

December 12, 1945

Dear ---- :

I'm writing this rather hurriedly in response to your request for more information on what has happened in Los Angeles, during the past six months, with regard to the role of the Workers Party and the Socialist Workers Party in the fight against Gerald Smith. Because of the press of other work, this isn't going to be put together in tightly organized form but I think you'll find the essential things here. I probably would have written earlier, but it was only recently that I got to see the articles in the SWP Internal Bulletins written by Murry Weiss on this question, trying to explain away for the benefit of the Cannonites the truly miserable role which they played here. I understand that Goldman has written a couple of articles for the SWP Internal Bulletin which took Weiss apart, but I haven't seen them, except for references elsewhere.

As you know, Weiss (as Cannon's hatchetman in this area) has the reputation among his comrades of being a mighty "slick" and "smooth" article. I suppose then that his apology for the Cannonite line in Los Angeles is the best they can do along those lines. But when he bases most of his defense on a transparent falsehood, and then includes in his CW article the factual DOCUMENTED disproof of said falsehood, one can only conclude that the lawyer's job he undertook was too much even for him. But let me get down to the facts.

You know, of course, that Gerald Smith started his invasion of California last June, made some preliminary contacts under cover, then held a meeting in the Embassy Auditorium which was more in the nature of an organization meeting than a public rally. About the first information on his activities came from an article written for the New York PM by Carey McWilliams, which (interestingly enough) made the comment that there were no picket lines against this affair, no opposition. It became public knowledge that Smith's intentions were to establish himself on the West Coast by building a base in Los Angeles.

It was at this time that we (that is, the Workers Party section in Los Angeles) decided that we had to get busy on this threat of a fascist invasion in our midst and immediately set about to investigate. As far as the SWP was concerned, as Weiss confesses in his article, it all went over their heads (more on this later). As the "vanguard of the working class," the SWP showed the same live reaction to an immensely important phenomenon right under their noses, as did the labor bureaucrats here. As for us, we kicked ourselves slightly for not having reacted even before the Embassy meeting and set about to see that it didn't happen again. It didn't.

We didn't have long to wait. It became known that Smith was going to hold his first large-scale public rally, at the Philharmonic Auditorium on Monday June 25. I say "it became known" because it was not announced by Smith. The rally was being organized through the Ham and Egg organization by personal contact and mail. Even the Philharmonic management did not know it was a Smith meeting until after the hall had been hired. x We learned it was going to take place about one week before the meeting.

This little fact is of some importance because of the fact that the Cannonites at first did a lot of yelping about how there "wasn't enough time" to take action against the meeting as an argument against participating in the picketing action. The implication was that we didn't give them "enough time." ~~Incidentally~~ That angle was killed, however, after we pointed out a few times that it was a definite policy on Smith's part to make it impossible for his opposition to have "enough time." It was exactly his strategy to "spring" his rallies, relying on the Ham and Eggs outfit, some Fundamentalist preachers and other subterranean channels to get his audience. The SWP found they were falling for his strategy and stopped yelling about our not giving them enough time to prepare. Their demand would have had to be presented to Smith himself in protest against his "unfair" tactics in not giving the SWP "enough

time" to shake the dust off them, yawn and get ready to do some leisurely "vanguarding."

During this week before Smith's Philharmonic rally, what was the state of affairs as far as the labor movement and the "general public" was concerned?

If we are to clarify the question before us and not confuse it, it is important to distinguish between the state of affairs before and after the Philharmonic meeting. This is necessary because, First: the Philharmonic meeting was an objective dividing line in this respect; and Second: in order to understand just what the SWP Executive Committee had before it when it refused our proposal to take action against this first Smith rally.

Weiss purports to discuss this on page 2 of his article (SWP Internal Bulletin for Sept. 1945). I must say that he writes like a man from the moon -- if we assume that he is discussing the situation before the Philharmonic meeting when his Executive Committee had to decide on a line. And this assumption must be made since he winds up the whole page by writing: "It was on this background that the Section Executive Committee considered the basic aspects of the campaign and worked out its policy" (at its meeting of June 21, four days before the Smith rally).

He starts out correctly enough by noting that at this time, "the leaders of most sections of the labor movement were completely passive to the fascist threat. Others were following a feeble and cowardly policy." This was, namely, the famous hush-hush policy -- ignore Smith, "don't give him publicity," etc. Not only the labor leaders, but also the liberal elements of the city were all wrapped up in this illusory policy; and among both labor and liberals, it was the Stalinists who set this tone.

