexpected source. This opposition came from Professor Sik, my old teacher at KUTVA, who was still teaching the Black students there. Sik contended that bourgeois race ideology, which fostered racial prejudices, was the prime factor in the oppression of U.S. Blacks. Therefore, their fight for equal rights should be regarded not as that of an oppressed nation striving for equality via self-determination but, on the contrary, as the fight of an oppressed racial minority (similar to the Jews under czarism) for assimilation as equals into U.S. society.

Sik undoubtedly thought that he was presenting original views, but stripped of their pseudo-Marxist phraseology, they were the old bourgeois-liberal reformist views. He slurred over the socioeconomic factors that lay at the base of the question, factors which call for the completion of the agrarian-democratic revolution in the South. His perspective divested the Black movement of its independent revolutionary thrust, reducing it to a bourgeois-liberal opposition to race prejudice.

However, Sik's thesis continued to be used as a crutch for the right opposition over the next year or so; it appeared in the *Communist International* (organ of the Comintern) in the midst of the Sixth World Congress.⁴ But the pressure for a turn to the left in this work was to flush it out into the open along with other right-wing views on the question.

Foremost among these were the views of Jay Lovestone. His view of Southern Blacks as a "reserve of capitalist reaction" provided a theoretical rationale for the Party's chronic underestimation of the question. This was clear in his report to the Fifth Party Convention in which he contended that:

The migration of Negroes from the South to the North is another means of proletarianization, consequently the existence of this group as a reserve of capitalist reaction is likewise being undermined.⁵

Lovestone held that the masses of Blacks in the South become potentially revolutionary only through migration to the industrial centers in the north and participation in class struggle along with white workers. This viewpoint, which was later to become a cornerstone for his theory of "American exceptionalism," was first out-

lined in his report for the Fifth Convention of the Party and again in his report in the *Daily Worker* in February 1928.⁶ But these articles passed unnoticed at the time. It was only on the eve of the Sixth World Congress and under the pressure of the new line that we became alerted to Lovestone's views.

The general meeting of the American delegation took place the day before the opening of the congress. All factions were represented but, as I recall, there were no fireworks. By that time, lines were clearly drawn and neither faction was trying to convince the other. On our part, we were saving our ammunition for the battle on the floor of the congress and its commissions.

Apparently there had been some objections in the Lovestone group to the proposed new line on self-determination. To mollify these people, Lovestone stated that he stood for the right of self-determination of oppressed peoples everywhere; surely he said, no communist could oppose this right. I assumed that he regarded the slogan as some sort of showcase principle; something to be declared but which did not commit its advocates to any special line of action. Lovestone knew which way the wind was blowing and was clearly trying to straddle the fence on the issue.

The delegates at this meeting were assigned to the various commissions; there was no struggle over the assignments as it was understood that all commissions had to include members of both factions. These commissions included the American Negro/South African Commission, Colonial Commission, Trade Union Commission, and Program Commission.

THE SIXTH WORLD CONGRESS

On July 17, 1928, 532 delegates representing fifty-seven parties and nine organizations assembled in the Hall of the Trade Unions. The delegation from the United States was a large one – twenty-nine delegates, including twenty voting and nine advisory delegates. The Sixth Congress convened under the slogan of “War Against the Right Danger and the Rightist Conciliators.”

The period since the February plenum of the Comintern had been marked by the emergence of a clearly defined right opportunist deviation in most of the parties. They advanced the perspective of continuous capitalist recovery and the easing of the class struggle. In the realm of tactics this meant a continuation of the old “united front from above” and a reliance on social reformist trade union leaders. In the U.S., the right was to find its foremost exponents in

the Lovestone-Pepper leadership, which emphasized the strength of U.S. capitalism and its ability to postpone the crisis.

A right opposition had also begun to develop in the CPSU, headed by Bukharin; Rykov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissions; and Tomsy, heading the Soviet Trade Unions. This group opposed the programs of the Stalinist majority of the Central Committee with respect to the goals of the new Five Year Plan, which called for intensified industrialization, collectivization, and the drive against the *kulaks*. The right deviation in the CPSU and in the other parties of the Comintern had a common source – overestimation of the strength of world capitalism. The congress was faced with the need to answer these critics by deepening its analysis of the period and by spelling out more clearly the policy flowing from it.

In the Soviet Party, the disagreement had come to a head prior to its plenum of July 1928, which adjourned just before the Sixth Congress. The differences, however, were hushed up by a resolution unanimously adopted by both groups which stated that there were no differences in the leadership of the CPSU. The agreement undoubtedly expressed the desire of the Soviet leadership to keep the congress from becoming an arena for discussion of Soviet problems before they had been finally thrashed out within their own Party.

The delegates, however, were not unaware of the struggle in the Soviet Party. They gathered in an atmosphere charged with rumor and speculation about differences within the CPSU. The questions in our minds were: Who represented the right danger in the CPSU, the leading Party of the CI? What was the role of Bukharin? What had been the outcome of the discussions in the plenum of the CPSU? How would the congress be affected? We did not have long to wait for answers to these questions. Differences developed over sections of Bukharin's *Report on the International Situation and Tasks of the Comintern*.⁷

In his report which was distributed on July 18, at the second session of the congress, Bukharin analyzed the post-World War I international situation, dividing it into three periods. He defined the first (1917-1923) as one of revolutionary upsurge; the second (1924-1927) as a period of partial stabilization of capitalism; and the third (1928 on) as one of capitalist reconstruction. Bukharin made no clear distinction between the second and third periods; the latter was simply a continuation of the second. According to his characterization, there was nothing new at the present time to shake capitalist stabilization. On the contrary, capitalism was continuing

to “reconstruct itself.”

