

873 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10003  
December 24, 1965

FOR N.C. INFORMATION

(The following is a transcript from tape of Comrade Cannon's remarks during a recent Los Angeles branch discussion of the Thanksgiving Anti-War Convention.)

I presume the assumption is that I was only 3,000 miles away from Washington so I would know all about it. And that I can give you all the dope. The fact is when the meeting occurred last week I knew very little about the events in Washington, but just enough from the general reports to make me curious as to what had happened and decide to get a picture of the whole situation and the forces at work before coming to a conclusion about it. That's the best way to proceed on all questions.

What happened in Washington two or three weeks ago had to be regarded as an incident in the long-drawn-out struggle in which we are going to participate from now on. A struggle under conditions of constant urgency the like of which has never before been known by our movement or any other movement. Above all what's new and different and what almost everybody understands is that the bomb hangs over the world and the war we're talking about is the nuclear war we are trying to head off. It's an atomic war which would not be just another war like the last two world wars in which America got fat and prosperous, but a war that could very well mark nothing less than the end of the adventure of the human race on this planet.

I recall that when the formula for the production of the H-bomb was perfected and had been tested, Einstein wrote a memorandum to the President in which he said that it is now theoretically possible to destroy all life on the planet Earth. That seemed like a far-fetched assumption at the time, but it has since been repeated by practically all disinterested scientists. The movement against this war -- what is sometimes rather incorrectly called the peace movement -- which has grown up out of this new situation must be recognized also as a new phenomenon; a new movement which is taking forms and intensities that we have not known in previous wars. I am talking now about the war in Vietnam.

It's the first time in the knowledge of the present generation that there has been an open, active protest movement against a war in wartime. Prior to World War I there was a tremendous opposition against the entry of the United States into the war but when the shooting started the movement evaporated. There

was nothing left of it except the Socialists, the IWW and the Anarchists, who were ferociously persecuted and suppressed from the very beginning. In the Second World War there was no vocal opposition at all except for some conscientious objectors and our party. In the Korean war, which I am sure most of you can recall, the press of our party was the only press that attacked America's action.

Now we have a very widespread and diverse protest movement against the war while it is going on. That, I say, should be recognized as a new phenomenon.

Another new thing is that the dynamic militant action, and even the leadership for the opposition to the present war, comes from the campus -- primarily from students. And that, as far as I know, is something quite new in this country. The academic world never led anything of any social consequence in this country before. We have not had, as the other advanced Western countries have had a radical and socialistic student movement we now see developing in this country.

There is also a new type of pacifism. The classic pacifism we know which Lenin denounced as worse than useless, was a pacifism that denounced war until it started and then rallied around the flag. I don't know whether many of you present here have seen that characteristic of the old pacifism, as I recall it, especially from the First World War. At that time there was a tremendous movement of opposition to America's entry into the war. So strong was the popular sentiment that Woodrow Wilson was reelected to the Presidency primarily on the slogan "he kept us out of war."

Many public speakers, politicians and, of course, preachers, spoke against entry into the war. I can't forget the effect it had upon us militants. We thought we had the population with us in our opposition -- until the declaration of war. Then everything went out of the movement and the loudest pacifists became the loudest patriots, right away. They said you don't fight the government when it is at war. So the pacifists had simply led the people up to the expectation of opposition and then led them down immediately.

We have a sort of pacifism today that is still operative after the shooting has started. We have an active war in Vietnam, rapidly escalating since last February when they began bombing right and left, but there is still a considerable segment of the pacifist movement that does not cease to protest. That's new.

Now this peace movement, as I have undertaken to examine it, has many components and it behooves us as Marxist revolutionists to analyze the different segments of this movement and see which are useful, which can be considered as possible allies of ours, and which are not and not to confuse the one with the other. At first glance it is a very heterogeneous assortment of all kinds of people. You even have a few people who are part of the **political** establishment, such as Senator Morse. They are against the war in Vietnam not by any means as opponents but as advisers, on the ground that it is not a profitable war for the U.S. There is even, in my opinion, a considerable segment of the ruling powers that has grave doubts about the wisdom of the policy of the administration on the same grounds; that it's the wrong war in the wrong place. They are not against the government or against American imperialism, but on the grounds of tactics, maneuver, time and circumstance, they think this is not the way to begin a showdown.