And yet at this very time (still in the week before the Philharmonic rally) the press reported "a deluge of resolutions of protest from trade unions and other organizations" going to the Philharmonic management and to the city administration. There is no doubt that this was stimulated at the tops of the trade unions by the Stalinists as their face-saving gesture in the midst of their hush-hush policy. (But it is of interest to note this since, when the SWP later got around to introducing their resolutions of protest against Smith in a few trade union locals -- Weiss counts up to seven -- they immediately began to talk as if they were stirring the trade union movement to its very depths practically single-handed, like Atlas holding up the earth.)

As for the rest of Weiss's description, most of it refers to after the Philharmonic meeting. The Stalinist "anti-lunatic fringe committee" which he mentions came then. Weiss writes further: "With each new successful meeting of Smith, hammer blows were being struck at the policy of hush-hush... More and more workers were being drawn into the movement for anti-fascist action... It was on this background that the Section Executive Committee considered..."

This is nonsense. There had been no "hammer blows" against Smith when "the Section Executive Committee considered" our proposal for a picket line at the Philharmonic. Not only no blows, let alone "hammer" blows, there had not even been any "new successful meeting of Smith." The Philharmonic was Smith's very first rally. By thus confusing the growth of militancy from below after the Philharmonic, with the week before the Philharmonic when the SWP had to adopt its line, Weiss is merely trying to lay a fictitious basis for attacking our picket line demonstration. He is trying to give the impression by this sleight-of-hand that when we organized that picketing demonstration in the name of the Workers Party, the labor movement was already stirred up, and that we ignored this fact.

On second thought, perhaps I am giving Weiss too much credit for a deep Machiavellianism. To be perfectly fair, it may be that he is merely confused and ignorant of how the situation developed; and that in writing his piece, his confusion

tailored itself along the lines of his desire to accuse the Workers Party of "ignoring" the labor movement. Be that as it may, such are the facts. When we were organizing our picketing demonstration for the Philharmonic, those sections of the labor movement that were at all aware of Smith were, under the leadership of the Stalinists, determined to take no overt action against it.

How did we set about preparing for a picket line demonstration at the Philharmonic in this situation?

Now, in what I shall say on this point, far be it from me to claim that we did a perfect job on the project. We did a darn good one, but even that formally speaking is irrelevant to the question. The question is one of policy. Naturally, if the SWP had pitched in, a better job would probably have been done by our combined forces. I am also perfectly willing to agree that if the SWP had pitched in, they might have been able to make suggestions on what to do or how to do it which might have been helpful. All that is precisely the reason why a UNITED FRONT of different organizations is desirable. I say this in order to draw a sharp line between two kinds of criticism: criticism of MISTAKES OF EXECUTION of a policy, and criticism of the correctness of the policy itself. Naturally, a disloyal and dishonest critic, who is interested only in making a debaters' point in order to cover up, may have no scruples against confusing the two. I do not intend to counter this by claiming that we made no mistakes down to the last jot and tittle. I leave that kind of braggadocio to Weiss.

The main determining factor was the shortness of time, obviously. With a certain amount of man-power, only a certain number of things can be done in a couple of days. This is a principle of applied Marxism which the SWP took so to heart that they did....nothing. We could not do everything.

It would ordinarily have been desirable to organize such a picket line by calling a preliminary united front conference. One of the by-product advantages of this, given the time, is that it is more possible to demonstrate clearly where the invited organizations stand, by their response. As we all know, the first purpose of a united-front proposal is to organize and unite and strengthen the fighting forces for the action in view; but a second purpose of a united-front proposal is to put on the spot and expose those who do not want to fight. This second purpose applied with full force to the Communist Party which, of course, was against a picket line. Spending much of the meager time at our disposal on united-front maneuvers with the CP was out of the question for us. We decided to concentrate on channels which might really add man-power to the immediate picket line before us, and turn the guns on the CP when we had the time to do it.

The holding of a formal preliminary united-front conference was made impossible under the circumstances by Smith's unwillingness to cooperate by giving us more time to organize before springing his meeting. We can let Weiss wring his hands over this sad fact, but we did not. There were three channels through which to organize the picket line projected:

- (1) Other organizations;
- (2) Our own mailing list of contacts and sympathizers and Labor Action subscribers;
- (3) Distribution of leaflets at industrial plants,

besides agitation at their places of work by our comrades. Clearly items 2 and 3 presented no special difficulties. Within 24 hours a leaflet was printed and was being distributed through the mail and in a series of plants.

Organizations we divided into three categories: (1) Trade unions; (2) Community organizations, with emphasis on minority groups of course; and (3) Radical organizations which, as far as we knew at the time, might most quickly and easily be drawn into a militant action like a picket line.

In this last category we listed the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Labor Party, and the IWW. We found we were mistaken about all four of these organizations, of course. None of them were willing to move. We had given these birds too much credit. Even the subsequent development of the Smith fight found the SP, SLP and IWW still on ice. It was waste motion which certainly could have been more profitably spent on local Communist clubs.