On this question Bukharin was challenged by his own Soviet delegation which submitted a series of twenty amendments to the thesis. These characterized the third period as one in which partial stabilization was coming to an end. Later, in his criticism of Bukharin’s position, Stalin pointed out the decisive importance of a correct estimate of the third period. The question involved here was: “Are we passing through a period of decline of the revolutionary movement... or are we passing through a period when the conditions are maturing for a new revolutionary upsurge, a period of preparation of the working class for future class battles? It is on this that the tactical line of the Communist Parties depends.”⁸

At first, all of this was somewhat confusing to us. In his opening report Bukharin had himself declared the right deviation the “greatest danger” to the Comintern. But in his characterization of the third period as one of virtual capitalist recovery he had adopted the main thesis of the right. He had also put himself in the awkward position of being rejected by his own delegation. But as Stalin was later to point out, it was his own fault for failing to discuss his report in advance with the Soviet delegation, as was customary. Instead he distributed his report to all delegations simultaneously.⁹

In accordance with our battle plan to expose the Pepper-Lovestone leadership as the embodiment of the right deviation in the American Party, our caucus took the offensive. Even before the discussion on Bukharin’s report began, our minority had submitted a document entitled “The Right Danger and the American Party.” It was signed by J.W. Johnstone, M. Gomez, W.F. Dunne, J.P. Cannon, W.Z. Foster, A. Bittelman and G. Siskind.¹⁰

The document contained a bill of particulars in which we sought to point out that the rightist tendencies and mistakes of the Lovestone-Pepper leadership added up to a right line.

Our attack, however, was hobbled by blemishes in the stateside record of our own caucus. At that point it would have been hard to discern any principled political differences between the majority or minority. Nevertheless, differences were developing on the estimation of the third period and U.S. imperialism.¹¹

Pepper and Lovestone exaggerated the might of U.S. imperialism and spoke only of the weakness of the U.S. labor movement and the class struggle in this country. But the minority had also wavered on the question of building independent trade unions, the logical follow-through of the correct estimate of the objective situation

in terms of practical policy.

On the Negro question, the minority record up to that point had been no better than that of the majority. This fact was quickly pointed out by Otto and others. Both groups had shared the same mistakes. As Foster later observed, both factions had “traditionally considered the Negro question as that of a persecuted racial minority of workers and as basically a simple trade union matter.”¹² It was this orientation which explains the Party’s shortcomings in this field of work. But now, the tentative endorsement by our caucus of the proposed new line on the Afro-American question strengthened its position vis-a-vis the majority leadership.

The prospects for our minority were brightened by the difficulties of Lovestone’s friend and mentor, Bukharin. Corridor rumors concerning his right-wing proclivities were now being confirmed by his differences with his own Soviet delegation on the character of the third period.

The congress was now settling down to work. A number of commissions were formed to discuss and formulate resolutions on the main subjects confronting the congress. Among them were: 1) A Commission on Program, to complete the drafting of a program for the Comintern; 2) one on the Trade Union question, to apply the struggle against right opportunism to the trade union field; and 3) a commission on the Colonial Question which discussed strategy and tactics of the liberation movements in the colonies and semi-colonies and the tasks of the Comintern. There were also several commissions on the special problems of individual parties.

My major concern, however, was the Negro Commission, which was to take up the problem of the U.S. Blacks and the South African question. Although set up as an independent commission, in reality it was a subcommittee of the Colonial Commission. The resolutions formulated by it were included in the final draft of the congress’s thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies. The Negro Commission was set up on August 6, at the twenty-third session of the congress. It was a memorable day, particularly for us Black communists – a day to which we all had looked forward. At last there was to be a full-dress discussion on the question.

We listened attentively as the German comrade Remmele, chairman of the session, read off on behalf of the presidium the list of members and officers who would comprise the commission. It was an impressive list and indicated the high priority given the question by the congress. Thirty-two delegates, representing eight-

een countries, including the United States, South Africa, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Turkey, India, Palestine and Syria were members of the commission. Impressive also were its officers: the chairman, Ottomar Kuusinen, was a member of the CI Secretariat and chairman of the Colonial Commission; the vice-chairman Petrovsky (Bennett) was also chairman of the Anglo-American Secretariat; and the recording secretary, Mikhailov (Williams), was a former CI representative to the American Party.

The delegates from the U.S. included five Blacks: myself, Jones (Otto Hall), Farmer (Roy Mahoney), James Ford and, I believe, Harold Williams; plus two white comrades, Bittelman and Lovestone. Others included Sidney Bunting of South Africa; Fokin and Nasanov, representing the Young Communist International; the Swiss, Humbert-Droz, a top CI official; Heller, from the Communist fraction of the Profintern; and several members of the Soviet delegation to the congress.

Participation in commission meetings was not limited to its members, however. Among the important figures who spoke in the discussions were Manuisky, a CI official, and the Ukrainian, Skrypnik, both members of the Soviet delegation. The hall was always crowded with interested observers.

The first order of business before the Commission was the Negro question. It was introduced by Petrovsky, who, as I recall, stressed the need for a radical turn in the policy of the American Party with respect to its work among Blacks. He referred to the Negro Subcommittee, set up earlier in the year by the Anglo-American Secretariat, which was given the task of preparing materials on the question for the Sixth Congress.

Petrovsky described the two positions which emerged from this subcommittee.

One held that the weaknesses of the Party's Negro work were a result of an incorrect line. The partisans of this position regarded Blacks in the South as an oppressed nation and recommended that the right of self-determination be raised as an orientation slogan in their struggle for equality.

The other position, he said, held that the question was one of a "racial minority" whose immediate and ultimate demands were embraced by the slogan of complete economic, social and political equality. The supporters of this position attributed the weaknesses in the Party's Afro-American work to the underestimation of the

importance of work among Blacks. This resulted, in turn, from the survivals of racial prejudices within the ranks of the Party and its leadership. This position did not challenge the Party's line, but called for its more energetic application.

As I recall, Petrovsky stated that he himself favored the position on self-determination. He did not see it as a negation of the slogan of social equality which, he said, would remain the main slogan for the Black masses. But in the Black Belt, where Blacks are in the majority, in addition to the slogan of equality the Party must raise another slogan – the right of self-determination. For here, equality without the right of Blacks to enforce it is but an empty phrase. At the same time he expressed agreement with the comrades who contended that the hangovers of racial prejudice in the Party were a main obstacle to the Party's effective work among Blacks. He stressed the need to fight against the ideology of white chauvinism, a principle block to the unity of Black and white workers.

