

September 15, 1945

James P. Cannon, National Secretary,
Socialist Workers Party,
116 University Place,
New York, New York

Dear Comrade:

Our Political Committee has discussed your letter of August 28 on the question of the unification of the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party, and wishes to place before you its views on the matters dealt with in your communication.

We have taken note, first of all, of your statement that you are in favor of a discussion on the question of unification of the two parties and will so recommend to the next Plenum of your National Committee. We have no doubt that such a discussion, carried on with the candor and seriousness to which you refer, and animated by a mutual desire to reach speedily the solid basis for unity which we believe exists, can result in the consolidation of a strong and healthy party of the Fourth International in the United States, with stimulating effects upon the movement in every other country. The reasons for this conviction have already been stated in a general way in the Resolution on Unity adopted by our National Committee and sent to you on August 22.

To us, the central question to settle is the basis for unification, which, in the concrete case, is the question of the basis for the revolutionary Marxian party. You state in your letter that the Socialist Workers Party has "always proceeded from the point of view that programmatic agreement on the most important and decisive questions is the only sound basis for unification." As we have understood this conception, which applies not only to the basis for unification between two revolutionary organizations but in general to the basis for the existence and functioning of a revolutionary party, we are able to subscribe to your formula. In the present case, however, the concrete meaning of the formula is not sufficiently clear to us. The ambiguity to which it lends itself is heightened in our minds precisely because of what you call "the split between us and the formation of your own organization five years ago, and... the deep differences which have separated us since."

If, by "programmatic agreement on the most important and decisive questions," you refer to agreement with the fundamental principles of Marxism and the basic program of the Fourth International as worked out in the whole period, that is one matter. In that case, any preliminary discussion between us could only establish the fact that on this plane, the plane of basic program and principle, the two parties are close enough in their positions to require and justify immediate unification, on grounds similar to those which made their membership in one party possible and desirable in the period prior to the split. We are quite prepared to engage in such a discussion, but our knowledge of the similarity of position of the two parties on this plane, as revealed in their public documents, causes us to regard such a discussion as a formality.

In other words, we feel, for our part, that an extensive discussion for the purpose of establishing "that we are approaching agreement" on such basic questions is not essential. On these basic questions, sufficient agreement already exists to warrant unification, and a discussion could only record that fact.

If, however, "programmatic agreement" refers to agreement on those theoretical, political and even organizational questions that have divided us in the past, that seems to us to be a different matter. The differences between the two parties on these questions are not less well-known than the points of agreement. They relate to such questions as the class character of the Russian state; the slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union", the application of the Leninist theory on the national question to the world today, in particular to Europe; aspects of the military policy of the revolutionary Party; application of the principle of democratic centralism and the question of party regime; and a number of questions of lesser prominence and significance. In some instances, these are differences between our party and yours; in others, it has not always been clear whether our differences are with positions officially taken by the Socialist Workers Party or only by individual party representatives. But even if in every instance, the specific differences were between the two parties officially, that would not, in our view, rule out unification. Our position on this point has already been set forth with sufficient clarity in the Resolution of our National Committee. We reiterate it here:

The differences that do exist between the two parties are not, singly or severally, of a nature that is impermissible within the framework of one revolutionary Marxist party. It is possible for the two parties to unite now into one, despite these differences, because, as our Resolution states, first, there is a sufficient fundamental agreement in principle between them, and second, the main political difference which engendered the original separation into two parties, namely, the question of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union," does not now have the same acuteness or prominence that it had at the beginning of the war, according to the declarations of the Socialist Workers Party.

Those facts, too, we believe, could only be recorded by a more detailed discussion between representatives of the two parties. From that standpoint, such a discussion would be profitable. By means of a discussion, to be sure, the character, scope and means of regulating (eventually, disposing of) these differences could be established more precisely. But in view of the lengthy period over which these differences have developed, and the vast documentary material presented on them by both sides, it is, of course, most unlikely that they could be eliminated in one, or even two or three such preliminary, meetings, and a completely common point of view worked out.

