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C O N T E N T S :

## **The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism**

*by (P. C. Minority)*

Abern, Bern, Burnham, Shachtman

## **Correspondence:**

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# The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism

## I.

### The Origin of the Party Crisis

It will not be disputed that the party is now in the midst of a serious political crisis. All the familiar signs of such a crisis are present: a factional division in the leading committees; the growing extension of factional lines into the membership; the use of the harshest language in designating opponents; the growing concentration of the energies of the party on the internal dispute to the grave detriment of constructive external activities; etc. The purpose of this document is to examine, analyze and explain the party crisis, and to indicate a solution of it.

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Whatever the background of an internal crisis, however much it may be implicit in the general situation within a party, it very often comes first into the open in a leading committee. This is the case with the present crisis in our party, and the place and date of its breaking into the open can be precisely fixed. It occurred in the Resident Political Committee at a special meeting held on the evening of the day when the German army invaded Poland; that is, the first day of the second world war. Between the end of the July convention and that day there had been no crisis and no "crisis atmosphere" in the Resident Committee. From that day there has been an uninterrupted and deepening crisis.

The crisis was precipitated by a statement and series of motions presented by Gould. Gould's statement condemned the sluggishness and inactivity of the Committee, and its failure to respond adequately to the war situation which had been signalled by the announcement of the German-Russian agreement and the subsequent mobilizations of the European powers. His motions, practical in character, called for a drastic re-orientation of the party's activities and attitude in order to meet the demands of the war: cancellation of all leaves; more frequent publication of the *Appeal*, and of pamphlets, leaflets and manifestos; the holding of public meetings and demonstrations; the immediate convocation of a full plenum of the National Committee. He proposed that the agenda of the plenum should include an analysis of the war, the preparation of the party's organization to meet the war, and the "Russian question" in the light of the new developments.

Neither Cannon nor Shachtman was present at this meeting. Abern, who also could not be present, had expressed substantial agreement with Gould's proposals earlier that day. The response to Gould's statement and motions already showed, however, the emergence of a sharp division in the Committee. On the one side, Burnham, McKinney, Carter, Bern agreed in substance with Gould. On the other, except for Lewit, the other P. C. members agreed with the proposal for an early Plenum, and, after some questioning, virtually all of Gould's proposals were adopted. The question of the Plenum date was held over to another meeting that Cannon would attend.

It is of the first importance to recall that the "Russian question" played a completely subordinate role at this meeting, as it had in all previous meetings, including those following the announcement of the German-Russian agreement. Gould did not motivate his demand for an immediate Plenum only or mainly on the Russian issue. All of the Committee, without exception, recognized that discussion of the Russian question ought properly to be part of the business of the Plenum. And the Committee at that meeting voted **unanimously** to appoint Burnham to make a verbal report on the Russian question to the next meeting, as preparation for the Plenum.

At the next meeting, however, with Cannon present and under his pressure, there was a general reversal of position of all but the present Minority members. Cannon, Lewit, Morrow, Gordon denounced Gould's contribution as "hysteria," "light-mindedness," "irresponsibility"; and contended that nothing in the situation called for "excitement" or drastic action.

A knowledge of its beginning is of the very greatest importance in understanding the real meaning of the present crisis in the party. Let us sum up what this brief review discloses:

A great event—the greatest since the beginning of the Fourth Internationalist movement, the start of the second world war, occurred. **This great event precipitated a major crisis in our party**, in the first instance in the leadership. One part of the leadership held that this great event called for a drastic change in the organization and activity of the party, and a change in our policy towards Stalinism in the war along the lines already dealt with by Johnson, Shachtman and Carter, prior to the German-Soviet Pact, at the July convention of the Party. Another section (the majority of the Committee) held that no change was necessary.

The view that the crisis broke out over the "Russian question" is entirely false, and is disproved by the record, the essential parts of which are cited in Shachtman's speech to the New York membership discussion meeting and all of which will be presented verbatim in the Internal Bulletin. The crisis broke out over the war, not over the Russian question. The Russian question entered, and became acute, only as one phase of the more general question of the war.

The first stage of the crisis was completed at the Plenum of the National Committee. The intervening actions in the Resident Committee have been reviewed in Shachtman's speech which, in written form, is before the membership, and we will not repeat the review here. We wish to emphasize only certain general features:

The minority kept pressing along three lines: 1) for concrete answers to the specific questions being raised by the war—in particular the Red Army's invasion of Poland, which was then the outstanding immediate issue; 2) for action on the reorganization of the party's structure and activities to meet the war; 3) for the opening of a discussion in the party, and the holding of a Plenum.

The majority, on its side: 1) gave no answers whatever—neither right nor wrong—to the specific questions, merely repeating day after day that "nothing had changed," "we had predicted everything in advance," and, when it came down to committee motions, simply "reaffirming the fundamental position of the Fourth International"; 2) agreed in occasional words with the need of reorganization and did nothing whatever; 3) opposed for weeks the opening of a discussion, and delayed as long as possible the calling of a Plenum.

The Plenum, when finally held, revolved around the Russian question and the reorganization of the Political Committee. The first session, held nominally on "the party and the war," was hardly more than a formality, and has besides led to nothing. At the Plenum there were presented for vote: (1) the resolution of Shachtman, which characterized the war in its present phase and the role of Russia in the war, and drew the conclusions from this characterization as to our attitude in such cases as that of the Polish invasion; and (2) a motion of Cannon re-affirming our basic position, but not in any way characterizing either the war or the role of Russia or the Polish invasion.

At approximately 2 A. M. on the Sunday of the Plenum, the lengthy article of Trotsky, published subsequently in the New International, was made available to those committee members who had not gone to bed. In spite of the fact that this document had not even been completely read by all committee members during the course of that Sunday, that one of its pages was because of a technical slip missing, and that no one short of a super-man could have assimilated its meaning without serious and considerable study, it, together with Cannon's motion, was endorsed that afternoon by the Plenum. The Political Committee was then reorganized, and provisions made for beginning a discussion in the party.

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The present party crisis began under the impact of the war. Nevertheless, though this crisis is probably the most severe that has occurred during several years at least, many of its features are recognizably similar to lesser crises of the past—some of which, like the curious debate at the July convention over the "organizational secretary" were more or less carried to the party, others of which remained on the whole within leading committees. For one thing, there is roughly the same lineup of committee members as in the lesser disputes of the past couple of years. Secondly, the same

general sort of charges at once were made by both sides: the minority speaking of "routinism," "conservatism," "bureaucratism"; the majority of "irresponsibility," "light-mindedness," "petty-bourgeois instability," and so on.

It is necessary to emphasize—though not to over-emphasize—this similarity to past disputes in order to indicate that although the present crisis was provoked by the war and takes its special character from that circumstance, it nevertheless has its roots in a past before the war began.

## II.

### *The War and the Party Crisis*

Too much cannot be made of the fact that the war was the occasion of the present crisis.

From one point of view, every comrade will naturally feel regret, disturbance and even dismay that when the war which we had so long been concerned with in preparation became a reality of the living present, our party did not meet it in a unified and positive manner but immediately plunged into a crisis.

Justified as such a feeling may be, an objective and scientific view must however conclude that what has happened is what was most likely to happen, even apart from the particular tendencies that were present in our own party. Indeed, in a certain sense, the occurrence of the crisis is understandable and might have been foretold: if the war had left things in the party just where they were, it would not necessarily have been a sign of health but perhaps of senility or death; even pain can be felt only by a living organism; it is a dead animal that makes no response whatever. Such a crisis affects the basically healthy and the basically unhealthy organism differently in that the latter is completely paralyzed by it while the former is able to emerge from the crisis without fatal consequences.

If a party is not completely monolithic and totalitarian (even such a case may not be an exception), the occurrence of a major historical event of worldshaking importance is bound to produce a crisis of one or another degree. Different members react differently to the event. Some think big changes are called for, others not, some want to re-orient, others to continue along the previous directions; some want to expand boldly, others think it is necessary to contract cautiously. Whichever of the opposing views is right under the given conditions, clashes are sure to result.

Wars and revolutions are the most decisive of all events in the lives of political parties. In 1914, the outbreak of the war had a shattering effect upon every working class party in the world. In their bulk, the parties went over to their respective imperialists. But even within the left, ostensibly revolutionary wings, the Russian Bolsheviks not excluded, the outbreak of the war provoked the most profound crises. In spite of all that had been written and foretold, no one—neither Lenin nor anyone else—had anticipated the actual effect which the outbreak of the war would have. New groupments and re-groupments were to be found within every party, the Bolshevik party included. Nor was a definitive solution to the various crises found in a day or a week. During the course of the entire war, even among those who stood committed to struggle against the war, a constant and changing debate went on as to just what struggle against the war meant concretely (Lenin, Liebknecht, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Debs. . .).

The same phenomenon was to be observed again, in 1917, with the outbreak of the Russian revolution. In Russia itself, inside and outside the Bolshevik party, the response to this event was not at all uniform, and a crisis—or rather crises—occurred. It was necessary for Lenin himself to throw overboard some of his own most cherished doctrines, and to meet on common ground many, such as Trotsky, who had up to then been not merely organizational opponents but even members of different organizations.

The outbreak of the second world war is not less but far more momentous in the history of mankind than the outbreak of the war of 1914. Indeed, in all probability the fate of mankind for centuries to come will be decided during this war and the period immediately following it. Small wonder, then, that in our own small group the war has a convulsive effect.

We are, in reality, facing the question of whether we are prepared to meet the challenge of the war; and, perhaps, we could not face that question fully and openly before the war itself began. The war challenges us every moment, without respite, **politically**: Can we answer concretely and rapidly (for the speed of events no longer gives us the luxury of delay) the political questions posed by the war? Can we explain our answers to others? Can we fore-

see, at least sufficiently, what is going to happen so that it will not take us by surprise? Can we give guidance and a program of action to ourselves and those others whom we can reach, every step of the way? And the war challenges us also, every moment, **organizationally**: Can we continue to exist as an organization, to act and to function? Can we find ways to make our program a reality in the minds of the workers, or at least of a significant section of the workers? Can we assimilate in our ranks the genuine and militant anti-war fighters, from whatever quarter, who are not now with us? Can we—have we the will to—develop the technical and structural means to continue to live and to be active through the war itself?

These questions are the background and foundation of the present dispute in the party, whatever form it may seem at a given moment to take. The Russian question became a center for a while not merely because of its own independent merits—and it is a very serious question indeed—but because in the first stage of the war the party leadership had shown itself incapable of meeting the political challenge of the war on the issues where that challenge first became acute—namely on the issues raised by Russia's actions. But the organizational problems could not be left out, even temporarily, because the leadership was simultaneously showing that it was not meeting the challenge of the war organizationally.

The issue, then, is the war.

## III.

### *What the Present Crisis Expresses*

In every serious political dispute, it is a necessary part of the duty of a responsible politician to define the **political** character of the various positions taken. If this is not done, we cannot understand the disputes politically, nor know what to do about them. We must decide whether a given position is "sectarian" or "centrist" or "reformist" or "syndicalist" or whatever the case may be.

It is not enough merely to say that your opponent is "wrong"—everyone always thinks that his opponent is wrong. We must know just why and how, **politically**, he is wrong. And it is not enough to give merely an impressionistic or psychological or moralistic analysis—to say that our opponent is "irresponsible" or "light-minded" or "unstable" or "wicked." Such psychological and ethical judgments might be true enough, but they would not aid us in a **political** definition of his position. The central question can never be whether he is light-minded or inefficient, but—into what kind of a **political** position has his light-mindedness or inefficiency led him.

It is the contention of the opposition that the position which the Cannon group has taken in the present dispute is the manifestation or expression of a type of politics which can be best described as **bureaucratic conservatism**. We hold that this bureaucratic conservative tendency has existed in the party for some time; that during the course of a number of years it gradually solidified, manifesting itself at first sporadically and then more and more continuously; and that the outbreak of the war crystallized this tendency and brought it to a head. The outstanding representative of this tendency in the party, we hold, is Comrade Cannon. The importance of Cannon, however, is not primarily as an individual but precisely as the embodiment of bureaucratic conservatism; and when we refer to him in what follows we do so in no personal sense but simply as the outstanding representative of a tendency.