As far as the CP officially was concerned, it was obvious that that was a horse of a different color. There was no possibility of getting the Stalinists officially to act with us (in the space of a couple of days too), not only because they would not unite with Trotskyists in the first place, but because their policy was against picketing. Getting the Stalinists to act was a longer-term perspective. On the other hand, we tried to make arrangements to get our leaflet and if possible visitors to the local Communist clubs, but our forces were inadequate in the rush. I think only one CP club was covered, their most important Negro branch.

Naturally, a united front with the SWP would have helped considerably in permitting better access to the Stalinists. But under Weiss's leadership the SWP refused to pitch in. What then can a man say when this very Weiss turns around and attacks us for not wanting to approach the Stalinists...not wanting to! Weiss's flock in the SWP can swallow this sort of stuff if they are carefully shielded from the truth. While on the subject of the Stalinists, in the plants our comrades as a matter of course paid special attention to hammering at the Stalinists, especially at the Negro workers who follow them.

Our united-front proposal to the four radical organizations, including the SWP, went out June 18, one week before the Smith rally. At the same time, a special letter went out to a list of about 200 or more trade union bodies, both CIO and AFL. Likewise to some community organizations, but this angle was very inadequately covered. Attempts we were able to make during the next couple of days to follow up the letters to trade unions came to nothing.

Now I come to Weiss's very clumsy attempt at falsification. It is his assertion, repeated at least a dozen times in his articles, that we "never tried to get the trade unions to act," that we ignored the labor movement "completely", etc. Driven by the political necessity of finding a basis for their criticism, and having no other, he makes this apply not only to our organization of the Philharmonic picket line but to subsequent activities also!

I imagine that the first thought that would come to the mind of a disinterested person reading Weiss's stuff is this: How does Weiss know that we "never tried to get the trade unions to act"? Maybe we told him so...?

(1) Weiss and the SWP know even before the Philharmonic affair that we had contacted the trade unions by letter and would try to follow up in the time available. We told them, of course.

The silly accusation about "never trying" was never made to our face by any of the various SWP people with whom we discussed this business, from last June to today. I saw it for the first time in Weiss's article in his Internal Bulletin -- where, I suppose, he considered it safe since it goes only to SWP members. In speaking with us they criticized us for not waiting for the labor movement to act, but never for not wanting to get the labor movement to act. The reason for the two-facedness is obvious: the proof is on black and white.

(2) In Weiss's own article (p. 20), our letter to them is quoted in full as an appendix. Sad mistake. For there in this brief letter is THE paragraph which presents our proposal. "We propose...." it reads. What are we proposing?

"We propose that the SWP and the WP plan a joint campaign on this issue. We believe that such a joint campaign would strengthen the possibility of involving the labor movement in the struggle."

We were not writing to the capitalist press or the Stalinists or a corporation lawyer, and so while we anticipated political objection from the SWP we did not anticipate disloyal falsification. All of which goes to prove how naive we were.... about the Cannonites.

(3) Weiss writes himself down further as a willing but clumsy falsifier when (on p. 9) he admits in another connection that "they (the WP) proposed blocs to pass resolutions in the unions."

A slip. The man is simply uncoordinated. On the one hand the WP "never tried to get the trade unions to act," and on the other hand we propose joint action to get the trade unions to act. Indeed, in the two largest CIO locals in the area, when later they were lined up to pass resolutions for action against Smith, the main speech at the union came in each case from WP'ers.

But Weiss tips his hand perhaps most completely when he repeats (two or three times!) that Draper "admitted" that "We (the WP) expect nothing from the labor movement at this time."

He actually triumphantly submits this as "proof" that the WP did not want to get the trade unions to act!

This is by the very man who himself writes that at the time Draper is quoted as making this estimation, "the leaders of most sections of the labor movement were completely passive to the fascist threat. Others were following a feeble and cowardly policy." Why on earth does Lawyer Weiss make such a to-do proving that I agreed with him in this estimate at that time?

Of course we did not expect to be able to get the trade unions to participate in the Philharmonic picket line at the time. Weiss agreed with that prognosis --- that's exactly why the SWP likewise followed a "feeble and cowardly policy." We told Weiss and the SWP that a picket line at the Philharmonic would be striking a blow to put a fire under the trade union leaders and Stalinists.

But since Draper did not "expect" the Stalinists and labor leaders to act at this time, obviously it is proved -- is it not? -- that Draper assumed the labor movement would never act.... Therefore, Draper also proposed joint action to (of all things) get the trade unions to act.... Therefore, Draper also argued that a picket line at the Philharmonic would put a fire under the labor leaders and stir the rank and file to act.... Mustn't we all admit that the lawyer's job which Weiss undertook proved too much for his "slick" talents?

