

Dangerous "Disinterestedness"

By JAY LOVESTONE

THE writer recalls a debate he had with Mr. James O'Neal before the Italian section of the Socialist Party in 1919. It was the occasion on which I sought to secure the withdrawal of the Italian socialist federation from the socialist party and its affiliation to the Communist Party of America.

The main argument then presented by the writer in his appeal to the representatives of the Italian class conscious workers was that the Communist International was openly and militantly serving as the champion of the revolutionary proletariat, the working class the world over. I argued that the Italian workers in the United States had been occupying places in the front ranks of the class conscious workers in this country. It was my contention that it was the duty of the revolutionary elements in the Italian federation of the socialist party to take their rightful place in the Communist ranks in order to be able to lead the Italian working masses and secure their active participation in the class struggle in the United States.

MR. O'NEAL'S argument was twofold. First, he appealed to the delegates that they should shun the Communist Party because it was too revolutionary. This did not take with the delegation except for a few trade union officials. Then Mr. O'Neal made a plea for neutrality, for "disinterestedness" on the part of the Italian socialist federation in the question of its withdrawal from the socialist party and its affiliation to the Communist Party.

An Opportunist Trick.

THIS is a dangerous and typical method employed by the social-democrats and opportunists in the ranks of the workers whenever the workers are confronted with moments of decision involving important questions affecting the most vital interests of the working class.

Such positions of neutrality on serious questions of principle are invariably the entering wedge to attitudes and positions of hostility to revolutionary theory, to revolutionary practice.

The Dangers of "Neutrality."

IN our own ranks some comrades, now and then, for want of sufficient experience, tend to be neutral on questions of paramount importance not only for our own section of the Communist International but for the entire Communist International. In cases of this sort where we deal with rank and file proletarian elements it is primarily a question of educating, or informing, of properly directing the temporarily mistaken comrade to the correct position of active support for

the right Communist principles and vigorous opposition to the opportunistic deviations.

But in instances where such attitudes of so-called "neutrality" and "disinterestedness" towards fundamental questions of Communist principle and policy are manifested by experienced comrades holding leading positions, we face very dangerous manifestations of unhealthy tendencies menacing the Communist foundation of our party.

An instance of the latter type is to be found in the attitude of "impartiality," "neutrality," "disinterestedness" on the question of Trotskyism displayed in an article in the *Il Lavoratore* of May 16, 1925. This article entitled "The Return of Trotsky" is signed by G. C., G. Cannata. Comrade Cannata is one of the members of the bureau of the Italian section of the Workers (Communist) Party of America. Comrade Cannata is one of the responsible leading comrades of the Italian section of the Workers Party. Consequently such "neutrality" by a comrade occupying the position that Comrade Cannata does is, to say the least, a strong manifestation of highly dangerous "disinterestedness"—an attitude undermining the Communist foundation of our party.

Trotskyism and Our Party.

THIS is neither the time nor the place to enter into a discussion of the merits of the position of the "Old Guard" of the Russian Communist Party and of the demerits of the position of Comrade Trotsky in the recent controversy. This controversy was one involving basic Communist tenets. The questions involved affected not only the Russian Communist Party but every section of the Communist International, the entire Communist International.

It is not our objective to criticize Trotsky personally. It is not our task to criticize his position at length on this occasion. The model methods resorted to and the splendid results achieved by the old guard of the Russian Communist Party in dealing with the Trotskyist deviations have settled this controversy very effectively to the advantage of the Communist International. Unfortunately this can be said only insofar as the Russian Communist Party is concerned.

The manifestations of Trotskyism on an international scale were clearly evident in the Czecho-Slovakian Communist Party, the Italian Communist Party and in other Communist Parties. Of course, in each instance the sectional expression of this right wing tendency in the Communist International had its own additional specific feature. But in every instance the fundamental errors were obvious. In our own American party where the general theoretical level is on the whole

below that of our European sister parties, the manifestations of Trotskyism did not assume the crust of a theoretical apology. These manifestations veered from an avowed sympathy for Trotskyism to camouflaged or insufficiently courageous endorsement of the fundamentals of the Trotskyist concept of the development of the world proletarian revolution.