Then there is a big assortment of others like the SANEites -- is that the right word for them? Those who make up this respectable body of middle-class people held the March in Washington a few weeks ago. They want to make it clear that they are not against the government and they are not in favor, by any means, of the revolutionary people of Vietnam, but would like the government to get out of the situation through negotiations. This implies that Americans have a right to be there in the first place, and it's just a question of bargaining back and forth as to how long they stay, how much they keep of that country, and how much of it they destroy.

Now I don't consider these people allies of the revolutionary workers. On the contrary, a year or so ago they conducted an enormous witch-hunt in their organization to drive out everybody suspected of being reds. The Communist Party people had been sneaking into their local assemblages and calling themselves SANEites, and all that was needed was for one Jim Crow senator to get up on the floor of Congress and denounce one of the people in an organizing committee in New York to just scare the lights out of them and they started a wholesale purge of their organization. And the March they held in Washington a few weeks ago was a very polite affair. They had some trouble with the people who wanted to carry genuine anti-war slogans like the central slogan: Bring the Troops Home Now, and even some who wanted to carry the flag of the National Liberation Front. They were in a quandary as to whether they should call the cops or counter-balance this scandalous performance some other way. So they worked out a system of surrounding the flags of the National Liberation Front with a little American flag. This was to make it clear to the President that they were with him and not with them.

The Social Democrats and the Stalinists are also negotiators, not real opponents of the war. There are some independents and these are some of the most important people in the movement, especially new young people who have never been a part of any of the sectors of the traditional radical movement and who are sincerely opposed to the war and want to do something about it but have not yet found any definite political ideology. And then, of course, you have the revolutionary socialists represented by our party.

I think the party is proceeding correctly in its attempt to cooperate in action with anybody who will help to make a demonstration against the war, while at the same time making it clear they stand for certain definite slogans which really means opposition to the war. Especially a slogan which means that America has no right whatever in South Vietnam -- and that is the slogan: Bring the Troops Home Now. In my opinion, that is the correct slogan. I don't see how any revolutionist could oppose it. It is a revolutionary slogan. And it is the one the party and the youth think is the proper one around which to rally the really militant and earnest opposition to the continuing war.

This slogan appealed to me right away, partly out of nostalgia because this is not the first time it was raised by the socialist movement in this country. When Wilson sent American troops across the Mexican border in the period just before our entry into the First World War, the Socialist Party called an emergency meeting of its National Committee and adopted a Manifesto which bore the title: "Withdraw the Troops." That was the essence of the demand upon the government; get out of Mexico and stay out of Mexico. That was all the situation called for, and it created both the basis for organizing the broadest opposition of people who were really against this monstrous attack upon the Mexican people and at the same time made no concession whatever in principle because the withdrawal of the troops signified the victory of the Mexicans.

When we entered the Korean war, as far as I know the only paper in the country that came out with a forthright denunciation of the war and a demand which incorporated all that was necessary from a revolutionary point of view, was our paper the Militant. I was appointed by the P.C. to write an Open Letter to the President and the members of Congress. And this letter contained the demand: "Bring the American soldiers out of Korea and let the Korean people alone to settle their own affairs." It never entered anybody's head so far as I know or heard, to suggest that this was not fully adequate as an expression of our support to the Korean people and our opposition to our own government.

So I think that slogan which our comrades have settled

on as the central, motivating agent for the building of a genuine anti-war movement, stands up both historically and for the needs of the present day. I don't think that's the purpose of the political elements in the so-called peace movement beside ourselves and some of the pacifists and independents. As far as I can make out both by past experience and present operations, the Stalinists and the Social Democrats are primarily concerned with gearing the so-called peace movement toward the next election campaign for "peace" candidates, and peace candidates can be any kind of political faker who will say he is in favor of negotiations while the troops are still there and still bombing the people. It's an important question whether they will be able to take this inchoate and unclearly defined peace movement down the blind alley of coalition politics or whether a big section of the movement will respond to a different slogan and a different line of action.