The fact cannot be ignored that we have the same firmness and depth of conviction about the views we hold on a number of theoretical and political questions as the comrades of the S.W.P. have of their views. It is not to be denied, either, that these views relate to significant and important questions. Furthermore, we are the last to minimize the importance of political and theoretical questions, and of taking a correct position on them.

We do not regard this as a hindrance to early unification, however. As all of us in the movement have held, a "monolithic" party is neither possible nor desirable. In the history of the Fourth International, there have been, and still are, sections in which the differences on certain theoretical and political questions were greater than those which today divide the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party. It might be added that within the Workers Party itself, we regard as entirely permissible the existence of differences in some controversial questions, which are not less important than those which, on other questions separate us from the S.W.P. We not only believe that our differences with the S.W.P. today are of such a nature as are quite permissible within the limits of a united revolutionary party, but that they can be fruitfully debated and best settled by means of comradely discussion, organized and conducted in the best

traditions of democratic centralism, within the ranks of one party.

These views, if we may repeat, make up our conception of the basis for unification and the basis for the revolutionary party in general. If your views are the same as ours on this score, or similar to ours, we would consider that very little remains for the achievement of unity beyond the discussion and settlement of practical organizational steps. Moreover, agreement on this would dispel any impression that the indispensable pre-condition for unification of two revolutionary Marxist groups is an agreement on every theoretical, political and organizational question. However, if your conception differs in any important respect from ours, we are prepared to discuss it with the necessary objectivity. A precise formulation by you would make it possible for us to express a precise opinion.

There remain three points which are dealt with in your letter.

To the statement quoted above, you add: "... when divergences of opinion occur, unity can be maintained only by the scrupulous observance of the democratic principle of the subordination of the minority to the majority and strict discipline in public activity and action." To this point of view, too, we subscribe. We have maintained this view throughout the existence of the Workers Party. We would of course continue to maintain it within the united party. To this view, we join the view, likewise well-established in the revolutionary Marxist movement, that a minority has the right and even the duty to disseminate and defend its special point of view in the party, and that the majority - precisely because it is the majority and therefore mainly responsible for the leadership and integrity of the organization - has the special obligation to protect the rights of a minority as a function of its obligation to preserve the rights and interests of the party as a whole.

Having these conceptions, we believe that a "genuine unification on a firm and long lasting basis" is possible. It goes without saying that we share the view that a "unification followed by a sharp faction fight and another split would be highly injurious to the party." No serious comrade could contemplate a unification of this kind. A faction fight of any sort, much less a split, following the unification, would compromise both the party and those responsible for such lamentable consequences of the unity. In any case, it seems to us, the unification would have to be followed by a period of intensive common activity in the class struggle, during which - while the opinions and rights of any minority would be respected and protected - factionalism, mutual recrimination, and judgements of the old division would be abjured.

On the basis of the foregoing, we have no difficulty in meeting your request that we indicate more precisely and more concretely our view of how the unification is to be brought about and what form it should take.

Once it is agreed that there is sufficient accord in our positions on the fundamental principles of Marxism and to make possible and justify unity; once it is agreed that the differences we do have (which we do not wish to conceal) are of a nature that may exist within the ranks of a single revolutionary party - the only important point left is the discussion of the practical organizational steps for fusing the two parties into one.

If the comrades of the Socialist Workers Party feel that a preliminary exchange of opinions, especially on controversial questions, would make for a better and more fruitful understanding of the respective views among the membership of the two parties, and would contribute to a smoother passage to a healthy unity, we are ready to consider the publication under the joint auspices of the two Committees

of a discussion bulletin open to both organizations. If this measure is considered superfluous, and the Socialist Workers Party is of the opinion that a discussion of controversial questions is, under the circumstances, better held after the unity, the decision is in its hands. In that case, representative Committees of the two parties could, as is customary, arrange the details of the fusion. A National Committee could be set up subject to review by the first convention of the united party; similarly in the case of officers of the party. The question of merging the two theoretical and popular organs could also be settled by the two negotiating Committees.

