
Our Appeal Against Expulsion from the Communist Party.

Speech Delivered at a Plenum of the
Central Executive Committee, Dec. 17, 1928.

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Comrades:

Many of the most important events and turning points in our party's life have been summed up in party gatherings, which stand out in party history as the expression of these events. The present meeting of the Central Executive Committee, called to confirm the control of the party by an opportunistic and bureaucratic leadership and to endorse the expulsion of its opponents, is such a gathering. It will represent in party history a downward curve.

In most of the significant party meetings of the past, certain features, certain details, stood out and gave in themselves an indication of the whole character of the gatherings. That is true also of this one. Let me mention a couple of these characteristic features of the present meeting of the Central Executive Committee.

We were impressed as we entered the hall to see Comrade Devine occupying the post as chairman — a new distinction for him — and you have all heard him tell us with a brusque authority — which is also new for him — that we will be given one hour and no more to answer the three hours of reports against us. The chairmanship of Comrade Devine will not be forgotten for it is a symbol of the meeting.

He is the district organizer in that district [Minnesota] where the expulsion of proletarian Communists for their views has attained the widest proportions. Twenty-one comrades there have already been expelled, and they are precisely the comrades whose

names have stood out in the labor movement of Minnesota for years as the very banner of Communism. The prestige our party enjoys in the labor movement there is due mainly to them. And it is to their loyal, untiring and sacrificing work that we owe the five thousand votes — more than 10 percent of the total votes for our presidential candidates — which we received in the elections in Minnesota.

The election of Comrade Devine, who is respon-



sible for the expulsion of these Communists, as chairman of the plenum, has a meaning in the light of those facts. It signifies the conferring of exceptional honors upon the district organizers who bring about the greatest disruption. It puts the seal of approval upon the policy of mass expulsions of proletarian Communists. Thus the chairmanship of Devine is a symbol of the plenum.

The second significant detail I wish to mention is the selection of Pepper as the reporter against us. This fact epitomizes the plenum and the whole issue around which it centers better than anything we could say. It demonstrates in deed that the fight against us, because it lacks all principle, must be placed from the beginning on the lowest basis and must use the vilest instruments. The selection of Pepper, the bearer in the Communist movement of all that is most corrupt and most detestable to revolutionaries, as the reporter against us, to bring here the demand for our expulsion, in itself discredits that demand.

The very fact that the sewage of slander against us and our comrades is poured out officially here through the mouth of Pepper puts an evaluation on this slander — it answers and refutes it. I will not insult a single Communist by “defending” him against the accusations of this characterless adventurer whose unspeakable record shames the Communist movement of the world. The Communist militants who constitute the forces of the Opposition, with the honorable record of the years behind them, are in no need of such a defense. For revolutionaries, the calumny of a Pepper is only a mark of distinction and a badge of honor. It is those who elected Pepper as the reporter against us who will have need of this defense before the party and before the proletariat which judges the party by its spokesmen.

In the period that has intervened since our expulsion on October 25, we have continued to regard ourselves as party members and have conducted ourselves as Communists, as we have done since the foundation of the party, and even for years before that. Every step we have taken has been guided by this conception. Those acts which went beyond the bounds of ordinary party procedure in bringing our views before the party were imposed upon us by the action of the party leadership in denying us the right and opportunity to defend our views within the party by normal

means. Our views relate to principled questions, and therefore it is our duty openly to defend them in spite of all attempts to suppress them.

We are bound to do this also in the future under all circumstances. However, we said on October 25, and we repeat now, that we are unconditionally willing to confine our activity to regular party channels and to discontinue all extraordinary methods the moment our party rights are restored and we are permitted to defend our views in the party press and at party meetings. The decision and the responsibility rest wholly with the majority of the Central Executive Committee.

Events since our expulsion have only served to confirm more surely the correctness of the views of the Russian Opposition, which we support. The momentous developments in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and throughout the Comintern have that meaning and no other. Life itself is proving the validity of their platform. Even those who fought that platform, who misrepresented it and hid it from the party and the Comintern, are today compelled, under the pressure of events and forces which overwhelm them, to give lip service to it, to pretend to adopt it. Many of the statements and proposals of the Opposition which were branded “counterrevolutionary” a year ago are today solemnly repeated, almost word for word, as the quintessence of Bolshevism.

