

INTERNAL BULLETIN

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BACKGROUND AND ISSUES OF THE PARTY CRISIS (Letters to Comrades)

By James P. Cannon

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SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
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NOTE

The conflict of tendencies, which has been going on for a long time in the party leadership, has finally made its way into the open. This, in my opinion, is a good thing. A long and thorough-going discussion is overdue.

The experience of more than a year has demonstrated that the conflict cannot be resolved by compromise and agreement in the National Committee. Every attempt at such a solution -- and there have been several -- met with failure. The reason for these failures, as is now quite evident from the discussion articles already published in the Internal Bulletin, is that the differences are not compromisable. It is now up to the party to discuss and to decide.

My own opinion about the matter has been frankly stated on different occasions to the Political Committee and to the Plenum, and has also been recorded in letters addressed to leading comrades during the past year. I am now submitting these letters as a preliminary contribution to the discussion in the party ranks.

The first letter -- as will be noted -- was addressed to Comrade Tanner from New York on April 25, 1952 -- on the eve of the May Plenum, one year ago. The other letters were written from Los Angeles at different stages of the evolution of the conflict.

J.P.C.

Los Angeles, Calif.

April 21, 1953

1. THE ORIGIN OF THE STRUGGLE

(Letter to Myra Tanner)

New York, N.Y.
April 25, 1952

CONFIDENTIAL

Los Angeles

Dear Myra:

This is in answer to your letter of April 21 about the Plenum.

It is true that Dan plans to attend. Both Morris and I think that one of you should come too, since this will probably be the most important Plenum in the history of our movement. The final Plenum with the Burnham-Shachtmanites was a matter of dealing with an alien petty-bourgeois tendency. We all understood that at the time and consequently the decisions we made were not too difficult. The last Plenum with Goldman-Morrow was the same thing on a tiny scale -- a matter of dealing with the remnants left over from the 1940 split. Everybody understood that and took it in stride. But now we have a serious rift in the basic cadre itself. For that reason I think the Plenum will be far more important than the Convention. The Plenum has to face the issue first and the vote the Plenum takes will be decisive in foreshadowing the ultimate decision of the party. At least, that is the way it always has been in the SWP, since the Plenum is a representative body -- a small convention in itself.

For about six months -- ever since Clarke returned -- we have been occupied with a dispute in the committee over the question of our attitude toward the Stalinist movement in America. Perhaps you have gathered some impressions of this from the minutes. They do not tell the whole story because we were never able to get the others to put their ideas down in writing. If I recall correctly, the only thing we have is Mike's proposal to turn toward the Stalinist movement as the principal milieu of our work in this country.

* * *

The worst thing was the attempt to construe such a line from the resolution of the Third World Congress. I was really appalled to see this. First, because I think that as Marxists we are bound to seek the milieu for our main activity and derive the corresponding tactics from the reality of the American labor movement and not from any abstract text, even the highest. Secondly, this Marxist method is exactly the method employed by the authors of the Third World Congress resolution -- and that is its great merit -- in approaching the living labor movement everywhere as it really is, and in admonishing comrades in each different country to accept the mass movement as it is and adapt themselves to it no matter what its leadership may be, even though it be Stalinist.

Thirdly, there is not the slightest sanction in the resolution of the Third World Congress for any orientation toward the bedraggled, isolated and discredited Stalinist movement in this country. Just the contrary. Insofar as the Congress resolution could be specific, it pointed our movement in England, the Scandinavian countries, Belgium,

Western Germany, etc., toward the social democracy and the reformist trade unions and not to the isolated Stalinists. The inference for the United States is obvious.

I think by now you have received a copy of the document adopted at the Tenth Plenum, which clarifies everything that needed to be clarified on this point. The Tenth Plenum document makes doubly clear for anyone who is willing to see that the orientation of the Third World Congress was not directed toward Stalinism, but toward the mass movement as it really is in each and every different country.

Unfortunately, the proponents of an immediate, hysterical turn toward the virtually non-existent "Stalinist milieu" -- George, Mike and Harry F. -- could not restrain themselves and confine the discussion to the Political Committee until the Plenum would have a chance to consider the question, which as responsible leaders, they were obliged to do. The new revelation spilled over into the New York Local with bad results on the inexperienced and unthinking, who have worked themselves into a factional attitude, if not into a factional formation, all the more readily because they don't know from their own experience the deadly seriousness of a faction fight in our kind of party. I hear that Murry's brother, Dave, with his flair for high politics, experimentation and maneuverism -- which is sometimes fruitful in opening up new possibilities when it is under responsible control -- unfortunately got himself involved with this and got the New York youth involved with him. The result is a rather messy situation which will take some time to straighten out, even in the best case.

As you will see from the second draft of the Plenum resolution, which has been accepted by the minority, there is not much left of the pro-Stalinist orientation. The line of the party remains exactly what it was before. Its main orientation is toward the militant workers in the labor movement, in particular the CIO. It is this "milieu" that is our main field of work and within this field we fight the Stalinists, as all other tendencies, for influence.

* * *

The rather long and elaborate exposition of a tactical approach and the united front policy toward the Stalinists and their periphery -- put in the resolution to satisfy the minority -- only spells out in detail and does not change what has always been our policy in this respect. Examples come to mind readily. I think Murry was in New York when we made a united front with the Stalinists against the gangster administration in the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union. We were part of the Thomas-Addes bloc which included the Stalinists in the auto union. We combined with Curran to break the bureaucratic grip of the Stalinists in the NMU, and then later worked in a bloc with the Stalinists against Curran when he made his sharp swing to the right. Following the 1948 elections, the New York Local, with PC approval, sent a number of comrades into the Young Progressive organization to do fraction work, with some fairly good results. Our delegates appeared at the Civil Rights Congress and offered the Stalinists a united front.

I don't mean to say that the differences have been entirely eliminated. The minority is still harboring the idea of a "soft" approach to the Stalinists, which we emphatically reject. They don't

like my pamphlet, "The Road to Peace," for example, because of its "tone" (the thing I like best about it) and argue that this is not the way to approach the Stalinists. They don't want to understand that it wasn't written for the benefit of Stalinists. The basic aim of the pamphlet was to inoculate militant non-political workers against Stalinism. I know very well that tone is important because tone signifies line. I recall that Trotsky once said that the original leaders of the German SAP were not serious revolutionists because after they had split with the German Social Democratic Party they referred in their paper to Leon Blum as "Comrade Blum" and really meant it.

Anyone trained in the school of principled politics -- which is our school and the very best example of it anywhere in the world -- might conclude that if the original differences have become attenuated, if not entirely eliminated -- the atmosphere in the committee would moderate and harmonious collaboration would be re-established. But that is not the case this time. Since Bert arrived in New York we have been confronted in the committee with an organized faction and the atmosphere has sharpened enormously as the original differences were narrowing down. Bert, who knows the reality of the American labor movement, had no sympathy at all with the search for a Stalinist "milieu." Unfortunately, that did not prevent him from combining with the others. This unprincipled procedure naturally provoked great indignation and resulted in a big blow-up at a special meeting, March 22, called to discuss the first draft of the Plenum resolution, with the school students present.

* * *

The situation was brought to a head by a letter which I read to the committee, which I had addressed to all members of the National Committee and all sections of the world movement, denouncing the minority as an unprincipled combination whose procedure could lead to nothing else but disruption and split, as all such formations in the past have done. As far as I could judge, the conduct of the four members of the minority had no sympathy in the rest of the body. It was clear at the same time, however, that they hoped that some kind of accommodation could be worked out which would avoid an open fight in the party. I told the meeting frankly that if there is going to be a faction fight, I demand that it be brought out in the open and that all the cards be put on the table; but that, if the others think some modus vivendi can be worked out, whereby a fight can be avoided, I would be more than agreeable and would refrain from sending the letter I had drafted.

Things were quieter for awhile after that, and a joint committee managed to work out the second draft of the resolution in agreement. Then we came to another conflict, precipitated by the "Proposal for a Marxist Propaganda Campaign," submitted by Clarke as a member of the sub-committee as a substitute for point 4, page 17 of the resolution.

In reality it is a factional document worked out by them as a body, as was immediately demonstrated by the discussion in the committee. An attempt was made to represent this merely as a restatement of my proposal for a propaganda campaign at the 20th Anniversary Plenum, December, 1948. However, that is a mere strategem; it is not the same thing at all. My proposal was simply for a sub-committee of

the PC to work out a general plan for some polemical articles and pamphlets directed against our ideological opponents, particularly the neo-Social Democracy, not the setting-up of a separate institution which would be "freed, as much as possible of other tasks, material means placed at their disposal, etc."

* * *

My plan of 1948 worked out only desultorily, partly perhaps because of my negligence but mainly because we didn't have a sufficient number of writers to do the thorough job that I had in mind. I think you interpreted the campaign locally in terms of a better organization of the study class work. I made my own personal contribution in a polemical pamphlet against the Stalinists. A real job on the Social Democrats and the labor fakers remains to be done.

This new proposal, however, is aimed against the Trotsky School. It is nothing but a restatement of the proposal at the Plenum to transform the School into a writing project. This was made absolutely clear at last Tuesday's meeting of the PC when I asked Clarke: "Is this proposal counterposed to the Trotsky School?" Bert answered for him: "It must have priority over the Trotsky School." Then to make it more emphatic, he added: "Yessiree bub."

We are not going to accept this proposal, and it will have to go to the Plenum for decision. However, it will not be an isolated question for practical decision. Bert informed us at the last meeting that they considered the proposal the heart of the political resolution and on that ground, they refuse to vote on the resolution until we have disposed of this question. I think the majority of the PC will reject the proposal at its next meeting. The matter will then go to the Plenum. It would be a great mistake, however, to think that the matter can be decided by a mere practical discussion of the relative merits of the proposed writing project on the one side and the School on the other. As in every little dispute in this ultra-factional situation, the real issues are hidden.

* * *

There are objective causes for the stagnation of the party. The fourth section of the Plenum resolution on "The Causes of Labor Conservatism and the Premises for a New Radicalization" was written to explain this to the party membership. It is not the fault of the policy of the party, not the fault of the leadership. The stagnation, however, is a fact and that puts the cadres to a severe test, in which the qualities of endurance and faith in the future, derived from Marxism, are the qualities that really count. Nevertheless, the stagnation and the isolation has an almost physical affect upon the leading cadres, like close confinement in jail, and is giving rise to a noticeable nervousness, touchiness and irritation in personal relations on the part of some. Others are looking for a new milieu which doesn't exist in reality, or for some kind of a gimmick that may enable us to leap over reality (that is the real source of the short-lived search for an opening in the Stalinist environment).

Others are looking for scapegoats. Implied in all the criticisms, proposals and elucidations of the minority is the unspoken implication that everything that has been done up to now was wrong and

that those who were mainly responsible for doing it are at fault; that we need a shake-up, a drastic change in our way of doing things, and in the personnel of the central leadership. That is why we hear from them nothing but deprecation and denigration of practically everything that has been done and attempted in the last period.

* * *

I, for my part, can't make any concessions whatever to these moods. As a matter of fact, it is precisely during the period since our 1948 election campaign, when the full weight of the growing conservatism of the labor movement and the general reaction have pressed in upon us most heavily, that the central leadership has given its best service to the party. That has been done by holding the line firm, rejecting all adventures, keeping things going, keeping up its courage and encouraging others, organizing one national tour after another, conducting two sessions of the Trotsky School, coping with the gruelling financial problem of meeting rising costs and increasing deficits on the press with a decreasing income, etc.

I will admit there is nothing spectacular about this performance. It just happens to be what needed to be done and the only thing which could be done in the circumstances. That's the way I feel about it anyway, and if anyone comes to the Plenum with the idea they can lay the burden of the party's troubles and difficulties on our shoulders, as "the Lord he laid it on Martha's sons," is very apt to get a sharp answer. We, too, can get irritated.

Fraternally,

JPC:ra

Jim

P.S. If either of you decide to come to the Plenum, raise the money the best way you can and we will see what we can do when you get here. At the rate we are going, we will probably be flat broke as of the day you arrive, so if you find yourselves in financial trouble in New York you will have plenty of company.

P.P.S. There are other, perhaps more important, reasons for our opposition to the "Proposals for a Propaganda Campaign" than the above stated reason that it is counter-posed to the Trotsky School. We are against the whole concept, against the motivation given in the discussion and against the ultimativistic form in which it was presented. I may write about this separately.

J.P.C.

cc: Vincent
Arne
Farrell
Dan
Larry
Ted
George
Sol

2. THE POLITICAL BASIS FOR COLLABORATION

(Letter to Vincent R. Dunne)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Oct. 7, 1952

Minneapolis

Dear Vincent:

We are all settled down here now, feeling fine and I am getting down to a schedule of work from which something ought to come. . .

I find the organization here in good shape, active and optimistic and recruiting new members quite steadily in spite of all the difficulties. I believe this is the case generally throughout the party where the leadership is on the ball, implementing our basic theses of 1946 and the political line deriving from them, inspiring the younger comrades to study and assimilate our tradition and our methods of party building and wasting no time on mullery and moperly.

Farrell left last night after quite a successful visit here. . . The meeting was held in the new party headquarters which is not as well located as yours in Minneapolis, but larger and more commodious. We are working on a plan to build it up into something through a fall and winter program of forum lectures and affairs. I like it here and expect to give them a hand on the program, perhaps by trying out some of the projects on my writing schedule in the form of lectures. . .

Murry and Rose and I had several long talks with Farrell. I think we came to an agreement on a solid basis for collaboration both in the practical work of the party and in the internal situation. He will have the main load to carry in the center in the next period and will be entitled to real support and cooperation from the field. I think we left him no doubt that he will get such cooperation from us. We had already started to work on the question of financial support for the N.O. from L.A. and, while he was here, completed arrangements on a couple of projects which will help to ease the N.O. situation between the end of the election campaign and the start of the next fund in March. We also hope to build up local activities as a source of regular contributions to the sustaining fund from L.A.

* * *

On the internal situation it appears there have been some misunderstandings on both sides. He thought, it seems, we were hell-bent on organizing a factional fight in the party without consulting him and before the party members, or even a considerable section of the leading cadre, were convinced of the depth and seriousness of the conflict. He said he had not intended his memorandum in the PC as a declaration of political neutrality -- as we told him frankly we had interpreted it -- but only as a means of slowing down the organizational side of the internal conflict. Whether it had that effect is another question, but it is water over the dam now anyway.

I think I can formulate our agreement approximately as follows -- (you can show this letter to Farrell when he gets to Minneapolis and check with him):

1. The 1946 "Theses on the American Revolution" remain the basic conception of American perspectives; and the type of party we are building and aim to build must correspond to this conception -- that is, a Leninist party designed to lead a revolution and not an intellectual circle of observers, analysts and commentators.

2. The basic nucleus of such a party has already been constructed in 24 years of struggle, and this historic achievement must not be disparaged, denigrated or considered a "failure." On the contrary, we must consciously build on the conceptions, traditions and methods formalized in the theses of 1946 -- and their further extension, elaboration and concretization. The party, from top to bottom, must be educated and re-educated in this spirit.