Another word is necessary about our united-front proposals to these fantastic people of Cannon's SWP who call themselves "revolutionary leaders" (god save the mark). Naturally, we put our proposals to them down on paper, in communications. It's the custom. Not once did we receive a reply in the same usual manner, though it was repeatedly requested. For one thing, the SWP in this way avoided the necessity of putting their changing arguments down in black and white. In oral conversations we got different arguments from different members of the SWP, even different members of their Executive Committee. One rationalization was as good as another, as long as it avoided a united front.

For another thing, the Cannonites thereby exercise their determination to refuse to recognize that the Workers Party really exists (it is an inconvenient fact), with all the majesty of the royal House who rules his own hole-in-the-wall with imperial sway, allowing no other king before him. The Cannonites act in this way on the theory

of the notorious German philosopher whose theory was that the world exists only in his own head and therefore refused to "recognize" as real the four walls of the prison he was thrown into.

Weiss denies that the S'P's rejection of joint action with us flowed from their attitude of personal hostility and "grudge" -- but will he kindly account for the failure of the S'P to reply to one of our communications in kind? ... For our part, we did not stand on ceremony, any more than we do with the Stalinists whose practices they are copying. Pettifoggers of Weiss's stripe not only will never be able to make a revolution, but they should also remember that they (unlike the Stalinists) do not have the power and prestige of the Russian state behind their spines of the Stalinists. They strut in borrowed clothing.

Actually, all this is piddling stuff. Or it should be. But don't reproach me for spending time on Weiss's dodges: this is the sort of thing with which the ears of Weiss's flock are stuffed. The important point is the question of policy: the S'P's policy of waiting for the labor leaders to act first, versus our policy of initiating picket action in our own name when necessary while at the same time pressing (and in order to press) inside the labor movement for militant action.

The S'P brain-trusters laid great emphasis on "poking fun" at our "puny" picket line of 150 at the Philharmonic Auditorium. They denounced it as a "demonstration of weakness." To it they counterposed their policy of waiting until the CIO and the Stalinists (both of which add up, in Los Angeles, to the Stalinists in terms of leadership) were willing to issue a call for a picket line, while of course putting what pressure they could to bring this about. We said: Our "puny" picket line at the Philharmonic played a significant role in putting pressure on these people. It put a fire under them. To put it with a maximum of modesty: it was one of the important pressures which forced the CIO and the Stalinists to jump on the bandwagon. As our letter to the S'P documents, we approached it from this point of view. The S'P policy of hanging on to the tail-end of the twists and turns of the Stalinists' changes of policy gave up a powerful weapon in the fight for anti-fascist militancy.

The difference is high-lighted when we consider the character of Weiss's approach to this question of policy. He asks the question: Did the WP picket line at the Philharmonic "stop" Smith? No, it did not and could not. It was too small. There's no use picketing at all (says Weiss) unless you start with a mass of preponderant strength. Otherwise it is only a demonstration of weakness, etc. Naturally only the trade unions or the CP can organize a demonstration of this size. Therefore you have to wait till they decide to act. The policy of the "revolutionary vanguard" must be to snipe away and push away at them until they do. Then the "revolutionary vanguard" can come forward (straight from the printer's shop) and announce that it supports them in this action.

The superficiality of this "tail-endist" approach is clear as soon as one realizes that the role played by our picket line was that of INITIATING militant picket action. The problem was not merely: Will this picket line stop Smith -- by itself, so to speak? The real question was: WILL THIS PICKET LINE STIMULATE AND ROUSE OTHER SECTIONS OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO MILITANT ANTI-FASCIST ACTION?

What nonsense it is to talk about such a vanguard action as if its only purpose could be to stop this particular meeting of Smith's! The pilot-parachute which unfolds first has the job of pulling out the big parachute, not of supporting the falling man. This is the very definition of a vanguard action. The "big parachute" was there -- the present and potential desire of the rank and file for militant action.

And so in view of Weiss's strictures about "ignoring the labor movement" and similar claptrap, the ironic fact is that our approach was based precisely on how the revolutionary vanguard party can stimulate, SHOW THE WAY TO, other sections of the

labor movement. That is why Weiss considers it so important, by his devious means, to try to show that we weren't even interested in the labor movement, fantastic as this mambo-jumbo would otherwise appear. For it is precisely on this question of the VAANGUARD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY AND THE MASSES that the CP betrayed its lip-service to Marxism. On the one side they adopted a TAIL-END RELATIONSHIP between the party and the masses, and on the other side tried to assert that we recognized no relationship whatsoever. So to speak, they tried to excuse their own deviation by imputing the opposite deviation to us. (Any experienced comrade can, at this point, call to mind the long list of historical examples where this kind of "clever" distortion has been pressed into service.)