The crisis in the party occurred fundamentally, it follows, because of the resistance by one section of the party, in the light of the war, to the solidification of the entire party on a bureaucratic conservative basis. The **resolution** of the crisis, therefore, must be sought in the definite ascendancy in the party as a whole of either bureaucratic conservatism or of the opposition which stands for party democracy and collective leadership.

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How would it be possible to prove this political conclusion—namely, that the Cannon faction is bureaucratic-conservative in its political character? This can be done chiefly in two ways:

(1) First it is necessary to analyze carefully the immediate dispute, to determine whether "bureaucratic conservatism" is a correct description of the position and actions taken by the Cannon faction.

(2) Such an analysis would, however, be by itself inconclusive. It would leave the possibility that the present position of Cannon is an exception or an "accident." In order to show that Cannon

represents a bureaucratic conservative tendency, it is further necessary to relate the position taken in the immediate dispute to other positions and actions of the Cannon group both during recent months and also in the past. If it is found that as a general rule in the past two-three years Cannon has shown himself to be not bureaucratic but democratic, not conservative but dynamic, especially as against other comrades, then the characterization of his present position becomes at least doubtful. If, on the other hand, we find numerous other examples showing Cannon to be bureaucratic and conservative, the characterization of his present position and of the tendency he represents is reinforced and established. We propose to make the analysis and to give some of the evidence. Many members of the party, however, are in a position to come to conclusions independently on the basis of their own experience.

It should be remarked that the N.C. majority is under exactly the same obligations as the minority. If it is to be taken seriously the majority must make up its mind—it has not done so up to the present—about how it characterizes the minority politically. It must then attempt to prove its characterization both by an analysis of the position taken by the minority in the present dispute and by relating this position to other actions of the minority both at the present time and in the past. In a later section of this article, we shall return to the unhappy troubles which the majority has had in trying to decide on a political characterization of the minority.

#### IV.

### *The Nature of Bureaucratic Conservatism*

It is a fact that from the outset in the present dispute there have been raised questions of "organization" and "regime." The majority has accused the minority of having been "responsible" for raising these questions, and in addition has made the mutually contradictory accusations that: (a) the minority has been using the question of "regime" as a cover for a false and revisionist position on the Russian question; and (b) the minority has been using the Russian question as a cover for an under-handed attack on the "regime."

In his letter of October 22 to Comrade Stanley (Internal Bulletin, II, 2, p. 14), Comrade Crux writes as follows:

"... (4) You state in your letter that the main issue is not the Russian question but the 'internal regime.' I have heard this accusation often since almost the very beginning of the existence of our movement in the United States. The formulations varied a bit, the groupings too, but a number of comrades always remained in opposition to the 'regime.' They were, for example, against the entrance into the Socialist Party (not to go further into the past). However it immediately occurred that not the entrance was the 'main issue' but the regime. Now the same formula is repeated in connection with the Russian question.

"(5) I, for my part believe that the passage through the Socialist Party was a salutary action for the whole development of our party and that the 'regime' (or the leadership) which assured this passage was correct against the opposition which at that time represented the tendency of stagnation.

"... (9) Thus in two most important issues of the last period comrades dissatisfied with the 'regime' have had in my opinion a false political attitude. The regime must be an instrument for correct policy and not for false. When the incorrectness of their policy becomes clear, then its protagonists are often tempted to say that not this special issue is decisive but the general regime. During the development of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International we opposed such substitutions hundreds of times. When Vereecken or Sneevliet or even Molinier were beaten on all their points of difference, they declared that the genuine trouble with the Fourth International is not this or that decision but the bad regime."

A correct understanding of Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism will enable us to understand both how and why the question of "organization" and "regime" immediately entered, and also the falsity of the accusations made by the majority on the one side and by Crux on the other.

(1) The initiative in introducing the question of "regime" was taken not by the minority but by the Cannon faction. On September 5 Burnham submitted to the Political Committee a resolution on the character of the war (included in Internal Bulletin II, 2). In sending copies of this resolution to members of the N.C., Cannon accompanied it with a letter signed by himself. This letter did not deal essentially with the political issues raised by Burnham, but made a sharp organizational attack, contending that the raising of

the issues was irresponsible and scandalous and that the party could not afford the "luxury" of a discussion. This letter was only a pale written reflection of the "organizational" denunciations of the minority which were being made at committee meetings. The unprincipled and bureaucratic manner of reorganizing the P.C. at the Plenum, again on the majority's initiative, brought the "organization question" to the forefront. Goldman's article in Internal Bulletin II, 1, contains a sharp organizational attack on the minority, on the usual personal-psychological plane. The first internal discussion meeting was held in Newark, a few days after the Plenum; there Weber, speaking for the majority, made a sharp organizational attack on the minority in his opening report. When Cannon subsequently accused Shachtman, at the New York membership meeting, of "dragging in" the organization question, he was simply falsifying facts that he was well acquainted with. On the basis of these facts, Comrade Crux is quite wrong in the impression and argument incorporated in his letter.

The record is unambiguous: the majority was the "aggressor" in pushing forward the organization question, the question of "regime"—as has repeatedly been the case in lesser incidents of the past. We do not make our decisions here, any more than in the case of war, on the basis of who is the aggressor party. The minority does not object to or condemn the majority for taking the initiative in raising questions of regime (though it does condemn misrepresentations about it). On the contrary, the minority believes that this flowed naturally from the real nature of the dispute.

(2) It is difficult to understand with what motivation Crux tries to draw an analogy between the present dispute and that over entrance into the Socialist Party. Leaving aside the fact that the latter dispute was some years in the past (1934-35), and without discussing here the issue involved, the composition of the present opposition does not in the least coincide with that of the opposition to entry. Indeed, the present opposition includes many of the most conspicuous leaders in the "pro-entry" group, including Shachtman, and Carter, and Burnham—who first posed the perspective of an S.P. orientation, as well as many comrades who were not even in the Fourth Internationalist movement in those years (among them the chief "pro-entryists" in the Socialist Party itself, Erber, Draper, etc.). On the other hand, prominent among the present Cannon group are Weber, for long the accepted theoretical leader of the "anti-entryists," and the one who from any point of view did not play the least shabby role of all participants in the dispute of those years; and Goldman, whose role in the dispute over entry into the S.P. was not very politely characterized, in its time, by leaders of both the majority and the minority. The only objective meaning which reference to this past dispute can have today is to try to "smear" the present opposition, or at least some comrades of it, by arbitrary, sterile and irrelevant hints drawn from a quite different past.

The Cannon group has been concentrating, in "defense" of its political position, upon criticisms and even sharp polemical attacks made in the past by some members of the present minority against others, particularly against Comrade Abern. How much validity and merit are contained in the quotations from the past factional documents? How much clarity do they introduce into the present political dispute? With due regard for proportions, exactly as much as in the case of the "Old Bolsheviks" who condemned Lenin and Trotsky for uniting in the political disputes of 1917 by quotations from the violent polemical attacks the two leaders had directed at each other before the war and on the very eve of the March revolution; exactly as much as in the case of the "Triumvirate" who condemned the Moscow Opposition in 1923 with arguments drawn from the same quotations; exactly as much as in the case of the Stalinists who condemned the union of the Trotskyist and Zinovievist groups in 1926 on the basis of quotations from the polemical attacks the two groups had made on each other up to 1926.

(3) Crux' references to "Vereecken, Sneevliet and Molinier" are even more extraordinary. Quite apart from their proved loyalty to the Fourth International, all the members of the present opposition have consistently been in the forefront of the defense of the Fourth International against Vereecken, Sneevliet and Molinier. The listing of Molinier is particularly inappropriate, since for a considerable period it was Comrade Crux who in many respects supported Molinier against criticisms some of which were levelled by leaders of the present minority (Shachtman, Carter, Abern).

(4) Nor can we agree in general with the mechanical relationship which the majority constantly alleges to hold between "good regime" and "correct policy." The majority reasons as follows: good regime automatically follows from correct policy; if the policy is correct, then the regime which tries to carry through that policy

is also correct. Though normally (not at all invariably) regime is or should be properly subordinated to policy, the automatic and necessary relationship between the two is a phantom of the imagination, and a dangerous phantom at that.

Assuming a correct policy, it is not merely possible, but it frequently happens, that this policy is carried through in a bad or false organizational manner: e.g., **bureaucratically**, by manipulation of the "apparatus," by arbitrary fiat, by removals from posts or expulsions, without education of the membership to the correctness of the policy, etc. When this occurs (and there are hundreds of examples in political history: the records of the Frey group in Austria and the Molinier group in France are but two instances in the history of the Left Opposition alone), a certain paradox arises within the given organization, especially acute for those who agree with the policy but object to the "methods." Ideally and in the abstract, this paradox can be solved by separating the two questions (policy and regime) carefully, and by supporting the policy but taking steps to alter the regime and methods. In practise the solution is not so simple, since the bureaucratic regime exploits its allegedly correct (or rather generally false) policy to uphold its regime and methods. Indeed, a bureaucratic regime, seeing its methods about to be attacked, often provokes a political dispute to turn aside the organizational attack. No absolute rule can be given in advance for meeting these problems in practise. At a particular time, the failure to alter the regime may have a more damaging long-term effect even than the adoption, temporarily, of a false or inadequate policy, especially in those cases where policy is only a secondary consideration in the mind of the regime.

We make these remarks not to suggest that the majority has in the present a correct policy—which it most certainly does not have, but to combat the loose and empty formalism of the conception that regime and policy are mechanically, necessarily and automatically united, and particularly against the conception that regime flows directly and harmoniously from policy.

(5) However, **bureaucratic conservatism** is unique among all political tendencies in precisely the relation that holds, in its case, between regime and policy. In its case, there is a necessary relation between regime and policy; and this relation is the reverse of the normal. In the case of bureaucratic conservatism, **policy is subordinated to regime**, not the other way around. Let us see what this means.

Bureaucratic conservatism is, put crudely and bluntly, **apparatus politics**. Its chief base, in any organization or movement, large or small, is the "apparatus." Objectively considered, the goal and purpose and aim of a bureaucratic conservative tendency is to **preserve itself**. To this aim all else is, in the last analysis, subordinated. To this aim, policy and political issues are subordinated.

It is for this reason that the policies adopted by the bureaucratic conservative tendency tend always toward being **conservative**. It is the defender of the **status quo**—until the point where its own preservation becomes incompatible with the preservation of the **status quo**. Normally a bold move, an abrupt change, a re-orientation, the intrusion of something new, upset things as they are: that is, tend to undermine the established regime. That is why, to Cannon and his central core of supporters, those who propose bold and new steps, changes and re-orientations, are almost invariably characterized out of hand, without even consideration or discussion, as "irresponsible," "light-minded," "yielding to pressure," etc.

This is the reason, moreover, why in a dispute with Cannon—especially of late years—the "organizational question" always makes its appearance almost at the start, from one side or the other. To imagine, as does Crux, that this is due to an "incurable habit" of the incorrigible comrades who opposed S.P. entry, is mistaken, for it is at variance with the facts. As a matter of fact, Abern, who with Weber led the fight against entry, has during the past three years up to the outbreak of the present dispute, gone to the most extreme lengths to avoid all disputes and to quiet them when they arose; it was invariably others, and usually those who fought for entry, who have been concerned in the disputes of these years.

The fact is that most if not all of the leaders of the minority have proceeded in the past period from the standpoint that compared with risking the precipitation of a sharp struggle in the party, a conciliatory attitude and even silence on a whole series of questions in dispute among the leadership are the "lesser evil." Hence the refusal to take a number of disputed questions to the membership, a refusal that often involved keeping the membership uninformed about what they had a right to know. This is the fact, regardless of whether the leaders of the minority, singly or collectively, were right or wrong in their manner of dealing with past disagreements in the National Committee. It is this which, more-

over, explains the obscure and perplexing character of the discussion at the last party convention over the question of the "organization department." If the discussion is now taking place in the ranks of the party in the form of a factional fight, the reason for it is not to be sought in the "incurable habits" of this or that comrade or group, but precisely in the fact of the outbreak of the war, the urgent and immensely important problems it raised, and the serious character of the disagreement over the answers that must be given to these problems. Only a disagreement over such vital questions—as contrasted with disagreements over relatively secondary matters in the past—could impel the comrades of the minority to present the questions, insoluble in the leadership itself, for fundamental decision by the membership.