3. The "Trade Union Report" of Cochran is an explicit challenge to the above conceptions which must be met head-on in open discussion before the entire party membership. Nothing can do more to poison the party with factionalism than to bottle up the disputes in the NC while the party members are fed on rumors, gossip, "grievances" and all the rest of the stock-in-trade of petty-bourgeois politics.

* * *

4. Right after the election campaign Farrell should draw up a report of the experience as a positive achievement in the light of the above general conceptions for publication in the discussion bulletin and the bulletin should be declared open for a full and free discussion.

5. We here should begin work on a set of theses formalizing our standpoint on American perspectives as a supplement to the theses of 1946, dealing more concretely and in more detail with the role of the party, and submit them for discussion to the entire membership.

6. The party, N.O. and press must be led and directed, in the period following the election campaign, along the general lines of the foregoing conceptions. The minority, naturally, will have full rights in the discussion, and the more they put their views down on paper the better it will be. But they will not be allowed to obstruct decisions or exercise any veto-power over decisions deemed necessary by the majority.

7. The question of whether the dispute can be resolved satisfactorily by discussion alone can be left for further developments. In any case, we have no interest in stimulating an organizational struggle before the issues are fully clarified in the open discussion.

Let me know your opinion of this outline.

Jim

JPC:rk

3. THE SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

(Letter to Reba Hansen)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Oct. 9, 1952

New York

Dear Reba:

. . . I have been going over the material in the files and folders, sorting it out and rearranging it, and I am continually amazed at its scope and volume. I have just about definitely decided to work on processing this material for the next period and let the daily-events journalism go for the time being. I can't do both without secretarial help and a decision has to be made as to the order of importance. The present tentative plan -- which I expect to make definitive in the next few days -- is to go right to work first on a big project under the general title of "America's Road to Socialism." The preliminary drafts of the chapters and sections would be worked up in the form of lectures to be given to the "Friday Night Forum" of the Los Angeles Local. There they would be recorded on tape or wire and transcribed. This would bring the raw ore into the second stage for processing into literary form.

The general scope of the project would extend over the following areas:

1. Socialism as projected by the great Utopians.
2. The Marxist development of Socialism from Utopia to science. (The points of agreement and the points of difference -- the great Utopians must get their full due; for the first time in our propaganda, as far as I know.)
3. The pre-history of the SWP. (An analytical panorama of the socialist and labor movement in the U.S. and its outstanding figures who blazed the trail for us.
4. Concretization, elaboration and extension of the "Theses on the American Revolution," projecting a sweeping revolutionary development in the U.S.; why it must take place and the kind of party it will call for. (Under this head -- for the first time, I think -- an exposition of the points of difference and the points of similarity of the problems of the Russian and American revolutions, and how Lenin's conception of the party will and must be adapted and applied here.)
5. The lines of development along which the Leninist party will expand and come to power in the U.S., excluding any prospect of any kind of substitute for such a party playing a revolutionary role under American conditions, or any victory for Socialism by default through automatic collapse of capitalism, etc.
6. A forecast of America in the transition period between capitalism and socialism. The most important problems which will probably arise and how they will probably be solved. (Here all the differences with Russia and the other backward countries will redound

in our favor, permitting the quickest and most drastic solutions. The "specter" of bureaucratism analyzed from a materialist standpoint. The comparative brevity of the transitional period; not a historical epoch but a period measured at the most in decades.)

7. What Socialist America will look like. An approximate estimate of how the people will live and think and change and begin to make what Marx called "The real history of mankind." Here we will go back to the great anticipators, the utopians, and estimate how their projects of the future society may appear to people who, having broken down all class distinctions and conflicts, can plan in real life what the utopians could only plan in their imaginations. Why the vision of the socialist future, firmly based on scientific premises, and recognized as realizable and inevitable, is faith enough to live by under any circumstances and at any price.

* * *

The above is just a rough outline of the project as it has leapt out at me from the notes and material already at hand in the files and folders. But I think it will give you a general idea of how my plan is shaping up in my mind. As the project gets under way there will be plenty of room and opportunity to shift around and re-arrange, add and subtract, etc. The general framework, however, won't change much. The big advantage of trying the sections out in lectures, as I see it now, is the flexibility it will provide for experiment, modification and change. The questions of the audience ought to help a lot, too, in uncovering blind spots and omissions.

What I must aim to guard against in this project is any stupid compulsion to produce a definitive or scholarly work. I value academic works but it is not my duty to produce them. My inclination, and in my opinion my best service, will be to take off in the free-wheeling style of "The History of American Trotskyism," telling what I know and what I think, for the benefit of those who may be interested, and let the scholars -- of whom there will be plenty later on -- take it from there.

Jim

JPC:rk

4. THE "THESES ON THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION"

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Oct. 14, 1952

Minneapolis

Dear Farrell:

I asked Vincent to show you the letter I wrote to him last week after your departure. Herewith is a typewritten copy of your reference. I also sent a copy to Joe. Please let me know the result of your discussion with Vincent on the matter and state how my summary of our discussion here stacks up with yours.

I suppose you have heard that Goldie finally succumbed after her 6-year battle with cancer. It is good that you had a chance to see her before the end. We are having a memorial meeting here Wednesday. Rose and I will both speak. Did you know that she had been with us since 1930? The history of her entire conscious life is virtually a history of our movement -- that part written in simple deeds by the rank and file.

We are still working on the financial problem here and still recording progress. . . . We are going to keep working on all possible projects of this kind and are also working out a program of post-election activities which, among other things, ought to strengthen the local financial situation.

We are still discussing the prospects for a party discussion. It seems clear that what the party needs above everything else is a thorough-going discussion of the perspectives of the country, of the labor movement and of the party. If this discussion really centers on the big questions of perspective, it cannot fail to enrich party life and create the conditions for a sound development of party activity.

I have just finished a careful re-reading of the 1946 "Theses on the American Revolution" and Report -- and heartily recommend this procedure both as a preparation for the discussion and for the guidance of party work, in the post-election period. The Theses are a fundamental document. It is all true and needs no revision or re-consideration. What is needed is merely amplification, expansion and concretization of the probable line of development (insofar as this is possible.) I recall that, at the time, I expressed the hope that our party scholars would undertake this task after the 1946 Convention. For some reason this was not done; and a mere conjunctural turn of the economic situation, effected by the artificial medicine of cold war expenditures, something like a sick heart stimulated by digitalis, was mistaken for a cure or, at least, for a long-time reversal of a chronic disease. That is not very scholarly.

The trouble is not that the Theses are wrong, but that they were put on the shelf, as if they had been merely a resolution for an occasion, and more or less forgotten. The first necessity for the party members, especially the new ones and some of the old ones, is to

take the Theses down from the shelf, and dust them off, and read them. The next thing is to make all party work and education revolve around them. That, I think should be one of the principal aims of the discussion on our part.

In the recent period I have heard, to my astonishment, that there is a fairly widespread opinion in the party that the Theses misfired, or that they are out-dated and need correction. It has been said -- so I am told -- that "the Theses disoriented the party," that "the Political Resolution of the 1948 Convention corrected the errors of the Theses," etc. The prevalence of such sentiments alone underscores the vital necessity of a clarifying discussion of the perspectives of American capitalism, of the labor movement, and of the party.

I suppose there are two different reasons for the skeptical and antagonistic attitude toward the Theses. One derives from a slip of memory in identifying the theses with the 1946 political resolution, although the Report on the Theses specifically states that they "do not tie themselves to the economic prospects of the next month or the next year. . . Our Theses do not consider immediate time-schedule, but the general perspective." Such misunderstandings can perhaps be cleared up by a re-study of the Theses. But in order to bring this about it is necessary to put the Theses on the table again, call attention to them and center a discussion around them.

Another objection may derive from the opinion that U.S. capitalism is going to escape the destiny assigned to it in the Theses, or at any rate will be able to postpone it for a long, long time. Such a rejection of the Theses is serious, even fundamental, and if it is held it should be frankly stated. If it is not frankly stated, but only implied in proposals which run directly counter to the Theses, it will be our duty to explain the logic of the implications. The party members have a right to know what is really involved in the discussion. That is the only way they can learn from it.

If my impression is correct, there is a third opinion to the effect that the Resolution of the Third World Congress sort of supercedes and telescopes the 1946 Theses and renders them, as an independent document, rather null and void. That's not so at all. The Theses stand by themselves; they are an essential part of any completely rounded world orientation, and are strengthened and re-inforced by the world developments analyzed so well by the Third Congress Resolution. I will undertake to write about this point separately.

Don't have any doubt that we agree with you about the desirability of a discussion separated from an organizational struggle. Nothing would suit our aims better. And nothing, in our opinion, would do the party more good. It hasn't worked that way up till now in New York. For the future, we'll see.

Jim

JPC:rk

5. THE BASIC CAUSE OF THE PARTY CONFLICT

(Letter to Dan Roberts)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Nov. 21, 1952

Seattle

Dear Dan:

I read your letter of Nov. 16, addressed to Murry. It would be a good thing, of course, if you could succeed in your endeavor to separate the local disputes from the larger issues which will probably be involved in the forthcoming national discussion. That, however, is easier said than done, because the root causes of the frictions and disaffections which can now be expected to manifest themselves on a local scale everywhere are the same as those provoking the conflict and discussion in the leading cadre. One could go even further and say that the external factors creating such great difficulties for the party in the broad arena are the same as those generating the internal frictions and antagonisms.

If we understand this firmly at the start, it will help to inoculate us against surprises and disappointments. Internal difficulties are implicit in the total situation. An understanding of this inescapable circumstance is the first necessity for those who want to cope with the difficulties -- present and to be expected -- in a Marxist manner.

After the long-drawn-out period of artificial prosperity and the concomitant stagnation of the class struggle, which, along with the witch hunt, weighs so heavily on the Marxist vanguard, internal frictions and conflicts, which may even take the form of a party crisis, are overdue. The internal repercussions of the objective pressure were staved off for a long time mainly by the will of the central leadership, its understanding of the situation and its deliberate attempts to steel the party against it, and its authority. Now it appears -- in fact it has been evident to me for the past year -- that the delayed internal reaction to the external difficulties of the party is hitting us in full force. Even more, the symptoms are manifest most strikingly in the leading cadre itself. This cannot fail to feed every kind of local discontentment arising from theoretical ignorance and indifference, inexperience and defeatist moods on the part of elements who feel about things without thinking about them in their larger scope.

I'm sure it is clear to you, from the experience of the May Plenum and the material that has come through in the PC minutes, that the conflicts and antagonisms in the leading cadre are by no means a simple matter of personal friction which might be resolved by judicious applications of common-sense and patient forbearance.

The treatment of symptoms without an investigation of causes yields no better results in politics than in the field of medicine. The personal antagonisms which have erupted so suddenly, and with such subjective intensity, bespeak a resentful recognition on the part of some comrades -- perhaps unconscious or not fully conscious --

that they have been pulled along for quite a while against their will. The sudden epidemic of grievance-mongering where no real grievances exist, this pitiful reversion to the outlived infancy of our movement, is simply an expression of belated revolt against our tradition and our methods; against the line which has been imposed upon them, which they did not elaborate themselves and didn't fully understand.

It is now perfectly clear to me that the internal antagonisms and conflicts, which ride on powerful objective pressures, will not find a simple and easy solution. I personally made two strong efforts to quarantine the disaffection in the leading cadre. The first was at the enlarged meeting of the PC in March which followed the first factional explosion over the Convention Political Resolution. The second was at the May Plenum. Both these efforts met with failure. That was not, as some may think, because I tried prematurely to disclose the real political causes of the disruption of committee solidarity; not because, as alleged, I tendentiously read something into the dispute that wasn't there. The reason for the failure of the May Plenum was the presence in the National Committee of too many people who think a deep-going sickness can be exorcised by ignoring it or diplomatizing with it; who haven't yet learned the real meaning of principled politics, or have forgotten what they learned.

The failure of the National Committee, as at present constituted, to quarantine the infection does not at all convince me that I was wrong in my diagnosis and in the measures I employed. Quite the contrary. The results of the experiment only convince me that the infection, in a less-developed form, is more widespread in the leading cadre than I had hoped at the time. In my opinion the results of these experiences mean that all hopes -- better to say, illusions -- about solving the crisis by diplomacy, tongue-in-cheek agreements to confine the dispute within the National Committee, and similar political chicken-feed -- must be resolutely cast aside. The National Committee is not going to settle this dispute for the simple reason that it is not able to.

Nothing will do now but a thorough-going discussion in which the entire party participates, and after which the party consciously decides.

Our task in this discussion is to put all issues, theoretical and political, on the table, and draw out the full implications of the contrasting proposals, with the aim of educating and re-educating the party in the rightness of the course we have followed up to now -- since the very beginning! -- and the imperative necessity of continuing along the same line. This will take time, and we have no reason to hurry. What is needed is a deliberate, thorough-going exposition of all questions -- theoretical, political and organizational -- which make up the body of our doctrine and our tradition, and which are once again under explicit or implicit attack. We can have patience with the party, if not with individuals who mistake their own belly-aches for doctrinal revolutions.

We have had some discussions here in Los Angeles, and I have had some correspondence with Farrell and Vincent afterward. For your personal information I am enclosing herewith copies of my letters to Vincent and Farrell, which give an outline of the point of view which we

have developed in the discussions here. I will be glad to hear your opinion on the matter.

Fraternally,

James P. Cannon

JPC:jm

* * *

6. A NOTE ON TEMPO

(Letter to Vincent R. Dunne)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Nov. 21, 1952

Minneapolis

Dear Vincent:

. . . Party activity can and should be regulated at a somewhat slower pace following the election campaign. I'm inclined to think the same holds true for the evolution of the internal party situation.

We have a lot of work to do and some big problems to solve, but this can't be done in a hurry and moreover it shouldn't be. We need to take time for thought and consultation in order to do a thorough job in all fields and in all respects. This purpose would also be served by a visit from you out here. . .

Fraternally,

Jim

JPC:jm

7. THE CHICAGO BRANCH

(Letter to Arne Swabeck)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Feb. 12, 1953

Chicago

Dear Arne:

I am enclosing copies of some letters written since I arrived in California, which give a rough idea of our line of thinking about the internal situation. I would like to hear from you about the matter.

I suppose poor Chicago has to go through one more real battle before we will have a right to call it a Leninist Branch, committed understandingly to the methods and principles by which we have built the party in 24 years of struggle, and standing firmly on its tradition. We are in for a fight of the most fundamental character. It appears to break out over "incidents" and personal frictions, but it would be disgraceful for anyone who has had the benefit of a Leninist education to think these incidents and frictions are what the fight is really about. And it would be utopian now to try to "settle" the conflict by compromise and diplomacy.