Petrovsky then referred the comrades to the material before them. It included the document by Nasanov and myself, summarizing our position in support of the self-determination thesis. The document contained a criticism of current Party activities and policies and condemned Pepper's May 30th resolution, which had made no reference to the Party's tasks in the South.¹³ It also criticized the completely northern orientation of the American Negro Labor Congress, as contained in the policy statements of its leaders, Lovett Fort-Whiteman and H.V. Phillips. Finally, it criticized Lovestone's characterization of Southern Blacks as "reserves of capitalist reaction."

Other documents presented to the commission were a statement by Dunne and Hathaway supporting the self-determination viewpoint and a document by Sik opposing the proposed new line. Sik argued that Blacks were a racial minority whose immediate and ultimate demands were embraced by the slogan of full social equality.¹⁴

Later in the discussion, Pepper submitted a document containing his proposals for a "Negro Soviet Republic" in the South, arguing that Southern Blacks were not just a nation but virtually a colony within the body of the United States of America.¹⁵

Among the American delegates who spoke in favor of the proposed new line were Bittelman, Foster and Dunne. As I remember, all were self-critical. Bittelman, however, emphasized the dual role of the Black working class envisioned by the new line: first, its role as a basic and constituent element of the American working class and, second, its leadership of the national liberation movement of

Black people.

I do not remember Lovestone speaking. If he did, he did not openly attack the proposed new line, for that would not have been his style. It was clear to all, however, that he had strong reservations. Sam Darcy of the Young Communist League was, as I remember, the only white comrade who openly opposed the proposed new line.

But the strongest opposition to the self-determination thesis both in the commission and on the floor of the congress was from the Black comrades James Ford and Otto Hall. In their arguments it was evident that they relied heavily on Professor Sik and his “new” theory on “race problems.” Up to that point, neither Nasanov nor I had paid much attention to Sik. But now after listening to Otto and Ford we suddenly realized the danger his theories posed to clarity on this vital question.

Sik had evidently been working hard on his thesis which he was now proselytizing with almost evangelic zeal. He had, if not a captive audience, at least a willing one among the Black students at KUTVA where he taught (of all subjects!) Leninism. Now suddenly it seemed that Sik had become cast in the role of chief theoretician of the opposition to the proposed new policy; in their speeches Otto and Ford repeated verbatim many of his arguments.

For example, both Otto and Ford insisted that U.S. Negroes were a racial minority rather than an oppressed nation or an oppressed national minority. (They used these two latter terms interchangeably at the time.) They ruled out all national movements among U.S. Blacks as reactionary. According to Ford, such movements were led by the “chauvinistic” Black bourgeoisie who wanted a freer hand to exploit the Black masses. These movements, he argued, “play into the hands of the bourgeoisie by arresting the revolutionary class movement of the Negro masses and further widening the gulf between the white and similar oppressed groups.”¹⁶ He also averred that Blacks lack the characteristics of a nation. There was not the question of one nation oppressing and exploiting another nation. “In the United States,” Ford continued, “we find no economic system separating the two races. The interests of the Negro and white workers are the same. The Negro peasant and the white peasant interests are the same.” The only problem, he contended, was one of racial differences of the color of the skin, barriers set up by the bourgeoisie.¹⁷

Otto sharpened the argument and contended that Blacks were

"not developing any characteristics of a national minority... there exists no national entity as such among... Negroes." Continuing along the same line, Otto saw no community of interest between the Black bourgeoisie and the Black toilers, whom, he argued, "are completely separated (from each other) as far as class interests are concerned." In sum, he contended that "historical development has tended to create in him (the Negro) the desire to be considered a part of the American nation."¹⁸

What then were the objectives of Black liberation? They were, according to Sik, the striving of Blacks for intermingling and amalgamation. I was astounded and dismayed. This seemed to me to be a bourgeois liberal-assimilationist position cloaked in pseudo-Marxist rhetoric.

A few days before on the floor of the congress, Ford and Otto complained bitterly about the rampant white chauvinism in the Party and the widespread underestimation of the significance of Afro-American work. Could they not see that they were playing into the hands of the white chauvinist downgraders of the Black movement? They had conceded them their main premise: that the movement for Black equality in itself had no revolutionary potential.

Sik's theory had stripped the struggle for equality of all revolutionary content; it involved no radical social change, that is, completion of the land and democratic revolution and securing of political power in the South. It was just a struggle against racial ideology.

How was it possible for Otto and Ford and other Black comrades to fall into this trap? They had separated racism, the most salient external manifestation of Black oppression, from its socio-economic roots, reducing the struggle for equality to a movement against prejudice. It was a theory which even liberal reformists could support.

And why did they downgrade the revolutionary nature of the Black struggle for equality? I could only assume that it was an attempt on their part to fit the Afro-American question into the simplistic frame of "pure proletarian class struggle." This theory ruled out all nationalist movements as divisive and distracting from the struggle for socialism. Lovestone's idea of the Black peasantry in the South being a "reserve of capitalist reaction" was the logical outcome of this kind of thinking.

What was clear to me was that our thesis of self-determination had correctly elevated the fight for Black rights to a revolutionary position, whereas the proponents of Sik's theories attempted to

downgrade the movement, seeing it as a minor aspect of the class struggle. Our thesis put the question in the proper perspective: that is, as a struggle attacking the very foundation of American imperialism, an integral part of the struggle of the American working class as a whole.

The sad fact was that Otto, Ford and other partisans of Sik's theory seemed completely unaware that they had come to a practical agreement with those white chauvinists who denied the revolutionary character of the Black liberation struggle in the false name of socialism.

Nasanov, sitting beside me, undoubtedly had similar thoughts. He muttered something in Russian that sounded like, "Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do."

During an interval in the Negro Commission sessions, I cornered Otto in the corridor and accused him and Ford of downgrading the liberation struggle and playing into the hands of the white chauvinist element in the Party. How, I asked him, did he expect to fight those responsible for the neglect of work among Blacks when he accepted their main premise – that the struggle of Blacks was not of itself revolutionary and that it only becomes so when they (the Blacks) fight directly for socialism?

Otto indignantly denied this and accused me of allowing the question to be used as a factional football by the Foster group. I conceded that they were not all clear. But, I added heatedly, at least they had begun to recognize that their position had been wrong and they were trying to change it.