The only question that remains is: Granted that this was the approach of the Workers Party, did the Philharmonic picket line really accomplish this aim?

There are no two ways about this. I shall describe the channels through which our action was felt through the layers of the Stalinist movement and the unions. Following the Philharmonic rally, in every contact we had with Stalinist rank-and-file the reaction was invariable: a gritting of teeth that it was the "fascist" Trotskyites who had done this and mumbled apologies why the CP had done nothing. In the case of the less hard-bitten Stalinists and their sympathizers, the reaction ranged from grudging admission that the Trotskyites "had something there," to openly expressed admiration. Naturally, these people did not have the benefit of Weiss's pseudo-Marxist theories on why the WP should not have picketed! THEIR reaction was: Why didn't we do it?... And they asked their leaders. The plant distributions of the WP leaflets were the first call to action against Smith, and the Stalinist unionists were keenly aware of it.

A little case in point. At the Philharmonic picket line itself, I talked with a leading Negro Stalinist in an important plant. He kept repeating to me with deep feeling as if it struck him afresh each time: "This action is worth a thousand leaflets." While we were talking he spotted a high-ranking Stalinist leader among the spectators. He called over: "Where are the boys tonight?" The CP leader answered with a snarl, "A-ah, this is just a Trotskyite shindig." -- "Well, why didn't you call the boys out yourself?" -- The CP'er moved his lips but no words came out, and he waved his forefinger as if to say, "Just wait, we'll show 'em."

Leaving aside even more favorable effects on individual Stalinists, that was the line of reaction of the Stalinists: "We can't let the Trotskyites steal the show." That is, in more political language, "We can't afford to give the Trotskyites a free field to demonstrate that they are the militant fighters against fascism while we content ourselves with protests hither and yon." -- Interestingly enough, the news item that appeared in the Stalinist People's World referred to the picket line as organized by a radical group, without the usual Stalinist epithets.

The effect on the Stalinists went a good deal further than our personal contacts with them. That is exactly one of the effects of such an action, over and above merely party propaganda. In the first place, the crowd of several hundreds who did not get on the picket line consisted largely of Stalinists. (Of course, incidentally, we had quite a number of Stalinist rank-and-filers on the picket line too!)

In the second place, the leading Negro paper in the city, the Sentinel, gave the Smith rally and picket line a front-page spread (the photos in our pamphlet The Truth About Gerald Smith come from that paper). The three metropolitan newspapers had small items on it, one of them (the Times) naming us as the sponsor. In the third place, in the two largest CIO locals (Longshoremeg and Shipyard Workers) not only every Stalinist but every active unionist knew all about it. Reaction -- invariably as described. In the CIO shipyard union Local 9, of course, "Trotskyism" is a prominent issue or a big "bugaboo", depending on how you look at it. Incidentally, the battle of the Stalinists against the "Trotskyites" in this local is something



that the ranks of the CP are acutely aware of throughout the area -- we have constantly run into evidences of that for years -- and even intra-union struggles here have had repercussions in the Stalinist movement in the area, let alone the fight against Smith.

And fourthly, there is the pamphlet we published, mentioned above. This came off the press on the night of the first big mass rally organized by the Mobilization for Democracy at the Olympic Auditorium on July 20, and of course attended by a concentration of Stalinists as well as unionists. In that one evening, we sold 1,500 copies of the pamphlet at this meeting alone. (Simultaneously we sold several hundred at Smith's own meeting going on the same night at the Shrine.) Altogether we have sold 4,000 copies of the pamphlet in Los Angeles alone -- 2,000 have been sold outside -- systematically covering union and progressive meetings as well as the Smith picket lines. The bulk of these were sold in the period before the CIO and the Stalinists jumped on the picket-line bandwagon. As you know, the pamphlet features the story and pictures of the Philharmonic picket line. The Trotskyist has perhaps never published a pamphlet which was received with such RESPECT -- I think that's the proper word -- especially by the Stalinist rank and file.

There was another angle which turned out to be very useful. You remember the Hollywood studio strike, which had been going on since March and which reached its peak just before Smith came back to Los Angeles the second time in September, at which time the CP and CIO went for mass picketing.

Well, when we started the picket line at the Philharmonic we were somewhat pleasantly surprised to find that already there were two or three "token" pickets from these Studio Unions. (They hadn't had the opportunity to read Weiss's apologetics about a "demonstration of weakness either; they said they were there because they were mad that the other trade unions weren't doing anything about Smith, and they wanted to "do something" and get other unions to do it too, and that's all they were able to do on the spur of the moment.) These studio striker pickets spoke with us at the open-air meeting we held across the street in Pershing Square after the picketing.