The fight erupts over "incidents" only because the real thinking -- more correctly the feeling, the moods, the moping, groping and griping, the sickly pessimism -- of the Cochranite faction implies such a far-reaching revision of our basic concept of the American problem, and such a hysterical revolt against our method and our tradition, that up to now they have been ashamed and afraid to put it on paper. It was the task of the party leadership, from the beginning, to recognize the real meaning and implications of this new shame-faced revisionism and to bring them out for discussion, at least in the leading cadre. But it is too late now to think or even dream of settling accounts with this faction in the present National Committee.

The issue has to be taken to the party for discussion and decision, and the less time wasted about it the better. You should have no illusions about the Chicago situation. The Cochranite faction is organized in Chicago and is directed from New York, and has been for a long time. It would be an unpardonable relapse into medieval knightliness to stand on ceremony or observe normal formalities in dealing with these people.

They want to work underground, poisoning the minds of the ignorant with gossip and slander, while outwardly professing their devotion to peace. These mush-mouth "non-factionalists" are the worst, the most corrupt factionalists of all. When they say they don't want to fight, they mean they don't want to fight in the open. But the party has been built from the beginning by posing all questions openly and fighting them out in the open. That's the only way the party members can learn anything from the disputes in the leadership. The real test and final justification of every internal struggle is precisely this: What has been learned by the members and assimilated into the traditions of the Party?

We have to go through this kind of struggle once again -- that is perfectly obvious now to anyone with half an eye -- and as in every struggle there will be some overhead cost. But if we conduct the struggle properly -- that is, on the highest plane of the Leninist method -- the party will be educated and re-educated in the meaning of this same method. That will be a positive gain, and in my firm opinion is the condition for the survival and further development of the party. . .

You are perfectly free to show my letters to those comrades who are interested in lifting the dispute from the underground coffee-kitchens into an open political fight in the light of day.

We here in California are fully prepared to collaborate openly, in dead earnest, and with all our strength, with all comrades who are interested in such a struggle and see the necessity for it; and we don't give a damn whether they belong to the National Committee or not. We make only one small condition: No compromise with Cochranism, and no derailment from the main highway of principled politics into the side streets, blind alleys, swamps and sumps of secondary questions, personal beefs and gripes and other inconsequential trifles.

Please give my best regards to Hildegarde. I count on her for sure as an active, militant member of the Leninist section of the poor, long-misled and corrupted Chicago Branch which has to fight for its right to live once again.

With anti-revisionist greetings,

Jim

P.S. I have long been intending to write to you about the ambitious literary project which I outlined soon after my arrival here, in my Oct. 9 letter to Reba. One section of this endeavor finally took the form of a series of six lectures on "America's Road to Socialism" which I finally got out of my system here in L.A. (Believe me, it was hard work for a lazy man.)

The paper has already printed three of these and a fourth one is due for publication in this week's paper. I am now correcting the stenogram (tape recording) of the last two -- "America Under the Workers Rule" and "What Socialist America Will Look Like."

The plan, as I understand it, is to save the type from the paper and to publish the whole series in a pamphlet without delay. The money to pay for this has already been provided by a special bequest of the Minna Bergstrom Memorial Fund here in L.A. I would like to have more time and have the benefit of criticism from yourself and some of the other Marxist scholars in the party, especially on the last lecture. On the other hand, I am eager to get the whole project off my hands and into print so that I will be completely free to concentrate all my thought and energy on the internal literary discussion.

On the third hand, the pamphlet can be broadly considered as a contribution to the internal discussion, since it is nothing more than an exposition and elaboration of the 1946 "Theses on the American

Revolution" -- which is the real issue in the internal dispute. And the "Theses on the American Revolution," in turn, are nothing but a concretization and adaptation to America of what we learned from the Marxist masters.

Of course, the pamphlet can have much broader uses too. As far as I know, this is the very first time any one has undertaken to set down, in one single connected work, the whole program of socialism from the political struggle of the moment ("America Under Eisenhower") to the Marxist conception of what the fully developed socialist society will really look like. That ought to have a considerable value for new workers and students who will be coming to us after a while in great numbers. The great majority of these new recruits will be absolutely new to politics and every single one of them will be asking many of the questions about socialism which I attempt to answer in this pamphlet.

These two considerations -- the uses the pamphlet can have for the internal education of the party members and as an introduction to socialism for new people -- rather impels me to let the pamphlet go to print without polishing off all the rough spots, which would be possible if I could take more time and receive some critical suggestions from the party scholars.

I would like to know what you think about this. I may try to send copies of the last two lectures to you before publication.

J.P.C.

JPC:jm

* * *

8. THE COMPONENTS OF COCHRANISM

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Feb. 20, 1953

New York

Dear Farrell:

I received your letter of Feb. 18. I am still bogged down with the manuscripts of the last two lectures and will have to delay a fuller comment for a while. Before I get around to that, however, I want to touch on a few points.

1. I fully agree with your decision to start the discussion in the Bulletin without waiting for the Plenum. The subjects and the assignments already made also seem to be just right. I believe it would be most advisable if all the comrades indicated would go to work on their assignments without delay, even if that means neglecting some other matters, and get the finished articles into print as soon as possible. That's what the party members are waiting for.

2. You can go right ahead with your literary program as outlined without waiting for coordination with us. We will begin to roll out a lot of stuff along the same lines, but we don't need to worry whether there's a little over-lapping here and there.

3. We considered my lectures as a contribution to the discussion as well as to the external propaganda work of the party. It is an attempt to elaborate the "Theses on the American Revolution" in popular form, and is irreconcilable with the Cochranite concepts. In the fifth lecture I deal somewhat with the question of Stalinism, and I make no concessions to Bartell and Company there. The more I think about it, the more important it seems to me to publish the lectures in a suitable form. The pamphlet (it will really be a small book of about 48 thousand words) really shouldn't be turned out as a make-shift job. I would like to know your decision on this point, which I brought up in a previous letter.

4. A great deal depends on the tone of the articles you project. This is not an incidental tactical dispute, but a fundamental conflict, and our line must be counterposed to that of the Cochranites in irreconcilable terms. It is politically correct to characterize this tendency as Cochranism, because that is the ingredient which holds the combination together and determines its basic character. The components of Cochranism are capitulatory pessimism and unprincipledness. The impressionistic experimentalism of Bartell and Clarke in their search of a Stalinist "milieu" wouldn't amount to much by itself. A little clarifying discussion and some practical experience would sink these experiments without a trace, as has been the case with similar brain-storms which have annually erupted from these sources for as long as I've known them.

It is Cochran's unscrupulous combination with the advocates of this new orientation toward a Stalinist milieu, which he brutally stated in the PC does not exist -- going on this point farther than we do, for we recognize that there is a certain Stalinist milieu, although it is a very small one and not the main one for our activity -- and his permeation of the whole combination with the sickly spirit of defeatism that determines the character of the combination.

If we want to keep the SWP alive and give it a chance to grow, we can't make any peace with this tendency, or give any quarter to it. That should be made clear and unequivocal in our very first literary contributions to the discussion, and should be the line of all correspondence and conversation on the subject. The first big prerequisite for a genuinely Leninist struggle is to draw the line at the very beginning and let the chips fall where they may. Among the chips I include those people who think they can mope and dawdle and hum and haw, and shift their weight from one foot to another, when the party's right to existence is challenged. . .

Fraternally,

Jim

JPC:jm

9. ON THE INTERNAL BULLETIN

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
Feb. 28, 1953

New York

Dear Farrell:

. . . On the question of the Internal Bulletin, I would suggest, the tradition of the party gives the answer and should be referred to for guidance in the decision. That tradition shows that the minority was always given full rights and full expression, but was never allowed to obstruct the decisions of the majority or to exercise a veto power over them. The Cochranites have been demanding these veto rights for the past year, but it would be a violation of our tradition and contrary to Leninist principles to grant them -- in this case or any other case.

All you have to do is to check the files of past discussions in the bulletin to see that we always permitted the minorities to publish their stuff -- as a rule without holding it up for our answer; and conversely, we published our own stuff when it was ready without waiting till an answer was ready. The demand to publish nothing without an answer in the same bulletin only prepares the ground for another delay till the answer to the answer is ready, etc. The result would be to paralyze the functioning of the bulletin; and that is just what the Cochranites want, because they are afraid of the open discussion.

As far as their rights are concerned, I would vote with both hands to publish anything they hand in on receipt, and even ask them to help mobilize volunteer technical help to speed it up, and let them have a whole bulletin to themselves if the length of their contributions would fill a minimum-sized bulletin -- and publish an answer later when it is ready. The agreement, however, should be reciprocal.

. . . As to parity rights in editing the bulletin -- the only precedent I know of for that was in 1939-40. Our reasons for granting it then was that: (1) The petty-bourgeois opposition had already published their platform and openly proclaimed themselves as a faction challenging us for the leadership of the party. (2) They had nearly half of the party behind them. (3) They were openly preparing a split, and we were trying to head it off by exceptional measures. I think we would do the same thing again under similar conditions, but if the Cochranites want to appeal to the 1939-40 precedent they should wait at least until the Plenum to demonstrate how they qualify under the conditions of the precedent.

The demand for parity in a Leninist party is an exceptional demand and exceptional conditions must be present to justify it. Barring that, our tradition has been to leave the editing of the Internal Bulletin up to the Secretariat, where the minority is represented and has a chance to participate in the decisions -- but not to veto them. If the Cochranites don't want it that way, let them wait for the Plenum to show cause.

It goes without saying, that the Secretariat should be scrupulously fair to the minority in editing the bulletin. We want to clarify the issues in a free discussion, not to gain a formal victory by mechanical tricks. The most important thing is to get the discussion started, with whatever material is ready for either side. That's what the party is waiting for, and it should not be delayed or obstructed.

Fraternally,

Jim

JPC:jm

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10. THE DEDIJER REVELATIONS

(Letter to Joe Hansen)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 2, 1953

New York

Dear Joe:

I just received Internal Bulletin No. 4 with your article and read it through attentively. It is very good, I think. One of the best effects will be to force the Cochranites to make some kind of a written answer to your challenge and thus put something down on paper. When you recall that we have been asking them to do this for the past year and a half, without success, you will have a right to pride yourself on this accomplishment. Of course they have been promising and threatening all along to write something terrible; but I never believed them and will not fully believe them yet until I see it in print.

These warriors are strictly guerrilla fighters, and consider it an outrageous frame-up to demand that they come out from the coffee-klatches and face the fire of open debate. I noticed from the recent minutes that they are still angry at me for demanding that they put their cards on the table at that enlarged meeting of the PC a year ago.

I hope the other projected articles are really in the works and that they will soon be published.

* * *

I am enclosing an extremely important item on the subject of the real character of Stalinism and the way it showed the "revolutionary" side of its counter-revolutionary character in Greece and China. This is a column of the Alsop brothers, printed in the Los Angeles Mirror last week. You may have missed it in the Herald Tribune. The quotation they give from DediJer's new biography of Tito, is, in my opinion, one of the most important pieces of secret history that has come out since the end of the war. DediJer's report of Kardelj's interview with Stalin is a confirmation from an inside source, that both Stalin and the Chinese Stalinists had agreed to come to terms

with Chiang Kai-shek. It further confirms that in February, 1948, Stalin wanted the Yugoslavs to withdraw further support to the Greek partisans.

The Alsop brothers cite Dedijer's revelations to cool off the Congressional Republicans who are yelping about the Yalta deal, by showing them that "Stalin made certain equally vital promises to Roosevelt." I think you can use Dedijer's revelations for another purpose: to show that if the dual role of Stalinism consists in it being half counter-revolutionary and half revolutionary, the second half wasn't working very well at Yalta and in the policy agreement between Stalin and the Chinese Stalinists after Yalta.

I feel a little personal interest in this revelation because it bears out my analysis and estimate of the Yalta deal -- without documentary proof -- in my "Road to Peace" pamphlet, which has been suppressed in the New York territory under the dominion of Bartell. Do you think there's a chance, now, with Dedijer's help, to arouse a little interest in what I said about Yalta and get the ban on the pamphlet lifted?

Jim

JPC:jm

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11. PERSPECTIVES OF THE STRUGGLE

(Letter to Ted Grant)

Selander

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 6, 1953

Cleveland

Dear Ted:

I was glad to get your letter of March 2. You didn't need to tell me that you had hoped "there would not be a fundamental conflict" with the Cochranites. That has been the attitude of many of the National Committee members. But it was not politically justified. The full implications of the Cochranite position were fairly clear a year ago. That's why I took the drastic step of demanding that they put their cards on the table at the special enlarged meeting of the PC which was held at that time.

My hope was to quarantine this factional tendency while it was still incipient; and at the same time to give those involved a chance to think over the seriousness of the course they had started on, and perhaps to draw back before it was too late. The reluctance of so many of the leading people to face the prospect of a fight in the "family" ("My God, we've all been friends and chums so long!") frustrated all attempts to deal with the problem politically.

The friends-and-chums sentiment, the peace-in-the-family sentiment, which I must tell you frankly has nothing to do with Leninist politics -- Leninism puts the party above the family -- dictated a passive, bystander attitude at the most critical moments and attained

opposite results from those intended. It only emboldened the Cochranites, encouraged them to go farther and move faster than they had intended, and made the present showdown struggle inevitable.

As you will probably recall, at that meeting I characterized this faction -- in a letter which I proposed to send to all members of the NC and to our friends abroad -- as an "unprincipled combination which does not disclose its aims." My purpose was to compel them either to state their aims or to say they had none. The purpose was not to "pick a fight" but to demand, if there was to be a fight, that it should be conducted in the open.

I never heard of a Leninist party being built and educated in guerrilla warfare. But despite my wishes and intentions, we have had a year of guerrilla warfare since that time, with the result that a lot of young comrades have been poisoned and disoriented by gossip and slander. And now we're going to have the open fight anyway. And even now, after the instructive experiences of a year of corrupting guerrilla warfare, we have some nervous Nellies and old grandmothers of the male sex, nervously twittering and inquiring: "What will be the outcome? What is the perspective?"

This makes me laugh -- if one can laugh with bitter disdain. The perspective is to educate and re-educate the party in the programmatic principles of the "Theses on the American Revolution" and in the method of Leninist politics; and to show in the course of a long thorough, and patient discussion that the Cochranite brand of revisionism is no better than any other brand.

What will be the outcome? Unless our consistent 25-year struggle has been wasted on the cadre it assembled -- each and every member of which owes his political existence to that struggle -- the outcome will be a reconsolidation of the cadre and a reinspiration to renewed work and struggle with a firm conviction of its great historical mission.

Will there be some losses? I don't know, and at this stage of the developments that is not my primary concern. My concern is to save the party from the degeneration and death which could only follow from a false orientation and an unqualified leadership. When that aim has been achieved, and only then, we can turn our attention to the problem of individuals who have given good service in the past, as long as they were on the right line, and can give good service in the future under the same conditions.

You can set it down as a law for this party fight as for all others when great issues are at stake: the more resolute, aggressive and uncompromising the struggle against the revisionist tendency the smaller will be the losses, if any, in the long run. Leninism has nothing to do with petty considerations of personal revenge, spite, favoritism, discrimination, persecution and so forth. It also has nothing to do with soft-headed sentimentality with respect to the fate of individuals when great questions of principle and policy are involved.