Meanwhile their sponsors — the true leaders and defenders of the Russian Revolution — remain in exile, and there is no guarantee whatever that the presently advertised “left course” will mean anything more than a cover for further concessions to the right wing, whose policy directly undermines the dictatorship. The victorious fight of the party masses in Russia and throughout the Comintern against this disgraceful and dangerous course cannot be much longer postponed....

Our views on the problems of the American party and its leadership, outlined in our statement to the Political Committee on October 25, hold good today and have been underscored by the whole conduct of the Pepper Lovestone faction since that time. We spoke then of “its opportunist political outlook, its petty-bourgeois origin, its corrupt factionalism, its careerism and adventurism in the class struggle” as “the greatest menace to the party.” To speak now about the present party leadership with objectivity and precision,

we could not use different language to characterize it. This estimate is written in unmistakable words in the election campaign, the trade-union work, the inner-party regime and in all phases of party life and activity.

Since October 25, the Pepper-Lovestone leadership has taken further steps on the course of bureaucratic disruption which confronts the party today as a deadly menace — a course which began with the expulsion of Communists, copied from the labor fakers, and which has already taken another weapon from the same arsenal: the weapon of gangsterism. Everyone sitting here knows the facts about this. You know that inspired and organized gangster attacks have been made against us on the public streets, not once but several times.

Woe to the party of the workers if its proletarian kernel does not arise and stamp out these incipient fascist tactics at the very beginning! The blows from the blackjacks of gangsters which have descended on the heads of Opposition Communists are blows at the very foundation of the party. This abominable gangsterism, for which the leaders of the two factions collaborating against us, the Lovestone faction and the Foster faction, are directly responsible, is hated by every honest worker. It discredits the party before the working class and threatens to deprive the party of its moral and political position in the struggle against these methods of the trade-union reactionaries.

Only the blindest bureaucrat, or the most irresponsible dilettante adventuring in the movement, can fail to see the unbounded consequences of the bureaucratic expulsion policy of the Lovestone-Pepper leadership and to react with alarm against it. It directly threatens the existence of the party. The first step was the expulsion of three members of the Central Executive Committee, in the futile hope that the issues could thereby be disposed of. But the very next day these issues arose again in a wider circle as a result of the action against us and called forth new expulsions. In the six weeks which have elapsed since that time, more than sixty proletarians have been expelled from the party for their views and glibly denounced as “renegades” and “counterrevolutionaries” by people who are scarcely worthy to criticize them in any respect.

Bureaucratic suppression has its own logic. It begins with the expulsion of individuals and ends with

the disruption of the movement. Yesterday we saw the attempt to suppress the views of the Oppositionists who fight the party regime on principled grounds. Today already, inspired resolutions from the party units are making the same demand against the limited criticisms of the Foster group, with the threat of organizational measures after the packed and gerrymandered convention has “endorsed” the regime. Bureaucratism is alien to the proletarian Communist movement. Bureaucratism cannot stand criticism. It cannot stand discussion. Bureaucratism, which is an expression of bourgeois influence, and Lenin’s proletarian doctrine cannot live together.

The regime of bureaucratic strangulation, which expels its outspoken opponents and bludgeons the party into silence, has become an international phenomenon of the period. This is the only key to an understanding of its absolutely unprecedented excesses. A real struggle against it cannot be made without an understanding of its international scope. On this, as well as on the other principled questions, the fight of the proletarian Communist elements in all parties unites with the Bolshevik fight of the Russian Opposition under the leadership of Trotsky.

At the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Stalin issued a warning against the course he later adopted, and predicted its disruptive consequences. He defended there the refusal to expel Trotsky from the Political Bureau and said: “We are against the policy of lopping off, of blood-letting (it was blood they wanted). It is a dangerous thing. One day you lop off this limb. Tomorrow another, and the next day a third. And after a while, what becomes of the party?”

Stalin forgot these words so full of prophetic significance. He formed a factional combination with the right wing to suppress and expel the left, the Opposition. He gave the signal for the same line in all the parties of the Comintern. As a result, in the recent years we have seen everywhere a strengthening of the opportunist elements, an enormous development and entrenchment of bureaucratism, and wholesale expulsions of the proletarian left — the core of the workers’ vanguard. All the little Stalins in all the parties are bolstering themselves up by these means.

