

The Struggle Against Trotskyism and the Right Danger

Declaration by Central Committee of Workers (Communist) Party of America

On October 27th the Political Committee of the Central Executive Committee unanimously expelled from the Party James P. Cannon, member of the Political Committee, Martin Abern, member, and Max Shachtman, alternate of the Central Executive Committee, on the following charges:

The Political Committee declares that the statements made by Comrades Cannon, Abern and Shachtman and the statements made by other comrades, prove without any doubt that the comrades mentioned are sharing the views of the Trotskyist Opposition outside the Comintern, are trying to make an attempt to organize a Trotskyist faction within our Party; therefore the Political Committee expels Comrades Cannon, Abern and Shachtman from the Party, stating at the same time that the comrades have the right to appeal against the expulsion to the Plenum of the C. E. C., to the Party Convention and the Comintern.

The C. E. C. refrained from publishing the facts regarding the expulsion, until now because it did not want to distract the attention of the members of the Party and of the working class from the election struggle. Now that the election campaign is over, the C. E. C. takes this occasion to present the facts regarding this new, significant outbreak of Trotskyism within the Party and even within the leading committee of our Party.

RECURRENT OF TROTSKYISM IN THE WORKERS (COMMUNIST PARTY).

The main facts regarding the appearance of Trotskyism in the party and its leading committee are the following:

On October 16th Comrades Aronberg, Bittelman and Foster submitted a statement to the Political Committee containing the following charges against Cannon, Abern and Shachtman:

"It has become clear, in recent weeks, that Comrade Cannon, supported by Comrades Abern and Shachtman, is carrying on activities, leading to the crystallization of a Trotskyist faction in our Party. Comrade Cannon is making a political platform of such propositions as: keeping an open mind on the question of Trotskyism, studying the question, spreading doubt as to the correctness of the C. I. attitude on the question and urging the need of re-examining it, etc. (2) Trotskyism has been correctly condemned by the C. I. as a social-democratic and counter-revolutionary tendency, Trotskyism employs left phrases to cover up right deeds. Comrade Cannon's variety of Trotskyism in the U. S. constitutes a tendency to develop a right wing orientation for the American Section of the C. I. under cover of reopening for discussion the C. I. attitude on the question of Trotskyism.

(3) The main dangers in our party, as in the C. I., come in the present period from the right. The minority is committed to an uncompromising fight against the right danger in our Party no matter from where it comes or under what covers it makes its appearance.

(4) "The minority therefore completely disassociates itself from Comrade Cannon and those who hold similar views. The minority decides to wage a merciless fight, against this Trotskyist maneuver of Comrade Cannon and to wage this fight as an organic part of its general struggle against the right danger and the right wing of our Party (the Lovestone group)."

The Political Committee demanded that Cannon and his associates should give a straight-forward, clear-cut answer to the question: Are they in agreement with the views of the Comintern or do they share the opinions of Trotsky? Cannon, Abern and Shachtman at first evaded giving an unqualified rejection of Trotskyism. Thereupon the Political Committee decided to remove them from some responsible tasks and to carry on a further thoroughgoing investigation to find out all the ramifications of Trotskyist propaganda and any attempt to crystallize a Trotskyist group within the Party.

Extensive hearings followed, in the course of which Cannon and his associates had unlimited possibilities to express their views, to defend themselves against the charges, and to produce any evidence they chose.

The investigation revealed the following outstanding facts:

Already for some months previous Cannon had shown a leaning towards Trotskyism. He had minimized the role of the Party and its achievements. He questioned the ability of the Party to lead in mass struggles. Growing pessimism, skepticism, and cynicism characterized his attitude in the Party organization. He showed a growing lack of interest in the affairs of the Party, a failure to contribute anything to the deliberations of the leading bodies. In the World Congress he used, without mentioning Trotsky's name, one of his documents as a weapon against the C. E. C. He absented himself from voting on the Trotsky question in the 6th World Congress.

After his return from Moscow, Cannon and his associates began a more or less open propaganda for the re-opening of the Trotsky question, despite the final decision of the 6th World Congress confirming the expulsion of Trotsky from the Communist International. They raised the slogan of a fake "study" of Trotskyism. They made covert attacks on the policies of the Comintern regarding the Chinese revolution, the Anglo-Russian Committee. They declared that the building of socialism in one country is a "joke," despite the fact that they had never raised the question previously. In caucus meetings, Cannon, Abern and Shachtman proposed the issue of Trotskyism as a basis for the coming Party discussion. They put forward the charge against the Communist International and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that the latter did not publish the Trotsky documents and that the whole discussion about Trotskyism was conducted in an atmosphere of terrorism.