That's the gist of the matter as I see it, Ted. I am enclosing copies of letters I have written to leading comrades. There are six members of the National Committee out here in L.A. We have been keep-

ing close track of the party situation as it has developed in the PC since I left New York six months ago, and these letters will give you a rough idea of the evolution of our thinking on the matter.

My letters to Vincent of Oct. 7 and the companion letter of Oct. 9 to Farrell show that we were not interested in an organizational fight if we could get the Cochranites to put their program on paper and have a full discussion in the party. Six months have gone by since I left New York. The faction struggle has raged with increased fury in the PC, but the party is still waiting for the opposition to comply with the demand I put to them in that enlarged PC meeting a year ago -- to "disclose their aims."

Al Adler's remarks which you quote in your letter give far more of the Cochranite program than the party members suspect. But Al's remarks do not yet contain the whole program; Cochran hasn't told even Al yet what he is really driving at. That has to be deduced from his conduct in the PC, from meanings slyly insinuated in his "Trade Union Report" to the National Convention, and from motions he made in the PC -- the motion against the Los Angeles election campaign in particular.

It is the duty of a political leadership to deduce the program from these things and to force it out into the open -- and not to permit the party to be corrupted by factional guerrilla warfare before the whole program is finally unveiled.

Jim

JPC:jm

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12. THE "NEW LINE" OF BARTELL'S "REPORT"

(Letter to Joe Hansen)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 10, 1953

New York

Dear Joe:

I am taking a little breather between editing lecture 5 and lecture 6 to catch up with correspondence, and will start with your March 6 letter and work backward. The report about your forthcoming debate with Frankel is good news. The more open discussion the better; and the more individual leaders smoked out from the coffee-katches to reply to the open discussion -- still better. I think your inclination to "advance the discussion" from your Internal Bulletin article is a correct one. Keep a jump ahead of them all the time and give them something to catch up with until we finally get their whole program out in the open.

However, I think you should still concentrate heavy fire on Bartell's "Report" as an attempt to smuggle in a contradictory political line under cover of a local program of activities. This is really a vicious and contemptible procedure which is quite alien to our tradi-

tion and must be condemned on that ground, regardless of any merits the new political line might have.

But, unfortunately, the "new line" of Bartell's Report has no merit, none whatsoever. If you will take the trouble to go over that report with a fine-tooth comb, you will find just about all the deviations of the opposition presented in Bartell's inimitable, if not always lucid, style. For example:

1. The disillusionment with the American working class and the assumption that not much can be done at the present time, in the unions. (Compare that with the report of the auto worker from Milwaukee in the PC minutes of Feb. 10, and the recent trade union elections in Los Angeles.) Right now the Los Angeles Local, which is alleged to be exclusively occupied with the "Talmudic" study of "dead Marxism" (Capital!) is engaged in as busy, varied and fruitful trade union activity as I have ever seen.

Two of the party fractions have been deeply involved in trade union elections which resulted in the victory of opposition slates. Another fraction has been involved in a very effective fight over trade union democracy in another important local union. A fourth fraction is involved in a strike. The discussion at the Los Angeles Party Conference last Sunday revolved the whole time around the reports of this trade union activity. (Incidentally, all four of the key comrades involved in the work of the above-mentioned fractions are eager students in the "Capital" classes.)

The question was put falsely by Bartell when he demanded that his critics point out to him some specific field of trade union activity. The thing is, that you must first have an orientation toward the trade unions, consider that our main field of work, proletarianize the membership, especially the younger comrades, and send them into the factories; that is the precondition for the opening up of specific opportunities. That's the way our trade union activities began almost everywhere.

2. Bartell's Report lists a six-week lecture course on the American Revolution (the first one) but none on the American Revolution (the third one). This really ought to find a place on the agenda of a branch which regards the first and second American Revolutions, with all their great importance, as preparatory to the third.

3. The Report lists a study course in Capital, which is good, but no class and no lectures on the history of our party, which is bad. Are the new members supposed to be born Leninists who don't have to learn from the living history of our 25-year struggle how to act like Leninists? Is that why so many of them take gossip and small change as a sufficient motive in political struggles? Where and when did Local New York decide to cast off the tradition of the party? And if so, what tradition is to be substituted for it?

4. The fantastic painting-up of the "milieu" of the petty-bourgeois Stalinist circles as the main field of our work in New York can stand another thorough drubbing on the grounds of reality; all the more so if a little retreat is being ordered in this respect. Under this head it would be appropriate to fish in last year's PC minutes for Bartell's conception of our election campaign as a fifth

wheel on Marcantonio's omnibus. That motion really ought to be read to the New York membership, and Frankel should be given an opportunity to say what he thinks of it in the light of the counter-arguments made at that time, the experiences of the election campaign, and the final conclusion of the Stalinists themselves that the whole Progressive Party experiment was a "mistake."

5. On page 7 of Internal Bulletin No. 2, Bartell quotes from my Convention Report and then says, "This same conception was contained in Comrade Cochran's trade union report." This is taking my name in vain. His quotation from Cochran, which he says is the "same conception" as mine, to the effect that "We cannot just shout promiscuously at the general mass, for that would be like hurling seeds into a storm," -- has nothing in common with my conception nor with the conception of the Convention Resolution which put the National Presidential Campaign as the number one task of the party for 1952.

What are radio and television speeches in an election campaign, addressed to anybody who may listen, but "shouting promiscuously at the general mass"? We believe in explaining our program every chance we get, and on every occasion and at every forum open to us. Election campaigns offer the biggest free forum of all under present conditions, and that's why we take part in them wherever our means and forces permit.

Cochran and Co. don't believe in that kind of activity. That's why they don't really believe in election campaigns. I would suggest that your debate with Frankel would be a good occasion, taking Bartell's quotation as a point of departure, for you to open fire on Cochran's trade union report as you had planned to do at the Convention; to state the circumstances under which the Convention discussion was cut off, and to flatly challenge the assertion that Cochran's report was "unanimously adopted" and represents the policy of the party. This, it seems to me, gives you a real opportunity to broaden and advance the discussion and force some new debaters to come into the arena.

6. What about those "new" organizational conceptions which have been brought forward in the course of the New York dispute? The challenge to the constitutional authority of the local executive committee; the disparagement of the authority of the PC and its right to decide local organizational disputes, or any other local disputes for that matter; the proposal for a "referendum" to decide questions which are in the province of the constitutional bodies? I understand those questions have already been discussed but it might be a good idea for you to formalize the indictment in your debate; and to point out that throughout its entire history, since 1903, Menshevism has never yet failed to show its long ears on the organization question at the very start of every conflict.

* * *

The gist of these suggestions is to express agreement with your proposal to "advance the discussion," but to propose at the same time that you don't shift your base of operations from the New York Local situation, where it first broke out into the open and where there is still so much gold yet to be mined.

JPC:jm

Jim

13. THE BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE "THESES ON
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION"

(Letter to Dan Roberts)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 13, 1953

Seattle

Dear Dan:

I have delayed answering your letter of Dec. 14 mainly because of my preoccupation with the lecture series. This is now nearly done, thank God; there's nothing left but to edit the tape of the last lecture. If I had fully realized what I was getting into when I light-heartedly agreed to undertake this series, I probably would have shied away from the project. It has been years and years since any party local got this much concentrated work out of me in such a short period of time. But I guess I got infected with the Los Angeles spirit and did more than I was able to.

I have been disturbed by one sentence in your letter where you say: "I don't fully agree with you when you say that the Third World Congress resolutions only fill out the American Theses." I have re-read my letters to Vincent and Farrell several times in an attempt to find out what gave you that impression. It does not represent my thought. All I can find is my following statement in the letter of Oct. 14 to Farrell:

"If my impression is correct, there is a third opinion to the effect that the Resolution of the Third World Congress sort of supercedes and telescopes the 1946 Theses and renders them, as an independent document, rather null and void. That's not so at all. The Theses stand by themselves; they are an essential part of any completely rounded world orientation, and are strengthened and reinforced by the world developments analyzed so well by the Third Congress Resolution. I will undertake to write about this point separately."

I think the 1946 Theses and the resolutions of the Third World Congress fit together in a completely rounded world orientation. But still they are two separate documents. The latter deal with world developments of the post-war years, which were hardly discernible in 1946, and could hardly have been written with such assurance at that time.

In 1946 the Stalinists were still deep in their post-war collaboration with the imperialists, participating in bourgeois cabinets, demanding "more production" from the workers and condemning strikes in France and Italy, and seeking a compromise with Chiang Kai-shek in China.

The immediate prospects of revolutionary developments on the world arena didn't look very bright at that time. The morale of the American movement couldn't very well be sustained under such conditions by "cheering for revolutions in other lands," as you aptly express it. These revolutions were not much in evidence in 1946. On the contrary it appeared that the international revolutionary developments had once again been retarded and pushed back by Stalinist betrayal.

It was one of the great merits of our 1946 Convention that it did not bow before the conjunctural situation and accept it as permanent. Precisely at that time, when international perspectives were none too promising, the "Theses on the American Revolution" confidently outlined the revolutionary perspectives in this country. By adopting these Theses, the American Trotskyists showed that they don't expect the workers in other countries to do all the fighting while they cheer from the sidelines.

The theory of "revolution in all other countries but our own," which is currently fashionable in a section of our party, is nothing but an expanded version of the Stalinist theory of "socialism in one country." It is a theory for analysts, observers and commentators on other revolutions in other lands. It is a theory for a sterile propaganda circle of pretentious wise-acres, but not for a fighting party of active revolutionists. The Marxist who has no perspective of revolution in his own country is no Marxist at all.

In my New York speech on May Day, 1945, when international developments seemed most unpromising, I adumbrated the American Theses as follows: "Whatever happens abroad in the immediate future, whatever defeats and setbacks the revolutionary workers may encounter in their struggle against such tremendous difficulties, we intend to fight it out in the United States. This struggle, the issue of our whole epoch, the issue of fascism or communism, will never be settled in the world until it is settled here in America. And here it depends on the party."

For some reason this speech was not published. But I remembered it quite well and the design behind it, and found the stenogram in my files. The above quotation is from the stenogram.

This question of the perspectives of the American revolution has been at the bottom of our struggle against all other parties, tendencies and factions ever since the foundation of our party in 1928 -- and even before that, in the factional struggles in the Communist Party. All the original leaders of the early Communist Party, who later split into three permanent factions within the party, began as American revolutionists with a perspective of revolution in this country. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been in the movement in the first place, and wouldn't have split with the reformist socialists to organize the Communist Party.

But during the long American boom of the Twenties, which coincided with defeats and a recession of the post-war revolutionary wave and the restabilization of European capitalism, the Lovestone and Foster factions in the Communist Party lost faith in the revolutionary perspectives in this country, just as the Stalinist faction in the Soviet Union lost faith in the international revolution in general. It was precisely this capitulation before temporary, conjunctural phenomena that prepared both the Lovestone and Foster factions in the CP for Stalinism, with its theory of "Socialism in (only) One Country," and for their acceptance of the role of "border guards of the Soviet Union."

At the same time, it was our refusal to bow before the temporary appearance of things, our refusal to renounce the revolutionary perspective in this country, as well as internationally, that brought us

to Trotsky, to the fight against Stalinism, and to the split with the Lovestone-Foster majority of the CP. Those who may superficially think that we started such an unequal and difficult struggle, and have sustained it for 25 years, merely for the sake of "factionalism," would do well to inquire what that fight was really about and go to the record for an answer.

The first and most important document in this record is Trotsky's "Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern" which was published in this country under the title, "The Third International After Lenin." This document was published serially in the paper and openly proclaimed from the beginning as the programmatic basis of our fight. It shows that the real axis of the struggle, which began in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and then became international, was precisely the question of the perspectives of the revolution on the international field, including America. All the other questions in dispute were wrapped up in this over-all question.

The second document which I would recommend to the study of those who want to know something about the motivating origins of our party, is Trotsky's first letter to us after his arrival in Constantinople. That appears in the June 1, 1929 issue of the paper. This quotation in particular, referring to the revolutionary perspectives in this country, should be noted:

"The work to be achieved by the American Opposition has international-historic significance, for in the last historic analysis all the problems of our planet will be decided upon American soil. There is much in favor of the idea that from the standpoint of revolutionary order, Europe and the East stand ahead of the United States. But a course of events is possible in which this order might be broken in favor of the proletariat of the United States. Moreover, even if you assume that America which now shakes the whole world will be shaken last of all, the danger remains that a revolutionary situation in the United States may catch the vanguard of the American proletariat unprepared, as was the case in Germany in 1923, in England in 1926, and in China in 1925 to 1927. We must not for a minute lose sight of the fact that the might of American capitalism rests more and more upon a foundation of world economy with its contradictions and crises, military and revolutionary. This means that a social crisis in the United States may arrive a good deal sooner than many think, and have a feverish development from the beginning. Hence the conclusion: It is necessary to prepare."

A third document which shows what Trotsky thought of the prospects of capitalism and socialism in the United States is his introduction to "The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx," published in 1939.

A story is going around in the party, assiduously circulated by the Cochranite leadership, that the 1946 Theses on the American Revolution, was cooked up for the occasion to "hop up the party" with false optimism. This is the real program of the Cochranites, although they have not yet committed it to writing as far as I know. This is what the fight is really about, as I have pointed out in previous letters. Now comes the March 2 letter of Ted G. quoting Al Adler, who gets everything straight from Cochran, as follows: "The Theses on the American Revolution and the 1946 Convention disoriented the party."

If that is the case, the party has been "disoriented" from the very beginning. The files of my lecture notes show that on Dec. 30, 1930, I spoke at the public forum of the New York Local on "Revolutionary Perspectives in America" (I had given the same speech a couple of weeks earlier at the forum of the IWW). In 1933 I made a tour as far west as Kansas City and Minneapolis, speaking on two subjects: (1) "The Tragedy of the German Proletariat" and (2) "America's Road to Revolution." (Reported in the paper May 20 and June 7, 1933.) In 1935 I spoke on the same subject in Los Angeles under the general title of "America's Road to Socialism."

When I sat down to draft the 1946 "Theses on the American Revolution" I took the main outline from my notes of those previous lectures and simply brought them up to date. There was nothing new to add except some new developments and new facts. The basic line, the basic perspective, was the same line and perspective we began with 25 years ago.

The idea that the 1946 Theses were suddenly proposed under the influence of the strike movement of the post-war period, is at best a comical misunderstanding. My motive in presenting the Theses at that time was directly opposite. When I first began to discuss the project with Murry Weiss and others in Los Angeles in the summer of 1946, I gave as my reason for the timing, the economic boom which was already six years old at that time, and my fears that this prolonged prosperity might get into the bones of some of our comrades; that they might take it as a permanent state of affairs and lose their revolutionary perspective. I remembered all too painfully what the long boom of the Twenties had done to the pioneer cadres of American communism.