In our case, as, we suppose, in the case of the Socialist Workers Party, all these proposals, if agreed upon by the Committees of the two parties, would be subject to the preliminary approval of a National Convention.

One further point, in conclusion. We find that we do not agree with your statement on the possibility or expediency of practical collaboration in a number of fields, to be carried on between now and the eventual union of the two parties.

You say that "to attempt to begin with such practical cooperation, prior to a definite approach to unification, would seem to us to put things upside down and lead to a sharpening of conflicts over secondary questions rather than to their moderation."

We call your attention, first, to the fact that it is not practical collaboration that we are beginning with. Both organizations have already begun with the question of unification, the Workers Party by its Resolution in favor of unification and the Socialist Workers Party by its decision in favor of discussing unification. The fact that both parties envisage unification as a practical possibility - and unless they did, further discussion would be superfluous or deceptive, - creates, in our view, the basis for considering, now, agreements for practical collaboration in specific, concrete fields of work. Second, it is difficult for us to see why such collaboration would necessarily, or at all, lead to a sharpening of conflicts.

On some questions there are, it is true, differences in theory. But we have always held that it is precisely in those cases where there is a difference in theory or program between two proletarian organizations, and not contrariwise, that practical collaboration is necessary and possible - provided, of course, that the two organizations have a similar standpoint or aim in the practical step. Such collaboration is not less indicated between organizations with a similar program. It is certainly ten times more warranted in the case of two organizations which have already commenced to discuss the question of unity between themselves.

Naturally, when there are specific political disagreements on actual tasks, tasks of the day, practical collaboration is not possible between the organizations involved. For example, we cannot today have practical collaboration between the parties on the question of the election in Detroit. But the two parties can, even now, we are convinced, reach a high measure of fruitful collaboration in such matters as a joint fight, or joint consultation in the fight, for those slogans and aims which we put forward in much the same way in the trade unions. Similar practical collaboration is possible and desirable in the case of the New York municipal elections; in the case of united action against Fascists like Smith and Winrod; in the case of joint efforts on behalf of our comrades of the Fourth International abroad; etc., etc.

For these reasons, we request that you reconsider your position.

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We have set forth our views on a number of questions as plainly as we can, with the aim of clearing all obstacles off the road to unity and without concealing our differences in general or our differences, to the extent that they exist, on the question of unity itself. It is quite possible that we have failed to express ourselves in all questions with the necessary clarity, or have failed to deal with all the questions of importance. If that proves to be so, in your view, we are prepared upon request to elaborate our views on any point germane to the question of unification. We are ready to deal with any such points in further correspondence, or orally in a meeting with the sub-committee appointed by your Political Committee. Meanwhile, we await your reply to the present communication.

Yours fraternally,

Max Shachtman,
National Secretary,
Workers Party

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

August 28, 1945

Max Shachtman, National Secretary
Workers Party
114 West 14th Street
New York 11, New York

Dear Comrades:

Your letter of August 28 with the enclosed statement of your National Committee "On the Unification of the Workers Party and the Socialist Workers Party" has been received and discussed by our Political Committee. We especially note your declaration, in Point 5 of your statement, that the Workers Party is "prepared to discuss the question of unity with the Socialist Workers Party." We are in favor of such a discussion and will so recommend to the next Plenum of our National Committee.

In view of the sharp conflicts which resulted in the split between us and the formation of your own organization five years ago, and in view of the deep differences which have separated us since, we believe that the National Committee's consideration of the question will be facilitated if you will indicate more precisely and more concretely your view of how the unification is to be brought about and what form it should take.

We have always proceeded from the point of view that programmatic agreement on the most important and decisive questions is the only sound basis for unification; and that, when differences of opinion occur, unity can be maintained only by the scrupulous observance of the democratic principle of the subordination of the minority to the majority and strict discipline in public activity and action.