In the beginning of the hearings Cannon and his associates continued their tactics of evasiveness, because they hoped to be able to continue their secret Trotskyist propaganda and organization in the Party. But later, under the pressure of evidence, they came out unreservedly, brazen-faced for Trotskyism. Part of their joint declaration reads:

"The opportunity which has come to us in the recent period to read a number of these documents, dealing with some of the most disputed problems of the Comintern in the past five years, together with the rapid confirmation of their correctness by the whole course of events, have shaped our views and convictions. We consider it our revolutionary duty to defend these views before the Party."

"The Opposition in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led by L. D. Trotsky has been fighting for the unity of the Comintern and all its sections on the basis of the victory of Leninism. The correctness of the position taken by the Russian Opposition over a period of five years of struggle has been fully confirmed by events."

"The struggle led by Trotsky since 1923 for Party democracy and against bureaucratism as the pressure of another class upon the Party of the proletariat, was absolutely correct then and is even more so now."

"The attempts to revise the basic Marxist-Leninist doctrine with the spurious theory of 'socialism in one country' have been rightly resisted by the Opposition led by Trotsky."

This statement, which is an outright endorsement of counter-revolutionary Trotskyism, made any further hearings or investigations unnecessary. The Political Committee thereupon unanimously expelled Cannon, Abern and Shachtman.

THE OPPOSITION'S BREAK WITH CANNON.

The leading comrades of the Opposition who in past discussions in the Party associated themselves with Cannon unquestionably rendered a service to the Party by exposing Cannon's open embracing of Trotskyism, by bringing the whole case to the attention of the Political Committee.

But at the same time we have to state that some of the leading comrades of the Opposition committed grave political errors in their relations to Cannon in the following ways:

(1) The withholding for several weeks of information about the outright Trotskyist attitude of Cannon from the Political Committee by Comrades Gomez, Costrell, Aronberg, Douglas, Hathaway, Gorman, Frankfeld and Wagenknecht in the absence of Comrades Foster and Bittelman.

(2) Taking action in regard to the outbreak of Trotskyism first in a caucus, by expelling Cannon from their caucus and there passing a resolution against him, instead of immediately

bringing the whole matter to the attention of the Political Committee of the Party.

(3) Failure to inform the Communist International and the Party delegation to the World Congress of the fact that Cannon absented himself from voting on the Trotsky question in the World Congress.

(4) The mistake committed by Comrades Aronberg and Costrell in making a joint declaration with Cannon in the Polcom, expressing reservation on the Comintern decisions regarding the American question, although they had already, as their own testimony states, some misgivings about Cannon's Trotskyist attitude. This was done in the absence of Comrades Foster and Bittelman.

(5) The unanimous selection by Comrades Gomez, Costrell, Aronberg, Douglas, Hathaway, Gorman, Frankfeld and Wagenknecht of Cannon as a member of a steering committee consisting of Comrades Wagenknecht, Hathaway and Cannon and as spokesman of the Opposition at the membership meeting of the biggest district of the Party on October 2nd, although in their group meeting, held on the same day, Cannon had already revealed himself as an enemy of the Comintern and the comrades had already full knowledge of Cannon's Trotskyist policies.

Following is a quotation from the testimony of Comrade Hathaway at a meeting of the Political Committee of Oct. 18, 1928.

"So then we put the question sharply, as to just what Cannon's attitude toward Trotskyism was, and Cannon replied in an evasive manner and said that they were not ready to commit themselves on the question. They still had doubts as to what their attitude would be. At any rate the line proposed by these comrades was rejected as being politically incorrect, harmful to the Party and one that we could not follow. In the evening we went to the Membership Meeting."

At the same meeting of the Political Committee the following testimony was also given:

"CANNON: Did you elect a steering committee at this meeting?

"HATHAWAY: We did. We elected Comrades Wagenknecht, Hathaway and Cannon.

"CANNON: You elected Wagenknecht, Hathaway and myself? Whom did we elect for spokesman at that meeting?

"HATHAWAY: Comrade Cannon.

"CANNON: Did I not oppose my selection on the ground that I had certain criticisms of the C. I.? And did you not insist in spite of that that I should be spokesman?

"HATHAWAY: I think not.

"CANNON: You do not remember my objections?

"HATHAWAY: No, not on those grounds.

"CANNON: Do you remember that I was elected unanimously?

