

12/23/30

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(Outline of the speech of Comrade Cannon before the New York Branch, reporting for the National Committee, Dec. 23, 1930.)

1. THE DUTY OF THE LEADERSHIP.

- (a) To establish the theoretical and political foundations of the movement and lay out its perspectives.
- (b) To define the tasks.
- (c) To employ tactics suited to the moment and consonant with our principle line.
- (d) This means concretely to have the right answer to the question: what to do next?

Has our policy, in the main, corresponded to these requirements, or is it necessary now to make a drastic change, as Weisbord proposes, as well as a change of the leadership, as he also proposes? Let us examine the whole question and see.

2. THE GENESIS OF THE OPPOSITION.

(a) Formally speaking, the American section of the International Left Opposition was formed a little more than two years ago. It began its public formal existence with the declaration read to the Political Committee by Abern, Schactman and Cannon in October, 1928.

(b) But neither the ideas of the Opposition nor we who represent them fall from the sky on that date. The whole situation is an outgrowth of the evolution and development of the Party and the Comintern. The founders of the American section of the Opposition were "prepared by the past" for their present stand. This is equally true of the Lovestone and the Foster factions, that is, of the right wing and the centrists of our party. Anyone who denies this has to ground his position on the theory that political groupings and political developments are accidental and arbitrary. Such methods of analysis never had any standing among Marxists.

3. THE CRUX OF THE ISSUE CONSISTS IN THIS:

(a) The World War and the Russian Revolution brought the conflict between opportunism and Marxism to a head and resulted in a split in the Second International.

(b) The revolutionary wing of the labor movement has been organized, over a period of more than eleven years, under the banner of the Comintern and the respective parties. This must not be forgotten for a moment. Under the banner of the Comintern and nowhere else the revolutionary workers have been organized.

(c) The first four Congresses of the Comintern represent in their theses and resolutions the revolutionary Marxist doctrines.

(d) The period since the Fourth Congress has been a period of reaction, of sliding backward, in the Russian Party and in the Comintern.

These are the main conditions of the crisis in the Communist movement from which all our conclusions must be drawn.

4. THE FUNDAMENTAL BASIS OF THE THREE FACTIONS.

(a) The crisis in the Comintern has revealed three clearly defined faction groupings. The struggle between them represents, in the final analysis, the struggle of the classes.

(b) In this struggle the Left Opposition represents the proletarian class in its highest historic interests.

(c) "The Right Wing is the handle on which the enemy classes are pulling... The success of this wing will be but a temporarily disguised victory of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat" (Trotsky). The Right Wing is the objective representative of the pressure of the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat and the party.

(d) The Apparatus centrists stagger between the Right and the Left Wings and carry out a petty bourgeois policy.

(e) Thus the crisis in the Russian Party and throughout the Comintern is not a mere "faction fight" between comrades of equal merit as revolutionaries over episodic questions. Weisbord seems to think it is and that is his fundamental error. His whole point of departure is false to the bottom and consequently his tactics cannot be right.

5. THE TASK OF THE LEFT WING.

(a) To base its whole activity on the principles of Marx and Lenin.

(b) To make its policy become the policy of the workers' vanguard.

This main principle line is a settled question in our ranks. The entire work of our first National Conference was conducted under this sign and it is reflected in our platform adopted at the Conference.

As we see the issue a discussion of the validity of these two points is in place only with outsiders. In our ranks they are settled questions -- we proceed from them.

6. ABNORMAL FEATURES OF THE FACTION STRUGGLE IN THE PARTY.

(a) Under normal conditions we would wage our fight within the framework of the Party. Why?

(b) Because we are Communists and not anarchists, because we regard the principle of party organization as an inseparable part of Marxist revolutionary conceptions.

(c) Because we believe the Communists and none other constitute the vanguard of the proletariat.

(d) Because we adhere to the Marxist principle of organization and regard the organized movement more highly than the unorganized. The dispersed and unorganized elements, just because they are dispersed and unorganized, cannot be relied on to any great extent.