If, in the course of the discussion, it appears that we are approaching agreement on the most important political questions, as well as upon the organizational principle referred to above, and that unification is a realistic perspective, then systematic joint consultation and plans for the cooperation of the two organizations for the carrying out of practical work pending the formal unification, would follow as a matter of course. But to attempt to begin with such practical cooperation, prior to a definite approach to unification, would seem to us to put things upside down and lead to a sharpening of conflicts over secondary questions rather than to their moderation. In our view, "the practical possibilities of living and working together harmoniously" flow naturally and inevitably from a basic agreement on the fundamental questions, not vice versa. Friction and conflict arise from political disagreement rather than from personal incompatibility. In the long run, the latter is always subordinated to the former.

In our opinion, the question of unification must be discussed with complete frankness and seriousness. The aim must be to effect a genuine unification on a firm and long-lasting basis. We, for our part, believe that unity would be a good thing if it is firmly based and leads to the strengthening of the party and the building up of the party. On the other hand, a unification followed by a sharp faction fight and another split would be highly injurious to the party.

The views set forth above are designed to give a concrete basis to the preliminary discussions between us. Naturally, we are perfectly willing to hear and consider any different form of preliminary approach which you may wish to make. If you think that any exploratory verbal discussion would facilitate the preparation and organization of the agenda for a thorough-going consideration of the whole problem of unification in all its aspects, a sub-committee of our P.C. is prepared to meet with you for such a preliminary discussion. Such a meeting can be arranged on short notice by a telephone call to Comrade Stein, Organizational Secretary, at the National Office of the S.W.P.

Yours fraternally,

JPC/sc

J.P. Cannon
National Secretary
Socialist Workers Party

REPLY TO WORKERS PARTY

(Adopted by Political Committee. August 27, 1945)

Max Shachtman, National Secretary
Workers Party
114 West 14th Street
New York 11, New York

Dear Comrade:

Your letter of August 22 with the enclosed statement of your National Committee "On the Unification of the Workers Party and the Socialist Workers Party" has been received and discussed by our Political Committee. We especially note your declaration, in Point 5 of your statement, that the Workers Party is "prepared to discuss the question of unity with the Socialist Workers Party." We are in favor of such a discussion and will so recommend to the next Plenum of our National Committee.

In view of the sharp conflicts which resulted in the split between us and the formation of your own organization five years ago, and in view of the deep differences which have separated us since, we believe that the National Committee's consideration of the question will be facilitated if you will indicate more precisely and more concretely your view of how the unification is to be brought about and what form it should take.

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If, in the course of the discussion, it appears that we are approaching agreement on the most important political questions, as well as upon the organizational principle referred to above, and that unification is a realistic perspective, then systematic joint consultation and plans for the cooperation of the two organizations for the carrying out of practical work pending the formal unification would follow as a matter of course. But to attempt to begin with such practical cooperation, prior to a definite approach to unification, would seem to us to put things upside down and lead to a sharpening of conflicts over secondary questions rather than to their moderation. In our view, "the practical possibilities of living and working together harmoniously" flow naturally and inevitably from a basic agreement on the fundamental questions, not vice versa. Friction and conflict arise from political disagreement rather than from personal incompatibility. In the long run, the latter is always subordinated to the former.

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The views set forth above are designed to give a concrete basis to the preliminary discussions between us. Naturally, we are perfectly willing to hear and consider any different form of preliminary approach which you may wish to make. If you think that an exploratory verbal discussion would facilitate the preparation and organization of the agenda for a thorough-going consideration of the whole problem of unification in all its aspects, a sub-committee of our P.C. is prepared to meet with you for such a preliminary discussion. Such a meeting can be arranged on short notice by a telephone call to Comrade Stein, Organizational Secretary, at the National Office of the S.W.P.

Yours fraternally,

J. P. Cannon, National Secretary
Socialist Workers Party

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October 4, 1945

National Committee,
Socialist Workers Party,
116 University Place,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades:

To facilitate the consideration of the question of the unification of the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party at your Plenum, we want to summarize here the views we have already set forth in our written communications to you and orally at the two discussion meetings already held by your subcommittee and ours.