"HATHAWAY: Yes.

"CANNON: That was after the meeting where I said—but at this meeting you said that I said that we should fight the C. I.

"HATHAWAY: At this meeting you did."

These actions of some of the leading comrades of the Opposition had the effect of weakening and retarding the fight against Trotskyism, which is an organic part of the right wing danger in the American Party. The declaration signed by Comrades Aronberg, Bittelman and Foster and submitted to the Polcom on October 16th, which states that not Trotskyism but the "right-wing" leadership of the Party is the main danger in the Party which must have, objectively, the effect of distracting the attention of the membership from the necessity of fighting Cannon's Trotskyism, and thereby weakening the impetus of the struggle against the social-democratic, Trotskyist deviation.

At the same time, the Central Executive Committee of the Party declares itself most emphatically against any attempt to link up the Opposition with Trotskyism. The CEC declares most vigorously against any attempt to dub the comrades of the Opposition as Trotskyites. The CEC warns every Party comrade against such a mistake. The CEC declares that it will not refrain from taking disciplinary measures against anyone who violates this firm policy of the Central Executive Committee. The CEC emphasizes this policy with the utmost energy, because of the need of a complete union of all Communist forces in the Party to beat back the counter-revolutionary onslaught of Trotskyism against our Party.

The declaration of Cannon and his group repeats parrot-like the unfounded accusations by Trotsky against "the rule of Stalinist bureaucracy" in the Soviet Union, the slanders regarding the orientation toward the kulaks and Nepmen, the revisionist and opportunist errors in various fields of Comintern activity, about the "false line in the Chinese revolution, the debacle of the Anglo-Russian Committee, the alarming and unprecedented growth of bureaucratism in the Comintern, and incorrect attitude and policy in the Soviet Union." Cannon is aping his master in attacking the "spurious theory of socialism in one country."

"This new 'theory' is bound up with an overemphasis on the power and duration of the temporary stabilization of capitalism. Herein lies the true source of pessimism regarding the development of the proletarian world revolution. One of the principal duties of every Communist in every Party of the Comintern is to fight along with the opposition for the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on this basic question."

Cannon declares himself an organic part of international Trotskyism, and puts forward the "charge" that the present leadership of our Party is:

"The logical American banner-bearer of the demagogic and unscrupulous international campaign against the leaders of the Russian opposition."

The CEC pleads guilty to this charge of the renegade. Cannon is absolutely right when he declares that the present leadership of the American Party is the logical American banner-bearer of the general struggle of the Communist International against the leaders of the Russian and international Trotskyist, counter-revolutionary, social-democratic opposition.

THE BASIS OF THE RECURRENT OF TROTSKYISM.

The coming out of Cannon for Trotskyism is all the more dangerous, because there are certain factors in the objective conditions of the country and of the working class and in the situation of our Party which makes a new outbreak of Trotskyism possible. The strength of American imperialism, the contradictions of the simultaneous development of reformism and the radicalization of certain sections of the working class tend to create confusion in some sections of our Party. The uneven tempo of the radicalization of the unskilled masses simultaneously with the shifting of the labor aristocracy to the Right, the divisions within the working class (organized and unorganized, foreign-born and native, skilled and unskilled, etc.) find expression in differences of opinion and serve as a basis for groupings, within our Party.

We are at a turning point in the life of our Party. In the process of transition from a mere propaganda organization to a political party of action the Party has become a leader of working class mass activities. Some sections of the Party have been unable to adapt themselves to this sharp turn.

The growing attacks against our Party, the united front of the government, the Ku Klux Klan, the American Legion, and reactionary labor officials and socialist party against the Communists have had the effect of filling some members of the Party with pessimism, of making them capitulate before the growing forces of reaction. A wrong estimation of the international role of the Soviet Union, the growing pressure of the imperialist powers against the sole working-class state, has also had its effects in some sections of the working class in the form of a retreat before this pressure.

On the basis of the contradictions and difficulties of the situation, certain members of the Party have lost faith in the Party's capacity to lead, have developed a wrong attitude denying the leading role of the Party in mass organizations, have developed an erroneous attitude towards the Communist International, challenging the correctness of the Comintern, slandering the leadership of the Communist International as Right wing leadership, and speculating on the alleged differences in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Crass examples of this fundamentally wrong attitude towards the Comintern are to be found in the declaration of Cannon and his associates:

"The trend of events and the irresistible pressure of class forces is already driving a deep cleavage in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and is forcing the Stalin group to struggle against the right wing (Rykov, etc.) with other elements (Bukharin) vacillating between the two. The platform of the Russian Opposition, prepared for the Fifteenth Congress of the C. P. S. U., indicates the revolutionary policy for the present situation in the Soviet Union. The prediction and warning contained in this platform against the inevitable growth and aggressiveness of a genuine right wing in the Party (Rykov, Tomsky, etc.) has been precisely confirmed in the intervening period, particularly in recent months.