(e) Our expulsion only makes the situation, and consequently some of the methods of struggle, abnormal. It does not, of itself, alter the situation fundamentally. It does not change the fact that we remain in essence a faction of the Party struggling to win over the proletarian majority to our stand-

point. What else can we mean when we say so repeatedly: "The Opposition has a correct line. The task is to make this the line of the proletarian vanguard." - (Trotsky, Militant, 1-2-29.)

(f) The question now arises: Have we followed a correct line of policy in the Party struggle -- have we understood the main task -- or must we now reverse our position and take another course? Such is the question posed by the proposals of Weisbord.

7. THE QUESTION HAS BEEN DISCUSSED BEFORE.

(a) At this point it is proper to remark that we are not discussing this question for the first time. Our policy has been discussed quite thoroughly before, during and even after the National Conference. Decision has been made and American as well as International experience has confirmed the decision as correct.

(b) We cannot make a practice of returning continually to the discussion of positions already won in struggle. Such a course would be fit only for irresponsible café revolutionists whose talk is endless and means nothing. Bolsheviks discuss only in order to come to a decision and to act upon it.

(c) We return to the question once more only because the tested policy and experience of the Opposition on an International scale has not been fully assimilated by some comrades -- new in the struggle for the greater part -- whom we wish to pull along with us if we can.

8. WHAT IS THE REAL ISSUE HERE?

(a) The real issue -- from a political standpoint -- is: A faction of the Party on a Bolshevik platform, or -- A new party on an Opportunist platform. A dissection of the various so-called "new arguments" in the light of our principle line will make this clear.

(b) The contrasting methods of approach to the question are quite in accord with all International experience in the struggle between the Marxists and the opportunists.

(c) The Marxists put the principle bluntly, and subordinate tactics to principle. The opportunists hide the principle and try to smuggle it in under the cloak of "tactical differences". This is what Weisbord is trying to do now with his talk about correcting our "tactics".

(d) Compare, for example, the contrast between the methods employed by us in launching the organization of the Left Opposition with the methods of the Right wing at the time of their break with the Party. We began with a declaration of principle in our very first document (Declaration to the C.E.C., October 27, 1928, signed by Cannon, Abern and Shachtman. See Militant, Vol. 1, No. 1). Lovestone and Company began with a whole ream of faction material emphasizing personal and secondary matters and saying nothing about principle differences. The platform of Brandlerism was unfolded only afterward, after the workers in the Right Wing had been "prepared" by degrees and maneuvered into position for it.

These methods are alien to us. We will not allow Weisbord to draw us into a discussion on that basis. That is why we insist on putting the principle question as it really is: Faction of the Party on a Bolshevik platform -- or, new party on an opportunist platform. That our formulation of the issue will be demonstrated clearly enough

9. WHO ARE THE VANGUARD OF THE PROLETARIAT?

(a) The definition of our task "to make our line the line of the proletarian vanguard" is not an abstraction. It means a definite formation within the working class stands nearest to us and is the bridge to the wider masses.

(b) The Party is the vanguard of the class. This formulation holds good even in America where the organization of the workers as a class is still in the elementary stages.

(c) The correctness of this formulation is easily demonstrated by putting the question in another way: If not the Party, then who or what forces constitutes the proletarian vanguard? Is it not an indisputable fact that there is no other leading force on a national scale at the present time? If there is such another leading force, more advanced than the Party, please name it. It's existence is not known to us.

(d) The Party, under Centrist domination, leads the mass of workers who have partly awakened to consciousness. It leads them badly, as we have proved; it leads them to more defeats than victories, but it leads them just the same at present.

(e) What can be the meaning of the March 6th demonstrations last year -- a fairly imposing movement. Compare the Party's demonstrations of 20,000 workers at Madison Square Garden with our little meetings of 200 or 300 at the most. There you see a fairly accurate reflection of the "relation of forces". Or, compare the Party's demonstrations with those of the Right Wing -- the disparity is about the same as with us.