I thought it would be timely to pull the party up short with a sharp reminder of what the future really holds in this country for the labor movement and for our party. Furthermore, in my report to the Convention on the Theses, I emphasized that we were saying nothing really new but were simply codifying and formalizing the basic conceptions which had animated our party since its inception in 1928 and had sustained it ever since.

This matter of pessimism about our revolutionary perspectives -- that is to say, over the right of the SWP to exist and prepare for its great future -- is not arising for the first time. Take my book, "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party," and read my letter to Trotsky about Burnham and the pessimism of the intellectuals under date of Dec. 16, 1937. Take the bound volume of the twice-weekly Socialist Appeal for 1939 and read the four pre-convention discussion articles I wrote under the dates of June 13, 16, 20 and 23, where I asserted the revolutionary perspectives in America and the right of our party to lead the revolution.

That was at a time when a section of the party was sick from the influence of another conjunctural phenomenon -- the terrifying spread of fascism throughout Europe -- and my articles were written to combat the pessimism it engendered. Trotsky warmly commended my articles at that time and said: "The advances of fascism are an important fact but the death agony of capitalism is a still more important fact, and that is what we have to base ourselves on."

Now the Cochranites seem to think that the documents of the Third World Congress which analyze the new revolutionary advances in all parts of the world outside of America, have superseded our 1946 Theses and made them obsolete, even if they are willing to grant that they had any validity in the first place -- which is doubtful.

Examine Bartell's unfortunate "Report" in Internal Bulletin No. 1 and his still more unfortunate replies to the discussion in Bulletins No. 2 and No. 3. Here is a man in charge of the work, and presumably of the education of the membership, of the biggest and most important local of the party, who tells the New York members that the Third World Congress has "armed us with a consistent world outlook and a clear answer to all the big questions of our time," and does not say one word about the programmatic document known as the "Theses on the American Revolution" which was supposed to inspire our work in the class struggle in this country, and which in fact has done so ever since the beginning of our movement, even before the Theses were formalized in a single document.

Is this "omission" of Bartell an accident due to a fit of absent-mindedness on his part? Not at all. Bartell is one of those who think the Theses of the Third World Congress, analyzing revolutionary events and perspectives in other countries, are a substitute for the Theses analyzing revolutionary perspectives in the United States where we, whether we like it or not, have to do our work. Proceeding from this separation of things which ought to be united, he manages to combine in one head exuberant optimism about revolutionary perspectives in the rest of the world -- which is fully justified by the present reality -- with an attitude of pessimism and prostration in regard to the labor movement in this country, which has no foundation in reality.

The conclusion that a radical improvement in the revolutionary prospects in the rest of the world can coincide with worsening prospects in the United States is true only in a very narrow, restricted and limited sense. It is true only as it affects the immediate activities of the revolutionary vanguard and puts extraordinary difficulties in their way; they are, in a sense, treated as hostages of the world revolution, as Stein expressed it, and made to pay for its advances. But even that is only a temporary affair, and it is disgraceful for revolutionists to let their political thinking about the great determining objective factors in the situation be affected by momentary personal difficulties.

The over-all effect of the revolutionary advances in the rest of the world can not but be a great stimulus to the mass radicalization of the American workers and therewith, in due time, an improvement in the position of the revolutionary party. In reality the events analyzed in the Third Congress documents powerfully reinforce the American Theses, and give them more actuality. The world trend toward revolution is now irreversible, and America will not escape its pull.

This is the time, not to put the American Theses on the shelf, but to take them down and read them, to recognize their unity with the documents of the Third Congress, and to make the general line as a whole, the axis of all our party work and education. My Los Angeles lectures on "America's Road to Socialism" -- soon to be published in pamphlet form -- have been conceived precisely in this spirit. I hope the example will be followed by others -- by the whole party.

To clear the way for this, we have to settle accounts with the new revisionists who want to substitute the Third Congress Resolutions for the "Theses on the American Revolution" and reinstate these Theses as the programmatic guide of the party's activity.

Fraternally,

James P. Cannon

JPC:jm

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14. ON THE COCHRANITE "SPLIT" PROPAGANDA

(Letter to Joe Hansen)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 13, 1953

New York

Dear Joe:

Taking up at the point where I so rudely interrupted myself, to write a long letter-article to Dan Roberts, I will try to finish acknowledgment of the rest of your letters.

I am overjoyed to hear about the way various comrades are coming forward in the New York discussion. I was really quite pessimistic about New York. Bartell and his circle have wrought a great work of corruption, of defiling and desecrating the great political and ideological heritage of this, the founding local of the party, which has cost so much blood and sweat over a period of nearly 25 years. It is most gratifying to learn that not all our efforts have been wasted, and that we will have real support in the necessary job of political and ideological renovation which must now be carried through to a successful conclusion.

* * *

I am inclined to think it is best to give the Cochranites a little more rope on the "split" question and try to induce them into putting something down in writing. If they do, I may answer them in the form of a historical review of the question of unifications and splits, and point out what historical experience has revealed as the tell-tale warning signs. Experience shows that there is the danger of a split in every faction fight regardless of the original intentions of either side; and the danger is multiplied at least ten times when one of the factions is an unprincipled combination, which is an act of disloyalty to the party to start with.

A conscious leadership has to take a matter of fact attitude toward such potential results of a factional struggle and have a deliberate policy to minimize them if they cannot be prevented. The surest way to end up with a demoralizing split is to begin by coddling and conciliating a revisionist faction, glossing over the fundamental issues at stake and making unity, rather than clarification of political line, the primary concern. That has been the French method. The result has always been the worst and most demoralizing of splits.

Another method is to see the issues clearly, to put them squarely and to educate the decisive cadres of the party accordingly, without disguising or minimizing the seriousness of the issues at stake. That's the way to prepare the party for any eventuality, to take any eventuality in stride. That method is not guaranteed to prevent splits -- neither Marx and Engels, nor Lenin, nor Trotsky could do that -- but it can narrow them down and prevent them from demoralizing the party. And sometimes it can prevent them.

Up to now that has been the American way. And nobody can convince me, after all the experience of the Trotskyist movement throughout the world in the past 25 years, that it isn't the best way. "By their fruits ye shall know them." That applies not only to trees but also to methods.

* * *

I took out a couple of hours for a second attentive reading of your Bulletin article. It is really a first class job, Joe, and I am most pleased to see the whole question of Stalinism put so fully and unambiguously. I hope all the other documents will have the same forthright tone and uncompromising clarity of line. We have a wonderful opportunity to reeducate the party in this discussion and must not sleep on it. This, in my opinion, far outweighs the negative aspects of the factional struggle, serious as they undoubtedly will be.

Reading your article in the Bulletin reminded me that I have practically stopped talking about Stalinism in my political letters, after fighting about it for six months in the PC. I suppose that is because I recognized that the entrance of Cochran into the situation, with his pessimism and his unprincipledness, introduced a new element which represented the greatest danger and requires the most concentrated and direct attention. I regard your writing and mine, however, not as contradictory, but rather as a division of labor. And I am very glad that you have taken care of your side of it so well.

My original plan was to write out the main parts of a projected thesis for the present party discussion first in the form of letters to comrades; and then to take the material from the various letters and rearrange it formally in a single document. But in the last few days I have been playing with the idea of just publishing the political letters as written.

I would like to know how this strikes the people in New York. If the letters were published in chronological order, the first two letters to Vincent and Farrell, referring to the discussion with Farrell here in L.A. last October, would show quite clearly that we preferred a discussion without an organizational struggle. These letters are rather convincing evidence that we were not "planning a split." There is a great difference between warning about the danger of a split implicit in every serious factional fight, as I did for example in my letter to Renard, and accusing the other side of intending and planning a split. Did anybody anywhere ever organize a split without accusing the other side of such designs?

As you will recall, that accusation was one of the top items in the Burnham-Shachtman catalogue. You know that we didn't need a split at that time, any more than we need a split now, and the Old Man was

in favor of preventing it if possible. But when Burnham and Shachtman began to accuse us of split intentions, my answer by conditioned reflex was to warn our people throughout the country to get ready for eventualities. You will find my letters dealing explicitly with this subject in "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party."

We couldn't prevent Burnham from pushing through the split and dragging Shachtman along, although we tried our best. But we did prevent any demoralization of the party from the split. The same was true with the other splits too. The past experience is worth recalling when anybody begins to mutter about another split.

Fraternally,

J. P. Cannon

JPC:jm

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15. UNFOUNDED PESSIMISM ABOUT THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 13, 1953

New York

Dear Farrell:

. . . The memo about Clarke's opinions of the American working class, to the effect that it has been "hopelessly corrupted," is another alarming symptom of how deeply Cochranism has permeated the moods which pass for thinking in the ranks of this opposition combination. In this, as in many other things they say, there is a grain of truth, but it is not the whole truth, or even half of it. They leave out all counteracting factors and magnify everything out of all proportion to reality. This is a sure road to political derailment.

At the 1950 Convention I stated that not only the bureaucracy and aristocracy of labor, but the working class as such had been corrupted to a certain extent by the prosperity afforded by American imperialism. The 1952 Convention Resolution says the same thing in the section about the causes of labor conservatism, which is another name for corruption. To go farther back, Engels spoke about the same thing in England in the hey-day of the British empire, even going so far as to say that there was "no socialism in England" because the British workers had become "bourgeoisified." Lenin explained the corruption of opportunism in the Second International by the same reasons.

But neither Engels nor Lenin ever thought that the effects could remain after the cause was removed. Engels, if I remember correctly, said there would be "socialism again" in England when Britain's domination of the world market was undermined.

To get back to America -- we had to recognize that the prosperity of the long boom in the Twenties conservatized and corrupted not only

the American working class but the cadres of the Communist Party itself, and prepared them for the ready acceptance of Stalinism with its theory of socialism in one country only. The present conservatism of the workers is by no means as serious and deep as it was in the boom of the Twenties. Then it was combined with faith in the permanence of the prosperity. Today there is no such faith.

Experience has already shown that the conservatism of the American workers, induced by a high standard of living, can be rapidly turned into its opposite when these cherished standards are infringed upon. The American worker's high regard for his living standards can and will become a revolutionary factor of the highest importance when the attempt is made to cut them down.

It was pointed out during the depression of the Thirties, and not without some truth, that the American workers on relief and WPA were living better than most of the employed workers in other parts of the world. But that wasn't good enough for the American workers; they were used to higher standards and wanted them back. How otherwise explain the great upsurge which culminated in the semi-revolution of the sit-down strikes and the founding of the CIO?

Looked at from this point of view we are completely realistic when we foresee the possibility of a rapid and sweeping radicalization. A pessimistic view in this regard can only be based on the assumption of permanent prosperity, with full employment and all the rest; and you can hardly find a bourgeois economist or enlightened businessman who promises that. We have even less reason to believe it and base a policy on it. This subject is worth an article.

* * *

I received a copy of your letter of Feb. 27, addressed to Arne with the report on developments in New York. I am very glad to note that you are pegging all the Cochranite assaults on our organizational principles and traditions. They seem to be working overtime to round out their revisionism to cover all fields. We are looking forward to the promised Bulletin articles on this subject by Tom and Duncan. I think I indicated previously that we are in full accord with your decision to start the discussion in the Bulletin with separate articles on different subjects.

Have you decided yet what kind of a document you plan to draw up for the Plenum -- whether a single document touching all points or separate documents with separate points? There are advantages and disadvantages in either way, but some general decision should be made on this point. The main aim in my opinion should be to present things in such a definite and categorical way that the Plenum can take a position, establish a definite majority on a political basis and empower the PC to proceed on that line without any obstructions or challenges to its authority.

Within that framework we can then develop a real, thorough-going discussion in the party. I agree with Al Adler on one point, as quoted in Ted's letter, that we should have "a real long discussion," with only one proviso -- that there is an established majority in the National Committee and Political Committee with full authority to direct the party work while the discussion is going on and clear instructions as to what its line shall be.

I think it was incorrect to refer, in the PC arguments about the Plenum date, to an "interim" policy. We should take the position that the policy has been fully established by the tradition of the party, its programmatic documents and the Political Resolution of the last Convention; and that we propose to continue along that line. It is giving the opposition too much to let it be assumed that we have no policy and that they stand on equal footing with the majority. We are reaffirming an established policy and they are proposing a new one. I think that's the way it should be put at the Plenum.

J.P.Cannon

JPC:jm

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16. THE "MILIEU" OF SECOND-RATE STALINISTS

(Letter to Joe Hansen)

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 18, 1953

New York

Dear Joe:

I suppose you are quite busy preparing your debate so I will limit myself here to a couple of points:

1. Reba sent me a copy of the New York Bulletin No. 4 with Joyce's article. It is really a remarkable contribution to the discussion and we are delighted with it out here. We think it should be printed in the National Bulletin right away without fail. I am really beginning to revise my previous pessimistic opinion of the New York membership. It is becoming more and more evident with each contribution to the discussion that the educational work of the past has by no means been obliterated by the miseducation of more recent times.

Joyce certainly hits the nail on the head when she says on page 3: "To me it would seem a lot easier to talk to a worker who is against the war and doesn't have a program than a Stalinist who is against the war and has an incorrect program and has to be reeducated." The experience of all political groups I have been connected with confirms this principle in general.

This "milieu" of Stalinist fellow-travelers which is recommended to us as made up of people who are "better equipped" to understand our presumably esoteric, but in reality very simple program, are for the most part second-rate Stalinists. Huberman and Sweezy are types. They are full up to the gills with the Stalinist ideology, but have lacked the courage to join the party and take the responsibility for it. "The worker who is against the war and doesn't have a program" can be considered as a person who is willing to listen to a program without hard and fast pre-conceived prejudices -- and there are many such people, as we will find out if we really look for them. They haven't got as many obstacles to hurdle as the Stalinist whose mind is stuffed with dogmas and prejudices. Before the latter can learn he must first unlearn; and Aristotle, if I remember correctly, said that was harder than learning. The American Stalinists are not the

same thing as the European Stalinist workers, who in large numbers are not ideological Stalinists at all, but revolutionists who mistake the Stalinist party for a revolutionary party in the absence of any serious rival. That is what justifies and necessitates an orientation toward them, not toward Stalinism.

I have a wonderful quotation from Engels on Joyce's point in regard to the Lassalleans and the tactics he recommended to his friends in Germany in regard to them. Here it is, from Engels' letter to Bebel, June 20, 1873:

"But both the General Association of German Workers and the Social-Democratic Workers' party together still form only a very small minority of the German working class. Our view, which we have found confirmed by long practice, is that the correct tactics in propaganda is not to entice away a few individuals and memberships here and there from one's opponent, but to work on the great mass which still remains inactive. The raw force of a single individual whom one has reared oneself from the raw is worth more than ten Lassallean turn-coats, who always bring the seeds of their false tendencies into the Party with them."

In your debate you can quote Joyce and then Engels and say they are both right, and both speak with authority. I have been getting a new appreciation of both Marx and Engels as politicians in my search through their writings for references and insights about the socialist society. Those old boys were Leninists all right.