I was greatly impressed by the reports that we got from the Washington conference. I am not speaking now of the March organized by SANE but of the conference called by the National Coordinating Committee, with delegates from various elements of the peace movement. I was impressed by the feeling that this was a new political experience for the younger generation of revolutionists. This is the first time they have had a serious confrontation with political opponents on a national scale. This marks the emergence of our small party from previous isolation toward the center of what radicalism there is in the country. It is the first opportunity they have had to learn at first hand what it means to deal with political opponents who are presumably all united in the same wonderful camp -- unity, gosh, it's wonderful -- but in actuality have entirely different objectives. They learned how to handle themselves when they meet these opponents at close range. That I consider a great victory for our young comrades. They were an active part in the preparations of this gathering and they participated in it as revolutionists. And they learned something that could not be learned fully out of books. Some things have to be learned in experience, although the books help to prepare for them.

I recall talking with Trotsky -- on a delegation that went to see him in 1938 in preparation for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International -- about the experience we had just finished in the Socialist Party. We were drawing the balance sheet on what had been achieved or not achieved, and he wanted a very full and detailed report. I recall his remarking that he was well pleased with the practical results; with the recruits, the fact that we had kept our own forces intact and had gained some new forces. And he said, the principal gain is the experience. Those who have been through this experience of a direct confrontation with centrists and right-wing socialists, have acquired something that cannot be

lost. That is necessary for the full development of a revolutionary political leadership.

I think that is the big gain out of the Washington Conference. And even mistakes that could have been made or defeats suffered can be turned to good account if it's all understood and assimilated as part of the experience.

As to what really happened in Washington, we had conflicting reports. At first I was surprised to hear our delegate come back and say we had done very well there. Then I heard other reports, some comrades thought a terrible mistake had been made and a catastrophe had overtaken us because we had run head-on into a battle with the majority of the steering committee and others there. So I thought the best thing I could do was to try to find out what had happened.

I read in my attempt to inform myself about all aspects of the event. I studied the National Guardian. I studied the Militant, the People's World and the New Republic. I heard the reports of Comrade Derrel and I read the account of the Conference in this Newsletter of the National Caucus for the organization of independent committees united on the slogan of withdraw the troops now. And I also read -- you don't know how thorough I am when I am looking for information as to who really hid the body -- I even read the circular letter distributed by a united combination of two people here, the Spartacist and the Wolforthites and the Phillips tract. I even read a couple of copies of the Bulletin of the Fourth International printed by a couple of other people in New York. And everything I read except the Militant seemed to point directly at the Trotskyites in Washington as the people who had committed the crime. And I was just about to say it looks like a perfect case -- because it was so unanimous -- until I remembered that I am a Perry Mason fan and that I have often noticed the one who is accused of the crime turns out to be innocent, and the dirty dog who did the job fixed things so that he could clear himself and throw the suspicion on an innocent man.

The minute I read the Guardian -- being a politician -- and knowing what the Guardian is and how it has been evolving, I said, that's a poisonously slanted article. It's aimed with deadly malice to compromise what they call -- quoting others -- the "Trotskyite splitters." That put me on guard. Then I later got hold of the People's World, published up here in San Francisco, and I read their account; how everybody was for unity except some disgruntled and disruptive minority that they didn't even dignify by naming. The Guardian did; they said we had been denounced as "Trotskyite splitters."

The People's World informed me that Dave Dellinger and Professor Staughton Lynd of Liberation magazine worked with Communist Party delegate Arnold Johnson and Irving Beinin of the Lower East Side Mobilization for Peace Action, and many others to find a common ground for agreement. Now the minute I saw just that paragraph informing me that Arnold Johnson was working down there, and that he was backed up by Beinin, I knew there was something crooked going on. Because I know who Johnson is; he's the organization secretary of the Stalinist party. I know who Beinin is. He's the ex-Cochranite who has been making a profession of baiting Trotskyism ever since he got kicked out of the party twelve years ago. I know that he's identified not merely with the Guardian but with the right-wing group which has recently conducted the swing of the Guardian to the right.