(f) The Party has a rather formidable press -- dailies in many languages through which it influences wide circles of workers. The Daily Worker circulation is growing. The resolution of the last Plenum says it doubled during the past year, meaning probably that it increased somewhat. There is no doubt it has made a substantial gain, especially in New York.

(g) Those who want to deny that the Communist workers organized in the Party and under its direct influence in other bodies constitute the workers' vanguard must give us another name for them. What are these people who, to the number of thousands and tens of thousands throughout the country, march in the demonstrations, resist police persecution, support strikes, sacrifice their time, their means? Are they idiots, fools and dupes? That is stupid, reactionary talk!

(h) I repeat: the proletarian vanguard is not an abstraction. If not the Party, then who, or what? Is it the Socialist Party? No; since the World War and the Russian Revolution there can be no doubt on this score. In the needle trades, for example, we had a concrete illustration of the reactionary role of the S.P. Is it the Progressives? No; in so far as the progressives do not support the Party, that is follow the Party, they act as windbreaks for the reactionaries. Is it the I.W.W. or the Anarchists? No; these are both reactionary sects, reactionary through and through.

(i) What elements remain? There are the scattered and demoralized workers who have left the Party or been repudiated by the Party. Among them there are undoubtedly many workers of potential value for the revolution. But in the mass, as a definite category, they are characterized by this fatal weakness: they do not lead! What else can be the meaning of the fact that they allow themselves to be dispersed and demoralized, that they withdraw from the movement and conduct no organized struggle to reform it? To seek for individual recruits in this di-

reaction is sensible enough. To expect a considerable influx of these elements into the ranks of the Opposition later on is not unreasonable, for it is the characteristic of these elements to follow and they will come toward us when we are stronger more than they will take up the burdens of our struggle while we are still weak. But to seek for the regeneration of the Communist movement from these discouraged and bewildered people is to leave the ground of reality altogether.

(j) The talk about the Party losing all its influence beyond the hope of revival -- above all to say that this has already happened -- is quite false. On the contrary, there is more reason to think that, in spite of the systematic errors of the leadership and the whole idiocy of the "third period" bluster, the influence of Communism, and that is primarily of the Party, has made gains in the past year. The German election returns tell a story about this which cannot be ignored, and similar signs are to be observed in America. The doubling of the 1928 election vote, for example, is one of these signs.

The gain of Party influence in the face of the blunders of the leadership is to be accounted for by the fact that the official Party represents in the eyes of the workers the idea of Communism and the Russian Revolution. The pressure of conditions, especially the conditions of the economic crisis, drives the workers toward Communism faster than the Centrist bureaucrats can drive them away.

(k) Conclusion: The Communist workers organized in the Party and around the Party under its direct influence are the future troops of the Opposition. We must concentrate on the task of winning them over in the shortest possible time.

10. THE POSITION OF THE OPPOSITION WITH RELATION TO THE CLASS AND THE VANGUARD.

(a) If the Party is the vanguard of the class, what is the position of the Opposition? "The Opposition is the vanguard of the vanguard" (Trotsky).

(b) Our first task: "To make the line of the Opposition the line of the proletarian vanguard."

(c) Our strongest weapon: Our Platform.

(d) The nature of our principal activity: Propaganda.

"The revolutionary Marxists are now again reduced (not for the first time and probably not for the last) to being an international propaganda society... It seems that the fact that we are very few frightens you. Of course, it is unpleasant. Naturally, it would be better to have behind us organizations numbering millions. But how are we, the vanguard of the vanguard, to have such organizations the day after the world revolution has suffered catastrophic defeats brought on by the Menshevik leadership hiding under the false mask of Bolshevism? Yes, how?" (Trotsky, Militant, Oct. 1, 1928.)