To imagine, as Crux does, that oppositions revert to the "organization question" when "the incorrectness of their policy becomes clear" is likewise incorrect, at variance with the facts. In the first place, the organization question always enters before it is in the least "clear" whose policy is false (in the present dispute it is certainly not clear either to the minority of the N.C. or to the party membership that its position is false: the fact is that every day more of the party thinks it correct).

No, here as elsewhere we must seek a **political** explanation for the speedy appearance of the organization question in every dispute. And that explanation is found in the political character of the Cannon faction, in the fact that it is a **bureaucratic conservative** tendency, a tendency for which every serious political proposal with which it differs (and this includes virtually all proposals which involve something new) is interpreted as an attack on its regime. It replies always by raising, openly or implicitly, the question of "confidence." Its tone takes on the bitterness of the apparatus defending its control of the leadership.

Let us give two examples here to concretize the point we have been making:

(A) Comrade Goldman is a prominent supporter of Cannon. He himself has often declared that he supports the Cannon leadership and regime, independently of agreement or disagreement on policies. During the course of the present dispute, when the question of the invasion of Poland by the Red Army was before the P.C., Goldman made a motion supporting and approving the invasion. He alone voted for this motion. Nevertheless, during this entire period, Goldman supported Cannon in general, and acted as a chief spokesman for the majority. At the Plenum, Goldman voted for both the Cannon political and the organizational motions, in spite of the fact that the political motions conflicted flatly with his own expressed opinion. He published an article in the Internal Bulletin (II, 1) among other things, to "explain" his change in politics. This explanation (dealt with by Shachtman in Bulletin II, 3) is so feeble as to deceive no one. The fact is that Goldman, caught in the trap of the bureaucratic conservative group, was compelled to subordinate his politics to his defense of the regime. Exactly the same procedure was followed later by Goldman on his slogan for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Finland—suppressed by Goldman when the faction meeting voted it down.

(B) At the convention, a freely elected convention committee voted by a large majority to include a provision for an "organizational department" in the resolution on organization to be presented to the convention. In meetings of the ex-N.C. held during the convention, Cannon objected to this plan. His objections were based not in the least upon the merits of the proposal itself, but because he thought he saw in it some kind of "plot," a conspiracy to get a stranglehold on the "apparatus," to put a "commissar" in the National Office, etc. (This interpretation was, in passing, in the highest degree fantastic—and typical. The plan was presented quite spontaneously by several comrades in the convention committee, most particularly by Comrade Weiss, a Cannonite supporter, and in the light of their experience recommended itself at once to virtually all committee members.) To remove these absurd suspicions, Shachtman, Burnham, and others who favored the plan on its merits pledged themselves (as they did later on the convention floor) to vote for any nominee to the post of "organization secretary" who would be nominated by Cannon (expressing as their own opinion that Comrade "Smith" of Minneapolis, a well-known Cannon supporter, would be the best qualified man for the job). Cannon was not at all content. He turned this comparatively simple question—which could easily have been settled quietly on its merits, and about which a difference of opinion was certainly legitimate and to be expected—into what parliamentarians call a "question of confidence." To support the "org. dep." was—to attack the regime and the leadership. No one would get away with such an underhanded attack; he would go to bat on the convention floor if the

plan was persisted in. And then, to underline the point that it was a "question of confidence," Cannon made the usual cheap announcement of a Chamberlain or a Norman Thomas or any bureaucrat under similar conditions: he told the N.C. that his term of office as National Secretary had expired at the convention and that he was not a candidate for re-election. In other words: play my way, or I quit. This bluster was enough to whip his faction into line, even those who (like Comrade Weiss) had, voting on the merits of the issue, supported the plan in the convention committee. Needless to say, nothing was heard subsequent to the convention about the resignation and withdrawal from further service as national secretary.

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From the point of view of the minority, therefore, it is not in the ordinary sense that it raises the question of "regime." When we call the Cannon faction "bureaucratic conservative," we are giving a political characterization. But this particular political tendency manifests itself at one and the same time as conservative in its politics, and bureaucratic in its regime—these are the two sides of the same coin.

If we keep these conceptions clearly in mind, we shall find them a key to the understanding of the Cannon tendency, not merely in the case of the present dispute, but in its role in the movement generally.

## V.

### Bureaucratic Conservatism in Action

That the N.C. majority has manifested bureaucratic conservatism in the present dispute is so obvious that the merest recital of the facts suffices to prove it.

First, as to the conservatism of its policy: Conservatism in policy can be shown in either of two different ways—either by a failure to change a past policy when changes in events call for such a change, or by a failure to apply concretely a general position which itself may still be correct in its general form. The former type is more easily recognized than the latter. When, after the consolidation of power by Hitler, revolutionists refused to change the earlier policy of "working as a faction of the Comintern" to the policy of building a new party, they were displaying the first type of conservatism. The second type can be equally fatal for the progress of the movement. For example, a given situation might call imperiously for the application of a united front tactic toward some particular organization. This application might be opposed conservatively by those who would not at all call into question the "general policy" of the united front; indeed, these would probably be just the ones who would most solemnly "reaffirm" the "fundamental position" of the International on the united front.

What has been the position of the N.C. majority on the actual questions which have been before the party, the questions, namely, of the character of the war, the character of the role of the Red Army in the present stage of the war, the characterization of the Red Army's and Russia's intervention in Poland, the Baltics, Finland, etc.? As a matter of fact, no one can answer this question with any assurance—for the simple reason that the majority has had no position at all! Startling as this may seem, it is the undiluted truth. The majority has had no position on the most momentous events in the history of our movement and perhaps of mankind.

Does anyone doubt this? Then let him tell us what the position has been. The record of the committee speaks clearly for itself. The majority has some general and abstract remarks in its motions about "the class character of the Soviet state" and about "reaffirming our fundamental position on the defense of the Soviet Union." But to this day it has not answered the actual questions. To this day it has not characterized the Polish invasion, or the Baltic adventures or the moves toward Finland. To this day it has not characterized the present war, or the role of Russia in the war. To this day it has not even stated whether in the case of the invasion of Poland or similar threatened invasions we are for the "unconditional defense" of the Red Army. For the position it is obligated to state as a group, as the leadership (majority) of the

party, it substitutes a number of individual positions, mutually exclusive and contradictory.\*

It has not answered these questions. Much less has it given any concrete guidance for the future. It does not say what we should be telling the Finnish workers and soldiers, or the Red Army soldiers facing the invasion of Finland. For weeks it prevented even mention of India and the relation of Russia to India in the Appeal; and of course has had nothing to say about India itself. And while the minority was denounced for raising the "remote" question of India, it was peremptorily asked to state its position on the defense of Odessa from a British warship going through the Dardanelles and up the Black Sea, presumably on the grounds that this was indeed the immediate and not a "remote" question. Events finally compelled the majority to permit the minority to raise, in part, the Indian question—though this question is at least as burning as any other in connection with the present phase of the war. No, the majority has done nothing whatever—save to reaffirm "fundamentals."

Now the minority contends that the war which is going on is not entirely the war that we foresaw and that the role of Russia in it is not what we expected; and therefore that we must make new analyses related to the reality of today's events and give new answers, and that among other things we must also revise our slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union." The minority, concretely and clearly, has made the new analyses, given new answers, and proposed the revision of the slogan. This again is why we say that the policy of the majority has been conservative.

But let us assume, for a moment, that the minority is wrong, and that the old position and analysis are correct. Even with that assumption, the policy of the majority is revealed as starkly conservative—conservative in the second sense explained above. The majority was unable to apply the general position to the concrete events, and it is therefore reduced to the politics of mumbo-jumbo.

But it is no less clear that the majority has acted bureaucratically in the present dispute. This may be unambiguously shown in four ways:

(a) At the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the beginning of the war crisis, it was unanimously recognized by the committee that at the very least a "reexamination" of our position was called for in the light of the new events. Nevertheless, for weeks, the majority bitterly opposed any party discussion, and delayed as long as possible the calling even of an N.C. plenum—in spite of the fact that the need for a discussion and the wish of the membership for it became daily more apparent. This attitude meant nothing else than an attempt to solve the political difficulties within the "apparatus," to solve them bureaucratically. (After the discussion was finally forced by the minority, Cannon, of course, changed his tune, and said that a "discussion was imperatively required in order to clarify the membership"—but, he added, "fruitful" discussion could only be "on the character of the Russian state.")

(b) During the entire first period of the dispute, the majority (in public and in private, in committee and out) hurled charges of "irresponsibility," "lightmindedness," "instability" at the opposition, and condemned it for "throwing the party into a crisis on the eve of war," while at the same time making no reply whatever to the opposition on the political points it raised. We have here the classic response of the bureaucrat to political criticism: no answer to the criticism, charges of irresponsibility and disruption against the critic (for further analysis of this attitude, see Trotsky's article on the P.S.O.P. in the October 1939 *New International*).

In the few weeks elapsing since the opening of the discussion, with the contending groups having scarcely had the opportunity to state their positions fully before the membership—in other words, with the discussion really in its first stages—the Cannon faction has enormously sharpened the atmosphere with the most violent attacks ever known in our eleven years of existence. Bureaucratic disloyalty and misrepresentation of an opponent is developing in exact proportion to the majority's inability to give a political defense of its political position. Every day now sees increasing at-

\*Although this was written before the actual invasion of Finland, the charge is not invalidated but substantially confirmed by the actions of the majority. As is shown in more detail in our document on the Russian question, the Cannon group, characteristically, evaded taking a clear-cut position on the invasion by the device of taking several positions, containing mutually contradictory lines of policy, and each succeeding position being adopted with a renunciation of those it succeeded. Under pressure of the minority and the membership as a whole, the Cannon group felt compelled to do in the case of Finland what it denounced as superfluous in the case of Poland, that is, to formulate a specific position on the concrete situation. In actuality, however, it remained true to itself. On Poland it said nothing and therefore its "position" could be and was all things to all men. On Finland, it says several different things in several different documents (all written within a week or ten days!) so that its "position" can again be and is all things to all men.

tempts by the majority to displace the axis of the discussion from the political and organizational dispute (the organizational questions involved are in this case also political questions), to questions of personalities and the type of abuse known to us up to now only from the records of the Stalinist campaign against the Russian Opposition. It is not so much the "Russian question" and the "question of the party regime" that is discussed by Cannon now—the ground under his feet is too weak for that—but Abern's personal record, Burnham's personal record, and the like. It is not a political characterization that the Cannon group gives of the opposition; it substitutes for that such characterizations as "traitors," "scabs and strikebreakers," "Finland's Foreign Legion," "enemies of the Soviet Union," "agents of imperialism." The tone and style fit the regime, and while it is unprecedented in our movement, it has its precedent in the Stalinist party.

(c) When the specific problem of characterizing the Red Army's invasion of Poland came before the P.C., the majority passed Cannon's motion which gave no answer to the specific problem but merely "reaffirmed the fundamental position." It then instructed Cannon to prepare an article for the *Appeal* on the invasion. But it had already been shown that on the alleged basis of the "fundamental position," three entirely different positions on the Polish invasion had been held: approval of the invasion, disapproval, and "explanation" without either approval or disapproval. This fact proves that the action of the majority here was bureaucratic. It did not have the committee (or even itself) take a position. Instead, it turned a blank check over to Cannon, and said in effect—whatever you write is the position. Such a procedure, if there is any serious issue in dispute, is always bureaucratic. The democratic procedure must always be to have the proper party body make the decision, and then assign someone to carry out—not to make—the decision.

(d) The reorganization of the P.C. at the plenum was bureaucratic. Cannon has denied this charge, claiming that the reorganization was entirely proper. He argues as follows: There was a political dispute; we had a majority, and therefore we had to construct a P.C. majority to carry out our politics. He further argues: our majority was 16 to 9 in the N.C.; in the new P.C. our majority, when the youth representative is included, is 8 to 4, a close and reasonable approximation of the N.C. majority.