2. Reba said Usick noticed "a couple of loose spots" in lecture No. 5. It will be all right with me if you and he edit the manuscript in this respect but be sure not to put in enough technical language to slow down the flow of the document. The aim of the whole project is primarily to lead new young workers into the study of socialism, and I know very well that they will balk at technical obstacles. Next to a theoretical flaw in the manuscript I would regret most to have a young worker militant lay the pamphlet down with the remark: "This guy is too smart for me. I can't understand him."

Of course it is the devil's own difficulty to simplify some of the theoretical questions the manuscript deals with, and the attempt can easily lead to theoretical slips and misunderstandings. I would like to avoid these as much as possible, and from that standpoint I will welcome a rigorous editing before publication -- with the above noted limitation.

James P. Cannon

JPC:jm

17. LENINIST ORGANIZATION PRINCIPLES

(Letter to Duncan Conway)

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 3, 1953

New York

Dear Duncan:

Your article in the Internal Bulletin had sort of a double effect on me; I was delighted and at the same time somewhat deflated. I had really thought, in my conceit, that I was the only one who fully and completely understood the Leninist theory and practice of organization in and out, as well as its derivative character as a functional instrument in the service of a specific perspective and program.

Democratic-centralism has no special virtue per se. It is the specific principle of a combat party, united by a single program, which aims to lead a revolution. Social Democrats have no need of such a system of organization for the simple reason that they have no intention of organizing a revolution. Their democracy and centralism are not united by a hyphen but kept in separate compartments for separate purposes. The democracy is for the social patriots and the centralism is for the revolutionists. The attempt of the Zam-Tyler "Clarityite" faction in the Socialist Party to introduce a rigid "democratic-centralist" system of organization in the heterogeneous Socialist Party (1936-37) was a howling caricature; more properly, an abortion. The only thing those people needed centralization and discipline for was to suppress the rights of the left wing and then to expel it. Thereafter they forgot all about "democratic-centralism," having no further need of it.

A propaganda circle which has no intention of taking part in any actions -- and that is the central, governing feature of such a formation, as distinct from a party, or what amounts to the same thing, a propaganda group which aims to become a party -- has even less use for the Leninist system of democratic-centralism. Such a group may begin, or think it begins, with a single program. But it is bound by its very nature to become hospitable to different and even contradictory programs. Nothing is going to be done about it in the realm of action anyway, so why get excited? If you want a first class example of this, take a look at the Shachtmanite organization if you can find it in New York, which is more than we can do out here in L.A.

The Leninist principle of organization is designed exclusively for a combat party, and is strictly derivative from a single program and perspective of revolution, which first must be foreseen and then consciously prepared for. Those who regard the "Theses on the American Revolution" as unfounded ballyhoo designed to pump up false optimism; who consider the American working class more or less hopeless; who have no real faith in our future as an independent party, and are waiting for someone else to build a party which we can join; -- are in effect, whether they realize it or not, rejecting the premises for a combat party which regulates its internal life by democratic-centralism. Seen from this point of view, the gross violations of Leninist organizational principles cited in your article have a certain logic of their own, even if the authors of these violations have not yet formulated and announced the motivating theory behind them.

I think I could write an essay on Leninist organization for the internal discussion in the form of a commentary on your article which deals so systematically and methodologically with this not unimportant question.

Fraternally,

J. P. Cannon

JPC:jm

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18. THE "SIX POINTS" OF COCHRANISM

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 4, 1953

New York

Dear Farrell:

I received your letter of April 1 with the enclosure of the 6-point program of the opposition [concluding "The Roots of the Party Crisis" -- Internal Bulletin No. 8.] I will study it carefully and discuss it with other comrades here. I suppose we will have to have the full document at hand to get a clear picture. My first impression of the summarized points is about as follows:

1. They reject the perspective of the development of an independent party, but don't want to say so in so many words. They are fishing for support on both sides of this question.

2. They want to make the Third World Congress the axis of the discussion in order to avoid concretization of problems and perspectives in this country.

3. They want to rehabilitate the Stalinists as having been "thrust into the same class camp with us," without saying anything about the new post-election policy of the Stalinists which calls for entry into the Democratic Party. (Which camp is that?) This policy has its first implementation in the present Los Angeles municipal election -- the election campaign which, it seems, was fated to bring many political issues to a head. The CP here has just issued a statement declaring that "socialism is not the issue" and calling for the support of those candidates who are "endorsed by the labor movement." This turns out to be Mayor Bowron, who just by an unfortunate coincidence, received an endorsement on the same day from the Board Chairman of the Southern California Edison Co. which is currently waging a vicious strike-breaking fight against the union, refusing even to negotiate unless the strike is called off.

The Cochranites can call that policy "in the same class camp with us," but Murry Weiss, in his first campaign speech tonight, is going to say the election policy of the Stalinists today, just like their strikebreaking policy during the war, is that of traitors to the working class.

4. Point 4 puts the "propaganda group" orientation as forthrightly as they can put anything, without being specific enough to alienate support from those who have doubts on the question. Real cute are the qualifications tacked on to the end of their Point 4. As a sort of after-thought, they allow us to continue agitation about the Korean War and our defense activities, and even permit election campaigns "on a rational basis and where genuine gains can be expected."

This is tongue-in-cheek ridicule of the party. They voted against our mayoralty election campaign in Los Angeles, where we have a tradition of such campaigns since 1945; where we have a strong local with a lot of experience in election campaigns and a good many election-minded activists to do the work; where we have an experienced, skilled and rather widely-known candidate who has ready access to popular radio and TV programs, and to all kinds of unions and other organizations; where our candidate for Mayor is the only working class anti-war candidate; the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party all abstaining; and where all hands agreed the local has had the most successful campaign ever, which is already yielding numerous contacts and some recruits.

We have to say flatly that when the Cochranites disapprove an election campaign under such favorable circumstances they are against election campaigns in general. Even the qualified and hypocritical concession permitting election campaigns "on a rational basis" is taken away by the last sentence of their point 4 which assigns to the so-called propagandist activity "the main orientation and order of priority."

As you say, we have to meet this head-on, as that is probably the central issue. In doing so, however, we must be careful to state our own view correctly and not allow ourselves to be pushed by the factional situation into a one-sided and indefensible position. As long as we are not in a position to lead mass actions much of our work necessarily has a propagandist character. But we insist on combining it with agitation around the burning issues of the day such as the Korean War, and so on. And instead of putting such agitation at the bottom of the "order of priority," we put it at the top. And even our propaganda "directed toward advanced and thinking workers and students, etc." takes as its point of departure our fighting position on the Korean War and the other burning issues of the day. In other words, we are a fighting party, not a wretched circle of commentators.

We find here in L.A., where a modest amount of recruiting goes on steadily all the time, that very few if any of the new recruits consist of this remarkable selected breed known as "advanced elements" who are supposedly "best equipped to understand our world program." On the contrary they are contacts flushed out and attracted by our activity in the election campaigns, by our agitational fight on the issue of the Korean War, and in general by our rounded program of activities suitable to an organization which calls itself a party.

This week, for example, the local here took in a new member who first heard of us through one of your broadcasts. Another was first contacted on the picket line of a strike in which some of our members were active. Others were first attracted by my lectures on Socialism. The point is, nobody gave us a list of specially qualified hot-shots to canvas. The contacts and recruits were attracted by our activities.

We never heard of them before. They heard about us, because we were out in the open trying to attract attention by all kinds of activities.

That, I have no doubt, is the experience of active branches everywhere. The trouble with "propaganda groups" which retire to the cloister; take no part in public activity; never get their names in the paper in connection with action of one kind or another; shrink from the microphone and TV cameras in election campaigns -- the trouble with them is that they soon run out of contacts because nobody seems to know their address.

5. Point 5 of their 6-point program is the "sleeper" that ought to be studied under a microscope. After condemning the whole line and tradition of the party, and condemning the leadership and offering themselves as a substitute -- they suddenly stop short and remark that the differences are still in the "embryonic stage." This looks to me like preliminary preparation for a soft-talking peace proposal at the Plenum. This would be designed to stop the open struggle and discussion and give them another year to work underground -- on the condition, of course, that "both sides" have equal rights in the leadership and "in the writing of articles on disputed questions."

They may catch a few suckers with this bait, but our answer should be absolutely clear and unambiguous: We don't consider the disputes "embryonic" but deadly serious, and some of them even fundamental, which have to be discussed to the end throughout the party and then decided by the democratic action of the membership. As far as "consultation" between "both sides" is concerned, the Cochranites are represented on the political committee and have free speech there, as well as in the Internal Bulletin. But we are not interested in any compromises in the writing of "articles on disputed questions." We are interested in putting forward the line of the majority and rejecting the line of the minority.

6. I see, by Point 6, that the Cochranites are red hot for party unity. I never knew or heard of an unprincipled combination that didn't holler the same thing at the top of their voices while cynically proceeding to undermine and disrupt the unity of the party. We had a first class illustration of that in 1939-40. We can hope that the present experience will be an exception to the general rule. Meantime we'll watch and see, and promise anybody who is interested that we won't be caught napping. Their final statement that the "decision" on unity, etc. "rests with the majority" is almost 90 years old in the Marxist movement. Up till now it has always been translated to mean: "If we make a split it's the fault of the other side."

* * *

I am writing a long comment on your letter of March 28 in regard to the Plenum resolution. I hope to get it to you in the same mail with this. If not, the gist of it is full agreement with your outline. We propose that you draft the resolution in New York. I am suggesting the addition of another point indicting and rejecting the organization policy of the Cochranites. We are also proposing that you consider having separate resolutions and reports on (1) the specific nature of American Stalinism and our attitude toward it, and (2) organizational policy.

Both these questions are now quite important, and we are inclined to think that we will get better educational results in the party if the Plenum gives a lead through separate resolutions for separate discussions in the branches and in the Bulletin on these two points.

However that may be, the main thing is to go ahead now first with the draft of the general resolution. I am inclined to think that the positions of the Plenum members are pretty well fixed already. We ought to form a clear idea in our minds of what we expect from the Plenum. As I see it, the aim should be approximately as follows: (1) to fix the policy and determine the authority of the leadership by a majority vote; (2) to prohibit any infringements on the central authority of the majority leadership in any respect whatever; (3) to set the stage for the most thorough-going educational discussion the party has had since the settlement of accounts with the petty bourgeois opposition.

Fraternally,

J. P. Cannon

JPC:jm

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19. STALINIST CONCILIATIONISM AND STALINOPHOBIA

(Letter to Farrell Dobbs)

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 6, 1953

New York

Dear Farrell:

This is in answer to your letter of March 28. We fully agree with your outline for the Plenum Resolution. It should, however, contain one more point, so as to cover everything involved in the fight under one general resolution. The extra point should be an indictment and rejection of the organizational theory and practice of the opposition -- local autonomy, "dual power" in the party leadership, etc. . . .

We think it best for the resolution to be drafted in New York. If copies are sent in advance to members in the field we can all have a chance to offer some suggestions. In the meantime, you are of course free to take anything you may find useful in my letters for the resolutions and reports. As to the line and structure of the document, as outlined in your letter, it seems to us there can be no serious disagreement.

It would be a good idea for you to send copies of your March 28 letter to other NC comrades and contacts in the field, if you have not already done so. This can serve to give them a more systematic orientation in the local internal discussions which are now opening up everywhere.

* * *

We have another proposal which we discussed with Warde when he was here; that is, that the majority presentation to the Plenum be made in two, or maybe three, resolutions -- one general resolution outlining our whole program as projected in your letter of March 28, and two others elaborating separate issues.

The second resolution should deal with "The Specific Nature of American Stalinism and our Attitude Toward It." That would probably be a good title for the resolution, as indicating its contents. This is needed in view of new developments.

As the discussion has developed, it has become clear already that we are no longer dealing with the mere tactical question of an approach to the Stalinist milieu and the amount of emphasis to be placed on it in relation to our real field of activity in the non-Stalinist labor movement. Assuming a common analysis of the nature of American Stalinism and a common attitude toward it, such a difference and discussion could be narrowed down to an analysis of the real facts of the situation and an estimate of what we might gain by a struggle against the Stalinists within their own milieu. Such an approach to the realities of the situation, plus perhaps a little experimental practice, would soon convince the party of the unrealism of any proposal to direct our main efforts in this direction, and dispose of the controversy.

But the discussion in Local New York already showed at the very start a deep-going difference in our analysis of present-day Stalinism in general, and of its specific American expression in particular, as well as no less serious differences about our attitude toward it. The discussion in the Chicago Branch, and even more glaringly the discussion in the Seattle Branch, has revealed these irreconcilable differences in even sharper form. The simple truth, which we must now recognize and deal with, is that we have nothing less than a pronounced tendency toward Stalinist conciliationism in the party. The real problem in respect to Stalinism now is not a directed infiltration of some of our people into the Stalinist milieu, which might yield some small results, but the infiltration of Stalinist ideology into our party, which could corrupt it and destroy it. This is a question of principle which must be fought out to the end.

It would be a mistake on our part to let this now clearly revealed difference be smothered in a general discussion at the Plenum over a single resolution. Of course there is bound to be a little overlapping, but we should try to reduce it to the minimum. The general resolution as outlined by you, provides so much material for the main discussion of American perspectives within the framework of world perspectives; and therewith the discussion of the American Theses and its essential place in a fully rounded world program; party or propaganda group; and all the related questions -- that the special question of American Stalinism might get lost in the shuffle.

For educational purposes it would be far better to segregate this discussion, both at the Plenum and in the post-Plenum discussion in the party, to the extent that this is possible. A separate resolution would facilitate such a segregation. We have to take the New York and Seattle manifestations apart and show the Plenum and the party what they mean. Of course, this would extend the plenum discussion; but that would be in our favor, and another day or two should be added to the schedule.

The correct contention of the Third Congress that world Stalinism has lost its monolithic character under the stresses and pressures of war and post-war events, and that each national section must be examined separately in this light, applies with double force to the American agency of this criminal band. American Stalinism is worse than French and Italian Stalinism; it has all of their vices without their virtues as a political movement based on mass support of the workers.

I completely agree, as I said at the PC meeting more than two years ago (minutes of Feb. 24, 1951) that precisely this mass workers base of French and Italian Stalinism deprives the leadership of a completely free hand, renders its policy subject to pressures of the masses, and in the event of war and social crisis, can even impose a revolutionary orientation on the parties. All this opens up fruitful possibilities for Trotskyist work in the mass movement dominated by the Stalinists, and to a certain extent even in the Stalinist parties themselves. In view of this we have to condemn the Bleibtreu policy in France as sectarian abstentionism from the living mass movement; if it isn't, at bottom, something worse.

The position of the American Stalinists in relation to the living mass movement of the workers is so evidently different from that in France and Italy that nobody has disputed the point. If I were to dwell, in passing, on the isolation of the Stalinists from the American labor movement it would only be to remark that this isolation is more complete, and more deadly for the prospects of American Stalinism than even we have fully recognized up to now.