11. THE RELATION OF FORCES.

(a) We have said before and we say now that our attitude toward the official Party is determined to a large extent by the relation of forces. The present relation of forces determines our position as a minority faction of the Party, and a small minority faction at that. Whom will we deceive except ourselves by ignoring this fact?

(b) In Comrade Trotsky's letter printed in the Militant for November 30,

1929, he indicated the perspective of a second party for the American Opposition. But this was wrong and it was based on incorrect information about the relation of forces. In a second letter Comrade Trotsky acknowledged this.

(c) We are the nucleus of the future Party. The Opposition will become the Party. But by what dialectic process we cannot give a complete answer now and we do not have to. What we must do is to keep the goal in mind and adopt the tactics most suited to the given time and circumstances. The question whether we become the Party by means of a formal re-entry into the organization and the subsequent conquest of a majority by democratic vote; whether we swell our ranks through the process of further splits which unite with us; whether we gradually expand in numbers and activity and step by step supersede the official Party in the class struggle; we will reach our goal by one or more or by a combination of all of these methods in the course of time. We will do this provided we do not derail our movement by falsely estimating the situation at the various stages of the development of the struggle. This was the cardinal error of the German Leninbund. It tried to jump over the barrier set up by the relation of forces in the beginning. (Trotsky, Militant, Jan. 25, 1930.)

12. THE PROPOSAL OF A BLOC WITH THE RIGHT WING.

(a) The essence of Weisbord's policy which he offers as a substitute for ours is the proposal that we, the Left Opposition, should form a bloc with the Right Wing (the Lovestoneites). This is clearly set forth in his statement printed in the Militant for September 15, 1930, again in his later article on Unemployment.

(b) He means by this that the Left and the Right should form a bloc against the Centrists, against the official Party. In the Militant for September 15th, for example, he says: "The Communist 'Majority' opposition group and the Communist League by working together can help to re-establish mass work and to resist the violent tactics of the Party officialdom. Further in the Militant, for November 1, he says, addressing what he calls "the Communist Opposition groups" (meaning the Left Wing and the Right Wing which he puts on the same level), "When will you join hands on this issue...When will you begin the work the Party criminals cannot do?" From this, as well as from his whole conception, which denies the Thermidorian character of the Right Wing, which denies the existence of Centrism in the Communist movement, it is quite clear that he wants a bloc of the Right and Left against the Center.

(c) This question has been raised before in the ranks of the International Left Opposition and has been decisively answered in the negative. In my very first introduction to the basic documents of the Russian Opposition I became acquainted with this answer. In his "Appeal to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern" (a document which has not yet been published in English -- I saw it in Moscow at the Sixth Congress), Comrade Trotsky referred to the split in the Right-Center Bloc and the suggestion that the Left might now make a bloc with the Right. He said: "Blocs between the Right and the Left have been made in other revolutions, and they have also ruined other revolutions." In that document, where the question was first considered, Comrade Trotsky said such a bloc was absolutely unthinkable. That has been, it is and it will be the unalterable position of the Left Opposition.

(d) Would a bloc with the Right Wing, that is with the Lovestone liquidators, the faction of petty-bourgeois adventurers -- would such a bloc draw us nearer to the proletarian vanguard or would it separate us more? To ask such a question is to answer it. We have taught the Communist workers, and not since yesterday to hate and distrust the rotten petty-bourgeois faction

of Lovestone and Wolfe. To appear side by side with them now in a common front against the Party would discredit us before the Communist workers and push them away from us.

(e) The very fact that one can make such a proposal shows that he does not understand the Right Wing and has not really broken with it. This is what is really the matter with Weisbord. In reality he is trying to reconcile us with the Right Wing under the pretext of curing our "sectarianism". He will not succeed.

(f) In the Militant for December 28, 1929, Comrade Trotsky warned in advance against such opportunist proposals as Weisbord makes: "I received the news of the negotiations between Bucharin and Kamenev simultaneously with the report on the ambiguous declarations of Urbahns on a bloc with Brandler. I answered with an article on the absolute inadmissibility of unprincipled blocs between the Left and Right Oppositions."

