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November 8th marks the midterm elections in the United States. One of the most well-known communist organizations - the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) - has made their position on the upcoming events clear. The CPUSA goes on to explain that in order to address the threat of fascism and pursue the correct path forward it is necessary for Communists to form a broad-based coalition with other political allies so that "a massive, collective voter turnout can defeat that 'red wave'".

Using the looming fear of fascism as the underlying premise, the organization makes the argument that there are serious issues at stake which demand the attention of the Communists. Is this the correct line of reasoning that the Communists should take and is there any viable alternative to what the Communist Party USA is proposing?

One of the fundamental assumptions being made by the CPUSA in their attitude towards the upcoming midterm elections is that Communists ought to form a common front with various broad-left tendencies to repel the fascist drive through voting and mobilizing voters in bourgeois elections. "Leftists who tell people to not bother voting, that voting is a waste of time, are committing terrible errors. The extreme right is expending vast amounts of time, energy, and money trying to limit voting rights, to minimize or eliminate democracy. That alone should tell progressives and leftists to fight like hell to expand the electorate, to never counsel people to not vote. The electoral struggle is a necessary path of struggle."

Basically, there are 2 main arguments:

- The expansion of the abstract democracy;
- The right-wing threat.

Democracy and The Capitalist State

The first argument being made in support of electoral participation is that communists should be expanding worker participation in elections for the purpose of achieving "tangible gains" for the working class which are to be obtained from the electoral sphere.

This organization seems to be accepting the myth of the democracy under capitalism. For centuries the ruling class portrayed the bourgeois democracy as the democracy for the whole nation. "You can change the country by voting, your vote counts" - this is their slogan. And what is the essence of such a democracy? Lenin wrote:

"Once every few years to decide which member of the ruling class will suppress, crush the people in parliament - this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics".

The “United Front”

What’s wrong with the second argument? CPUSA’s anti-fascism is actually limited to writing the right names on their ballots. Why do they do it? The people usually refer to the 1930s and the United Front tactics: “there was a fascist threat so they had to unite with the other left-wing and progressive forces, and so do we”. Today’s circumstances, however, are so far removed from that United Front period in the 1930s from which they suck out some legitimacy, because in that moment the workers and the old CPUSA led an incredible advance.

Moreover – that tactic was a necessary measure, because at that period the Soviet Union was alive. The biggest and strongest socialist state in the world was to be defended at any cost, and that’s why the communists agreed to work with the social-democratic parties: this was the moment when “less reactionary” government was making a difference. Such an attitude, however, wasn’t an essential part of the communist tactics, since it was implemented by the same people who were fighting against social democrats back in the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s. This was a compromise, forced by the circumstances.

The CPUSA, however, have compromises as the cornerstone of their policies. It’s not something extraordinary: a lot of “communist” parties adopted broad-left tactics after the dissolution of the USSR and the socialist countries. Russia’s CPRF does the same thing. It’s the CPUSA, who shamelessly drag it out at every opportunity; whether endorsing Barack Obama twice, with ‘fascists’ behind every corner even then, endorsing Hillary Clinton, endorsing Joe Biden, and the open promise to loyally endorse whichever cut-out the bourgeoisie chooses next.

Co-opting the United Front, this ‘front’ they propose is really a thinly-veiled defence of the Democratic Party’s political ground, which they mistakenly call their own out of a prevailing ‘culture war’ liberalism. It is not surprising that by adopting the tactic of a wide-left coalition with “progressive” bourgeois elements the same language of the Democrats would be adapted in their messaging such as the 2020 Pro-Biden slogan “Vote Against Fascism”.

Emerging from decades of liberal ideological entrenchment, the CPUSA simply mirrored the liberal model of general panic over the “fascist” presidency, and later of the January 6th unrest, and are parroting Joe Biden’s own press notes with their claims of a spectacular threat which must unite the Left. This premise uses the very real threat of fascism to not only justify the participation in bourgeois elections such as the upcoming midterm elections, but to present them as a means by which the Communist movement can be furthered to achieve “democracy”.

In the past two years, the CPUSA has emphasized their participation in the Poor People’s Campaign (PPC) as a fine example of the activity of their program; listing it as a plank of their “Summer of Struggle” national level activity in 2021, mobilizing its members to attend the PPC’s June 18th Moral March in DC with many other left-liberal organizations and major unions. The PPC takes its name from a 1968 march made famous by Martin Luther King Jr., which speaks to the core of the propaganda strategy taken by Democrats as a whole in their efforts to rally support among their older and most loyal base. While of course it is in the interests of the Communists to demand “action on poverty, racism, the war economy, and climate change”, it remains to be seen whether participation in bourgeois elections can achieve any tangible gains in achieving these aims.

The CPUSA and the “Lesser Evil”

In fact, Lenin stated that class collaboration was one of the key characteristics of opportunism and is a form of right deviation. By adopting the terminology and rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism, it is possible to distort the proletarian line and replace it with a non-proletarian line which is exactly what is being done by the CPUSA. Only by such means would it be possible to logically defend the position of using bourgeois elections as a viable means of defeating fascism and not simply being used as political pawns of the bourgeois Democratic Party to elect the “good” or “favorable” candidates.