"The activities of this right wing, which have already necessitated organizational measures in the Moscow and other organizations of the Party, is a proof of the awakening of the proletarian masses of the Party to this danger. The 'left' course of the Stalin group in the direction of a struggle against the right dangers, for Party democracy and self-criticism, against the bureaucrats, the Nepmen and the Kulaks, can become a real left course only insofar as it abandons zig-zag movements, adopts the whole platform of the Opposition, and reinstates the tested Bolshevik fighters, who have been expelled, to their rightful places in the Party.

"The attempts to revise the basic Marxist-Leninist doctrine with the spurious theory of 'socialism in one country' have been rightly resisted by the Opposition led by Trotsky. A number of revisionist and opportunist errors in various fields of Comintern activity and its ideological life in general have proceeded from this

false theory. To this in part at least can be traced the false line in the Chinese revolution, the debacle of the Anglo-Russian Committee, the alarming and unprecedented growth of bureaucratism in the Comintern, an incorrect attitude and policy in the Soviet Union, etc., etc."

THE COMINTERN AND TROTSKYISM.

The Ninth Plenum as well as the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern condemned Trotskyism as an outright counter-revolutionary anti-working class ideology.

The resolution of the Ninth Plenum characterizes Trotskyism in the following way:

"The Trotsky opposition has in all basic questions gone over to the viewpoint of the 'left' lackeys of opportunism and has taken on an open counter-revolutionary character. The Trotskyites, who, under the cover of phrases about loyalty to the revolution and the Soviet Union, slander the Communist International, the CPSU, and the proletarian dictatorship, whose outer and inner policies they represent in just as lying and distorted fashion as the social democrats, are taking, together with the international social democracy the course of the overthrow of the Soviet power."

"All the worst elements of the working class movement, the openly opportunist elements of the Communist movement, all the little groups of renegades, that were thrown out of the ranks of the Comintern, now rally around the Trotsky platform of the fight against the Soviet Union, against the CPSU, and against the Comintern, and play the role of one of the lowest tools of the international social democracy against the Communists in their struggle to penetrate the broad masses of the working class."

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern declared:

"The Congress considers it superfluous to discuss, with enemies of the C. I., the counter-revolutionary political content of the Trotsky platform, after the combined membership of all Communist parties has repeatedly and most emphatically rejected the standpoint of the Opposition."

Trotsky and his group were definitely expelled by the World Congress as bearers of a social democratic ideology:

"The World Congress fully approves the decision of the 15th Party Congress of the Soviet Union and the resolution of the 9th Plenum of the ECCI regarding the incompatibility of membership in the Trotsky opposition and propaganda of their conceptions, with membership in the Bolshevik Party. The Trotsky group has degenerated to the standpoint of Menshevism in its attitude on program, political and organizational questions and, has, objectively, become transformed into an organ of the struggle against the Soviet power. The exclusion of this group from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was therefore correct and unavoidable."

Cannon and his group have linked themselves up organically with international Trotskyism. Their declaration says:

"The problems of the American Party are organically bound up with the fundamental questions confronting the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, and cannot be solved separately from them. The left wing of the American Party, taking shape in the principle struggle against the right wing leadership of the Party (Lovestone-Pepper group) will go forward only insofar as it recognizes the necessity of a struggle against the right danger on an international scale and links up its fight in the American Party with the Bolshevik fight for the fundamental tenets of Leninism in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in the Comintern."

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“All Communists Unite in Defense of Comintern and Party Against Trotskyism!”