The minority does not at all deny the right of those who have a political majority to elect committees in accordance with the majority, nor does it deny that Cannon had an N.C. majority. It nevertheless maintains the charge that Cannon's reorganization of the P.C. was bureaucratic. Let us examine the facts.

On what political basis does Cannon establish his majority? Does he establish it on the basis of those at the plenum who voted against the Shachtman resolution? If so, the vote was 14 to 11, not 16 to 9.

Or does he (as would seem more plausible) establish his majority on the basis of those who voted for his motion of "reaffirming the fundamental position." This would get him his 16 to 9 majority. But in this case, what happened to Erber, McKinney and Abern (who voted for his motion) when the problem of constructing the new P.C. was decided? The P.C. slate was drawn up by a faction meeting; neither Erber, McKinney nor Abern was present at that meeting; none of them had any voice in selecting the new P.C. Why not? Will Cannon answer: because by their vote also for the Shachtman motion, they showed "instability," that they could not carry out the line "firmly." (On what basis, in passing, is Cannon the only judge of "stability" and the proper way of interpreting the fundamental position? On what basis is Goldman, who participated in the caucus, even though his views on the disputed question were rejected unanimously, more "stable" and "firm" on the issue in dispute than, say, Abern?) But if so, Cannon cannot have it both ways. He cannot count his majority on one basis, and select the personnel of his P.C. on another. To be consistent, he would either have had to propose at the least a bloc with Erber, Abern and McKinney in selecting the new P.C.; or he would have had to organize the P.C. on a different basis, namely, on the vote on the Shachtman resolution. This he could not do without reducing his alleged majority to 14-11. But he could not have done it even then for the simple reason that Cannon had no motion of his own in real opposition to Shachtman's motion—which would have had to be a motion including a specific characterization of the Polish invasion.

All this would have had to follow if Cannon had proceeded on a democratic and principled basis. In reality he proceeded on a clique basis, calling his caucus meeting and constructing his P.C. not on any political foundation, but solely on the basis of assured membership in his bureaucratic conservative clique. For this reason, naturally, Erber, Abern and McKinney were excluded—even

though, in the political rationalizations which were cooked up later, their votes were counted as part of the "justification" for the lineup of the new P.C.\*

\* \* \*

Was this series of incidents an accident, something extraordinary and unusual? Not in the least: it is normal and typical. But before citing other examples of the mode of operation of the Cannon clique, we wish to clear up an apparent—but only apparent—difficulty in our argument.

## VI.

### What Hides the Role of the Cannon Clique?

If our contention is true—namely, that the Cannon faction represents a bureaucratic conservative tendency in the party, and operates as a clique—it would seem, offhand, that this ought to be obvious to nearly every member of the party. If this is indeed the case, and if it has been going on to one or another degree for some years, why doesn't everyone know about it? Now many comrades, including not a few who are members of the Cannon faction, do know about it; and, especially when speaking "off the record," show that they have no illusions. But it is still true that there are sections of the party to whom our charges will come as a surprise, and will even seem to be unfounded.

There are three chief factors which have obscured the role of the Cannon faction:

(1) The first is that Cannon, upon all occasions without exception, accepts the politics of Trotsky, accepts them immediately and without question. Since Trotsky's politics are, as a rule, correct and progressive, this tends often to make Cannon's politics appear correct and progressive—that is, the opposite of conservative.

If this is the case (and no one will seriously dispute it) it might seem to refute, in itself, our contention that the Cannon tendency is conservative, unless we were saying that Trotsky's politics in general are also conservative.

Everyone knows that Comrade Trotsky is the outstanding theoretical leader of the Fourth International. It is entirely proper that every revolutionist should give the maximum weight to his opinions: other things being equal, more weight than to those of any other individual. Nine times out of ten, perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred, we find ourselves on the right course when we take the course mapped out by Trotsky. It would be superfluous to elaborate upon the irreplaceable contributions he has made to the international Bolshevik-Leninist movement for more than fifteen years, and for a long time before then. Even if less well known, his contributions to the solution of theoretical, immediately political and internal problems of the American movement have been none the less solid. We reject with the contempt it deserves that philistine protestation of "independence from Trotsky" which is calculated to promote "independence" from the Fourth International and the principles of revolutionary Marxism. At the same time, we can have nothing in common with the theoretical and political slothfulness which, under cover of hypocritical humility, seeks to counterpose and therefore replace serious political reflection and discussion of the membership and leadership with references of Trots-

\*Let us dispose in passing of the Cannonite contention that the minority is an "unprincipled bloc." This contention stands or falls on the claim that Abern and others voted for Cannon's Plenum motion on the Russian question but did not join with Cannon against the minority; and further that these comrades voted for the Cannon motion in favor of "unconditional defense" and also for the Shachtman resolution in favor of revising that slogan. The facts are these: Abern did vote for the Cannon motion, but added a statement making clear the meaning of his vote. A *loyal* reading and interpretation of this statement shows that Abern voted for that motion only in the sense of a reaffirmation of the official party position that the Soviet Union is a "degenerated workers' state, whose basic structure must be defended by the Russian and international proletariat against world imperialism and against the anti-Soviet bureaucracy of Stalinism." His vote was not, however, an endorsement of the—at best—ambiguous conception of the slogan of "unconditional defense" which is interpreted by the majority in several mutually contradictory ways, and which, at the Plenum, was used by the majority as a *substitute* for a position on the concrete events facing us. Abern's statement added: "With this basic evaluation I find no contradiction in the resolution of Shachtman which I accept in its essentials as an interpretation or analysis of specific current issues therein cited, not invalidating the basic party position. I am ready to leave to the next period the enfoldment or otherwise of the interpretations or implications asserted by some comrades here as to the 'bridge' character of the Shachtman resolution, or whether it stands episodically by itself; and to make my judgment accordingly on the merits of any issue." No wonder the Cannonites have carefully avoided quoting this statement! It should be added, finally, that the "next period" referred to in the Abern statement has showed more clearly that more than an "episodic" difference was involved; that our old formula does require revision, as the Shachtman plenum resolution proposed, if only because the Cannon faction employed and interpreted it in defense of an indefensible line (or variety of lines) which is essentially a political capitulation to Stalinism. Erber and McKinney, in voting for the Cannon motion, also subscribed to the Abern statement.

ky's position and demagogical invocations of his rightfully enjoyed authority. The Fourth International has not the slightest ground for "apologizing" for its outstanding leader, who, alone among the older generation of the world movement, has consistently defended the principles of revolutionary internationalism. Nevertheless, there are ways and ways of seeking and accepting advice.

For a genuine revolutionary politician, the thought of another cannot be a **substitute** for his own thoughts; the politics of another a **substitute** for politics of his own—regardless of who that other may be. The ideas of another can be correctly accepted only intelligently, only **critically**. Otherwise, what we have is not a policy really understood and capable of being utilized as a guide to action, but merely the ceremonial repetition of phrases.

For the Cannon faction, Trotsky's politics function precisely as a **substitute** for politics of their own. As a bureaucratic conservative group, they merely utilize Trotsky's politics, as they utilize politics in general, as an instrument of their regime. Thus, a policy which, as advocated by Trotsky has a progressive character takes on a sterile and conservative coloration in their hands.

This is not at all a psychological comment, but a political judgment; and it can be demonstrated by the evidence.

Consider the way (already described) in which the majority at the plenum "endorsed" the long article on the "Russian question." Some of them had not even read it in its entirety; none of them could possibly have studied and assimilated it, and the complete document was not even on hand. What had happened? They had arrived at the plenum with their faction, their clique, but **without a policy**. A policy dropped into their laps (fortunate for them that it was not a day or two late) and they snatched it at once as a **substitute** for their own inability to develop a policy, as a "political justification" for the clique which they **already** had, though without any political basis.

But, it might be argued, whatever the lacks of the past, they finally got a "correct" policy. This does not in the least follow, even if **Trotsky's policy is considered correct**. Their endorsement of Trotsky's policy, here as usual during the past couple of years at least is essentially formal, verbal, **ritualistic**. (For in reality, let us repeat again, the policy is the instrument of the regime, not vice versa.) Being adopted as a substitute, without intelligent examination, without critical thought, the Cannon faction does not in reality understand it—their own avowed policy from then on—nor know how to apply it in the concrete.

The ideas and theories of Trotsky, like the theories of revolutionary Marxism in general, are not a dogma or a ritual but a guide to action. Their formal acceptance, however correct by itself, does not eliminate the need of applying them to concrete situations and problems. To repeat a thousand times that we stand by the fundamentals of Marxism is no answer to urgent questions posed by specific instances of the class struggle; indeed, very often it is a way of evading an answer. To repeat a thousand times that we are followers of Trotsky is no answer to the question of what course the leadership proposes that the party shall follow in a given case, or what the party proposes that the workers shall follow.

Nothing could be clearer than this during the present dispute. Granted their policy (that is, Trotsky's policy) in the abstract, in general, they are unable to use it for anything but the purposes of internal polemic. Neither in committee nor in their public writings and speeches have they made a single illuminating analysis of a single concrete event; they have made no predictions, suggested no guidance whatever. They merely repeat, parrot-like, in their own phrasing and rhetoric, the ideas already presented by Trotsky.

Here, too, there is nothing exceptional. The same situation exactly obtained in the case of the "Transition Program" adopted at the N.C. plenum held in the Spring of 1938. Though many of the N.C. members, as usual, had not even read the entire document; though it was in many parts very difficult to understand; Cannon insisted on an immediate vote of endorsement with the threat to "ride roughshod" (as he put it) over anyone who hesitated. But, again, the Program was, and remained, for Cannon not a policy but a substitute for a policy. Endorsement meant not understanding, not the effort to apply the policy in the concrete life of the movement, but simply the ritualistic nod of agreement with its words. Shachtman, Burnham and others, including Goldman at that time, insisted that it meant nothing merely to "accept" the transition program; that in incorporating it into the life of our own party, distinction would have to be made between those parts of it which were directly applicable to the United States, and those parts which were not, between those slogans which were of a general propagandistic and educational character and those suitable for immediate agitational uses; and they insisted further that the

concrete meaning of many of the general concepts of the program had to be sought in terms of living developments in this country. For Cannon, the test of the true believer was whether he made the sign of the cross with proper piety. "All or none!"—100 per cent verbal acceptance of the program just as it stood, and **nothing more**. Cannon went even to the preposterous extreme of putting through a **motion** in the P.C. that there is no difference between propaganda slogans and agitation slogans (comparable to a motion that two plus two does not equal four). It took nearly a year to force through the conception that the movement and slogans arising in the labor movement for "Thirty hours, thirty dollars," "Thirty hours' work at forty hours' pay," etc., were concretizations of the general transition slogan for "A sliding scale of wages and hours"! It took a year before it was possible to treat the slogan for a workers' guard as suitable for anything but the most vague and general educational propaganda. As a consequence of this thoroughly sterile approach, the transition program has as a whole not to this day become a significant living factor in our movement.

The Cannon faction covers the conservatism of its own politics and seeks prestige and control through appearing as "the unyielding representative" of Trotsky's views. In the light of the foregoing analysis, we deny categorically that the Cannon group has the slightest right to be regarded as the representative of Trotsky's views in a genuinely political sense.

But even if it were true that the Cannon group were a responsible representative of Trotsky's politics and were able to apply those politics, the result would remain wholly unsatisfactory.

To begin with, Trotsky is not only capable of being wrong but has a number of times been wrong. The habit of automatic, uncritical acceptance of Trotsky's views eliminates the basis for fruitful discussion, in whole or in part, and the possibility of mutual influence and correction.

Secondly, it is impossible for Trotsky to present a line of daily policy for the development of the American section, that is, to substitute for the party leadership, its problems and its tasks; nor does he seek or desire to do so. So far as the American section goes, he can give guidance only on the more general, the international, the basic questions, and occasionally on specific national problems which arise. If this guidance were invariably right, it would still be only a part of what has to be done. There remain a thousand-and-one political problems of the American movement and the American revolution. These can be answered only by an independently and critically thinking leadership and membership of the American section itself. This is, as we understand it, the attitude that Trotsky has always had to this problem, and it is the only one admissible in our movement. There is not the slightest element of provincialism or nationalism in such a view. It is common horse sense. And unless such a leadership and membership is not developed—and it cannot be under the regime of bureaucratic conservatism—the Fourth International in this country is foredoomed to sterility.