The National Committee of the Workers Party proceeds from the following premises:

The Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party represent two tendencies in the revolutionary Marxist, or Fourth Internationalist, movement. Between the two Parties, there is, however, sufficient agreement on basic principles and program to warrant and make possible their fusion into a united Party. The differences between the two on a number of theoretical, political and organizational questions, the nature and scope of which are well-known, are permissible within the framework and in the ranks of a single revolutionary Party. Furthermore, the main political difference which led to the split in the S.W.P. and the formation of the W.P. more than five years ago, namely, the question of the defense of Stalinist Russia in the war, does not have the same acuteness and prominence today that it had then, the S.W.P. having declared recently that its main slogan in this question has receded into the background.

The unification of the two parties is thereby rendered politically and practically possible at the present time. Such a unification, accomplished on a sound and healthy basis, would serve the best interests of the working class and of our common cause. It would give the movement for revolutionary socialism a great forward impulsion in this country and stimulate the movement of our co-thinkers and co-fighters throughout the world.

In our discussions, the delegation of the Socialist Workers Party pointed out that its Committee had not yet taken an official position on the question of the unity of the two Parties and had not yet decided whether or not it wanted unification or considered it desirable. The delegation did not, therefore, make any proposals in the name of the S.W.P. on the question of unity, or on the basis upon which it could or should be accomplished. It limited itself largely to obtaining information from us with regard to the viewpoint of the Workers Party.

Nevertheless, we are able to record a point which is important not only from our standpoint, but from the standpoint of the consideration of the question of unity itself. As we pointed out in our last letter to you, the reply sent by your Party to our National Committee Resolution on Unity lent itself to ambiguity in the matter of the basis for unification. It could be interpreted to mean that the S.W.P. took the position that before unity could be accomplished between the two Parties, there would first have to be discussion and then agreement on the decisive and important political and programmatic

questions. We replied by saying that the political differences between us were sufficiently well-known on both sides; that they could most probably not be composed in one, two or three discussions between sub-committees; and that in any case, we took the position that these different views could very well be permitted, contained and freely discussed within the ranks of one revolutionary Party. At the first conference between the two delegations, this ambiguity seems to us to have been largely dispelled. Two circumstances give us this impression. The first is that the political differences between the two Parties were not raised by your delegation for discussion, were not proposed for discussion, and no indication was given that such a discussion, and above all, an agreement on the political questions, was considered an indispensable precondition of unification. The second is that the National Secretary of the S.W.P., in response to our direct question, declared that he could grant, abstractly, in a general way, that the differences between the two Parties were of a character and scope as made possible their co-existence within a single Party; and declared further that the present differences between the two groups could be considered "frozen". A more precise and formal confirmation of this view, would in our opinion, considerably narrow the field of difference between us on the question of the basis for unity and on the character of the united Party.

While granting abstractly the possibility of fruitful co-existence of the two tendencies within one Party, the delegation of the Socialist Workers Party repeatedly stressed the question of the concrete practicability, feasibility, of a fusion. It referred several times to the fact that the S.W.P. comrades had uppermost in their minds the question, "Will it work?", that is, will the unification work out profitably for the movement in practice, in the concrete? Reiterating the view expressed in the letter of the S.W.P. to our Party, the delegation pointed out that a unification followed immediately by an intense factional fight and perhaps another split, would not be a solid unity or a worthwhile unity from any standpoint.

These considerations were set forth by the S.W.P. delegation with particular reference, it seems, to one of our proposals. We find it necessary to repeat and motivate it here, inasmuch as on the one side it has been endorsed by our Committee both before and after its presentation to the joint conference of the two Parties, and on the other side, because it became the principal topic of discussion at the first joint conference.

In opening the discussion at the first Conference, our delegation put forward orally the views presented in our letter to you. In reply to the question as to how, more concretely, we envisaged the actual unification, we added: For us it is not a question of amneuvering, bargaining, or deception of any kind. We recognize the numerical superiority of the S.W.P., which means that unless and until altered by the majority of the membership of the unity party, the pre-dominance in leadership and policy in the united Party would fall to the comrades now composing the S.W.P., with the comrades now composing the W.P. making up a disciplined minority with all the necessary rights and facilities at its disposal to provide the means of changing the policy of the united Party by democratic process.