This meeting of the Central Executive Committee has an unusually large attendance, which has been

gathered together to applaud our expulsion. The composition of the audience is also symptomatic. Of the two hundred or more in the hall, almost everyone is a functionary or employee of the party, or of an organization or institution closely related to the party. There are not half a dozen workers from the shops present. The opportunist leaders of the needle trades are here, but the rank-and-file Communists, who fight for Communist policies against them, are barred. The fiction of “proletarian representation” was never more clearly exposed than it is by these simple facts. All this is in correlation to the shifting class composition of the upper circles of the party.

The wholesale expulsion of proletarian fighters goes hand in hand with the steady recruitment of all kinds of dubious, petty-bourgeois careerist and half-baked intellectual elements. The class composition of the party, particularly in the New York district, has been seriously affected by this process in recent years and has had a direct expression in the opportunistic policies of the party and the strengthening of the opportunist elements generally.

In the upper circles of the party, in the party apparatus, this increased proportion of nonproletarians is enormously expanded. Under the Lovestone regime, these elements are appearing more and more on all sides as party representatives, officials, managers, directors, teachers, supervisors. Coming to these positions without sufficient pre requisites, they bring with them the detestable careerist attributes of insolence, arrogance and pride of office, antagonizing and alienating the worker elements and thrusting them aside.

The “education” dispensed in the party school under such auspices is becoming a distorted caricature of revolutionary training. It is led almost exclusively by school teachers, dentists, “professors,” journalists — everything except proletarian leaders tested by the class struggle.

The party must examine this question in direct connection with the struggle against the right danger and the opportunist leaders who are its bearers. It is necessary at once to take a complete registration of the party membership with the object of precisely determining its class composition. A reorganization of the party apparatus from top to bottom, up to and including the Central Executive Committee, placing the overwhelming majority of the positions in the

hands of experienced and tested party workers of proletarian origin, must be effected at once. For the next period, until a proletarian stabilization has been achieved in the party and its apparatus, the party membership must be closed entirely to nonproletarian elements. Even then, their admittance to the party must be care fully restricted and supervised.

The failure of the party to grow in the favorable objective circumstances, the defeats it has suffered where victories were possible, its poor showing in the election with the field to itself as the party of the class struggle, the collapse of its trade union work, etc., are due primarily to the false leadership. Official bombast and factional trickery can no longer obscure or hide these condemning facts. The fight for the party is a fight against the systematic Opportunist policy of the leadership and the bureaucratic regime with which it fortifies itself against control and correction from below.

This internal regime is tied up with the external opportunist line and is an expression of it. A serious struggle for a correction of the opportunist external policy, which weakens the party and consequently the class before its enemies, is impossible without the most determined, stubborn and relentless fight for party democracy. Party democracy is the means whereby the policy of the party can be corrected and its leadership reorganized on a proletarian Communist basis.

The raising of the issue of party democracy and the education of the party membership on its meaning and significance are made all the more necessary by the confusion that prevails on the whole question of party government, of forms of working-class organization, of centralization and discipline. This confusion is fostered by the monstrous distortions of Lenin’s teachings disseminated by the party leadership and is the direct result of them.

The Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Russia, held under Lenin’s leadership at the end of the civil war, said: “The form of organization and the methods of work are entirely determined by the specific character of the given historic situation and the problems which arise directly out of that situation.”

The resolution of the Tenth Congress said further: “The needs of the current movement demand a new organizational form. That form is workers’ democracy.” We do not advocate the mechanical adop-

tion of the forms and methods prescribed by Lenin for the Russian party, which works under vastly different conditions from ours. But if workers' democracy could be proclaimed by Lenin for the Russian party, with the responsibility of the proletarian dictatorship on its shoulders, then it is a hundred times more applicable to our party under the given historic circumstances in America.

The present leaders and teachers of the party distort and misapply all these conceptions. They substitute the idea of discipline in the formal mechanical sense for the Leninist doctrine of democratic centralism. Our party, which ought to be the champion of workers' democracy throughout the entire labor movement, is making the very words taboo. All democracy is indiscriminately labeled bourgeois democracy. This false and thoroughly reactionary idea is heard on all sides, and Comrade Weinstone, who has become the full-blown type of party martinet, has made an interjection here to the same effect. Party democracy, of course, does not exclude but presupposes centralization and discipline. It is just the bureaucratic distortions and mechanical conceptions of discipline which give rise to syndicalist prejudices in this respect.