We broke off the discussion; it was obviously useless to pursue the matter further. We were both getting emotional. No doubt our relationship had become rather strained as a result of our political differences. I was terribly saddened by this growing rift between my brother and me. True, I no longer thought of him as my political mentor, but nevertheless I felt he was a serious and dedicated revolutionary.

What, I wondered, were the pressures that pushed Black proletarian comrades like Otto and Ford into this position? Foremost was their misguided but honest desire to amalgamate Black labor into the general labor movement. Nationalism, they felt, was a block to labor unity. They failed to recognize the revolutionary element in Black nationalism. I myself had held the same position only a few months earlier, but then I hadn't studied Leninism under Sik.

I remember running into Nasanov. We walked down the hall

arm in arm and he asked me if I was going to speak. I said, "I don't know, should I?"

Knowing my shyness, he laughed and said, "We've got them on the run. We've submitted our resolution and supporting documents."

We were then accosted by Manuilsky whom I had met before. He wanted to know if I was the only Black supporting the self-determination position. I told him that thus far I was.

"How did that happen?" he asked. That was a question I was still trying to answer myself. But before I could reply he said, "Oh, I know. They are all good class-conscious comrades. But I understand them. We Bolsheviks had the same type of deviation within the party." He turned away to greet somebody else.

And well he should understand, I reflected, for Manuilsky had been one of the leading Ukrainian Communists referred to in our class on Leninism, who, during the Revolution in the Ukraine, had been guilty of the same deviation.

He had been one of those whom the Bolsheviks had called "abstract Marxists," those unable to relate Marxism to the concrete experience of their own people. On that occasion he resisted the resolution of the CC drafted by Lenin which made necessary concessions to Ukrainian nationalism; these included a softer line on the *kulaks* and the establishment of Ukrainian as the national language.

What about Comrade Pepper's new slogan for a "Negro Soviet Republic?" Had he undergone a sudden conversion to the cause of Black nationhood? Was this the same Pepper who had completely ignored the South in his May thesis and who had, during the Program Commission at the Fifth Congress of the CI (1924), asserted that Blacks in the US wanted nothing to do with the slogan of self-determination?

Sudden shifts in position were not new to Pepper who, as we have seen, was a man unrestrained by principles. Lominadze had branded Pepper on the floor of the congress as a man of "inadequate firmness of principle and backbone. He always agrees with those who are his seniors even if a minute ago he defended an utterly different viewpoint."¹⁹

The Commission rejected Pepper's slogan on the grounds that, first, it actually negated the principle of the right of self-determination by making the Party's support of it contingent upon the acceptance by Blacks of the Soviet governmental form. Secondly, it was an opportunist attempt to skip over the intermediate stage

of preparation and mobilization of the Black masses around their immediate demands.

Pepper's position was actually an attempt to outflank the new position from the "left." Clearly he sought to grab the spotlight, to upstage the move towards a new policy. Perhaps he thought that the left-sounding term "Soviet" would make the new stress on the national character of the question more palatable to his factional cohorts of the pure revolutionary persuasion.

Otto seemed to have nibbled on the bait; at least he felt it did not contradict his position. In his previously quoted speech he stated, "There is no objection on our part on (sic) the principle of a Soviet Republic for Negroes in America. The point we are concerned with here is how to organize these Negroes at present on the basis of their everyday needs for the revolution."²⁰

In this case, however, Pepper had overreached himself, having jumped over the bandwagon instead of on it.

Despite Pepper's defeat in the commission, he still had a card or two up his sleeve. This we were to find to our surprise and anger when we received the October 1928 issue of *The Communist*, official organ of the CPUSA. Prominent among the articles was Pepper's on "American Negro Problems," which presented his call for a "Negro Soviet Republic." But that was not all; the article was also published simultaneously in pamphlet form by the American Party. Neither the article nor the pamphlet was labeled as a discussion paper, which gave them the appearance of being official statements of the new policy.

Pepper's article had originally appeared in the *Communist International*, organ of the Comintern, as one of a series of discussion articles.²¹ The other articles were one by Ford and Patterson (Wilson),²² "The Comintern Programme and the Racial Problem" by Sik, and "The Negro Problem and the Tasks of the CPUSA," by me.²³

Of these, Sik's was the only one to appear in the English edition of the magazine. This was because the English edition had suspended publication for technical reasons from September to December.

But Pepper also sent his article to *The Communist*, organ of the American Party, where it appeared in October 1928. Because the official resolutions of the congress were not published until January of the following year, Pepper's distorted version of the new line was the first document available to American Party members. The result was considerable confusion and misunderstanding.

Particularly aggravating was that Pepper filched the basic facts

of our analysis – national character, Black Belt territory, etc. – distorting them into a vulgar caricature of our thesis. This latest piece of chicanery did nothing to enhance Pepper’s image in Moscow where it was already on the wane. It was, however, well-received in the U.S. where he still had considerable influence.

ESSENCE OF THE NEW LINE

The CI’s new line on the Afro-American question was released by the ECCI in two documents. The first was the full resolution of the commission, which addressed itself to the concrete issues raised in the discussion. The second was a summary of the full resolution, worked out in the commission under the direction of Kuusinen, for incorporation in the congress thesis on the “Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies.”²⁴

The resolution rejected the assimilationist race theories upon which the line of the Party had been based. It defined the Black movement as “national revolutionary” in character on the grounds that “the various forms of oppression of Negroes.... concentrated mainly in the so-called ‘Black Belt’ provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement.”

Stressing the agrarian roots of the problem it declared that Southern Blacks “are.... not reserves of capitalist reaction,” as Lovestone had contended, but they were on the contrary, “reserves of the revolutionary proletariat” whose “objective position facilitates their transformation into a revolutionary force under the leadership of the proletariat.”

The new line committed the Party to champion the Black struggle for “complete and real equality for the abolition of all kinds of racial, social, and political inequalities.” It called for an “energetic struggle against any exhibition of white chauvinism” and for “active resistance to lynching.”