(g) It is a real political bloc with Lovestone that Weisbord is offering us as a means of correcting our policy. Such a bloc, he says, would enable us to "resist the violent tactics of the Party officialdom". Isn't that a brilliant idea? And who, may we ask, will help us to resist the under-world methods of the Lovestone gang? Doesn't Weisbord know that we first encountered "violent tactics" from the Lovestone faction when it was at the head of the Party and that we learned how to "resist" them on our own resources? Or does he think the leopard has changed its spots and that Lovestone and Company are better now, since their own weapons have been turned against them?

Weisbord goes further: By means of the bloc, he promises us, we will win "the advanced workers to a Leninist conception of Party democracy". No less. All the Oppositionists who were expelled from the Party by Lovestone, who were beaten up by his gangsters, will surely believe this.

And even this is not the end of the comedy. "Only such a working-together of Communist groups (only this!) can raise those fundamental principles of Leninist organization that can reconstitute the International of Lenin." We have been under the impression, together with the entire International Left Opposition, that the International of Lenin could be reconstituted only by the defeat of the Right Wing, by driving out the Thermidorians and the liquidators. How can these conceptions be reconciled? How can they both exist in the same organization?

13. THE SUBTERFUGE OF "UNITED FRONT" WITH THE RIGHT WING ON CONCRETE QUESTIONS.

(a) Double-facedness and subterfuge are the characteristics of all opportunists. Driven away from one position they always attempt to smuggle it in under some other pretext. This is the case in the attempt to retreat under fire from the idea of a political bloc with the Right Wing outlined in Weisbord's articles in the Militant to the proposal for a "united front" on everyday tactical questions. Can't we at least get together with them in the trade unions? they ask. No, not even in this limited sphere, **BECAUSE WE ARE NOT GOING IN THE SAME DIRECTION WITH THEM.** From the start, that is from the day the Lovestoneites were expelled from the Party, we rejected all ideas of a common front with them. And correctly so.

(b) The day their expulsion was announced we did not grow softer toward them. Just the contrary, we hammered them harder than ever and we predicted they would soon come out with a Brandler platform when they were loudly denying it. (See the Militant, July 1, 1929.)

(c) Can the Left Opposition which fights for the regeneration of the

Communist International have anything in common with the Right Wing which represents the tendency for its liquidation? Can the defenders of the October Revolution have anything in common with the faction of Thermidor, "the handle upon which the enemy classes are pulling"? No. The fact that contradictory lines cross episodically must not mislead us into this fundamental error. The fact, for example, that the Right Wingers want to work in the reactionary unions and that we also defend this idea -- in our time also against them, as our platform, directed against them as the Party leadership (Militant, February 15, 1929) shows -- does not give any ground for a common front. We have different and irreconcilable aims in the trade unions.

(d) Let the revisers of our basic policy on this question cite a single concrete situation where even such a limited conception of the united front with the Right Wing can be formed. Is it the Needle Trades? No, the Right Wing has already made a united front with Levy -- that is to say, with Sigman -- in this field. Is it the Marine Workers? No, the Right Wing made a united front with the reactionary syndicalist workers there against us as well as against the Party -- against Communism, in fact. Is it the Miners? No, the Right Wing is trying to come to an agreement there with the fakers posing as progressives in the Fishwick union. Is it the Textile Workers where Weisbord has already compromised himself with them in a "Textile Workers' Unity Committee" which is in reality a committee for the liquidation of the National Textile Workers' Union? No, we cannot work together with them there. Doesn't Weisbord know that Lovestone is trying to organize the workers for McMahon and that he is using Weisbord as a come-on for this perfidious work? He will not use us for it.

Take any other field of activity, and we will show that insofar as the Right Wing has any footing there it is forming a united front with the pseudo-progressive and reactionary elements against us and against the Party -- against Communism. The fact that they conceal these designs under a cloud of talk about Leninism does not alter the objective logic of their course. This is necessary to "prepare" and fool the Communist workers in the ranks of the Right Wing. It is our task to expose this camouflage and not to be deceived by it.

14. WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL STAND OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION ON THE QUESTION?

(a) It is worthwhile to put this question and to answer it from authoritative documents because Weisbord is trying to represent himself as a supporter of Trotsky but not of the American Trotskyites. We have heard that kind of talk before. The reformists throughout the world in their time have taken turns at declaring for Communism -- in Russia but not in their own countries. Purcell was for the Russian Communist Party but not for the British. Such people as Hillman closer home, and even many of the Socialist leaders have made similar expressions. Let us see what this pretension is worth.

(b) Comrade Trotsky has written quite often and quite explicitly on the question of a bloc with the Right Wing, warning us in advance, as it were, against the Weisbords of various kinds. Some of these remarks have already been quoted. On the question of a united front in the trade unions, he wrote in The Militant for October 1, 1929:

"Do we need a platform of immediate demands? Yes. Do we need a correct tactic in the trade unions? Certainly. But we cannot speak of these questions except with those who have clearly and firmly decided for themselves why all this is needed. Just as I will not discuss the various tendencies in materialism with a man who makes the sign of the cross whenever he passes by a church, so I will not work out slogans with Brandler who, in principle, calls the rear

of the revolution its face (and vice versa)...We are now in the period of the clarification of principles for ourselves and of pitiless delimitation from the opportunists and confusionists." This is an answer to Weisbord's claim that he represents the standpoint of Trotsky against the National Committee of the Communist League.

Again in the Militant for March 29, 1930, he wrote: "Will Trien and Paz work with Urbahns and with the Brandler blocs formed in the midst of the trade unions against the Communist Party?...They recognize the policy of a united front with the social democracy, with the reformist trade unions, with the Brandlerites, with the Alsatian nationalists -- but they consider inadmissible the united front tactic with the official Communist Parties."

(c) The French Opposition has already accumulated a rich experience on this question of the united front in the trade unions which have an instructive value for us. Their line-up is not, as Weisbord proposes, a bloc between the Right and the Left oppositions. On the contrary, the Left opposition is united with the Communist workers and is proposing a united front to the official party. The Right wing, on the other hand, has made a united front with the reactionary syndicalist elements on a platform of independence of the unions from the Party and the liquidation of the revolutionary unions into the reformist unions. In this they only anticipated our stand in the Marine and Textile Unions while the Right wing anticipated the stand of Lovestone in the same unions.

(d) Is it not clear that Weisbord's claim to be "for Trotsky but against the American Trotskyites" is a demagogic subterfuge that will not stand investigation? Is it not clear that The National Committee of the Communist League carries out the same policy as that of the International Left Opposition?

(e) International policy and experience confirms the correctness of our policy on this question of the united front: Not a bloc with the Right Wing against the official Party, but a united front with the Party against the Right Wing. This is the correct line of approach to the proletarian vanguard. The fact that the Party bureaucrats refuse the united front with us is not our concern. Our task is to make the Communist workers understand our policy. The rest will follow.

15. THE RETREAT FROM THE PRINCIPLE UNDER THE SLOGAN OF "MASS WORK".

(a) In his campaign against the policy and leadership of the Communist League, Weisbord is raising a great furore about "mass work". This empty ballyhoo is offered to us as a new discovery -- something we never knew till now.

(b) This is not so, there is nothing new or original about this formula for quick success. In every thing he advances Weisbord demonstrates his lack of originality, his chief characteristic as a political is that of the borrower. In his conflicts with us on the various main points of our platform he borrows first from the Right Wing and then from the Centrists. In his formula of "mass work" he is only repeating the slogan under which others have deserted the banner of the Left Opposition.