The Cochranite contention that this isolation is solely due to the blows of reaction is false; although there is no doubt that the heaviest blows of the post-war period have come from this direction. But Stalinism in this country is pretty thoroughly isolated and discredited among progressive and militant workers too, and we had a big hand in that.

Our merciless exposure and denunciation of their strike-breaking treachery during World War II -- on top of all our previous exposures and denunciations of this criminal gang -- had a lot to do with the beginning of their precipitous decline.

It should not be forgotten that we were in a bloc against the Stalinists at the 1946 Convention of the UAW, and that the votes influenced by us were decisive in turning the scale. The dynamic force behind the Reuther candidacy at that convention was the movement we set in motion during the war against the no-strike pledge, of which the Stalinists were the most aggressive and most vicious proponents. This movement was carried over into the Convention almost completely intact on the issue of supporting the General Motors strike which the Stalinist UE had betrayed by a separate settlement.

At that time we considered the General Motors strike issue, which Reuther had appropriated by actually leading the strike, as the more progressive cause in the 1946 Convention; and in retrospect I think there is no doubt that we were correct. The Stalinists left that convention discredited among the more progressive and more militant pro-GM-strike elements, and that was the real beginning of their decline and fall in the auto union. The reactionary crusade against

them came only later, and was mainly a mopping-up operation against a discredited gang of traitors who had no progressive or militant allies in the ranks of the union. That's why the Murray-Reuther operation against them was so easy and so successful.

The indisputable difference between the position of the American Stalinists and that of the French and Italian sections, in relation to the mass movement, imposes entirely different arguments and reasons on the proponents of an orientation toward the Stalinist movement in this country. In France and Italy the Third Congress took the Stalinist mass base as its point of departure, and argued that our comrades must get into this milieu under penalty of isolation from the living labor movement. It proposed no reconciliation whatever with Stalinism, as the French majority alleged, but only a tactical adaptation to the movement dominated by the Stalinists in order to facilitate integration. We considered and consider this argument of the Third Congress as fully correct in the circumstances.

But when we come to the United States we enter a new territory where the circumstances are obviously different and where the motivation for the tactic of the Third Congress in relation to the Stalinists, i.e., their domination of the mass movement, does not apply. A concentration on the Stalinist movement in this country has to be motivated on different grounds.

Deprived by the known facts of the European motivation for an orientation toward the Stalinists, as a turn to the mass movement, but still hell-bent on such an orientation anyway, the opposition had to fabricate a political motivation. The isolated American Stalinists had to be endowed with virtues they do not possess. And this is where the trouble began. The opposition leaders have been careful to hedge and qualify their counterfeited descriptions of a renovated and purified American Stalinism, but some rank and file members have taken them without diplomatic reservations. Thereby the corruption of Stalinist conciliationism has seeped into our party ranks, to our shame, on the eve of the 25th Anniversary of our historic fight. It must be cleaned out in the name of party sanitation! And, in my opinion, a special resolution and report on the question at the Plenum -- setting the line for a thorough-going discussion in the party -- is the best way to begin.

* * *

The speed with which the differences are developing in the faction fight are really breath-taking. In such circumstances the experiences of the past tell us that powerful pressures are operating here, bull-doing logic and reason out of the way. The Cochranites are obviously dominated not by thoughts but by moods, and it would be utopian to think that we can talk them out of these moods and the fantastic proposals they inspire. No, we have to fight this opposition, and try to prevent a spread of the infection by addressing our arguments and explanations to the party ranks. But just because the Cochranite opposition, in the first stages of its eruption, is governed by moods rather than by a thought-out program, I would like to offer a word of caution against a hasty political characterization of the opposition leaders on the basis of the deviations they are presently stimulating so recklessly in the ranks, in particular the deviation of Stalinist conciliation.

With the possible exception of Cochran himself, the Cochranites, in my opinion, do not yet have a deliberate political orientation. They are in an uncontrollable mood of opposition and revolt against the party and its whole tradition. It is this mood which unites the combination, not its political program. They do not agree among themselves on the little matter of program, and in fact, do not know what it will eventually be.

Theory and experience tell us that reckless moods and factional frenzy do not fall from the sky; they are invariably products of pressures which the victims do not want to understand; pressures which drive them to irrational conduct because they don't know what they want, or don't want to know. It is the pressure which, in the end, determines the direction, and not any collected thought about a deliberate course. The first reflexive jumps they take in one direction do not always indicate the direction of their ultimate course.

If you want a striking example of this, it is provided by the course of the right wing of the French section in the post-war period. They began with an hysterical rebellion against orthodoxy, "the repetition of old jargon;" the demand for "fresh ideas," experiments; the search for gimmicks and get-rich-quick schemes of one kind or another to get a mass party quickly. Just at the time when the road was wide open for the building of the solid cadres of an independent party on a firm principled program in a still fluid mass movement, they began to run after the Stalinists, offering their virtue in return for toleration.

You will recall that they even went so far as to support the referendum on a new French constitution sanctifying bourgeois private property -- on the ground that this little betrayal of basic principle was necessary to establish some kind of liason with the Stalinists who were then the chief prop of the bourgeois regime. But their real orientation, as later developments demonstrated, was not prompted by a thought-out conversion to Stalinism or Stalinist conciliationism. The real source of their frenzied political goat-leaps was the mood of capitulation before the strongest pressures of the day.

They thought at first that Stalinism was the greatest power behind this pressure, and they automatically adapted themselves to it. However, European capitalism, with American help -- not to discount the help that came from Stalinist policy -- regained a certain stability and it seemed that the tide was turning in favor of America. Thereupon our French right wing had no difficulty in turning a complete somersault within about 24 hours, and landing in the camp of American imperialism through the medium of the RDR.

* * *

A no less instructive example is that of the post-war course of the Haston majority in the British RCP. All the crimes and mistakes of this rotten-to-the-core Haston faction are directly traceable to its origin as an unprincipled clique in 1938. When I was in England a little later that year, on the eve of the First World Congress, I denounced the Lee-Haston faction as tainted by unprincipledness at its birth. I never had a bit of confidence in them through-out all their subsequent development, regardless of what theses they wrote or voted for at the moment.

Early in the post-war period the Haston gang became captivated by the expansion of Stalinism and thought they saw in it "the wave of the future." They bestowed the honorific title of "workers states" on every strip of territory the Red Army occupied the moment this occupation took place. Haston and Co. are the real god-fathers of the Vern tendency which currently pollutes the atmosphere of the L.A. Local. The Hastonites rejected Healy's policy of entering the British Labor Party on the ground that the future of British labor radicalism was assigned by history to the British Stalinist party. They made this sound so convincing that one member of the Haston Political Bureau decided to get on the band-wagon in good time and hastened to join the Stalinist party as an individual.

Did this first expression of the Hastonite's moods lead them eventually to Stalinism? By no means. Within a year after the Healy group, with our blessing and support, broke loose from the Hastonites and entered the Labor Party separately, Haston suddenly reversed his "position" -- if an unprincipled demagogue can ever be seriously said to have a position on anything -- jumped over his own head, and landed in the Labor Party himself. And, as was to be expected, he by-passed the left wing of the Labor Party and lined up with the pro-American right wing, offering them at the same time his services as an informer against the Trotskyists.

These two examples, so fresh in memory, should be sufficient to show that the first frenzied gestures of a pressure-driven unprincipled combination do not necessarily indicate its eventual political course -- especially in a country where the main power is not the power of Stalinism.

* * *

I stated in the PC in the early stages of our dispute with the Cochranites, and later in the May Plenum a year ago, that I did not accuse the minority, or any member of it, of pro-Stalinism. Today I would have to qualify that statement somewhat by saying, on the basis of the facts revealed in the party discussion, that the minority has recklessly stimulated and encouraged a genuine sentiment of Stalinist conciliationism in the party ranks. But I still do not say, and I think all the majority should be cautious about saying, that the leaders of the minority have a conscious pro-Stalinist orientation.

By that I do not mean to compliment them, but merely to avoid an imprecise characterization. They are not conscious pro-Stalinists; and Cochran, at least, will never be a pro-Stalinist. The determining feature of their frenzied, irrational conduct is the mood of yielding to pressure -- whether consciously or not makes little difference -- and the real pressure in this country does not come from the Stalinists.

The Cochranites are right when they say that, and when they say that the party logically has more reason to fear Stalinophobia. But they are wrong when they look for manifestations of this disease in the party leadership. We know all about Stalinophobia, and have fought a few successful battles against it -- notably in 1939-40 and again in 1944-46. We could fight it all the more effectively in these two instances because we know what Stalinophobia is and where it comes from.

What is Stalinophobia? Is it hatred of Stalinism; fear of this "syphilis of the labor movement" and irreconcilable refusal to tolerate any manifestation of it in the party? Not at all. That has been our attitude toward Stalinism from the very beginning; and anybody who feels differently about it is traveling in our party under false passports.

Is it the opinion that Stalinism is not the leader of the international revolution but its mortal enemy? No, that is not Stalinophobia; that is what Trotsky taught us, what we learned again from our experience with Stalinism, and what we believe in our bones.

The sentiment of hatred and fear of Stalinism, with its police state and its slave labor camps, its frame-ups and its murders of working class opponents, is healthy, natural, normal and progressive. This sentiment goes wrong only when it leads to reconciliation with American imperialism; and to the assignment of the fight against Stalinism to that same imperialism. In the language of Trotskyism that, and nothing else, is Stalinophobia.

Burnham and Shachtman fell victims to this, the real Stalinophobia, and ended up as social patriots. Goldman and Morrow took the same path for the same reason. We should tell the party members that Stalinophobia is indeed a deadly disease, and that its germs are carried in the air of imperialist America. Our party has yielded many victims to it.

Party members who really want to know what Stalinophobia is, how it is expressed and also how genuine Trotskyists detect it, expose it and stamp it out of the party -- would do well to make an attentive study of the record of our historic fights around the question in the two examples indicated. It's all written down in the books and in the old Internal Bulletins.

It can be anticipated that someone like Bartell, or some rank and file comrades miseducated by him, will object to the above strictly limited definition of Stalinophobia. Prompted by Frankel, they may point to France and say that the refusal of the Bleibtreu faction to plunge into the Stalinist-controlled labor movement there is a manifestation of Stalinophobia. Is it? I don't know. Judgment will have to wait the further evolution of their policy. It may be only sectarianism, as Joe Hansen has indicated in his contribution to the Internal Bulletin. In that case, we can hope for a cure, and their eventual reconciliation with the world movement. But for true Stalinophobia no one has ever yet discovered a cure.

* * *

If the present moods and proposals of the Cochranite combination do not turn out to be temporary aberrations, as may be hoped; if they are destined to go through a further evolution in rebellion against the political line, the organizational principles and the tradition of the party -- I venture to predict right now that the next stage of this evolution will not be along the line of greater adaptation to Stalinism. That's not where the real pressure comes from. When they issue warnings against the danger of Stalinophobia they are unconsciously issuing warnings to themselves. Meantime they are feeding

pro-Stalinist moods and tendencies in the party ranks, and we must do a serious job of fumigation in this respect.

* * *

Since I left New York the fight in the committee and in the New York Local has disclosed far-reaching differences on the organization question which may well develop into an issue of principle, if they have not already done so. For that reason, I think this question also should be segregated and presented in a special resolution and report. Duncan did a really workman-like job of exposition on this question in his article in the Internal Bulletin, but his treatment was necessarily limited to the experiences in the New York Local. You have had equally serious, and even more significant, manifestations in the PC, which are directly related to Bartell's experiments in the New York Local.

It appears to me that Cochran is following a deliberate policy of attempting to establish a "dual power" in the PC, which would give the minority equal rights and the right of veto over any proposal they disagree with. This, in effect would nullify the centralized authority of the PC as a leading body. You have reported a number of incidents which show this tendency; and it is quite clear in general from their conduct as recorded in the PC minutes.

Point 5 of their 6-point program virtually formalizes this demand for "dual power." I fully expect it to be supplemented by a "peace" proposal at the Plenum. The aim would be to stop the open fight and discussion and give them another year or so for underground factional work, with equal rights in the party leadership but without any of the responsibility. All this is a brutal challenge to our Leninist principles of organization.

I think the Plenum should have a special resolution and report on this subject, outlining our conception of Leninist organization, citing the Cochranite aggressions against it point by point, and rejecting them, and calling for a discussion in the party of the principles involved.

Fraternally,

J. P. Cannon

P.S. Cochran aims to force his "dual power" objective on the Plenum by "pressure" of a factional bloc and threats. I think his conception of "power-politics" and his methods of conducting a faction fight come from another school than ours. I will write about this separately.

J.P.C.

JPC:jm

20. MASS WORK AND FACTIONAL STRUGGLE -- SOME HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

(Letter to Hildegarde Swabek)

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 9, 1953

Chicago

Dear Hildegarde:

Among other interesting things in your letter you say: "Already some of our trade union comrades here are saying, 'I wish it were over.' For one thing the atmosphere here is a bit poisonous." I was waiting for some report of such a development; it happens every time in every party struggle, as I know from experience, including my own.

Before I had a chance to get my feet wet in revolutionary politics, I found myself caught up in a whirlpool of factional struggle in the left wing of the Socialist Party in 1919. I had come out of the mass movement and strike struggles of the old IWW, and my first reaction was one of dismay and discouragement. I was anxious to get the factionalism over with and get back to constructive work. It took me some time to learn that faction struggles are part of the overhead.

I mention this to show that I have a sympathetic understanding and feeling for the Chicago trade unionists who are reacting in the same way to the "poisonous atmosphere" of the present controversy, even though I do not agree with them. We had similar expressions from party trade union activists at the height of the 1939-40 fight against the petty-bourgeois opposition, and I reported it to Comrade Trotsky. You can find the exchange of letters on this point in my "Struggle for a Proletarian Party," page 175, and in Trotsky's "In Defense of Marxism," page 158.

I am sure the Chicago comrades will not take offense at Trotsky's remark that such an attitude of impatience in the middle of a serious ideological struggle "is not infrequently connected with theoretical indifference." Nobody was born a Marxist. Marxism must be learned, and our impatient trade unionists in Chicago may very well discover, as have others before them, including you and me, that factional struggles in the revolutionary party, despite their overhead cost, can also have a positive side as a school in which one can learn Marxist politics faster and more thoroughly than in the normal times of party life.

Lessons learned in serious struggle, from discussion which must lead to decision, sink deep and are not easily forgotten. We have all learned something, I think, from past experiences in this respect. I am sure this will be the case this time too, for the struggle opening up in the party is very serious indeed.

The aversion of trade union activists to faction fights is by no means a one-sidedly negative manifestation. They are interested in constructive work, and without that we will never build a movement. They are repelled by quarrelsome people who seem never to be happy unless they are hurling insults; "brawlers," as Engels disdainfully called them, without hesitating to fight them just the same. The ob-

jections the trade unionists raise to this kind of atmosphere are quite understandable. But we all have had to learn that factional struggles cannot be avoided by turning our backs on them. Our great teachers, who took faction fights like everything else, in stride, explained this to us a long time ago. Engels wrote to Bernstein in 1888: "It seems that every worker's party, in a great country, can only develop itself by internal struggle, and this is based on the laws of dialectical development in general."