At the same time, the resolution stressed the need for Black revolutionary workers to resist “petty bourgeois nationalist tendencies” such as Garveyism. It declared that the industrialization of the South and the growth of the Black proletariat was the “most important phenomenon of recent years.” The enlargement of this class, it asserted, offers the possibility of consistent revolutionary leadership of the movement.

It called upon the Party to “strengthen its work among Negro proletarians,” drawing into its ranks the most conscious elements. It was also to fight for the acceptance of Black workers into unions

from which they are barred, but this fight did not exclude the organization of separate trade unions when necessary. It called for the concentration of work in the South to organize the masses of soil-tillers. And finally, the new line committed the Party to put forth the slogan of the right of self-determination.

In those regions of the South in which compact Negro masses are living, it is essential to put forward the slogan of the Right of Self-determination... a radical transformation of the Agrarian structure of the Southern States is one of the basic tasks of the revolution. Negro Communists must explain to the Negro workers and peasants that only their close union with the white proletariat and joint struggle with them against the American bourgeoisie can lead to their liberation from barbarous exploitation, and that only the victorious proletarian revolution will completely and permanently solve the agrarian and national question of the Southern United States in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the Negro population of the country.²⁵

SOUTH AFRICA

There was keen interest as the Commission moved to the next point on the agenda – South Africa. Here again it was a fight against the denial of the national liberation movement in the name of socialism, the same right deviation on new turf. In the South African setting, where four-fifths of the population were black colonial slaves, the deviation was particularly glaring.

It was true that in the past year or so the South African Party had intensified its work among the natives, a “turn to the masses.” As the Simons noted, by 1928 there were 1,600 African members out of a total of 1,750 in the Party. The year before there were only 200 African members.²⁶

The Party had pursued a vigorous policy in the building of Black trade unions, in conducting strikes, and in fighting the most vicious forms of national oppression – pass laws and the like. The Party’s official organ, *The South African Worker*, had been revived on a new basis. More than half the articles were now written in three Bantu languages: Xhosa, Zulu and Tsotho,

Sidney Bunting, leader of the South African Party, had emerged as a stalwart fighter for Native rights in the defense of Thibedi, a framed-up Native communist leader. As a result about a hundred

Natives had been recruited into the Party, and two were now on the Central Committee. On the whole, the Party was making a turn toward the Native masses. But it still lacked the theory which would enable it to tap their tremendous revolutionary potential.

As did most of the white leading cadre, Bunting exhibited a paternalism with respect to the Natives. This paternalism was rooted in an abiding lack of faith in the revolutionary potential of the Native movement. They saw the South African revolution in terms of the direct struggle for socialism. This white leadership, brought up in the old socialist traditions and comprised mainly of European immigrants, had not yet absorbed Lenin's teachings on the national and colonial questions.

These shortcomings had been brought sharply to the attention of the Comintern by La Guma. The result was the resolution on the South African question which La Guma, Nasanov and I had worked on the previous winter. It recommended that the Party put forward and work for an independent Native South African Republic with full and equal rights for all races as a stage toward a Workers and Peasants Republic. This was to be accompanied by the slogan "Return the land to the Natives."

The resolution was not only rejected by the Party leadership, but they had now sent a lily-white delegation to the congress to fight for its repeal. The delegation consisted of Sidney Bunting, Party chairman, his wife Rebecca, and Edward Roux, a young South African communist leader who was then studying at Oxford. Whatever their hopes were on arrival in Moscow, they now seemed dejected and subdued. Having sat through the discussion on the Afro-American question, they undoubtedly saw the handwriting on the wall.

From the start, the South African delegation was on the defensive, having been confronted by other delegates with the inevitable question: Where are the Natives?

What answer could they give? It was evident to all that theirs was a mission on which Natives could not be trusted, even those "brought up in the old tradition," to use the phrase of Roux.

We Blacks asked about La Guma and they replied, "Oh, he was here just a short while ago and had his say. We felt that the other viewpoint should be represented."

After copies of the ECCI resolution on South Africa had been distributed, the South African delegates took the floor before the entire congress to challenge the line of the resolution. The South

African revolution, they argued, was a socialist revolution with no intermediate stage, an argument which posed a sort of South African exceptionalism.

The argument ran that South Africa was not a colonial country. Bunting then contended that “South Africa is, owing to its climate, what is called a ‘white man’s country’ where whites can and do live not merely as planters and officials, but as a whole nation of all classes, established there for centuries, of Dutch and English composition.”²⁷

Bunting’s statement came under attack on the floor of the congress, notably by Bill Dunne. Bunting defended himself, holding that his description was solely factual and was not an “advocacy of ‘White South Africa,’... the very view we have combatted for the last thirteen years.”²⁸

In essence, Bunting’s views liquidated the struggle of the black peasantry in South Africa. He declared that they were “being rapidly proletarianized,” and further that “the native agrarian masses as such have not yet shown serious signs of revolt.” Hence the slogan of “Return the land to the Natives” would antagonize white workers with its implication of a “*black race dictatorship*.”²⁹

Rebecca Bunting spoke in the commission sessions. Addressing herself to the land question, she denied that the land belonged to the Bantu in the first place. Both the Bantu from central Africa and the Afrikaaners coming up from Capetown had forced the aboriginal Hottentots and Bushmen off their land. Thus, there was no special Native land question.

The real question on Rebecca Bunting’s mind, however, was not of land, but of the position of the white minority in a Native South African Republic. She came right to the point. Who will guarantee equality for the whites in an independent Native Republic? Their slogan, as you know, is “Drive the whites into the sea.” We listened to her in amazement and a laugh went through the audience.

The cat was finally let out of the bag, and a mangy, chauvinistic creature it was. Manuilsky stepped forward, his eyes twinkling. “Comrade Bunting has raised a serious question, one not to be sneezed at. What is to become of the whites? My answer to that would be that if the white Party members do not raise and energetically fight for an independent Native Republic, then *kto znaet?* (Who knows?) They may well be driven into the sea!” That brought the house down.³⁰

The commission finally affirmed the resolution for a Native

South African Republic. It was then passed onto the floor of the congress where the fight continued and our position was eventually accepted.³¹

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN THE COLONIES

Upon the adjournment of the Negro Commission, many of us moved into the sessions of the Colonial Commission. We found there no peaceful, harmonious gathering, but acrimonious debate. Kuusinen's report and draft thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies was under sharp attack. The point of controversy was the nature and objective of imperialist colonial policy.