(c) We haven't had many capitulators in America, thanks to the firm principle foundation upon which we built the movement, but every one of them saluted us with this slogan before he departed. Every one who deserted the banner of the Opposition ran away under a cloud of dust about "mass work". This was the case with Allard, with Zalisko and with Blugerman in Toronto. Impatience with the slow development of the Opposition in the principle struggle

and the desire to get on with "mass work" on a big scale was the motivation for the great and unpardonable errors of some of the Minnesota comrades on the recent Farmer-Labor Party affair. And now Weisbord, who wants to overturn the position of the Left Opposition on nearly all its basic principles, comes forward with "mass work" as his all-embracing slogan.

(d) Is this a mere coincidence? How does it happen that this demagogic slogan is always followed by capitulation to the Stalinists or by capitulation in principle to the Right Wing? In fact, isn't Weisbord merely repeating the time-worn arguments of the Right Wing in his agitation against us? Read the Revolutionary Age and you will see there the origin of all the catch-words he uses against us. The "Trotskyites" are "sectarian", they are "passive", they do no "mass work", etc., etc.

16. THE MEANING OF BOLSEWIST MASS WORK.

(a) Mass work, in our conception, is not a form of exercise, like gymnastics, to be carried on for its own sake. It is connected with revolutionary aims and therefore it must be grounded on principle. We understand the Leninist conceptions of mass work. Our platform adopted two years ago shows the only road to it.

(b) We will only deceive ourselves and set our movement back if we overestimate what is possible for such a small group as that of the Left Opposition which has to work in abnormally difficult and complicated circumstances. We cannot lift ourselves by our bootstraps, no matter how much we may try. We cannot jump to the execution of a program of mass work on a wide scale over the head of the existing Party. We must not forget that we have an indispensable preliminary task: to win over the proletarian vanguard and imbue it with our principles.

(c) By mass work we mean prepared, planned and developed activity to set masses of workers in motion along lines which will heighten their consciousness. We do not mean spectacular stunts which leave nothing behind; we do not mean putsches. We are not graduates of the Feffer school of politics and we do not want that spurious brand of mass work.

(d) Our main task is propaganda to win over the workers' vanguard and our main tactic is the united front with the Party. This does not exclude independent work in the class struggle. In reality all our work is independent in the sense that we oppose our policy always and everywhere to that of the Centrist bureaucrats. What is really involved in the dispute over mass work is the question whether we shall oppose separate mass organizations to those of the Party -- joining hands with the Right Wing for this purpose -- or whether we shall penetrate the existing organizations of the Party. As a rule, and in the main, we have to follow the latter course at the present time.

(e) This is mainly a question of the relation of forces again. In Minneapolis, for instance, we have carried out several separate and independent actions. But to set up rival organizations and movements to those led by the Party all along the line would be a fatal error. It would close the doors to the Party members and sympathizers and create rallying centers for all kinds of reactionary and anti-Communist elements. Our participation as an organized group in the Indian demonstration of the Party last summer, in the May Day celebration, etc., these actions should serve as a model. We organize our own independent fractions in the needle trades and in the marine workers and such other places as we have forces. These fractions are not prevented by the policy of the opposition from carrying on an energetic activity. They are only prevented from combining with the Right Wing and with reactionary elements against the

Party. In short, we are in no way opposed to general activity in the class struggle; we only refuse to accept an opportunist formula for it; and we refuse to alter our conception of the main task of the Opposition at the moment -- propaganda to win over the workers' vanguard.

17. TWO KINDS OF CRITICISM.

(a) The Left Opposition has grown up in a struggle for Party democracy and against the barracks-discipline of the Centrist bureaucracy. The unrelenting fight against the suppression of criticism within the Party as well as the counterfeit "self-criticism" served up as a substitute is an inseparable part of our platform.

(b) This has given rise to one-sided and false conceptions in and around our movement. There are people who think the Opposition means to loosen or do away with ideas of discipline and that any kind of criticism can be tolerated interminably. That is not so. We strive toward an iron discipline, that is, a discipline grounded on uniformly conscious convictions. We are not vulgar "democrats" and our organization is not a free forum for everybody. And we make a strict distinction between what may be called legitimate criticism and criticism that is not legitimate in our organization.