It is well known that the political apparatus under capitalism does not mitigate differences between antagonistic classes, but is rather the tool by which one class suppresses another. Knowing this, it is difficult to imagine how Communists could earnestly direct the productive efforts of their cadre into bourgeois electoralism and a system which has actively repressed them for decades.

The party which the CPUSA claims will have “given us an administration more favorable to labor than the previous one.” is only declining in the estimation of the grassroots activists who are driving the growth of the labor movement. When big business labor steps outside the bounds of its pro-corporate role, Biden has made sure to crack down on its legal right to act with executive restrictions and cheap deals against the wishes of union membership, for example to prevent a rail-workers strike. A month later, the union base of workers rejected Biden and the union bosses’ backroom deal to prevent labor action in the vital railway sector.

The entire electoral apparatus seems on the verge of collapse as both voting places and Democratic electoral campaigns struggle to recruit volunteers, and the people’s illusions begin to fall away. The CPUSA itself is experiencing a similar decline in active bodies, seeing a number of its chapters throughout the US close down this year alone, which we will address towards the end. This organization is working hard to restrain spontaneity which crosses outside the bounds of the Democratic Party’s orbit of money and power.

How has the tactic of voting for the “lesser evil” of the Democrats and forming wide-left political alliances been for the workers movement and the Communist as a whole? Truth be told, the communist movement is still very underdeveloped and there is serious work to be done in this regard. Is the most reasonable method of furthering the class interests of the working class and developing the communist movement in the U.S. the promotion bourgeois electoralism such as participation in the midterm elections? Through this method it is only possible to elect the most “logical” candidate, the Democratic candidate, who will perhaps be better for the workers than the Republican candidate. Such a game of “good cop - bad cop” is just a way to keep the workers invested in the sphere of bourgeois electoralism.

The Biggest Problem is in the CPUSA Itself

In our previous publication on the American communists, we discussed how general decentralization is one serious organizational issue which can more clearly show how the current CPUSA is not a Leninist party, not a Communist Party in the Marxist-Leninist sense. The basis for the party on the ground, regional and local clubs and groups, operate largely independently from national leadership and not on the basis of a central plan for a unified policy of collective action.

The party structure can’t even manage its own publications. People’s World, the party’s main newspaper, operates outside central party control in an ethereal state

between formal outlet and outside voice. This circumstance expresses a sometimes wholly contradictory difference of opinion between the paper's editors and the party's established theoretical platform – usually over a degree of more or less support split between the Chinese social-chauvinist position and the more nationalist liberal position – undermining the theoretical positions which the central party leadership outlines for claims to present for its platform.

In a letter which has since become infamous in the American movement, the Communist Party of Greece criticized CPUSA leadership for its opportunist insistence on bourgeois electoralism and liberalism generally, outlining the obvious fraud of Sam Webb's program. While the American party cringes away from this criticism because of its relevance, their members at-once concede to the presence of the exact errors listed, while claiming the party has put the Webb platform behind them long ago.

CPUSA's practical position is to become another DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), as a left-wing caucus of the Democrats. A confused program, a political line ungrounded from Marxist-Leninist theory, is one which becomes powerless against the powerful bourgeois currents it has waded into. These issues in DSA run parallel to the divide between the good-intentioned communists who found themselves within the CPUSA, and their conflict with prevailing opportunist tendencies of both national leadership and the membership body as a whole. It is impossible to fight against the current state of things with one arm tied to the American state, and the other tied to the Chinese state.

«One of the most common sophistries of Kautskyism is its reference to the "masses". We do not want, they say, to break away from the masses and mass organisations! But just think how Engels put the question. In the nineteenth century the "mass organisations" of the English trade unions were on the side of the bourgeois labour party. Marx and Engels did not reconcile themselves to it on this ground; they exposed it. They did not forget, firstly, that the trade union organisations directly embraced a minority of the proletariat. In England then, as in Germany now, not more than one-fifth of the proletariat was organised. No one can seriously think it possible to organise the majority of the proletariat under capitalism. Secondly—and this is the main point—it is not so much a question of the size of an organisation, as of the real, objective significance of its policy: does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, i.e., does it aim at their liberation from capitalism, or does it represent the interests of the minority, the minority's reconciliation with capitalism? –V.I. Lenin, Imperialism and the Split in Socialism.

We will go deeper into the problems of the Communist Party USA in our future publications, but in light of this discussion, it is necessary to ask what are the roots of this behavior. Why a Communist Party so earnestly participate in bourgeois elections and present this position of wide-leftism as a truly revolutionary and correct position? The answer is that the party is not a true Communist Party as it has been corrupted by opportunism.

This is the track that the party has been on for years. Their actions are partially the result of bad policies, and partially opportunism. It is known that there are good cadres within the party, however, they must ask their leaders why their actions and policies of their organization stand in such stark contrast to Marxism-Leninism. And for others it is necessary to study Marxism-Leninist theory to learn from the mistakes of the past and work together for renewal of the communist movement in the world.