When the studio strike reached its height, a number of our comrades were active on the studio picket lines and became acquainted with some of the leading militants, among others, especially when we were all arrested at the studio gate. Just before Smith came back to town, a sale of our Smith pamphlet was announced from the strikers' sand truck at the gate of Warner Brothers among the people on the mass picket line there (which, by the way, was amply stocked with Stalinist rank-and-file too). When the question of a picket line thereupon came up in sharp form immediately afterward, our agitation bore fruit. Not only were the Studio Unions one of the trade union forces that pushed a mass picket line through the Mobilization for Democracy, but even before the Stalinists jumped on the bandwagon we had the assurance that there would be several hundred studio strikers picketing Smith regardless. In fact, the first announcement by the Stalinists that they were for a picket line was given by Phil Connolly of the CIO at a monster rally of the studio strikers, even though the very preceding evening he had still been blowing cold on it.

I have laid the emphasis here on the effect of the Philharmonic picket line on the Stalinist ranks and leaders. It goes without saying that as far as the average militant union man was concerned, in the plants and locals with which we had contact and through the other channels which we penetrated, the effect was exactly the same, except minus the animus against the Trotskyites.

Now I am not building up to the point where I can now say that if we had not picketed Smith at the Philharmonic, then there would not have been the mass picket lines that followed. It was one important force which gained a good deal of its momentum from the general feeling among the aroused sections of labor and the minority groups that militant action was necessary. We did not even press it home as far as



it was capable of. We pressed it home within the limitations of our forces. But it is enough to throw light on the pitiful attempt of Weiss to consider this -- the FIRST demonstration of militant action against Smith, which INITIATED the line of militant mass demonstration -- merely in the light of the question: Did it stop Smith's rally or "overawe" Smith?

It broke through the hush-hush policy. It put the Stalinists and labor leaders on the spot. It showed the way. . . Why, it even woke up the SWP! Weiss himself confesses (on p. 3) that it our pressure for a picket line at the Philharmonic which first "forced us to seriously consider the whole question of the fight against Smith -- something we had not done previously."

In line with his talk about the "puny" Philharmonic picket line, Weiss purports to quote Smith as gloating about the insignificance of the opposition to him. Before saying a word about the significance of this "argument" by Weiss, it is in order to record some facts:

(1) Our observers at the Philharmonic meeting heard no such gloating. Since I was not inside myself, I can only add that the morals which Weiss displays in his article do not induce me to take his word for it... But more than that, what is confirmed by many others (who told us about it as sympathetic strangers the night of the rally) what Smith indubitably did say about the picket line was that IT HAD BEEN ORGANIZED BY THE LEADING RABBI IN THE CITY, MAGNIN, AND THAT THE PICKETERS WERE PAID TEN DOLLARS BY HIM TO PICKET. HE PRESENTED IT AS A PLOT BY THE WEALTHY JEWS AND COMMUNISTS, ETC. I might add, with regard to the authoritative nature of this report, that at the Mobilization rally at the Olympic, Rabbi Magnin himself in the course of his speech there referred to it and publicly denied that he had paid the picketers -- and, also not having read the works of Weiss, he added no sneers about our picket line.

Furthermore, we run into Weiss's usual difficulty -- the existence of DOCUMENTARY evidence of Smith's approach! In his Weekly News Bulletin immediately following the Philharmonic rally, Smith devotes a section to denouncing the picket line as a dangerous plot hatched by sinister persons in limousines, etc. Not a word of "gloating," or sneering at its size. This is in written form about which no lies can be told, fortunately. In view of the doubts which assail me about Weiss's veracity in general, I ask myself how Smith could have pictured the picket line to his audience as a bunch of hirelings of sinister powers, and ALSO "gloated" about its small size (maybe the ten dollar bills ran out?) as representing the extent of the opposition to him. Perhaps it is no wonder that no one besides Weiss "remembers" the gloating!

(2) In subsequent speeches by Smith, far from sneering at the Trotskyite picket line at the Philharmonic, Smith has gone out of his way to attack the Trotskyites as even more dangerous than the Communists. This especially at his Denver rally, where he found our comrades selling the Smith pamphlet outside the door. In both Detroit and Los Angeles, he has linked the Trotskyites with "the Communists" as The Enemy. He is probably the first fascist demagogue to give his Red Doggy such a dual character... Was it perhaps because of the tail-endist policy of the SWP that the Trotskyites have come so prominently to his notice? Or was it because of the activities of the Workers Party, over whose "puny" picket line he "gloated"?