The party must make an end of this by struggle against the leadership that fosters and expresses it. The first step is the breaking down of the disruptive expulsion policy and the reinstatement of the expelled Communists, with the right to express their views in the party by normal means. The policy of administrative gagging, suppression and terrorism must be overthrown. The worker-Communist must be able to feel at home in his own party. He must have the right and feel the freedom to open his mouth and say what he thinks without being called into the office of some petty official or other, like a recalcitrant workingman in a factory, and threatened with discipline. All talk of party democracy in the face of suppression on all sides and the wholesale expulsion of comrades for their views is a swindle.

The party needs a real and free discussion. The suppressed documents of the Russian Opposition, dealing with the vital world problems of the period, must be printed and made available for the party members. The party must have the right to discuss the questions upon which there are differences and not merely those upon which there is general agreement. The party

must discuss the international questions and not merely the national and local ones. The party must have the right to discuss the questions confronting the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in order to participate intelligently in their solution. The party members must have the right to discuss all the questions of the Comintern, since they are part of the Comintern and should not regard it as an institution standing apart from them and making decisions without their participation.

There is one feature of the proceedings against us which gives them a tragicomic aspect. We see sitting here, ready to raise their hands to expel us, not a few comrades who exercised this privilege once before. Olgin, Trachtenberg, Kruse and others raised their hands just as high to expel us Communists, us defenders of the Russian Revolution, us followers of Lenin and Trotsky, from the Socialist Party in 1919. Then as now, they did not spare slander and vituperation in the process. We were also in those days called "renegades," "agents of the capitalists," and even "spies" and "provocateurs." It was not we, but they, who had to repent the actions and swallow the words. We survived all that — the expulsions and the slander — because we were Communists; and we will survive it now for the same reason.

We live and struggle in "the epoch of wars and revolutions," when the events of days and weeks transcend in their magnitude and importance the events of years and decades of other times. We Communists, who are the standard-bearers of the interests of the proletariat and the fighters for the future of humanity, cannot for a moment forget the immensity of our historic responsibilities, which are only magnified by the fewness of our numbers here in the reactionary citadel of world imperialism.

The sharpening international complications which push us every day nearer to the verge of imperialist war, the great and unavoidable difficulties of the Soviet Union in its capitalist encirclement, the colossal problems and tasks confronting our party in the class struggle — these facts are raising the question of party unity, of the full utilization of all the tested forces, in all its insistence. The burning issue of party unity demands a solution, not on the basis of bureaucratic machinations, but on the basis of Lenin's teachings.

We speak here for this unity. We declare our-

selves ready to do all in our power to bring it about and make it secure, disregarding all the slander against us. We make one demand only: that we have the right to maintain our views and to defend them within the party by party means.

We pioneers of Communism in America, standing here at the plenum of the Central Executive Committee, fully conscious of the great solemnity of the occasion, and with a full sense of responsibility for our words, say openly to the plenum and to the entire party: the views for which we have been expelled are Leninist views. We stand by them. As revolutionists we can do nothing else, and we will continue to stand by them and work for their victory in the future. On this basis we present our appeal for the reinstatement into the party of ourselves and the other expelled comrades who share our views.

Pepper ended his report against us with the prophecy that this will be the last time we will ever address a party gathering. But this statement will be refuted by the facts of the future just as his other statements are refuted by the facts of the past. In the past, during our entire lives, we have always fought on the

side of the working class when some of those who expelled us, including Pepper, stood on the other side of the barricades. We will be at our posts also in the future. Let the Peppers make predictions to the contrary if they wish. It is not we revolutionists with unsullied records who will be discredited thereby. For such talk of the future only invites a recollection of their own dishonorable past, which discredits them.

The party needs the scores of loyal and tested Communists who are being expelled today, and cannot spare them. The party will make its voice heard and assert its will. The party will call us back to our rightful places in the ranks, and will do this sooner than you dream. We say this because the platform of the Opposition rep resents the class interests of the proletariat on an international scale, and the Communist Party will adopt that platform. We say this because we have confidence in the proletarian ranks of the party, in their revolutionary spirit and will. Therefore our final words at this meeting are a revolutionary salutation to the party that we have helped to found and build, and from which no power on earth can tear us away.

*Edited by James P. Cannon Internet Archive/MIA. Photo of James Cannon in 1928 from Dog Days. (NY: Prometheus Research Library, 2002).
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