The Cannon group, we have said, accepts automatically, in words at least, the **politics** of Trotsky. But this does not mean that it accepts **all** the views of Trotsky. We have defined the Cannon group as bureaucratic conservative, and have pointed out that for a bureaucratic conservative group, politics is **subordinate** to regime. The **independence** of the Cannon group, what keeps it alive and makes it possible for it to be a group, is **not** its political policies—which, in the last analysis, are wholly secondary for it—but its central object of the maintenance of itself. On questions of regime, or "organizational methods," Cannon is not in the least the "follower of Trotsky, but, on the contrary, though willing to listen to Trotsky's opinion, pursues an assured and independent course. Political or theoretical questions can be left to others—to Trotsky, or even, on "normal" occasions, to Burnham or Shachtman. But Cannon will keep a firm and guiding hand on "organization." This difference in attitude is infinitely revealing of the true nature of bureaucratic conservatism. Politics, programs, are more or less routine matters for others to take care of; the business of the "real Bolshevik" is—to cinch up the majority and retain party control. Yes: Trotsky or Burnham or Shachtman writes the "political resolutions" for plenums and conventions; but the organization resolutions come from the firm Bolshevik hand of Cannon. From the end of the Chicago convention in November, 1937 to June, 1939 not one word of Cannon's appears in the public political press of the party; but his articles on "organization" feature the pre-convention discussion.

The articles themselves are characteristic, too. In the pre-convention discussion in the P.C., comrades of the present opposition pointed out, objectively and self-critically, the justified discontent-

ment of the membership with the sluggishness and apathy of the leadership, with its failure to elaborate or carry out a program of action, in particular the failure to make a living reality out of the Transition Program; point out, further, that the preparations for the convention are routinist to the core, providing for no critical examination of the past or program for the future. The articles by Cannon, many of the ideas in which were a collective product even though they were printed as a personal contribution, were written essentially for the purpose of warding off the necessary criticism of the party leadership's stewardship between the two conventions. No clearer proof of this assertion is required than the fact that following the convention nothing more was heard of the "program of action" contained in the articles. They were a defense mechanism for preserving the regime from criticism, nothing more.

(2) The second chief factor which hides the true role of the Cannon group is Cannon's undoubted organization skill—as it has sometimes been called, his "organization flexibility." This, well known to those who have been associated with him for a period of years at the center, is difficult to describe briefly and explain. No politician is more careful of "the record" than Cannon. He waits as long as possible to commit himself to writing and specific motions. And much, perhaps the most part, is done quietly in action, without motions at all, or motions only to record or sanction what has already taken place.

A trip by Cannon to Minneapolis seems advisable. Why? The comrades would like some "consultation." A few weeks after the trip is over, it turns out that a very important decision about the work of comrade "Smith" has been made. Naturally, the P.C. approves the decision.

A few weeks ago, Cannon evinced, for the first time in three years, a sudden interest in the Youth. Frightful conditions had come to his attention—by a coincidence, just as a severe factional struggle was getting under way. Comrade Tanner of the YPSL N.C. (up to yesterday, as proved by the record and by letters, well satisfied with the YPSL leadership) had, by a happy chance, felt compelled to tell Cannon, in an interview and then by letter, how bad things are. And a couple of days later—again by happy chance—Comrade Art Preis, who a few months ago publicly found the YPSL to be the only salt in his Ohio earth, wrote in to the national office a denunciation of the YPSL that must have exhausted his supply of adjectives.

The membership, approaching the July, 1939 convention, feels that all is not well with the functioning of the party. Cannon's excellent literary style, long slumbering, springs to life. What we need is ten thousand dollars, a three-a-week *Appeal*, and thirty new organizers. To try to talk soberly and critically about the past and what to learn from it—that is to sabotage the chance of a "constructive convention." The convention ends, but the new "program of action" does not get off the paper it was written on.

The New York organization has been slipping away from the Cannon influence? Luckily, just before a local convention, Cochran turns up in New York; and, though the P.C. has not known about it, it happens that his work in auto (three months before defined as the main concentration point) has come to an end. The articulate Cannon supporters in New York are not so many and not doing so well as in the old days? Murray Weiss, fortunately, is no longer needed so urgently in California and is specially assigned to New York; while auto has so thoroughly quieted down that George Clarke also is no longer required in the Detroit area.

The Organization Committee, discussing the severe financial crisis in the party, unanimously recommends a retrenchment policy to the P.C., which just as unanimously endorses it. To save the *Appeal*, it is imperative, under the conditions, to return to weekly publication, and to cut down the staffs of the national office, and the press. There is to be only one full-time editorial worker and one full-time business manager. After the defeat of the Cannon faction at the New York city convention of the party, the financial crisis disappears over night. Goldman is added to the national office staff; Clarke, who has never had the slightest experience in this field, is added to the *Appeal* staff as general manager of the press, without the P.C. majority deigning to give the slightest argument, good or bad, either for increasing the staff or for the candidate's qualifications. Other departments of the work, however, not less important than these, but manned by oppositionists, cannot be maintained for "financial" reasons.

And none of this is done with mirrors.

(3) The third chief factor which has obscured the role of Cannon is the cover which has been provided for him by other N.C. members, in particular by members of the present opposition. This has had, for many party members, one of two effects, both of which

serve to cover Cannon: it has led some party members, who decided for themselves that the party leadership was conservative and bureaucratic, to place responsibility on the leadership as a whole; whereas others, who did not believe that this, that or the other members of the N.C. was conservative and bureaucratic, felt that the failure of such members to separate themselves from Cannon proved Cannon himself to be neither bureaucratic nor conservative. (It may be noted that some N.C. members even now supporting Cannon—such as Goldman—still serve as covers.)

It is true that, with the exception of a partial and inadequate discussion at the convention, we have not spoken out and have therefore undoubtedly served as a cover for Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism. Why not? The party must understand the reasons for this silence, in order not to be misled by such suggestions as the one to the effect that we speak now in order to divert attention from an allegedly false policy.

(i) In the first place, the present N.C. minority, while opposing Cannon's organizational conceptions and actions as bureaucratic, does not in the least counterpose to them an anarchist conception of organization. We believe in centralism as well as democracy for the party; and we believe it leads to nothing but chaos when every dispute in a leadership is at once "taken to the ranks." We believe that there is a certain order in the party structure, and that this is as it should be. When disputes arise in the leadership, we believe that, in most cases, the possibilities of solving these disputes in the leadership should be explored and exhausted before they are taken to the ranks; and at the very least that they should not be taken to the membership until the differences—if there continue to be differences—are clarified and crystallized. A party pays a heavy cost for membership disputes, in terms of the lessening of positive external activity, the loss of members through discouragement and disgust, the waste of energies and funds, etc.; and such disputes are therefore not to be initiated lightly.

It is not in any degree true that the minority has suddenly "discovered" organizational and other differences with Cannon subsequent to the emergence of a political difference on the Russian question. During the past several years, one or another member of the present minority have time and again posed the questions herein discussed within the leading committees in the attempt to work out some solution. This was done, for example, at the time of the special enlarged P.C. meeting during the "auto crisis." Prior to the July convention, there were attempts to discuss them in a number of meetings. Burnham presented to the committee a long written document as a basis for discussion. The document did not pretend to solve all problems, or to deal with all of them; nor could it. It was meant to initiate an orderly discussion among the leadership so that, by a frank and general discussion, some solution of the questions raised might at least be approached. Apart from McKinney, who spoke briefly on the document, only Abern took the floor to discuss it. He dealt at length and in detail with the criticisms directed at him. Cannon, however, whose regime was the main burden of the document, did not deign to utter a single word of comment, either in defense or rebuttal. On a later occasion, he made it clear that he had no intention of even trying to resolve the problem by discussion in the formally constituted leadership of the party, or for that matter, in the national convention of the membership. Such problems are to be dealt with and disposed of only by the clique. In other words, the Cannon regime and it alone may judge the Cannon regime.

At the N.C. meetings immediately preceding the convention, Shachtman proposed to raise these questions at the convention, through placing on the agenda of the convention a report on the leadership's record since the last convention. This proposal was rejected by the N.C., on the ground that "such questions could not be decided by a convention." By whom, then, by the way? It was made clear that any attempt to raise any question, however limited, specific and partial, relating to "the regime" would provoke a crisis in the party. The majority operated under an American version of the famous slogan: "These cadres can be removed only by civil war." When nevertheless, these questions forced their way to the surface in the convention, they did so in the distorted and confusing form of the debate over the "org. sec."

(ii) The problem of Cannon's conservatism in politics has also often been before the committees. We have cited one important instance in connection with the interpretation of the transition program. Comrades of the present opposition at this time debated whether to submit an independent resolution to the party in the discussion and referendum, and did submit a draft resolution to the committee. But here, as has a number of times happened, the following factor operated to keep the dispute from the membership: Virtually all committee members were in general, at least formal,

agreement in supporting the transition program and the new Labor party position. Separate documents to the party would have been hard to understand, and would have interfered with the education of the party to acceptance of the new program, and to successful opposition to the opponents of the change in position on the Labor party. It seemed impossible to accomplish everything at once, and the main task seemed to be the general political one. Political scruples, justified or unjustified, blocked the road to the membership. This, we believe, has often happened with honest party members, who have closed their eyes to the meaning of the Cannon tendency because of conjunctural agreement on a question temporarily in political dispute. Cannon need not be troubled by such considerations, since his policy is the instrument of his regime, and since often the political dispute is for him simply the means of stifling the impending attack on his regime.

(iii) We have already pointed out that the Cannon group is in a state of development. Its bureaucratic conservatism is not the product of a day or a year. It has become crystallized, become a system, only gradually, over a long period. It is our conviction that the outbreak of the war is what precipitated it clearly and crassly. It was difficult to attack before the party as a whole what was primarily a threat, a tendency, an embryo. Nor would this have been justified. By taking things as they came, a point at a time, the tendency might be corrected in time; at least we might "muddle through."

(iv) Nor is a real understanding of the Cannon group arrived at overnight. Not all members of the present opposition reached their present views simultaneously. The intimate experience of years was necessary; and the war itself was required to make matters fully clear.

(v) These four are, we think, legitimate reasons for having hesitated to bring the dispute for open discussion and decision by the full party membership. We do not wish to pretend that only legitimate reasons motivated all members of the opposition. Other reasons, not so worthy, also influenced their actions: a certain inertia, even cynicism at times with regard to what often seemed an incurable evil in the party; unwillingness to take responsibility for a serious struggle—all of which boiled down to a shrinking from the kind of fight which a bureaucratic conservative regime is compelled to make against its opponents. . . . Certain members of the present opposition, in particular Burnham and Shachtman, do not pretend to be free from having shared responsibility in several of Cannon's bureaucratic actions, and from having themselves acted bureaucratically.

## VII.

### *The Clique and Its Leader*

The leading members of the Cannon faction are well known as such. They are not new recruits, either to the party or to the faction. They include such comrades as Lewit, Gordon, Dunne, Skoglund, Weber, Turner, Clarke, Cochran, Morrow, Wright, Weiss, etc. We have called this faction a *clique*. We do so not for the sake of employing an epithet with unpleasant associations against our opponents, but, as always, in the effort to give an exact and scientific political description.

The Cannon faction is a clique because it is a grouping that exists, that has a continuous existence, without any principled political foundation so different from the policies of others as to warrant a separate (and secret) formation.

Cannon has stated, in the present party discussion, that for two years there was no "Cannon faction," but that now there is; and there is one now because a serious political dispute arose (over the Russian question) and a faction representing an identical point of view took shape on the foundation of that political view. This claim is put forward only to pull wool over the eyes of the innocent. It is quite true that, in the present dispute, many supporters and members of the present (temporary) "Cannon faction," are not members of the (permanent) Cannon clique. But the *clique* itself has a lasting life.