However, our delegation added, the Workers Party, representing a distinct and different political tendency, or ideological grouping, from that represented by the S.W.P., required and was justified in having, inside the united Party, an internal educational bulletin of its own in which it could freely defend, disseminate and develop its particular point of view on a number of theoretical and political problems of the movement. We proposed that the right of any minority to publish and disseminate such an organ inside the party - a right

fully consonant with the best traditions and principles of democratic centralism- be recognized on both sides, thus obviating in advance any recriminations and friction that might otherwise be produced if and when such an organ was published. We pointed out further that the present party discussion bulletin, if published in the same way in the united Party, could not be considered an adequate substitute for a bulletin of our own, inasmuch as the comrades of the W.P. believed that they could not place sufficient confidence in the present auspices of the S.W.P. bulletin to warrant a withdrawal of our proposal for a bulletin of our own and a joint recognition of the right of ourselves, or any other minority, to publish one at its own discretion and on its own responsibility.

This proposal, as your delegation will report to you, constituted perhaps the main burden of our joint Conference, at least of its first session. Upon further consideration by us of the arguments advanced by your delegation, we find it necessary to reiterate our stand. It was our impression that most of the arguments advanced applied not merely to the harm that would allegedly come to the Party from the discussion of Party problems in a bulletin of our own, but equally to a free discussion conducted in any other form. We are unable to subscribe to any viewpoint that says or suggests that every ideological grouping or tendency is automatically a faction or must necessarily become one; or that every political or ideological discussion is automatically a factional fight or must necessarily become one. In our view, agreement with such a conception means one of two things: If every political or theoretical discussion is a factional discussion and means of a factional fight, the revolutionary Party must be engaged in permanent factional warfare; and if this is so, and factional warfare must be averted at all costs, then discussion must be disallowed, and then in place of a living revolutionary Party freely developing its theory, program and political line we will have a monolithic sect. Our conception of the basis for unification and therefore the basis of the revolutionary party, is radically different from this.

Your National Secretary pointed out, in the discussion, that there was no question of principle involved in our proposal. The publication of a minority organ inside the Party had been allowed before and even the issuance of a public organ by a minority cannot be dealt with as a matter of immutable principle, he declared. To take no more than one example, he added, the Oehlerites in the old Communist League of America and in the old Workers Party were freely permitted to publish an organ of their own inside the Party. What was involved, in his opinion, however, was the significance of our proposal concretely, in the given case. The question of unity could not be solved, he said, by the S.W.P. rejecting our proposal or by the W.P. insisting on it. It should rather be considered as a "symbol", and from this standpoint it appeared to him that the proposal would or might adversely affect or nullify the aspects of the unity.

For the reasons already set forth in our conference sessions, we cannot accept this point of view or share these apprehensions. We have not taken a position for unification lightly. We do not contemplate the abandonment of our independent organization, leadership and press lightly, but only because of the progress for the movement that a healthy unity would represent. We look upon a factional war the morning after unity as an absurdity. But we are compelled to add that we regard as equally absurd any suggestion that a free exchange of opinions on party problems, a free and fruitful and necessary discussion of such problems - which we look upon as the life-blood of a revolutionary party, and not as a "special" feature of party life or as a "luxury" accorded from time to time - is the same thing as a factional war or is in contradiction with any of the practical and daily needs of party work in the class struggle.

Finally, even if the publication of a separate organ inside the party by a minority is considered "abnormal" - a viewpoint we do not share - it must also be said that there are very few examples in our history of the union of two organizations which, for all they have in common, nevertheless have such a divergence of views, that is, of the union of two such distinctive tendencies as our two Parties now represent. In that case, it seems to us utterly unrealistic to attempt, in the problem of our unification, to apply "normal" criteria (as some comrades consider them to be) to an "abnormal" (i.e., a more or less unprecedented) situation. If some comrades find it necessary, we can establish our own "precedent" in this matter.