Another report I got/<sup>was</sup> of a meeting down in Houston, Texas, which one of our comrades by accident attended. He told me they had received before the conference a letter from the SDS office in New York tipping them off about the Trotskyists and preparing them for a fight.

So out of all this a clearer picture emerged. And if I would criticize our comrades who were in charge of the fight in Washington, it would perhaps be for a fault that is hard to avoid in the absence of experience of this sort. That is, the underestimation of political opponents; an assumption that everything is going to be on the level, which is a very bad assumption when you have Stalinists and Social Democrats to deal with. They may possibly have been caught by surprise.

I didn't doubt for one minute about the ambush being prepared after I heard that several weeks before the conference was held the Daily Worker and the People's World suddenly began to promote the conference in high gear. I know what that means. I don't have the slightest doubt that they stacked the convention with every kind of delegate from every kind of paper organization they could mobilize. I don't doubt that they stacked the steering committee, that they rigged the agenda, in such a way that the delegates of many independent committees and our own people ran into a prepared fight in which there was room for everything except the one thing they were most interested in. That was promoting the real slogan of the anti-war movement, "Bring the Troops Home Now." And of the right and necessity of the independent committees organized under that slogan to unite themselves nationally.

Our operations and those of the caucus were called a "splitting move." If you examine the evidence of that convention it's the most fantastic accusation imaginable. Splitting what? Every tendency represented in that convention had its national or-

ganization. There were the DuBois Clubs, S.D.S., Women's Strike for Peace, the Committee for Non-Violent Action, the Communist Party and many others. But the independent committees who have adopted the central slogan which tests whether you are really serious about opposing American imperialism, the war, or not, that is the withdrawal of the troops, were denied the right to organize themselves. There was no provision on the agenda or any of the workshops to even discuss that question and take it to a vote.

I'll admit my ignorance -- I asked what is this National Coordinating Committee anyhow? From the reports we got about splits, splits, splits I thought maybe there was a national organization that we were breaking up. It's not a national organization at all. It's just what its name says: it's a national coordinating committee. And where did it come from? Where was it elected? It wasn't elected anywhere. It's a self-appointed committee constituted in Washington a few months ago at the Conference of Unrepresented People. It has headquarters in Wisconsin, and it has as its president or chairman a man named Emspack.

Now that rang a bell for me. I have heard that name before. It isn't the same Emspack I am told. He's the son, and from all accounts, a chip off the old block. Emspack was a Stalinist hack; he was the secretary of the United Electrical Workers Union. Emspack was the central figure in 1941, when we came to open warfare in Minneapolis in the split with Tobin, who blocked the issuance of a CIO charter to the Minneapolis Local of the Teamsters who wanted to join the CIO. But the charter was issued to us -- not by the CIO -- there it was blocked by Emspack. There's your Stalinist hacks...It was issued by District 50 of the United Mineworkers Union. So in order to get into the CIO in the heyday of the Stalinists, the Teamsters had to join the Miners.

All this aroused the natural suspicion that proved to be a reality; that the NCC is in fact stacked and rigged and controlled by Stalinists, and it's not an organization. It's a committee, an unelected committee. It's not like a union or a political party or a cooperative or fraternal order; it's just what its name says -- a coordinating committee to coordinate the activities of other organizations in the peace movement. And all tendencies have the right to have their own national organization. But the independent committees to end the war in Vietnam, who adopted the fighting slogan, Bring the Troops Home Now, when they ask to have a gathering to discuss the proposal that they should organize themselves nationally, they were denounced as "splitters."

Well, I think that is crooked. I think the slogan of



Bring the Troops Home Now is an absolutely correct slogan, the one upon which you can organize an anti-war movement that really means business. Anybody who will not adopt that slogan isn't really fighting the war. Because if you agree to leave the American troops there, with all their equipment, there is never going to be any peace or independence for the Vietnamese people.

I think our comrades were correct to adopt that slogan and their militancy at the conference and their refusal to be bluffed or bulldozed is quite admirable. All the more so that they were perhaps taken by surprise and hadn't had previous experience with what the peridy of Stalinism and the Social Democracy is really like. I will guarantee you that they will never be taken by surprise again.