Is this doubted? It can be confirmed by a single incident. At the July convention, Shachtman presented a slate for the new N.C. He gave a political motivation for his slate: relating it to the difficulties and problems revealed in the party's activities, to the need for shaking off routinism and conservatism, and to the approach of the war; he advocated a committee which would: retain the core of the old leadership, in order to assure political stability and experience, and add a large draft of "new blood," especially of "youth" members.

After Shachtman finished, Comrade Dunne presented a slate. He

offered no motivation for it whatever. He simply presented it for the delegates to take and like. An adjournment was proposed by Cochran, and voted. As at a signal, 30 or 35 delegates then proceeded like a man to the back of the hall, where they held a caucus meeting. What political visa granted admission to that caucus meeting? There was none, and could have been none. It met as a clique, the Cannon clique.

Two other points were of interest in connection with this revealing incident. Cannon did not go to the back of the hall—nor does he usually on such occasions. Why not? Isn't the selection of a slate a sufficiently crucial problem to occupy the talents of the best leaders of the party—above all a slate, presumably, for war-time? Or is Cannon so purely interested in "political ideas" that he doesn't dip his hands into the business of selecting slates? Questions to trouble the innocent. The explanation is this: Cannon is very much indeed interested in slates and N.C.s; but he is interested only in having an N.C. whose majority will vote the right way when necessary. Consequently, he can safely leave to his faction associates—and does—the specific personnel.

And second: Cochran asked the adjournment because of the surprise and puzzlement at the slate which Dunne read off. But doesn't this disprove the existence of the clique, or at least Cochran's membership in it? Again, a question to bother the innocent. The explanation is the following: the inner circle of the clique's leadership has a contempt for the clique's own members, and especially for its outer circle of less informed supporters. Consequently, the inner circle didn't even bother to inform the rest of the members what the slate was; it merely declared, through Dunne: here is what you vote for. A shock, and a pitiful little "rebellion" resulted. Then it was quickly, and peacefully, straightened out by the clique gathering during the intermission. The P.C. members are all well acquainted with these little rebellions from committee meetings: they usually last just up to the time that a vote is taken.

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The Cannon faction is a bureaucratic conservative clique, not a group built on a commonly accepted political platform. But what, then, hold it together, if not a political platform? It, like all such groupings, if it is to endure, has only one resort: to group itself around an *individual*, a leader. The "platform" of the grouping becomes—the leader. It could not be otherwise.

It is natural, in politics, that individuals who have shown talent and ability should come to occupy somewhat special places in the minds of their associates, and that some or many persons will put considerable confidence in what the talented individuals do and say. It is natural that these leading individuals should carry weight as persons and not merely as embodiments of political ideas. There need be nothing wrong with this, though it contains undoubted dangers in the best of circumstances. But the relation of the followers of a clique to its "leader" is something very different; and the "cult of the leader" is not at all the same thing as confidence in an outstanding, tried, and talented comrade. It is in this latter sense that we say that Cannon is regarded as a leader by his followers. He is the *substitute* for a political platform.

Is this charge groundless? It is proved over and over again, often in the very eyes of the party. Let us take an example or two:

At the July convention, Weiss (as already referred to in another connection) was a member of the convention committee which sponsored the proposal for an organizational secretary. Weiss in the convention committee, favored the plan and voted for it. But Weiss is also a supporter of the Cannon clique. In his ten minute speech on the convention floor, when the point came up on the agenda, Weiss disclosed that he had "changed his mind" (not on the merit of the issue, he admitted, but because he had had pointed out to him "what was behind it"). But the greater part of his speech, as convention delegates and visitors will remember, was a song of adulation to his leader. He had observed Cannon, he told us, for many years. On organizational questions, he declared, he had found Cannon right 999 times out of 1000 (our reference is literal); maybe Cannon had been wrong in the final 1 out of the 1000, but if so, he, Weiss, did not know it. Weiss, in spite of his honest opinion on the issue, was another victim caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap.

A more revolting occurrence took place at one of the N.C. meetings which preceded the convention. The question under debate was the Shachtman proposal to have on the agenda the report of the secretary on the record of the party leadership. Morrow took the floor, in opposition to the proposal. And why did Morrow oppose it? Because it was a scheme to attack Cannon, and Cannon was the one and only one leader of the party. What was the evidence for this judgment? When the little movie of the workings of the Appeal

staff was shown to the members in New York, Cannon's picture on the screen was the only committee member's picture, except for McKinney's, to be greeted with applause. (Is it trivial gossip to recall such an incident? Alas, no: we know the school where such incidents are bred.) Morrow, by the way, was once explaining in a less formal meeting why Cannon "showed so much contempt for committee members" (these were Morrow's words). "It is because," we again quote literally, "Cannon towers above his fellow committee members as far as Lenin towered above his." Unfortunate for Lenin that he cannot defend himself from the praise of his self-avowed disciples!

Or a year ago, when the question of who should be the party representative in France was being discussed, and Clarke ended up a speech in favor of Cannon by demanding in a loud and belligerent voice: "Does any one here dare to deny that Cannon is the one outstanding leader of this party?"

Or more recently, and still more revealing: At the P.C. meeting of November 9th, the question of the attitude of the party toward Browder's arrest was discussed. Two motions were proposed, one by Burnham and the other by Shachtman. Whether the difference between the motions was great or slight, there was nevertheless a difference that had to be decided. Burnham's motion carried by a considerable majority, with Cannon and all of his group supporting it, and only Abern and Shachtman voting for a motion of their own. At the next meeting (November 16th), the point came up again. Cannon spoke for a minute or two: he had, he said, been thinking it over, and he wanted to change the record of his vote; he found after thought that he favored Shachtman's motion. He had spoken in a mild tone, and given no serious motivation for a change. Then Cochran spoke, and said he saw no reason for changing. After him, Weber: Weber not only saw no reason for a change to Shachtman's motion, but declared that in his mind the Burnham motion did not go far enough in the direction away from Shachtman's motion. While Weber was speaking, Weiss (at times an uneasy captive in the bureaucratic trap) triumphantly passed a note to Shachtman. You see, the note said, how wrong you are about the "Cannon hand-raisers"! Shachtman shrugged his shoulders, remarking to Burnham that on so minor a matter Cannon did not have to make it a "vote of confidence." But, lo, Cannon took the floor for a brief summary. He turned the heat on, became most fervent in defense of Shachtman's motion, since—he amazingly discovered—Burnham's motion implied his position on the "class nature of the Soviet State." The vote was taken, and Burnham found himself in a minority of one. Solid with Cannon were the votes of Cochran and Weber. But perhaps Cannon had "persuaded" them, in his summary, of the incorrectness of their position. Not so: an hour later, after the adjournment of the meeting, Weber repeated exactly the argument against Shachtman's motion that he had stated in the committee. But, caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap, he had voted in line with the demand of his leader.

(We do not mean to say that the Cannon followers never vote against Cannon. If you search the record carefully, you will find that on this or that occasion, some—not all by any means—have differed. But, as in a parliament, they never vote against him when the question is posed as a "vote of confidence," and it is Cannon, like Chamberlain or Daladier, who decides what constitutes a vote of confidence. A certain leeway for "self-expression" is tacitly assumed and allowable. But the leeway has been narrowing steadily.)

A clique with a leader-cult has its own laws of development, and the Cannon faction cannot escape the operation of these laws. In order to keep the leader in his niche, all other leading comrades must be toppled. Consequently, a systematic undercover campaign to poison the minds of party members is conducted, in terms often of the most fantastic slanders. An "anti-New York" propaganda is spread, which is at bottom a catering to prejudices that are not always healthy. This campaign was especially whipped up by Cannon at the last convention of the party in the most artificial manner and to such an extreme point that it was carried over to the public mass meeting celebrating the convention. It served the interests of the clique to do so at the national convention. But, at the New York City convention a few months later, when it served the clique's interests to laud to the skies everything Cochran, the city organizer, had done and to deny violently that anything was wrong or deficient in his administration, the New York organization was suddenly presented as an all but perfect section of the party—at least that section of it which supported the Cannon group.

Above all, an "anti-intellectual" and "anti-intellectuals" attitude is drummed into the minds of party members. The faction associates are taught, quite literally, to despise and scorn "intellectuals" and "intellectualism." A loud laugh is guaranteed for a joke or story

about an intellectual. Such symptoms, though they have been rare in the "Trotskyist" movement, are familiar enough. Some of us will remember a prominent appearance of them in the American movement some six years ago: within the A.W.P., the struggle against fusion with the C.L.A. was conducted by Hardman under the banner of "anti-New York," "anti-intellectual" (not unlike many of the present campaigners, the banner-carrier was himself a New York intellectual). The self-avowed "trade-union" faction of Foster and Co. in the old Communist Party fights distinguished itself in the same way, although in those days Cannon combatted Fosterite demagogy with all his strength.

Rudeness and harshness, of a personal rather than a political kind, more and more make their appearance. At the very beginning of the present dispute, before positions and lines were even clearly drawn, Cannon and his associates were referring to the opposition constantly as "traitors," "snivelling" this and "stinking" that. Not on the floor of the Plenum, but during its sessions Dunne described the minority as "snivelling strike-breakers" (our quotations are, as always, literal). The opposition has since become "agents of imperialism," "scabs" and "strikebreakers." Vocabulary, too, is caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap.

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Cannon has argued: How can I be blamed for the ills of the party? Do not the members of the minority occupy many of the most prominent posts? Was I not a minority of one in the P.C. that existed from the Chicago Convention to the recent July Convention? (In passing: We do not blame Cannon for all the ills of the party. We blame also the harshness of the times, and ourselves. But, in order to cure, it is necessary to diagnose the main danger and the root disease.)

It is true that the members of the minority occupy many posts, that they do their good share of the work of the party. Why not? Cannon has not the least objection to everyone in the party doing as much work, even in prominent posts, as he is capable of handling. Even Abern, who is now the target of Cannon's most venomous attacks on the ground of irresponsibility and incompetence, may be assigned to the most responsible or confidential work, often on Cannon's initiative. But on one condition: that the comrade in question carry out his task without exercising his right to criticize or differ with the regime and its line. As soon as he seeks to exercise this right in any important question, the qualifications of yesterday are instantly converted into disqualifications, and every conceivable means is employed to discredit and blacken him in the ranks of the party.

As for the P.C.: It is true that at the beginning of last summer, Cannon found himself in a minority of one in the P.C. Indeed, not once but a dozen times, he repeated: "I do not take responsibility for a single member of the committee." A damaging excuse, surely, when it is remembered that Cannon at the Chicago convention expressed himself as well satisfied with both the N.C. and the P.C. there chosen. A curious leader who in a year and a half has succeeded in driving every one of those who should be his closest colleagues into opposition!

But the full truth is more complex. The P.C. is in reality a fiction, or at best a semi-fiction. Its authority is strictly limited: here it may act, but into this territory it may not venture. Over the P.C. looms the N.C. (which, formally, is as it should be); and over the N.C. looms the final authority—the Cannon clique.

Often during the past eight months Cannon has been stressing the—formally quite correct—point that the P.C. has no independent status, that it is merely a sub-committee of the N.C. Why has this obvious truth become so prominent? For an important reason. Cannon is unable to construct a plausible and convincing and proper-sized P.C. on which his clique has a firm majority (the new post-plenum P.C., which is neither plausible nor convincing nor proper-sized, is no exception). But it always keeps a "safe" majority on the N.C.

But even the N.C. is largely fictitious. It is called to act only rarely, and then its deliberations have an air of unreality. The clique itself is the court of last appeal, on all "crucial" questions—i.e., questions "of regime."