* * *

The refusal to wade into a faction fight because one wants to do his work in peace, only results in turning the party over to "brawlers" and revisionists -- they are most frequently the same thing -- and that is a sure way to ruin the party, as other parties in the past have been ruined. That is a sure way to undo all the constructive work of the trade unionists and other activists in a comparatively short period of time.

Sometimes this can be done by a single mistake of the leadership, motivated by a false policy. For example: the Burnham-Shachtman group, who had a temporary majority in the PC of our party in early 1939 during my absence in Europe, had already caught the germ of Stalinophobia and were carefully nursing it to keep it warm. When Homer Martin, then President of the UAW, arbitrarily started a split in the union, the PC under Burnham and Shachtman directed that our auto comrades support the Martin adventure. They were motivated by the circumstance that the Stalinists had a powerful, if not a dominant position, in the anti-Martin majority.

This policy of the Burnham-Shachtman PC was violently objected to by our comrades in the field, who knew the situation better and didn't want to be isolated from the CIO majority. They opposed the decision, not in an undisciplined and disruptive way but in a political way, and succeeded in getting the decision changed. This enabled them to stay with the main stream of the movement which was remaining loyal to the CIO. The auto militants under the influence of the Lovestonites went along with the ill-fated bolt of Martin to the AFL. As a result they were wiped out of the union at one single blow, from one false political step.

Our comrades, on the other hand, thanks to the correct policy they pursued, were able to integrate themselves better than ever in the reconstructed CIO auto union. The false position originally taken by the Burnham-Shachtman leadership in the famous "auto crisis" of 1939 was one of the issues which led to its downfall and repudiation by the party.

* * *

I mention this example -- one of many which could be cited from the history of our movement -- to show how inseparably the constructive work of trade union activists is connected with the political line and leadership of the party. Times arise, and the present is one of such times, when the political line and the leadership of the party is called into question. We know no other way to resolve such a dispute than by open discussions, which sometimes take the form of factional struggle, and by the ultimate decision of the party in

democratic convention. That's the way things are done in a democratic party; the members themselves discuss and decide what policy and what leadership they want. The unavoidable irritations of occasional "factionalism" are a small price to pay for genuine party democracy.

Our trade unionists would do well to think this matter over; to reflect that they have a stake in this dispute; that if they remain indifferent and stand aside they may end up with a policy which does not correspond to the needs of the situation, and with a leadership which hinders rather than helps their work. Such things have happened before. It is far better to get alarmed about it before hand, and try to prevent it by conscious and active participation in the settlement of the dispute, than to lament an evil decision afterward.

* * *

One of my long-cherished projects, which I hope to get around to now that I am snugly settled in hospitable Los Angeles, is to write a political biography and evaluation of Debs. I think the young generation could profit from such a work, which has not been adequately done up to now.

My projected essay would have two sides. First, I would undertake to show Debs in all his grandeur as a proletarian hero; as the prototype and exemplar of the revolutionary man of the masses, the trade union organizer, the strike leader, the inspirer of the youth. That side of the project will be a labor of love for me, for I dearly love the memory of Debs.

But I would feel obliged also to deal with another side of Debs; what I consider the weaker side, which has never been adequately examined and explained by other biographers and evaluators. In fact, it has never been touched; and the true picture of the real Debs, "the man with his contradiction," with his weak side as well as his strong side, has never been drawn.

Debs was a man of good will, if there ever was one; a giver, a constructive worker, a builder. But he was just a little too "good" to be the leader that a revolutionary party requires. Debs couldn't stand quarrelling. He fled from "brawlers" as from a plague. He couldn't abide embroilments in controversies, especially if they were tainted with conniving and "maneuvering," which unfortunately are not always absent even in party disputes. He feared faction fights and splits above everything, and simply ran away from them.

As a result of all that, Debs turned his back on the internal affairs of the Socialist Party of the United States. He, the most influential leader, poured out all his energy, and eventually his life, in popular mass agitation, organization and struggle, and allowed lesser men than he -- lesser in all respects, in my judgment, and especially in revolutionary temperament -- to run the party machine and shape the party policy.

Never anywhere was there a group of beleaguered strikers to call on Debs for help without his taking the next train to get to the scene to take his place on the picket line; to lift up their courage with his words of noble eloquence. But to go to a party discussion meet-

ing, during a faction fight; or a wrangling committee meeting; or a convention where fateful decisions were to be made -- that Debs could not do. He thought his influence in the mass movement, his popularity with the party membership, the revolutionary enthusiasm which he generated every time he spoke -- was enough to shape the course of the party. He thought he could keep the party on a revolutionary line by the sheer weight of his example. But he was mistaken.

The opportunist tricksters, the "municipal socialists," the men of small vision who wanted to narrow down the program of socialism to small aims, outwitted and outmaneuvered Debs and used him for their purposes, instead of him using them for his. That, in my opinion, was the great mistake and failure of Debs. And that's why in the end his glory was shadowed by tragedy. He sympathized with the left wing of the Socialist Party, but could not bring himself to go with them in the split of 1919. He died still a member of the discredited Socialist Party, which the new generation of revolutionary youth had passed by in contempt.

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The whole career of Debs is the most complete and convincing proof that one cannot be an effective all-around revolutionist if he confines himself to mass work and agitation and leaves the internal affairs of the party, including disputes and faction fights, to others.

No, that too is the task of the proletarian revolutionist. If his duty requires him to wade through controversy; if he has to learn to cope with Engels' "brawlers," and even to get smudged a bit with slander -- he cannot ask exemption. His mass work has little point and meaning without the party. And the course and the leadership of the party are decided, in the last resort, by what he and others of his kind say and do about it.

Trotsky once wrote that a revolutionist is tested under all kinds of circumstances and in all kinds of actions, from strikes and street fights up to the revolutionary struggle for power, but that the most important test of all is his attitude toward the disputes within his own party.

* * *

The world knows Marx as the author of Capital. But we, his disciples, also know him as the founder and leader of the First International, and the theoretical inspirer of the socialist labor movement which grew up in his lifetime. The struggle of Marx and Engels during the period of the First International, and in the regroupment of the labor movement afterward, to the end of their lives, was a two-fold struggle.

On the one hand, they fought for the unity of the working class, summed up in the great slogan of the Communist Manifesto: "Workers of the World, Unite!" On the other hand, they fought for clarity of program which alone could make this unity conscious and effective, and in the end victorious. This struggle for clarity of program, which they never relaxed, involved them in unceasing controversies and polemics, which they never sought to avoid. On the contrary, they openly fought against all attempts to smuggle bourgeois ideology into

the labor movement under the various guises of anarchism and opportunism.

The great battles of Marx and Engels against the Bakuninite anarchists; against the Lassalleans; against conciliation with confusion in the name of unity, which called forth the classic commentary on the Gotha Program -- all this from beginning to end was a factional struggle. Without it the revolutionary political movement could not have been constituted and maintained; the line of continuity of Marx's thought could not have been kept unbroken by successors; and we and our party would not be here today. We owe our political existence to the valiant faction battles waged by the founders of scientific socialism and the two great disciples who came after them.

* * *

The main weight of the struggle for the socialist transformation of society is not in the direct struggle of the workers against the bourgeoisie. The workers are such an overwhelming majority, and their strength is multiplied so many times by their strategic position in production, that if they were united to act consciously in their own interests their victory over the bourgeoisie would be a mere push-over. But they are not united, not class conscious. The reason for this is the influence of bourgeois ideology in the ranks of the workers.

This influence is carried into the ranks of the workers in various ways, but its most direct representatives are the labor bureaucracy. That is why our main struggle against the bourgeoisie takes the form, in the first place, of a struggle against their agents in the labor movement. Nobody ever improved de Leon's classic definition of the conservative labor fakers as "the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class." Lenin was especially pleased with this striking characterization. And nobody ever emphasized the primacy of the struggle against these labor lieutenants of the capitalist class more than Lenin did.

The fight for socialism is unthinkable without a fight for the revolutionization of the trade unions. That is what gives party trade union work such transcendent importance. Party trade unionists who recoil against factional struggles in their own party, and even imagine that they are against factionalism in general, should give themselves an account of the fact that their own daily struggle against the treacherous bureaucracy is a factional struggle within the trade union movement. It too, gets "poisonous" at times, and very often gets mixed up with all kinds of personal antagonisms. But it is not at bottom a personal quarrel, and there is no way to get away from it.

It is caused, as has been said, by the pressure of capitalist influence which is represented by the labor skates, and to a certain extent by the aristocracy of labor. But this pressure and influence of the ruling class is not limited to the trade unions, although it is revealed there in the crassest form. It is all-pervasive in present-day society. That is not strange, considering all the instruments of education, propaganda and communication monopolized by the ruling class -- church, school, press, radio, etc.

The experience of 100 years has shown that bourgeois influence and ideology is also carried into the political organizations of the workers, even the most advanced ones, in various indirect forms, and frequently gets the upper hand there, resulting in the transformation of these political organizations into supporting props of the capitalist regime instead of organs of struggle against it.

This is the true explanation, as Lenin taught us, of the downfall of the Second International. The fight against this bourgeois influence represented by the opportunist leadership, was first a faction struggle led by Lenin within the ranks of a single international organization. After the split, and the formation of the Third International, the struggle continued and still remained in essence, a factional struggle between the two internationals within the broader labor movement.

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It was the pressure of bourgeois influence which also brought about the eventual degeneration and downfall of the Third International. The struggle against this degeneration, led by Trotsky, began as a factional struggle within a single organization; culminated at a certain point in the formation of the Fourth International; and continues to this day as a factional struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism for influence and leadership in the broader movement of the working class.

* * *

More recent history, in the making of which many of us have been direct participants, follows the same general line as that of our predecessors. Our party has not been immune from the internal troubles which have beset all workers' political organizations for 100 years. We have secured our existence and our unity by frankly facing them and contending with them.

Pressures bear down not only upon the broad labor movement but also upon the vanguard, and even upon the vanguard of the vanguard -- which is exactly what the SWP and its kindred organizations in the world movement represent. Problems pressing for solution under the influence of these external pressures produce differences of opinion in our ranks as well as elsewhere. Quite often these differences, touching single points, are solved by free discussion in our democratic party, without faction organization or struggle. This was the case in 1948 when we had an extremely serious difference of opinion over the presidential election policy. A similar experience was the discussion over the post-war developments in Eastern Europe.

These examples and the way the disputes were solved without internal struggle, are sufficient to show that one should not jump to hasty conclusions every time a difference of opinion is manifested in our ranks, and exclude the possibility of reaching agreement and reconciliation by a calm and friendly discussion. But on the other hand it is well to bear in mind what Trotsky said in 1939: "Any serious factional fight in a party is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle." That was certainly the case in our struggle against the petty-bourgeois opposition in 1939-40. That was a long, hard fight for the existence of the party as a revolutionary organization.

Many workers, especially trade union activists eager to get on with their work, got impatient with the long discussion then too. But what would have happened to the SWP if we hadn't made that fight, and won it, with the support of the proletarian cadres? We branded the Burnham-Shachtman opposition as a petty-bourgeois faction from the very start of the fight. And if ever a characterization was confirmed to the hilt, by the subsequent evolution of the people involved, it was that one.

I imagine it is difficult for some younger comrades in the party to convince themselves that Burnham, the current theoretician of the program of preventive war against the Soviet Union and revolutionary movements throughout the world, was once a member of our party. But he was, and we remember him well. More than that, he was a contender for party leadership who denounced the present leaders of the party as "conservative bureaucrats." He wrote a detailed indictment of our horrible "organizational methods" in a classic document of its kind called "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," which is published as an appendix to my book "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party."

Whatever the younger comrades may think about our "factionalism" in the present party struggle, they surely do not condemn us for our factionalism in the fight against Burnham and Co. They shouldn't, at any rate, for the party owes its existence, and its magnificent achievements in the Second World War and ever since, to that struggle.

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We did not hesitate to characterize the Burnham-Shachtman opposition as a petty-bourgeois opposition at the very start. That was partly because we had had previous experience and many intimations of the struggle to come. And when they erupted in opposition the moment the Second World War started, we knew what was the matter with them and how to characterize them.

The characterization of the present opposition in the SWP cannot, at this stage, be so precise. We do not yet know what line their further evolution will take, and still less do they know. But there are already a number of disquieting facts which make it absolutely clear to all those who have eyes and are willing to see, that we are in for a serious fight. It cannot be avoided for the following reasons:

1. The Cochranites formed a faction in the leadership and in the party ranks before they issued a program. In this they have followed directly in the footsteps of the petty-bourgeois opposition who had a faction fully formed before they unfurled their banner in September, 1939. In Leninist language such procedure has always been considered a criminal offense against the party.

2. The Cochran faction is an unprincipled combination of diverse elements who have different views about many of the questions in dispute and are united only in opposition to the party "regime." In our movement such combinations have always been considered anti-Leninist.

3. The underground arguments of the Cochran faction against the regime are nothing but a re-hash of old gossip and slander fished out of the Burnham indictment known as "The War and Bureaucratic Con-

servatism." I have already answered this indictment in my book called "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party," so will not pause further on this point here.

4. The Cochran faction is cynically encouraging and stimulating the sentiment of Stalinist conciliationism in the party ranks. Stalinist conciliationism is alien and hostile to the principles and tradition of our movement.

5. In the New York organization, and in the PC, the Cochran faction has declared open revolt against the Leninist principles of organization which have governed the internal functioning of the party since its inception 25 years ago. Revolt against democratic-centralism has always been the hall-mark of Menshevism.

6. In conducting an unprincipled struggle against the party leadership, first for over a year underground and now in the open, the leaders of the Cochran faction have been giving way to a factional frenzy which indeed "poisons the atmosphere of the party." Their methods of waging the factional struggle disorient and corrupt younger and inexperienced comrades who need calm discussion and pedagogical explanations to further their political education.

These manifestations, taken all together, are the well-known characteristics of a faction which has lost its head and does not know where it is going. You can call such manifestations what you will, but they are not the manifestations of self-confident Leninists, who stand up against all pressures and follow a conscious deliberate course.

We will wait to see the further evolution of this unprincipled combination. Meantime we will endeavor to explain things as we see them to the party in political discussion. The forthcoming Plenum of the National Committee will undoubtedly condemn the Cochran faction as an unprincipled and revisionist combination, and explain its reasons to the party in unambiguous resolutions.

Then will come the turn of the party membership to discuss and, eventually, to decide. The most important duty of every member in the next period is to study and discuss all the questions at issue, and to take a position on them. Nobody has a right to abstain; for the most important test of a revolutionist -- to quote Trotsky again -- "is his attitude toward the disputes in his own party."

Fraternally,

J. P. Cannon

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