The draft thesis held that the colonial policy of imperialism was directed toward "repressing and retarding" by all possible means the free economic and cultural development of the colonies and retaining them as backward, agrarian appendages of the imperialist metropolitan countries. This policy, the draft thesis maintained, is an essential condition for the super-exploitation of the colonial masses. Thus, it pointed out:

The objective contradiction between the colonial policy of world imperialism and the independent development of the colonial peoples is by no means done away with, neither in China, nor in India, nor in any other of the colonial and semi-colonial countries; on the contrary, the contradiction only becomes more acute and can be overcome only by the victorious revolutionary struggle of the toiling masses in the colonies.³²

Accordingly, the primary question for the colonies was their liberation.

The opponents of the draft thesis, on the other hand, took the view that imperialism had shifted its policy from one of hindering the economic development of the colonies to one of promoting industrialization under the joint auspices of the imperialists and native bourgeoisie. This was shown particularly in the more advanced colonies such as India and Indonesia, they argued.

It was the old social democratic theory of decolonization. It implied that the main contradiction between imperialism and the colonies was being eased; the colonial revolution was thereby being defused. The main components of that revolution, the national liberation struggle and the agrarian revolution, were being eliminated through industrialization. Thus, the perspective before the peoples

of those colonies was not national liberation, but rather a long-range struggle for socialism.

I was amazed to find that leading the attack on the draft thesis was none other than our Comrade Petrovsky. He who had seemed to be such a stalwart warrior against the right on the Afro-American and South African question had now become the chief advocate of the blatantly rightist “decolonization theory.” But that wasn’t all. He had rallied behind him most of the British delegation in his attack upon the draft thesis. It was quite a scandal!

Here was the British Party, in the homeland of the world’s greatest imperialist power, championing the idea that Britain was taking the lead in decolonizing her empire. The tragedy was that the British delegation seemed totally unaware of the chauvinist implication of their stance.

It became clear to us in the discussion that the British Party’s position with regard to the colonies pre-dated the congress. This was merely the first occasion for its full airing. Petrovsky had been CI representative to Britain and had played no small role in the development of the “decolonization” theory.

The partisans of decolonization were utterly routed both in the commission and on the floor of the congress. Lozovsky, Remmele, Murphy, Manuilsky, Katayama and Kuusinen all took the floor in rebuttal. In an early session of the congress, Katayama pointed to the “criminal neglect” of the British Party with regard to Ireland and India in the past, and of the Dutch and American Parties with regard to the Philippines and Indonesia. “The mother countries must correct this inactivity on their part, and give every assistance to the revolutionary movement in these colonial countries,” he said.

I was impressed by the speeches of Kuusinen and Murphy, the sole Britisher who really spoke out against the position taken by his delegation. Murphy accused his comrades of “presenting a Menshevik picture of the colonial problem and drawing ultra-leftist conclusions.”

He assailed the contention that the British were out to decolonize India jointly with the native bourgeoisie. “The need of the hour in every colonial country,” he continued, “is a strong independent Communist Party which understands how to expose the bourgeoisie and destroy their influence over the masses through the correct exploitation of the differences between them and win the masses in the numberless crises which precede the revolutionary overthrow of all counter-revolutionary forces.”³³ Kuusinen, a mild-mannered little

man with a dry, rasping voice, look the floor for the concluding blast. His summary, as I remember it, was a two-hour long devastating attack on the "decolonizers." He compared their position with that of the notorious Austrian social-imperialist, Otto Renner, who had put forth the perspective of world industrialization under capitalism, postponing the world socialist revolution "till the proletariat will become the great majority even in the colonies." Kuusinen pointed out that such views "embellished the 'progressive' role of imperialism.... as if the colonial world were to be decolonized and industrialized in a peaceful manner by imperialism itself."³⁴

Kuusinen further contended that "the development of native capital is not being denied in the thesis." But rather than there being an equal partnership in exploitation between the colonial bourgeoisie and imperialism, "imperialism does in fact restrict the industrialization of the colonies, prevent the full development of the productive forces." It is under such conditions that the class interests of the national bourgeoisie "demand the industrialization of the country," and in as much as the national bourgeoisie stands up for its class interests, "for the economic independence of the country, for its liberation from the imperialist yoke, then it plays a certain progressive role, while imperialism plays a substantially reactionary role."³⁵

It was a brilliant and definitive presentation, I thought. Slowly gathering up his papers, Kuusinen looked out over the audience. "Yes, comrades," he said, "industrial development *is* taking place in the colonies, but *very* slowly, comrades, very slowly. In fact, just as slowly as the bolshevization of the British Party Politburo under the leadership of Comrade Petrovsky."

He then picked up his papers and stepped down from the rostrum. A momentary silence followed, then an outburst of laughter and prolonged applause.³⁶

PEPPER GETS HIS LUMPS

The struggle against the Lovestone-Pepper leadership faction sharpened as the congress progressed. Their position of overestimating the strength and stability of U.S. capitalism and of underestimating the radicalization of the workers came under sharp attack. Our opposition group (Bittelman, Foster, Dunne, Cannon and Johnstone) came down hard on Pepper, taking advantage of his growing unpopularity at the congress. The attack on the Lovestone-Pepper faction was supported by leading and influential members of other del-

egations: notably Lozovsky, president of the Red International of Labor Unions, Lominadze from the Russian Delegation and Hans Neumann from the German Communist Party.

It was a pleasure to see how they zeroed in on Pepper. At last, he was getting his well-deserved lumps.

Lozovsky began by criticizing the CC of the CPUSA for having “instigated opposition to the decision of the Fourth RILU Congress on the question of new unions.” But the thrust of his attack was not on the position itself, but on the dishonesty of the U.S. Central Committee which, on its arrival in Moscow, claimed support for the RILU Congress decisions.

“Of course, every Central Committee has the right to declare its disagreement with decisions adopted by the RILU, but there must be the courage to declare this.... You cannot change a negative attitude... into a positive one on the way from New York to Moscow.”