We will illustrate these observations with three decisive examples:

On New Year's Eve of last year, Comrades Dunne and "Smith" of Minneapolis suddenly appeared in New York. When they were asked how they happened to be around, they replied facetiously that they wanted to attend the New Year's Eve party. On New Year's morning a number of invited comrades appeared at Cannon's apartment. These included: Cannon, Shachtman, Burnham, Smith

(with status as P.C. members); and Dunne, Clarke, Cochran, Morrow from the N.C. No one else had been invited. At this meeting there were taken up and decided plans for an "auto campaign"—including personnel and finances; plans for a projected more extensive campaign in the Michigan area; and the setting up of a special "field committee" with vaguely defined directorial powers; and, lastly, plans for the "harmless" presentation of this program to the P.C., for nominal approval. By what authority did this body sit as a deciding body, usurping the functions of both P.C. and N.C.? The full meaning of this meeting can only be grasped when we recall that Cannon was about to leave for Europe: this meeting was designed to sterilize the P.C. during his absence. (Here, by the way, is the source of the famous "auto crisis." Burnham and Shachtman have no defense to make for their attendance at this meeting, even though it was clear to them at that time that their invitation to the meeting was calculated to give a somewhat more acceptable status to its decisions—which had in reality already been made by the Cannon group. It is not today, however, that they realized their error: last spring, in writing and in speeches, they stated and analyzed it.) Cannon, it may finally be added, has never commented upon this meeting, never repudiated it or what it symbolized.

Second: In accordance with a mandate of the Chicago convention, a trade union department was set up, and Widick named trade union secretary. Presumably, Widick was to head the party's trade union work. There is no point in arguing whether Widick was or was not the most qualified comrade for the job; it was up to the N.C. to place in the job the most competent man available, and then to give him support and confidence. But this department and post remained also a fiction or at best a semi-fiction. The department was never even half-properly financed. Widick was compelled to spend much time keeping himself going. Wherever possible, he tried to carry out his assignment: in such places as Lynn, Newark and Akron his influence was felt, and trade union work in these localities advanced notably during this period. But never, at any point, was Widick permitted to "interfere" in Minneapolis, maritime or auto. These fields were within the special province of the Cannon group. Nor was the P.C. in any different relation to them. Indeed, questions that arose in these three fields were, more often than not, brought to the attention of the P.C. only after actions had been taken. Of the comrades at the center, Cannon and Cannon alone, and Cannon not as a representative of the P.C. but as an individual, was in reality consulted. In this light it will not appear so strange that the trade union secretary was excluded from the New Year's meeting which made such far-reaching decisions precisely in trade union matters. But why, then, was Widick given the job? Because no one of sufficient stature in the Cannon group would take the trade union job at the center. And because though Widick with his post was a fiction he was yet a useful fiction: like other useful fictions, he helped to hide the reality.

Third: Prior to and during the convention, comrades of the present minority proposed that comrade "Smith" of Minneapolis should come to the center as organization and trade union secretary. For this proposal they were denounced by the Cannon faction in N.C. meetings as light-minded petty-bourgeois who never did or would grasp the meaning and importance of trade union work. Three weeks following the convention, a motion submitted in writing by Cannon, Dunne and "Smith" made exactly the same proposal, which was hailed as a triumph of statesmanship. What had changed? Not the N.C., not the P.C., not the conditions and prospects of "Smith's" trade union work. What had changed was—for reasons that have never been explained—the clique decision.

## VIII.

### Cannon's "Theory of Crises"

We have explained to the party, consistently and openly, our political analysis of the party crisis. It is our duty to do so. It is no less Cannon's duty to give his theory, his political analysis. It is not without significance that since the beginning of the present crisis, he has shifted back and forth among no less than four different theories of the party crisis; and only one of these four, the one to which he has devoted least attention, is a political analysis.

(1) Cannon's first theory was that the leaders of the opposition are "irresponsible," "light-minded," "subjective," and using their own inner doubts to "throw the party into a crisis." This, it may be observed, is what Cannon has said at the outset of every even minor conflict in the party during the past several years. Let us note:

(a) Even if this were true, it would be of very minor significance

politically. Granted that we are responsible and light-minded (a rather cavalier charge against comrades few of whom are either new or untried in the movement), this is at most a psychological comment. The political analysis must show into what kind of false political position our "irresponsibility" throws us.

(b) But it is more important to see that this theory is an expression of a typically and time-dishonored bureaucratic approach. "Whoever disagrees with me—is irresponsible." This is the reply of the bureaucrat to his critics, the substitute for a political reply.

(2) The second theory of Cannon was that the position of the minority is an expression of "the pressure of democratic imperialism": that is, that the minority's position on the question immediately under dispute is social-patriotic. This is Cannon's sole attempt at a political analysis. But apparently he senses the weakness of this analysis, for he mentions it only occasionally and in passing. He never, so far, has dwelt on it, never attempted to prove it.

To prove it convincingly, it will not be enough for him to give an abstract analysis of the minority's position on "the Russian question." He must bolster his proof with evidence from other actions—motions, speeches, writings—of the leaders of the minority during this period and before it, must show that these too reveal the tendency toward democratic imperialist patriotism. But everyone knows that he cannot do this. Everyone knows that the leaders of the minority have consistently and day by day upheld the internationalist, anti-patriotic position of the party, above all on the question of war, where it means most. Everyone knows that they have been not the last but the first in the party in this all-important task.

Our party, true enough, is subject to the pressure of democratic patriotism, and we must guard against it. Fortunately, this pressure has not yet had serious and crystallized results in our ranks. Where it has been manifested concretely—when Cochran in Cleveland jumped head over heels into the Keep America Out of War Committee, when the comrades in Toledo slipped reformist versions of our transition slogans into the unemployment pamphlet they sponsored, when a couple of months ago our Minneapolis comrades supported a resolution at the Minnesota State A. F. of L. convention hailing William Green as a fighter against war—in these concrete cases we find that it was never members of the present minority who were primarily involved, or involved at all.

(3) The third theory of Cannon, advanced at a New York membership meeting, is that the present minority constitutes a "stinking office bureaucracy" (the adjective was very much insisted upon). As proof of this he offered flat falsifications of three incidents in party history. We shall not here counter these with the truth, though if the falsifications are persisted in or committed to paper we shall take occasion to do so, and do so conclusively. But we wish now only to observe, as in theory 1, how this reply is typically bureaucratic. "You call me a bureaucrat? You are yourselves not only bureaucrats, but stinking bureaucrats." Again: a substitute for a political answer.

(4) The fourth theory of Cannon is as follows: The present dispute in the party is the expression of a conflict between the petty-bourgeois, middle-class elements (the minority) and the proletarian elements (the majority). A luscious and satisfying theory indeed! What we—the majority says to itself, licking its chops—have in the party is: the class struggle. Thus the majority can get compensation by participation in "its own" class struggle for the party's inadequacies in the real struggle which is proceeding in its own way in the outside world.

This theory also is not political, but sociological. If it were true—and significant—it would still be necessary to characterize the position reached by the "petty-bourgeois current" politically. It is not enough just to call it "petty bourgeois."

Now, in the first place, this theory—even if it were significant and relevant as it is not—is not true even as a description of the facts, quite apart from their interpretation. We do not miss "petty bourgeois elements" prominently in the Cannon faction in many localities from Boston to the Pacific Coast to, above all, the national center. If we really think it worth while to speak of social status, we must remember that it is not altered by learning to speak out of the side of one's mouth, to smoke large cigars, or to sprinkle one's speeches with resounding cuss words.

We are the first to admit that the social composition of our party, above all its lack of genuine proletarians, is a tragic weakness, and that all justifiable means must be used to overcome this weakness. We find, however, that this has been a weakness of the entire Fourth Internationalist movement, and in fact of wide sections of the revolutionary movement from its inception. We do not expect, therefore, to solve it in a day or by an easy formula. "Pursue

a correct Marxian policy, translate our views into terms understandable by the masses, participate directly in the mass movement along this line—that is the only “formula” we know and it is not an easy one.

The revolutionary program is not the spontaneous or automatic product of the proletarians themselves; the “natural” proletarian policy is reformist or syndicalist. Indeed, from at least one most important point of view, the most radical influence in our party is the youth, the disinherited generation who above all have “nothing to lose but their chains” and their hopeless social situation. And the youth is in its overwhelming bulk against Cannon and his policies and his regime.

Cannon’s “class struggle” theory of the party crisis is a very dangerous fraud. Its concrete meaning is to encourage the trade union comrades to free themselves—not from “petty bourgeois elements”—but from political control by the party. The talk about “petty bourgeois elements” serves them as a rationalization to excuse rejection of political control by the party when that control seems to (and sometimes, necessarily, does) interfere with local or temporary advantages in trade-union work. In this fundamental respect it is identical with the “theory” and agitation of the Foster faction in the C.P. years ago, often condemned by our movement in the past and meriting the same condemnation today.

## IX.

### *The Sterility of Bureaucratic Conservatism*

A political party cannot continue as a living organism in a period of crisis, above all of war crisis, merely with a policy of “reaffirming our past position.”

More and more we find that the Cannon faction resists every new idea, every experiment. Let us grant that half at least of the new ideas and proposed experiments are wrong. Still: we can better afford to make mistakes than to do nothing. What is revealing is that the Cannon associates always have as their first response to a new idea—“hysteria,” “romanticism,” “light-mindedness.” In small things as in great: Whether it is the attempt actually to do something about building a “workers’ guard” or even to hold, in New York, an out-of-door May Day meeting (which Goldman and Cannon opposed as not feasible and sure to flop—though, as usual with experiments we try, it far more than justified itself when carried out). We must not “rush into” taking concrete positions on concrete questions of the day—the embargo or the invasion of Poland or municipal ownership of New York subways or what is going on in India—because, forsooth, we “might be mistaken” or “might violate our fundamental position” or “involve ourselves in speculation.”

Bureaucratic conservatism, by its very nature, is sterile. Its self-preserving objective allows it to be skillful in organizational maneuvers, but blocks the outward road; if it tries the outward road, it is only because its inner difficulties have compelled it to seek external solution; and its expansion is also therefore conservative and bureaucratic.

The growing sterility of the Cannon faction is shown most clearly of all by its attitude toward the youth, and by its inability to assimilate the best of the youth. It has never even noticed the youth except to smash down on its leaders for an alleged “anti-party” attitude and, characteristically, for their alleged “ultra-leftism” and “adventurism,”—which is in reality only the resistance of the youth to the Cannon clique’s bureaucratic conservatism and to its leader-cult. It is not yet a decided question in our party that failure to adulate Cannon as infallible leader constitutes an anti-party attitude.

Entirely prepared for the easy bureaucratic charge of “flattering the youth” and well recognizing the distinct weaknesses in our youth organization, we say without hesitation that our youth—the Y.P.S.L. organization itself and those comrades recently come from the Y.P.S.L. to the party—are in every essential respect the most progressive force in the movement, and 90% of its hope for the future. The approach of war only makes this truth the more weighty. The youth carry the burden of the work of the party as well as of the Y.P.S.L.; in responsible organization they put the party to shame; in receptivity to new and experimental ideas they are a standing lesson; they supply the party with most of its new members; and it is they alone who have actually done something to put themselves in readiness for work under war conditions. And it is this force, the potential force of the revolution, which Cannon, instead of educating and assimilating, brutally dismisses as “irresponsible petty-bourgeois triflers,” “Lovestoneites” and “traitors to the party”!

What, we ask, is the perspective of the Cannon group? We know very well what are its intentions with regard to the coming special convention. It has become increasingly plain that the Cannon regime is preparing a split. The party must not be taken in for a moment by solemn “unity resolutions” which Cannon presents and has adopted for the sake of the record. Despite the “unity resolution” the line and the conduct of the Cannon group have already made it abundantly clear that if they are in the majority at the convention, they will wipe out the opposition (that is, one form of a split); and if they are in the minority, they have no intention of abiding by the discipline of the party (that is, another form of a split). Whichever variant materializes, that is, no matter how the annoying opponents and critics are disposed of, the Cannon group will still have before it the question: What is its perspective? To continue forever “re-affirming our old position” in answer to the political questions of the day, and to reply to all proposals for new organizational steps by denouncing them as “hysteria”?

The truth is that the Cannon group has no perspective beyond that proper to it as a bureaucratic conservative grouping: self-maintenance; hanging on.

This is the truth: If bureaucratic conservatism completes its crystallization and engulfs the party as a whole, then the party cannot survive the war. It will not, as a whole, capitulate to the war. But it will simply be lost, swamped by great events that leave it helpless, to which it cannot respond. That is the destiny of bureaucratic conservatism in the crises of war and revolution.