These are permanent assets which speak well for the future. Whether some error or misstep of a tactical character was made in the heat of the fight I would not be competent to judge at this distance. But even so, tactical mistakes or setbacks or defeats can be corrected as long as the principal line is correct and as long as we don't get stubborn, when we do make a mistake, trying to rectify it by doing the same thing over again.

Nothing definite as far as I know was settled at this conference. No policy was adopted; no slogan was approved or rejected. They just met; they talked -- and attacked the Trotskyites -- and the only motion of any consequence that was passed that I could discern from what I studied, was to call some new demonstrations in March and to support the demonstrations in the South in February. I presume we will participate in that.

No formal organization was constituted. So how can you split the NCC? It's only a coordinating committee. And not only was it not elected when first constituted, it was not even elected at this conference. It's rigged and stacked with representatives of god-knows-what kind of organizations. With a Stalinist at the head of it. And anybody that will put any confidence in the fairness and justice of revolutionary militancy of such a committee has my sympathy. He badly needs attention -- and not the kind I can give, because I am not what they call a head-shrinker.

No definite program. Anybody that's for peace is entitled to be represented on the Committee. No formal organization; all the local organizations have their own autonomy. No elected national officers. Just a National Coordinating Committee. I wouldn't worry about accusations on trying to split that outfit -- because our people didn't split. The accusation is false. They stayed in the convention to the end, and they openly announced they were organizing a caucus of people who stood for the idea and the slogan: Bring the Troops Home Now. And the right of these inde-

pendent committees operating under this slogan to form a national organization of their own and to affiliate to the NCC like the other national organizations, such as the Women's Strike for Peace and others.

Now, I read the first Newsletter and thought it was well written, very intelligent and an honest report of the convention. Their proposals seemed sound to me from a revolutionary point of view. It remains to be seen whether they will be successful in their endeavor to create a national organization of independent committees on this slogan, or whether they will receive a setback. Experience will tell us. But if there is a setback or defeat I think our comrades will know how to recuperate from it and plan other tactics. Tactics can be changed if you've got the right line and know how to be a little flexible in your tactics, you're not easily destroyed.

The whole anti-war movement is, as I see it, at a very critical stage, because the war is escalating. The more the war escalates the more pressure will be brought upon the movement to conform. The weaklings and the negotiators and all the others will talk in softer and softer voices until you can't even hear them whisper any more. And the militants will get hardened and they'll get new recruits because every time the word gets out of another soldier killed there is his family and friends who hear about it. And the public opposition to the senseless slaughter will grow up and there will be new recruits. And the end of the movement, as far as I can see it, can only be toward more militancy and more assertion of the types shown by our caucus and our associates in Washington. And they will then have to seriously look from the campus where things started to the sources of power of the social struggle -- among the less privileged workers in the first place and eventually toward the organized workers.

And out of that I think we can see the beginnings of a new radical movement which raises great perspectives of world-historical significance for America, the most backward of countries in all things that concern culture, intelligence and social awareness. That American finally is producing a revolutionary and radical grouping on the campuses of **this** country. From the beginning of the socialist movement we have understood, and our fathers before us, that the power that can change society is the working class. But we understood also that from other classes could come what the Communist Manifesto calls elements of enlightenment and progress.

We should not forget that Marx and Engels began as students. We shouldn't forget that Marx and Engels and Lenin and

Trotsky -- and practically all the leaders of the Russian Revolution -- began as students in the colleges. And it really almost takes your breath away -- the prospect that we may be on the verge of a period when a new elite is taking shape among the student bodies across this vast country. They will find their way to collaboration with the working class in this country and bring with them the benefits of their talents and education. They will contribute new thinkers, new writers, new orators, and new agitators who know how to identify themselves with the working class movement. I think we will not neglect that field and I think that we have made a good start already with the organization and development of our Young Socialist Alliance.

I think that the experience in Washington -- regardless of what mistakes in tactics here and there might have been made -- has to be regarded as a great achievement for our movement.

\* \* \*