Lozovsky reiterated earlier criticism of the Party leadership; its passivity in organizing the unorganized, its incorrect attitude toward Black workers and toward the AFL. Then he focused in on Pepper, blasting his articles in *The Communist* (“America and the Tactics of the CI: Certain Basic Questions of our Perspective,” May 1928.)

“Comrade Pepper sees nothing but the power of American capitalism,” he charged, “and discovering America anew although this discovery was made long ago, completely passed over those vital points in my articles on the eve of the Fourth RILU Congress.”

Then, in a concluding salvo, Lozovsky accused Pepper of having “frequently lost his bearings in European affairs... Today, as you have been able to convince yourselves from his speech here, he is all at sea in American affairs. He could truly be named: the muddler of the two hemispheres.”³⁷

Lominadze also kept Pepper under constant attack during the congress, scoring some devastating blows. He called Pepper’s speech “an advertisement for the power of American imperialism,” and stated that if it were printed in the paper, it could be mistaken for a “speech of any of the candidates of the Republican and Democratic parties.”³⁸ He then blasted Pepper’s articles in *The Communist* which listed the obstacles to the growth of the Party. According to Pepper, Lominadze said, “everything is hindering us, capitalists are hindering us by exploiting the workers, the existence of capitalism itself hinders us, and of perspectives there are none at all.”³⁹

As the historic congress was drawing to a close, Jack Johnstone

read into the minutes for our opposition caucus a statement expressing our disagreement with the section concerning the United States in Bukharin's draft thesis.

Among many points made in this statement, the most important were that Bukharin failed to emphasize the instability of American imperialism and recognize the contradictions confronting it; he failed to condemn the opportunist errors in Afro-American work and did not "state clearly that the main danger in our Party is from the Right."⁴⁰

This statement was signed by Dunne, Gomez, Johnstone, Siskind, Epstein and Bittelman; significant was the fact that Browder, Cannon and Foster did not sign.

Although he basically agreed with the statement and opposed Lovestone and Pepper, Browder continued to hold his position of not identifying himself fully with the opposition caucus. Cannon's reasons for not supporting the statement were unclear at the time, but within a few months, he had become the organizer and leader of the Trotskyist movement in the U.S. I feel Foster was, at the time, still assessing the political lines in the struggle against the right deviation – and for this reason did not sign the document.

CONCLUSION

The Sixth Congress called for a sharpened fight of the working class and the colonial masses against imperialism. It set the stage for an all-out war against the main obstacle to the left turn. The right accommodationists and their conciliators in all the parties of the CI – all provided ideological ammunition for this struggle. The correctness of these documents was verified by the events of the following decade – world economic crisis, the rise of fascism and the outbreak of World War II.

The war against the right got into full swing immediately following the congress. In the next few months the Lovestone-Pepper cohorts were to expand further their right opportunistic thesis of American exceptionalism, elements of which they were developing before and during the congress.

In substance, the theory held that while the third period of growing capitalist crisis and intensification of class struggles was valid for the rest of the world, it did not apply to the United States. In the U.S., capitalism was on the upgrade and the prospects were for an easing of the class struggle. An era of industrial expansion lay ahead.

The next few months were also to reveal Lovestone's ties with the international right conspiracy led by Bukharin. This conspiracy, which we had only suspected during the congress, was finally exposed at the November 1929 joint meeting of the Political Bureau and Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From this point on, the conspiracy of the "Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" went underground to plot the overthrow of socialism in the Soviet Union. In 1937, Bukharin was convicted as one of the main leaders of this treasonous conspiracy and was executed.⁴¹

One of the most positive and enduring contributions of the Sixth Congress was the program on the question of U.S. Blacks. It pointed out that all the objective conditions exist in the Black Belt South for a national revolutionary movement of Black people against American imperialism. It established the essentially agrarian-democratic character of the Black liberation movement there. Under conditions of modern imperialist oppression, it could fulfill itself only by the achievement of democratic land redivision and the right of self-determination for the Afro-American people in the Black Belt. Thus, the new line brought the issue of Black equality out of the realm of bourgeois humanitarianism. It was no longer the special property of philanthropists and professional uplifters who sought to strip the Black struggle of its revolutionary implications.

The new position grounded the issue of Black liberation firmly in the fight of the American people for full democratic rights and in the struggle of the working class for socialism. The struggle for equality is in and of itself a revolutionary question, because the special oppression of Black people is a main prop of imperialist domination over the entire working class and the masses of exploited American people. Therefore, Blacks and the working class as a whole are mutual allies.

The fight of Blacks for national liberation, quite apart from humanitarian considerations, must be supported as it is a special feature of the struggle for the emancipation of the whole American working class. It is the historic task of American labor, as it advances on the road toward socialism, to solve the problems of land and freedom which the bourgeois democratic revolution of the Civil War and Reconstruction left unfinished.

The slogan of self-determination is a slogan of unity. Its overriding purpose was and still is to unite the white and Black exploited masses, working and oppressed people of all nationalities, in all

three stages of the revolutionary movement: from the day-to-day fight against capital, through the revolutionary battle for state power, to the task of building and consolidating socialist society. The new line clearly stated that this unity could be built only on the basis of the struggle for complete equality, by removing all grounds for suspicion and distrust and building mutual confidence and voluntary inter-relations between the white masses of the oppressor nation and the Black masses of the oppressed nation.

This line committed the Communist Party to an uncompromising fight among its members and in the ranks of labor generally to burn out the root of the ruling class theories of white chauvinism which depicts Blacks as innately inferior. The mobilization of the white workers in the struggle for Black rights is a precondition for freeing the Black workers from the stifling influences of petty bourgeois nationalism with its ideology of self-isolation. Only thus, the program pointed out, can the historic rift in the ranks of American labor be breached and a solid front of white and Black workers be presented to the common enemy, American imperialism.

Of course, weaknesses were inevitable in this first resolution. The document was open to the interpretation that the emerging Black nation was limited only to the territory of absolute majority and that the slogan of right of self-determination was primarily dependent on the continued existence of an area of absolute Black majority.