For myself, I know the answer straight out of the horse's mouth. It happens that I have had the "pleasure" of a couple of encounters with Smith's bodyguard in Los Angeles, a character named Ray Schmidt (who acted as doorman at the Philharmonic and angrily threatened us with future storm-troopers -- "puny" ones, no doubt). In my second encounter with this goon, he talked quite peaceably as if angling for information about plans against Smith. He was especially frank about the crimp we threw into Smith's meeting at the Ham and Egg hall on June 28, with a picket line of only about 60, because of the fact that noise from the street reverberated inside the hall. It was at this meeting that Smith got hysterical with rage more than once

not only because of the picket line outside but because of the hubbub and craning and fashing to the windows that it caused among his audience. Scattered anti-fascists in this audience came out chuckling with glee. Gloating indeed!

Weiss's talk about the "ineffectiveness" of our picket line because it gave Smith an opportunity (he says) to gloat over the weakness of his opposition, is exactly on a par with the talk of the liberals that the picket lines of 15,000 were a mistake because they only gave Smith publicity and built him up. And the liberals have a lot more to go on, as far as their type of blather is concerned. Smith does utilize the fight against him to repeat and repeat that "these Jews and Communists are fighting me because I'm effective, because I'm dangerous to them," etc. Trying to base an anti-fascist policy on the basis of what comes to Smith's mouth is as "Marxist" as the SWP's recipe of basing its united-front policy on never agreeing with what the Workers Party proposes.

I referred above to the second picket line we had on Thursday, June 28 at the Ham and Egg hall a few days after the Philharmonic. Therein lies a different kind of moral. When you're dealing with the kind of baggage that falls Weiss's articles, it's the human impulse to throw it all out of the window in one clump. But the fact is that it would be hard even for Weiss to write 31 pages without getting something right.

At the open-air meeting in Pershing Square immediately after the Philharmonic picket line, with a few hundred in the crowd all peped up and raring for another crack at Smith, some people in the crowd proposed that we picket this Thursday meeting of Smith's. It was one of Smith's smaller "intimate" get-togethers with the Ham and Eggers not a mass rally. The comrade who was chairman and other comrades immediately on the spot rashly promised to do so. That very night, at about midnight, our Executive Committee agreed that this should not have been done, in spite of the temper of the crowd. We did not feel that we could do much to prepare for it, that the Ham and Egg hall meeting would be a small shindig anyhow, and the picket line smaller. The important job had already been done by the Philharmonic picket line. But because of our contacts with people that night, we did not see our way, on the other hand, to wenching on it. Actually, as I have described, my worst misgivings about it never materialized. On the basis of general considerations, it was a mistake, but practically it turned out ~~quite~~ much better than we expected. -- I throw this bone to Weiss with full-hearted generosity.

There are two other comments to make on the SWP line. In the SWP Internal Bulletin for July 1945, there is printed the statement of policy adopted by them in Los Angeles, called "Proposal for an Anti-Fascist Campaign." This they adopted at the same time that they rejected our united-front proposal. Paragraph Four is the one which deals with what should be done regarding the Philharmonic rally. I quote the relevant section in full.

Perhaps because it was written so early in the course of events, before their tail-endist policy hardened and fossilized into a theory, it does not put forward the new-baked theory that it is impermissible for a revolutionary party to call an anti-fascist demonstration in its own name on a small-scale, as a vanguard action in an explosive situation to initiate a larger movement of the masses. This section asks: "Can we organize an effective picket demonstration in the available time as the Shachtmanites have proposed?" And it answers this laudable question:

"We do not exclude the variant of the party calling upon the workers in its own name to act against the fascists, as we did in Madison Square Garden (in New York) and in Los Angeles" (in 1938, and as the WP was proposing now).

Then why not call for a picket line against Smith's rally?

"It is necessary to weigh each action with great care and on its own merits."

It then proceeds to weigh the Philharmonic action with very great care and strictly on its own merits, as follows:

"Under the present circumstances the main line of our campaign should be to get the labor movement to act. We are dealing here with a threat of a sustained campaign on the part of the fascists, not with a single meeting."

This is given as the first reason why in Los Angeles in 1945 the same policy is not followed as was followed in the united party before the split between the Workers Party and the Cannonites. One would gather that in 1938 it was merely a question of a single fascist meeting, not a sustained fascist campaign. This silliness needs no comment whatsoever; everyone knows how the fascist movements were blossoming at that time. All that the SWP is really saying here is: "Well, even if we don't act against this meeting, there'll be other meetings...we can get around to it." That's not unreasonable under necessity, but then, why denounce the Workers Party for getting around to it now, not later?