(c) That criticism which aims to show weaknesses and shortcomings in the application of our principle line is certainly in order. We stand badly in need of a thoroughgoing criticism of our lack of activity along the lines of our platform. Above all, we need -- together with such a criticism -- concrete proposals regarding ways and means of increasing, of multiplying, our activity. Such criticism and concrete proposals are entirely legitimate and must not be suppressed on any pretext.

(d) But what we cannot allow is an attack on our principle line which masquerades as "criticism" and which attempts to belittle the great achievements of the Opposition, achievements which have a permanent value and which far outweigh the defects and the failures in our work. It is such "criticism" that Weisbord offers, and which we contemptuously reject.

(e) According to Weisbord our two-year struggle under the banner of the Opposition means little or nothing. Nothing of importance has happened. Things will only begin to happen when we adopt his platform and turn the leadership of the movement over to him. We didn't organize a single mass movement, we didn't conduct a single grand maneuver -- therefore, we are a failure. So say the opportunists and the defeatists -- so say the generals of the Pepper school of strategy and the faint-hearts who want quick results.

(f) Let them talk all they wish -- they will not change our course. For us the past two years, with all the faults and all the flaws, are the brightest in the history of the movement. They will represent in the history of American Communism the turning point, the time when a resolute handful began the conscious and open fight against the downsliding of the post-Lenin regime and organized the nucleus of the future Party, giving an object lesson to the Communist workers in how to fight for principle against slander and persecution, how to swim against the stream.

18. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE OPPOSITION

(a) We have laid the foundation, firmly and deeply, for the future movement. All that is done hereafter will be built upon it. Our firm insistence on the lines of principle, our stubborn intransigence in rejecting schemes for quick results at the cost of principle, will safeguard the future movement from

unnecessary internal crises and splits.

(b) We raised the banner of the International Left Opposition at the darkest moment, when the leaders were expelled and scattered and exiled and the cause seemed to be on the decline everywhere -- when the "wise" and practical people, the self-seekers and careerists on the make, saw nothing to gain and stood aside.

(c) The American section of the Opposition, small as it was, inspired and encouraged the movement throughout the entire world and decisively helped to stimulate a revival of the International struggle. Our voices were heard in the depths of Stalin's prisons, in the farthest reaches of his exile camps, and gave the Bolshevik-Leninists new hope of International support. The formation of the American section of the Opposition was the signal of a new rise of the International struggle.

(d) The American section of the Opposition managed to unite its forces on a national scale through a national conference and to adopt a platform. Up to the present time we are the only section of the Opposition outside of Russia to formulate a national platform. Comrade Trotsky has written that the platform, on the whole, is very good and that some sections, notably the trade union section, are excellent. He wrote: "Your platform is a guarantee of political success." The platform is no doubt subject to improvement, but it is a real beginning, a real foundation.

(e) We had few capitulators and no splits. The basic cadre which began the fight still conducts it. While the Opposition movement throughout the world has been passing through crises and splits, we have succeeded -- not without difficulties, frictions and symptoms of crisis -- in strengthening the principled unity of our organization. It is true that the factional maneuvers of Weisbord represent an attempt to break the unity of our movement, to "Austrianize" it and disintegrate it into factions. But these maneuvers will be defeated and we will finish the discussion more firmly united than before.

(f) The opportunists and the defeatists -- the people who ecko the sentiments of the Right Wingers and the Centrists -- want to discredit our achievements. And why? Because they want to discredit the principle line upon which these achievements have been based.

(g) They are coming too late. Two years of rich experience are behind us. They have not been in vain. We will build upon them. We will overcome all the obstacles and make the line of the Opposition the line of the proletarian vanguard. We must be imbued with the conviction that we are not fighting merely for the day. Ours is a great historic mission. This thought must animate us in every detail of our work. This conviction which makes necessary the greatest sacrifices also makes them possible.