## X.

### *The Alternative*

This document has been very long. We know that some comrades who will read it, some of those who agree with it altogether or in part, will draw from it cynical or discouraged or defeatist conclusions. This cannot be helped. It is necessary now to tell the truth and the whole truth. If we cannot face the truth, how can we hope to face the revolution? Nor are we in the slightest degree affected by the demagogic charge that we “have broken the harmony of the party on the very eve of war.” It is precisely because it is the eve of war that we realized we had to speak out bluntly.

There is in our presentation a certain possibility of distortion, hard to avoid in a polemical document. Just as we reject a “Messiah theory” of how to make the party succeed, so we equally reject any “Devil theory” of what is wrong with the party. We do not for a moment contend that Cannon has been engaged in any deliberate “plot,” that he, as an individual, has consciously conspired to impose upon the party a bureaucratic conservative stranglehold, with himself as leader. Not at all. Of all the victims, it is Cannon who is himself most painfully caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap. We know Cannon’s virtues and services and abilities—better, with a juster appreciation, we imagine, than many of his own most slavish idolaters. And it is his greatest virtue of all—his complete identification of himself with the movement—that, by a not uncommon irony, has played a great part in leading him to his present impasse, and that blocks a road out for him. And we know and estimate at their true value the qualities of the best of his associates; some of them are very great indeed.

What has led to the spreading growth of this evil of bureaucratic conservatism that now threatens the very life of the party? The general causes are clear: It is a consequence of long years of isolation, defeat, uphill struggle, fighting always against the stream; of the weariness, discouragement, even cynicism and despair that these engender in the hearts of men. Bureaucratic conservatism, creeping stealthily up, seems a last desperate mean of somehow “hanging on,” and refuge against a better day.

So far as individuals are responsible for this growth, we exempt no one, least of all ourselves. When Cannon replies to us by saying: “You are also responsible for these same crimes,” we answer: “We will take upon ourselves our rightful share of the responsibility.” Furthest from our minds is any desire to embellish the Minority, as individuals or as a group. It would be absurd for us to pretend a freedom from political mistakes, bureaucratic practises and even personal derelictions. Beyond doubt, however, most reprehensible in our conduct was our failure to present the problem under discussion to the calm and responsible and timely consideration of the party as a whole. Although we have not organized or functioned as an opposition until recently, we are prepared to submit our individual records for the examination and criticism of the entire party. But important as this may be, important as the examination of other individuals may be, they do not compare in

urgency and decisiveness with the central problem treated by the present document—the regime of bureaucratic conservatism and how to eliminate it.

The minority presents this chief claim as against the majority: Whatever the past may have been, we recognize the disease in the party, we diagnose it, we propose to cure it—and the first, most important step in the cure is the diagnosis. The majority, so far, refuses to recognize the existence of the disease; nay, more, proclaims that the disease is a vital and healthy plant. By this attitude they make their own even those evils which, in their origin, were not theirs alone. And by this attitude they prevent a cure.

We shall, in an independent document, present to the party a specific program of action, the initial steps in the cure. What is needed is, in its general outline, clear enough: In place of conservative politics, we must put bold, flexible, critical and experimental politics—in a word, scientific politics. In place of bureaucracy in the regime, not an abandonment of centralism naturally, but democracy also, democracy to the utmost permissible limit. Wherever there is a doubt, resolve the doubt on the democratic side. Only a truly democratic inner life can develop the initiative, intelligence and self-confidence without which the party will never lead the masses. All the formal democracy enjoyed by the party today—and it is abundant—is worse than meaningless, it is a mockery, if the real policies and the leadership and the regime of the party are continuously determined only by a clique which has no distinctive political foundation. The removal of party control from the hands of this clique is a pre-condition to the establishment of genuine party democracy and progressive policy. In place of a

leader-cult, not another leader (we propose none and want none) but a **collective leadership**, genuinely collective, coordinating and integrating by a real exchange of opinion and an efficient division of labor the best talents of the party. If there is one in the party who is outstanding from all others in his abilities and devotion and political insight, he will be known and recognized; but let him be **primus infra pares**—first among equals. In place of “reaffirming old positions,” let us like free and intelligent men use our mighty programmatic concepts to meet the living problems of history, to foresee and to guide in action. A maximum of branch and local initiative! Comradely education, not brutal and disloyal attacks, for those in error. A warm, if critical, welcome for every new idea, even a doubtful idea, not a denunciation for “irresponsibility.” Comradely criticism, encouragement, help, praise for the youth—even when the youth errs on the side of exaggeration or over-zealousness. And let us be less terrified of mistakes! Only the dead make no mistakes.

The future is hard, true, but not black. Already, on a world scale, the revolt against the war is rising. Tomorrow a storm will break in whose light our difficulties will be no more than the passing dream of an infant. It is for us to decide what role we shall then play.

December 13, 1939

(P.C. Minority)  
**ABERN**  
**BERN**  
**BURNHAM**  
**SHACHTMAN**

## Correspondence:

### BURNHAM AND DIALECTICS

January 3, 1940

Dear Friends,

I received the two documents of the opposition, studied that on bureaucratic conservatism and am now studying the second on the Russian question. What lamentable writings! It is difficult to find a sentence expressing a correct idea or placing a correct idea in the correct place. Intelligent and even talented people occupied an evidently false position and push themselves more and more into a blind alley.

The phrase of Abern about the “split” can have two senses: either he wishes to frighten you with a split as he did during the entry discussion or he wishes really to commit political suicide. In the first case, he will of course not prevent our giving a Marxist appreciation of the opposition politics. In the second case nothing can be done; if an adult person wishes to commit suicide it is difficult to hinder him.

The reaction of Burnham is a brutal challenge to all Marxists. If dialectics is a religion and if it is true that religion is the opium of the people, how can he refuse to fight for liberating his own party from this venom? I am now writing an open letter to Burnham on this question. I don't believe that the public opinion of the Fourth International would permit the editor of the theoretical Marxist magazine to limit himself to rather cynical aphorisms about the foundation of scientific socialism. In any case, I will not rest until the anti-Marxist conceptions of Burnham are unmasked to the end before the Party and the International. I hope to send the open letter, at least the Russian text, the day after tomorrow.

Simultaneously, I am writing an analysis of the two documents. Excellent is the explanation why they agree to disagree about the Russian Question.

I grit my teeth upon losing my time in the reading of these absolutely stale documents. The errors are so elementary that it is necessary to make an effort to remember the necessary argument from the ABC of Marxism. I hope to send the article also in Russian in a week or so.

Best thanks to Comrade Goldman for the sending of his illuminating letter.

**W. RORR**

**Coyoacan D. F.**

### TROTSKY TO SHACHTMAN

Jan. 4, 1940

Dear Friends,

I enclose a copy of my letter to Shachtman which I sent more than two weeks ago. Shachtman didn't even answer me. It shows the mood into which he has pushed himself by his unprincipled fight. He makes a bloc with the anti-Marxist Burnham and he refuses to answer my letters concerning this bloc. The fact in itself is of course of doubtful importance but it has an undisputable symptomatic vein. This is my reason for sending you a copy of my letter to Shachtman.

With best wishes

**L. TROTSKY**

\* \* \* \* \*

December 20, 1939

Dear Comrade Shachtman,

I am sending you a copy of my last article. You will see from my polemics that I consider the divergences as of decisive character. I believe that you are on the wrong side of the barricades, my dear friend. By your position you give courage to all the petty-bourgeois and anti-Marxist elements to fight our doctrine, our program, and our tradition. I don't hope to convince you with these lines, but I do express the prognosis that if you refuse now to find a way towards collaboration with the Marxist wing against the petty-bourgeois revisionists, you will inevitably deplore for years and years the greatest error of your life.

If I had the possibility I would immediately take an airplane to New York City in order to discuss with you for 48 or 72 hours uninterruptedly. I regret very much that you don't feel in this situation the need to come here to discuss the questions with me. Or do you? I should be happy . . .

**L. TROTSKY**

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### ON PARTY UNITY AND FINLAND

January 5, 1940

Dear Joe,

Thank you for your interesting information. In the case of necessity or of advisability, Jim could publish our correspondence and that with Wright concerning the split matter. This correspond-

ence shows our firm desire to preserve the unity of the party in spite of the sharp factional struggle. I mentioned in my letter to Wright that even as a minority the Bolshevik wing of the party should in my opinion remain disciplined and Jim answered that he wholeheartedly agreed with that view. These two quotations are decisive for the matter.

Concerning my remarks about Finland in the article on the petty-bourgeois opposition, I will say here only a few words. Is there a principled difference between Finland and Poland—yes or no? Was the intervention of the Red Army in Poland accompanied by civil war—yes or no? The press of the Mensheviks who are very well informed thanks to their friendship with Bund and with PPS emigres says openly that a revolutionary wave surrounded the advance of the Red Army. And not only in Poland but also in Rumania.

The Kremlin created the Kuusinen government with the evident purpose of supplementing the war by civil war. There was information about the beginning of the creation of a Finnish Red Army, about "enthusiasm" of poor Finnish farmers in the occupied regions where the large land properties were confiscated and so on. What is this if not the beginning of civil war?

The further development of the civil war depended completely upon the advance of the Red Army. The "enthusiasm" of the people was evidently not hot enough to produce independent insurrections of peasants and workers under the sword of the hangman Mannerheim. The retreat of the Red Army necessarily halted the elements of the civil war at the very beginning.

If the imperialists help the Finnish bourgeoisie efficiently in defending the capitalist regime, the civil war in Finland would become for the next period impossible. But if, as is more than probable, the reinforced detachments of the Red Army successfully penetrate into the country, we will inevitably observe the process of civil war paralleling the invasion.

We cannot foresee all the military episodes, the ups and downs of purely tactical interest, but they don't change the general "strategical" line of events. In this case as in all others, the opposition makes a purely conjunctural and impressionistic policy instead of a principled one.

(It is not necessary to repeat that the civil war in Finland as was the case in Poland would have a limited, semi-stified nature and that it can, in the next stage, go over into a civil war between the Finnish masses and the Moscow bureaucracy. We know this at least as clearly as the opposition and we openly warn the masses. But we analyze the process as it is, and we don't identify the first stage with the second one.)

With warm wishes and greetings for all friends,

**L. TROTSKY**

Coyoacan, D. F.

## CANNON AND TROTSKY ON PARTY UNITY

LETTER TO JOHN G. WRIGHT

December 19, 1939

Dear Friend,

I read your letter to Joe. I endorse completely your opinion about the necessity for a firm even implacable theoretical and political fight against the petty-bourgeois tendencies of the opposition. You will see from my last article, which will be air-mailed to you tomorrow, that I characterize the divergences of the opposition even more sharply than has the majority. But at the same time, I believe that the implacable ideological fight should go parallel with very cautious and wise organizational tactics. You have not the slightest interest in a split, even if the opposition should become, accidentally, a majority at the next convention. You have not the slightest reason to give the heterogeneous and unbalanced army of the opposition a pretext for a split. Even as an eventual minority, you should in my opinion remain disciplined and loyal towards the party as a whole. It is extremely important for the education in genuine party patriotism, about the necessity of which Cannon wrote me one time very correctly.

A majority composed of this opposition would not last more than a few months. Then the proletarian tendency of the party will again become the majority with tremendously increased authority. Be extremely firm but don't lose your nerve—this applies now more than ever to the strategy of the proletarian wing of the party.

With best comradely greetings and wishes,

Yours,

**L. TROTSKY**

Coyoacan, D. F.

P. S. The evils came from: (1) Bad composition especially of the most important New York branch; (2) Lack of experience especially by the members who came over from the Socialist Party (Youth). To overcome these difficulties inherited from the past is not possible by exceptional measures. Firmness and patience is necessary.

**L. TROTSKY**

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New York, Dec. 21, 1939

Dear Comrade Trotsky:

... Comrade Wright has just shown me your letter of December 19. I agree completely and wholeheartedly with your evaluation of our best course. It is in this sense that I draw back from a public discussion with the minority.

Fraternally,  
**J. P. CANNON**