The document should have made clear that one cannot hold absolutely to the national territorial principle in the application of the right of self-determination.⁴² The very nature of imperialism attacks and deforms the characteristics of nationhood. Imperialism has, to a large extent, driven Afro-American people from the rural areas to the cities of the north and South.

Another weakness was the underestimation of the nationality factor in the struggle for equality and democratic rights in the north. Thus, the program failed to advance any slogans for local autonomy which would guarantee and protect the rights of Blacks in the north. The need for such a program has been most clearly demonstrated in recent years by the growth and development of the movement for community control of the schools and police in northern cities.

But on the whole, the resolution was a strong one. Its significance was that it drew a clear line between the revolutionary and the reformist positions – between the line of effective struggle and futile accommodation.

The document was not a complete and definite statement, but a new departure, a revolutionary turning point in the treatment of the Afro-American question.

Notes:

1. (p. 246.) "Resolution of the Comintern on the American Question. Endorsed by the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, July 1, 1927," *The Daily Worker*, August 3, 1927.
2. (p. 247.) A. Lozovsky, "Results and Prospects of the United Front (in connection with the coming Profintern, R.I.L.U., Congress)," *The Communist International*, March 15, 1928, p. 146.
3. (p. 249.) Three of Foster's works which are of special interest to this period are: *Toward Soviet America* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1932); *From Bryan to Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 1937); *Pages from a Worker's Life* (New York: International Publishers, 1939).
4. (p. 255.) A. Shiek, "The Comintern Programme and the Racial Problem," *The Communist International*, August 15, 1928, pp. 407-11.
5. (p. 255.) *The Daily Worker*, September 22, 1927.
6. (p. 255.) *The Daily Worker*, February 17, 1928.
7. (p. 257.) La Correspondence Internationale, **August 1, 1928, pp. 9-23**. Only the French translation of Bukharin's report was available to me.
8. (p. 258.) Stalin, "The Right Deviation in the C.P.S.U.(B.) in April, 1929 (Verbatim Report)," *Works*, vol. 12, p. 23.
9. (p. 258.) *Ibid.*, p. 21.
10. (p. 258.) *The Daily Worker*, December 11, 1928. This issue of the *Daily Worker* was not available to me; the reference is taken from Draper, p. 501 n. 13.
11. (p. 258.) John Pepper, "America and the Tactics of the Communist International," *The Communist*, April 1928, pp. 219-27.
12. (p. 259.) William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of tin United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1952), p. 266.
13. (p. 261.) Pepper wrote the resolution on the Negro question for the Plenum of the Political Committee on May 30, 1928. This resolution was the basis for the section on Negro work in the "Resolution on the Report of the Political Committee (Adopted by the May 1928 Plenum of the CEC of the Workers Party)," *The Communist*,

- July, 1928, pp. 418-19.
14. (p. 262.) See note 4.
 15. (p. 262.) John Pepper, "American Negro Problems," *The Communist*, October 1928, p. 630.
 16. (p. 263.) Speech of Ford, *Inprecorr*, October 25, 1928, pp. 1345-47.
 17. (p. 263.) *Ibid.*
 18. (p. 263.) Speech of Otto Hall (Jones), *Inprecorr*, October 30, 1928, pp. 1392-93.
 19. (p. 266.) Speech of Lominadze, *Inprecorr*, November 8, 1928, p. 1462.
 20. (p. 267.) Speech of Otto Hall (Jones), pp. 1392-93.
 21. (p. 267.) John Pepper, "Amerikanische Negerprobleme," *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (Berlin), September 5, 1928, pp. 2245-52.
 22. (p. 267.) James Ford and William Wilson (Patterson), "Zur Frage der Arbeit der amerikanischen Kommunistischen Partei unter den Negern," *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (Berlin), August 29, 1928, pp. 2132-46.
 23. (p. 267.) Harry Haywood, "Das Negerproblem und die Aufgaben der K.P. der Vereinigten Staaten," *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (Berlin), September 5, 1928, pp. 2253-62.
 24. (p. 268.) "CI Resolution on Negro Question in USA," *The Daily Worker*, February 12, 1929; "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies," *Inprecorr*, December 12, 1928, p. 1674.
 25. (p. 269.) "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement," p. 1674.
 26. (p. 270.) See Simons, *Class and Colour*, p. 406.
 27. (p. 271.) Speech of Bunting, *Inprecorr*, August 3, 1928, p. 780; and *Inprecorr*, September 19, 1928, p. 1156.
 28. (p. 271.) *Ibid.*
 29. (p. 272.) Speech of Bunting, *Inprecorr*, November 8, 1928, p. 1452.
 30. (p. 272.) I know of no written record of either Rebecca Bunting's or Manuilsky's remarks since they were made at the commission meetings, and these were not recorded in *Inprecorr*.
 31. (p. 272.) This position was stated in the section on South Africa in the "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies."

32. (p. 273.) “Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies, p. 1661.
33. (p. 274.) Speech of Murphy, *Inprecorr*, October 30, 1928, p. 1410.
34. (p. 275.) Speech of Kuusinen, *Inprecorr*, November 21, 1928, p. 1524.
35. (p. 275.) *Ibid*.
36. (p. 275.) This last extemporaneous remark does not appear in the protocol of the congress. But I distinctly remember it, for we laughed about the matter for years afterward. Perhaps for political reasons it was later extracted.
37. (p. 277.) Speech of Lozovsky, *Inprecorr*, August 18, 1928, p. 914.
38. (p. 277.) Speech of Lominadze, *Inprecorr*, August 23, 1928, p. 932.
39. (p. 277.) *Ibid*.
40. (p. 277.) Declaration of Comrade Johnstone, *Inprecorr*, November 21, 1928, p. 1539.
41. (p. 278.) See Sayers and Kahn, *The Great Conspiracy*, pp. 324-25.
42. (p. 280.) In reference to this question, Stalin wrote:

The persons constituting a nation do not always live in one compact mass; they are frequently divided into groups, and in that form are interspersed among alien national organisms. It is capitalism which drives them into various regions and cities in search of a livelihood. But when they enter foreign national territories and there form minorities, these groups are made to suffer by the local national majorities in the way of restrictions on their language, schools, etc. Hence national conflicts.

Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 334-35.