We do not wish to dwell at length on our proposals for practical collaboration between the two Parties now. Naturally, the area of collaboration and its character and limitations will differ in accordance with the position taken by your Plenum on the basic and primary question, the question of unity. We are prepared for collaboration in either case. If you find that unity is either undesirable or unfeasible at the present time, we are nevertheless prepared to enter into practical agreements with the S.W.P. for united activity in all indicated fields. The nature of the agreements would then be of one kind. If, however, your Plenum decides that unity is not only desirable but feasible and soon realizable, the practical collaboration we should then engage in would be of another - a closer and more harmonious - kind. It would then also represent both a practical preparation for the unity of the two Parties and a realistic test of its workability.

Finally, we point out, the question of our views on the stage of development and the perspectives of the revolutionary Party in the United States, and of our views on the Stalinist Party, also arose toward the end of our second joint session. We find no need to reiterate what was said on these questions from our side or to elaborate on it. Some of what was said represents our Party's views; some, however, represents only individual views, as was made clear in the discussion,

Those members who find it necessary to examine our views on these or other questions, will find them stated with sufficient clarity and amplitude in the volumes of our theoretical organ and in the files of our Party bulletin, both of which were supplied to your delegation in the most complete possible form. Our views on the stage of development of the movement in this country today, of its tasks (in the general sense) and perspectives, on the question of a party cadre, of tendencies in the revolutionary Party, of party democracy and related questions, are best and most recently set forth in the documents presented to and adopted by our Active Workers Conference a little while ago.

In view of the foregoing, we reiterate the position that our Party has taken on the question of unification, and make the following requests of your Plenum:

That the National Committee of the S.W.P., upon examining the relevant documents and discussing the reports before it, adopt an official position on the question of unity to be communicated to us for our immediate consideration. It is difficult for us to see how any further progress can be made in the discussion and realization of unity between the two Parties if your sub-committee designated to meet with us continues to be in a position where it cannot and does not make any proposals of its own on the question of unity, where it cannot express itself definitely on proposals made by us, and where it is even unable to declare that the S.W.P. has decided in favor or in opposition to unity itself.

That the National Committee of the S.W.P., in adopting an official position, expresses itself at the same time on the series of proposals made by us for the basis on which the unification should be achieved and for the method to follow in achieving it.

Lastly, that the National Committee of the S.W.P., in its deliberations on unity, consider again the question of practical collaboration between the two organizations and adopt concrete proposals, either in agreement with our own or else as a substitute of our own for us to consider.

Any relevant questions that remain unelucidated, or that require amplification, we are prepared to deal with during your deliberations, either by letter or orally before you Committee. For that purpose, our Committee's delegation is being held at your disposal upon your request at any time during your sessions.

Fraternally yours,

Max Shachtman,
National Secretary,
Workers Party

November 15, 1945

Max Shachtman, National Secretary
Workers Party
114 W. 14 St.
New York City, N.Y.

Dear Comrade:

The SWP plenum resolution on unity, in referring to the proposal of the WP negotiating committee on a tendency bulletin in the united party, merely states the following: the WP "would insist on the right to publish their own discussion bulletin under their own control." Ostensibly, therefore, the SWP majority does not take a position on this question. However, in the actual life of the party it has become clear that the majority advances the tendency bulletin proposal as a great stumbling block to unity.

For our part, we do not believe that this is the real stumbling block to unity. Nevertheless we believe that it should be removed. The plenum refused to take note in its resolution of our distinction between the right to a tendency bulletin and the exercise of that right. We believe that the WP should make that distinction and pledge itself not to exercise the right in the united party under the following conditions:

(1) That the SWP cooperate closely with the WP for the purpose of preparing the membership of both parties for unity, and that after unity there will be real cooperation of the SWP and the WP;

(2) That the SWP recognize the right of a minority to issue its own bulletin for the purpose of convincing the membership of the correctness of its views.

Needless to say, nobody could demand nor could the WP comrades agree, to refrain forever from exercising the right of a minority to issue its own bulletin. No responsible minority would exercise that right without great justification, but no responsible majority would ever prohibit it from exercising it. If the right is used unjustifiably, a majority should easily be able to discredit a minority for doing so. But a united Trotskyist party is so all-important today that for the sake of it we appeal to the comrades of the WP to pledge themselves not to exercise this right, subject to the conditions indicated above.