Continued from Page Three

to reach. The first issue of his sheet, "The Militant" (against the working class) contains the anti-Leninist criticism by Trotsky of the Program of the Communist International; the renegade declaration of Cannon, Abern and Shachtman; and the document entitled "The Right Danger in the American Party." The Political Committee had to expel Dr. Konikov, because she has been organizing a Trotsky Club against the Party in Boston. In the New York Finnish Clubs there is an open anti-Party agitation conducted under the leadership of Sulkanen and Askeli; Ohrn, former editor of a Finnish Party paper, has come out openly against the Party. Baski, the inveterate social democrat, who united around himself all Hungarian-speaking expelled ~~members~~, is justifying the government persecution against Communists by citing the "Stalinist persecution conducted against Trotsky." Lore, the renegade, has been fighting our Party openly in the election campaign. Max Eastman, the bourgeois intellectual, is trying to sell everywhere his shallow revisionism of Marxism and his slanderous attacks on the CEC of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Salutsky, who became a mercenary in the service of the labor fakers, has been waging a sinister attack against the achievements of the proletarian revolution in Soviet Russia. Calverton, the pseudo-scientific charlatan, tries to undermine the theoretical prestige of Lenin.

All these renegades and enemies of the Comintern and the Soviet Union will unite and are already uniting against the Communist Party of America. The likelihood of a concentrated attack against our Party by all the forces of capitalism will be exploited by them to sharpen their onslaught against the Communist Party. The Right danger

within our Party is aggravated by the existence of these social democratic, half social democratic, more or less openly counter-revolutionary forces in the neighborhood of our Party.

The Right danger in the American Party is especially great, because our Party has not yet gone through a really revolutionary situation. It has had no chance to go through the ordeal of fire. But we can feel confident—on the basis of our experiences during the attack of the government in 1919-20, when the Party was driven underground—that the core of the Party and its leadership are sound and will, with the help of the Comintern, smash the Right danger.

The following basic tasks confront us in connection with the recurrence of Trotskyism and the Right danger in the Party:

1. **No tolerance of Trotskyism in the ranks of the Party.** We call upon all District Executive Committees and all subdivisions of the Party to expel all followers of Trotsky.

2. The CEC will wage a broad, thorough, ideological campaign against Trotskyism.

3. A broad ideological campaign is necessary against all other manifestations of the Right danger and against the slightest tolerance of the Right danger in the Party. Uncompromising struggle against the socialist party; clear attitude towards the leading role of the Communist Party; non-hesitant struggle for the organization of the unorganized and for new unions; exposure of white chauvinism in our ranks; concentration on factories; drawing of proletarian elements into the leadership of the Party; fight against underestimation of the war danger and pacifist illusions. These are the major tasks confronting us in fighting the Right danger.

4. Energetic defense of the CI and unreserved acceptance of all its decisions.

5. The frankest, most thorough self-criticism is necessary from the top to the bottom in the Party.

6. Merciless struggle against any manifestation of bureaucratism in the Party.

An absolutely prerequisite for a successful fight against the Right danger, whether it comes in the form of open opportunism or camouflaged with left phrases in the form of Trotskyism, is the unity of all Communist forces under the leadership of the CEC for the line of the Communist International.

The CEC herewith expresses its most determined, most sincere wish to achieve Party unity. The surest way to deal a crushing, death-blow to Trotskyism, to the Right danger, is the speedy, thorough unification of all Communist forces in the Party.

The Central Executive Committee calls upon all Communists to unite in defense of the Comintern and the Party against Trotskyism.

The Communist International has clearly pointed out in the Resolution of the World Congress the urgent need for dropping the factional fight in our Party, for which, in the judgment of the CI, there is today no basis in principle.

The CEC calls upon the comrades in the opposition, who broke in a decisive way with the Trotskyist Cannon, to drop their reservations towards the CI's thesis on the estimation of American imperialism, radicalization of the working class, and the estimation of the CEC of the Party.

The Communist International rejected the charge of the Opposition that the present CEC is a Right group. To continue the fight against the CEC as a Right group is, therefore, a fight against the CI decision, and most seriously weakens the fight against the Right danger, especially in its sharpest expression, Trotskyism.

The CEC call upon all comrades, regardless of their former groupings, to unite on the basis of unreserved acceptance of all the decisions of the Communist International—the American decision as well as all the others, of which the American is only an organic part.

The CEC earnestly pledges itself to take every possible measure to facilitate the realization of this end—the speediest and complete unity of the Communist forces for the Leninist line of the Comintern.

Unity against the Right danger and against any tolerance towards the Right danger must be the order of the day.

Unity against counter-revolutionary Trotskyism.

Unity for the line of the Communist International on the basis of unreserved acceptance of the decisions of the CI.

Unity before the attack on the Party by all forces of capitalism—from the government and Ku Klux Klan to the reactionary labor leaders, renegade Social Democrats and Trotskyites.

Unity, iron Leninist discipline and full Party loyalty in the face of the growing war danger.

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE WORKERS (COMMUNIST) PARTY OF AMERICA.