The careful weighing proceeds as follows:

"It would be very advantageous and effective to have the united labor picket demonstration against the Monday (Philharmonic) meeting, but under the present circumstances this is apparently not possible. The time is too short to prepare an effective demonstration of our own."

Would two weeks instead of one been "enough time" to prepare an "effective" demonstration of their very own? Or did they want two months to work at it? Later, at a public S P meeting on Smith, it was explained that to be "effective", a picket line against Smith would have to have a mass which by its numbers "overawed" the fascist audience -- this being said to excuse their refusal to picket the Philharmonic. In cold turkey, this means a picket line of near 10,000. Is this the "effective" picket line of their own ~~kind~~ for which, the statement laments, the time is too short for them to organize in the name of the party?

Rousing all of its resources, the Communist Party in this city, with thousands of members and thousands more of sympathizers and transmission belts, PLUS the organized force of the CIO and many AFL unions, PLUS over 400 community and Negro and Jewish organizations, PLUS the small forces of the S P and ourselves, got a picket line of 15,000. And the SWP mumbles about an "effective" picket line of its own, while it officially interprets "effective" NOT IN TERMS OF INITIATING A MASS MOVEMENT, BUT IN TERMS OF BEING THAT MASS MOVEMENT!

That is, I am assuming that the statement quoted means anything at all. What comes to mind is the comment by Comrade Natalia, clearly directed against these Cannonites, about the struggle of the Bolsheviks against "chvanstvo." It appears that the Russians had a word for it. She defines "chvanstvo" as a combination of braggadocio and snobbery. Nothing could characterize better the little imitations of Cannon who set themselves up here as the "revolutionary vanguard."

So far, all this is about the policy of the S P in Los Angeles. But after a lot of this water had flowed under the bridge, lo and behold! we read in the SWP's own Militant that in the city of Minneapolis there was a mass picket line against a Smith rally. Very good. Minneapolis is a city, as everyone knows, in which the Trotskyist movement has sunk its deepest roots, has achieved its closest connections with wide sections of the labor movement and a large following among workers --- "Trotsky Town" as envious Stalinists have out it. And what do we read in this

Militant report on the mass picket line against Smith in Minneapolis?

First, of all, it appears that no trade unions have sponsored it! An AFL leader and a CIO leader in their personal capacity, not in the name of their mass organizations, are noted in the article. We can let this go -- perhaps the personal sponsorship of two union heads can be considered as being "the involvement of the mass labor movement" (in Weiss's terms). But then we note that in this very city of Minneapolis, which sports a comparatively large branch of the SWP, the mass picket line amounted to exactly 100! ...

Obviously, the SWP knows how to "overawe" fascist rallies, not to speak of organizing "effective" (not "puny") picketing demonstrations of more than 150. In San Francisco, after months of boiling agitation against Smith, the Communist Party and the CIO unions and AFL unions PLUS other organization and PLUS the SWP "effective demonstrators" and the WP, call the first picket line against Smith...and there are 600 on the picket line.

Far be it from me to sneer at this "puny" number (especially for San Francisco) nor to fail to remark that the Stalinists obviously pulled their punch. I wish only to rise weakly and remark the following: that in Los Angeles, at a time when "the leaders of most sections of the labor movement were completely passive to the fascist threat," when the Stalinists and CIO officially were denouncing the idea of militant action and hush-hushing, with only our own faces, before the very name of Smith was very widely known, the Workers Party of Los Angeles organized a picket line of 150 accompanied by a demonstration of several hundred, and followed by an open-air meeting on the spot of several hundred.... We didn't do so badly, huh?

You will remember that in 1939-1940, when we analyzed the degeneration of the Cannonite regime, we characterized this regime as BUREAUCRATIC CONSERVATISM. This double term may be neatly divided in half and applied separately: "bureaucratic" and "conservative", or better still, left intact and applied in its relationship, to sum up the policy of the Cannonites in the fight against fascist Smith in Los Angeles. Instead of a revolutionary vanguard, a miserable policy of dragging at the tails of the Stalinists and the labor leaders. Instead of a bold policy, a search for "Marxist" excuses. Instead of providing imaginative leadership to the advanced sections of labor, a policy of grandmotherly caution against getting too far ahead of the current CP line.

Long as this is, I cannot hope to have said the proper word about each of Weiss's 31 pages. That would be a waste of time anyway. But I've tried to make clear the difference in approach between the Cannonites and ourselves on the relations between the revolutionary vanguard party and the masses. I understand that not in all sections of the country have the SWP branches adopted the extreme position of the Los Angeles Cannonites here. That is something to the good. The most charitable thing to be said is that there is hope for some of these people.

Fraternally,

Hal Draper