Fraternally yours,

Felix Morrow
for the SWP Minority

November 27, 1945

Felix Morrow
SWP Minority Group
214 West 16th St.
New York, N. Y.

Dear Comrade Morrow:

Our Political Committee has agreed to the proposals on the question of the tendency bulletin made by the Minority Group of the Socialist Workers Party in your letter of November 15. Your proposals afford us still another occasion for reiterating and amplifying our position. It has been stated with sufficient clarity in our written communications to the Socialist Workers Party and at the two oral discussions that took place between the delegations of the two Parties prior to the recent Plenum of the S.W.P.

What was involved from the very beginning of the discussion on the unity of the two organizations was not a determination of the Workers Party comrades to issue a tendency bulletin of their own on the very first day of the existence of the projected unity Party, regardless of circumstances. For example, so far as our Political Committee was concerned, this was made clear in the first report made by its representative to a general membership meeting of the New York Local of our Party, a report substantially repeated to most of the other Locals of our organization several months ago.

As you know, the question involved in reality was the right of the minority in the united Party to issue such a tendency bulletin. The SWP Plenum Resolution is literally correct in stating our position as an insistence "on the right to publish their own discussion bulletin under their own control". In the oral discussions between the delegations of the two Parties, it was not we but the principal representative of the S.W.P. who called attention to the fact that, for example, the leadership of the American Trotskyist movement, himself included, had freely permitted the Oehler group to publish an internal bulletin of its own inside the organization in 1934-1935. Therefore, he added, it was not a question of the "right" to such a bulletin "in the abstract", a right which could presumably be granted; but rather a question of our "attitude". We could not then and cannot today construe this otherwise than as a reference to our opinions about the present majority faction of the SWP. These opinions we expressed candidly to the SWP delegation. We pointed to what is generally known, namely, the fact that our comrades do not have sufficient confidence in the present leadership of the SWP, particularly with reference to its record toward inner-party opponents

and critics, and are therefore concerned with assuring their democratic rights in the united Party by having the minority's right to its own bulletin jointly acknowledged by both sides. We are perfectly ready to admit that abstractly considered this lack of confidence may prove to be exaggerated, or even groundless. In like manner, we admit that common work and common experiences in the united Party may cause the comrades of the Workers Party to abandon their opinions on this score. They are not ready, however, to abandon them merely on demand. What they are prepared to abandon in the interests of unity, has already been made amply clear and precise. We consider it enough.

We can go further and say that even the question of the right to issue a tendency bulletin is, in a sense, only the formal side of the matter. Ordinarily, it would not occupy the place of importance it has been given in the discussion on unity. As you so rightly put it, "we do not believe that this is the real stumbling block to unity." The "stumbling block" is the conception of the SWP Majority Group of the kind of Party revolutionary Marxists should have and build. Our Party shares with the Minority Group of the SWP the conception of the Bolsheviks which was fought for with such emphasis and clarity, especially since 1923-1924, by Trotsky and his supporters. The SWP Majority, in practice and often in words as well, holds the conception of a "monolithic" Party, which flies in the face of our whole tradition. We are compelled to say now that unity of the two organizations is possible only if this conception is abandoned. It is primarily in this sense that the question of the tendency bulletin is so important. It serves as the concrete test, at the present junction, of the conceptions held on the kind of Party we must build -- a sterile "monolithic" faction, or a united democratically-centralized party of action in which there is freedom of opinion and grouping, and the assurance of democratic rights for all views compatible with the fundamental program of revolutionary Marxism.

This is how the real issue stands. To it, the other considerations can well be subordinated, including the matter of whether a minority would issue a tendency bulletin the morning after the unification, a year afterward, or at all. It is in this sense that we are prepared to accept the proposals of the SWP Minority.

Fraternally yours,

MS/CW

Max Shachtman
National Secretary,
Workers Party

Copy to:

J. P. Cannon, National Secretary
Socialist Workers Party
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