Two Parts to Trotskyism.

COMRADE LORE was the outstanding representation of those holding an avowedly sympathetic attitude towards or actual endorsement of Trotskyism. The last Lenin memorial number of the *Volkszeitung*, edited by Comrade Lore, was a veritable apotheosis of Trotsky and Trotskyism. At the same time there were a number of leading comrades in the upper strata of our directing party group who, at the very moment that Trotskyism was a most burning question for the vanguard of the Communist International, the Russian Communist Party, did not think it necessary for the American section of the Comintern to take a stand on the struggle against Trotskyism led by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. These leading comrades were guilty of "neutrality." Undoubtedly it was only the swift and decisive defeat administered Trotskyism that prevented these comrades holding an "impartial," a "neutral" position on Trotskyism, from taking their next and logical step, from becoming open, conscious supporters of this right wing of the Communist International. Here we have a very dangerous expression of "disinterestedness" in taking a position on a cardinal problem of the Comintern.

Real Meaning of "Neutrality."

BUT since then, more than a year ago, the Ides of March for many of our comrades in the March, 1924 sessions of our C. E. C. G., the above mentioned article by Comrade Cannata is the sharpest expression of Communist "neutrality," of "neutral" Communism in our party. This "neutrality" means in practice, no Communism, since the Communist movement is a movement of revolutionary action and not of stagnant "neutrality." We quote the following from the article of Comrade Cannata as a shining example of hothouse Loreism in our ranks:

"Concerning the polemics about Trotskyism we have not spoken; we have occupied ourselves in investigating to form an opinion impartially concerning the matter under discussion. We have our own opinion on the matter. An opinion which does not tie us to one or the other camp of the opposing sides. There are legitimate differences of view-point on profound questions of tactics and of economic policy. There are contrasts of a purely

personal character. It is useless to claim a monopoly of an Olympian serenity, which does not exist among human beings for the leaders of the Russian Communist Party. There were mistakes and excesses committed on both sides; it is human to feel, as it is human to err."

The above attitude would be dangerous even if it were only wrong insofar as its conclusion is concerned. What makes this conception doubly dangerous is its basic non-Communist method. Here we have a method which is deeply impregnated with social-democratic eclecticism. Here we have a personal perspective, a use of personal intentions and motives as the basic factors in dealing with social movements. Here we have a flagrant attempt to play a so-called fair, a pseudo-impartial, a "neutral" role, in treating the most dangerous deviation in the history of the Comintern. The comrades cannot fail to note the covert endorsement of Trotskyism in this statement by Comrade Cannata. In this instance we really have an overt endorsement of Trotskyism, masked by a dangerous "disinterestedness." It is too bad that our C. E. C. has to date failed to correct this serious deviation from the position of the Communist International by Comrade Cannata.

"Neutrality"—A Phase of Opportunism.

THIS attitude of "neutrality," this manifestation of Loreism, which in the opinion of the Comintern is synonymous with opportunism, has also assumed "organizational" manifestations in other sections of our party. The party has for some time had some serious differences within its ranks as to its major policies. These policies involved the very life of the party. It was and is the duty of every Communist in our party to take a position on the points at issue. To prate about "neutrality," about "impartiality," when fundamental policies are discussed or are at stake, is inevitably only a prelude to the embracing of the wrong position in the controversy by those very ones leading "disinterestedness" and "impartiality."

In the present party controversy, it is the duty of every comrade to take definite position, to fight for this position, and to reject categorically such quack opportunist nostrums as "impartiality," "neutrality," and "disinterestedness."

Communists are never neutrals. Communist always fight for their positions.

In subsequent articles the writer proposes to deal with the present major tasks of our party and the duties confronting the membership in realizing these tasks fully.