

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

INTERNAL BULLETIN

Issued by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
116 UNIVERSITY PLACE, N. Y. C.

A.H.

Vol. II, No. 13

APRIL, 1940

CONTENTS :

The Struggle For A Proletarian Party

By JAMES P. CANNON

| | |
|--|----|
| What the Discussion Has Revealed | 2 |
| A New Stage In the Development of American Trotskyism | 3 |
| Their Method And Ours | 4 |
| The Organization Question | 5 |
| The Intellectuals and the Workers | 6 |
| The Case of Burnham | 7 |
| The Evil of Combinationism | 10 |
| Abernism: The Case History of a Disease | 11 |
| The Question of the Party Regime | 15 |
| "Conservatism" | 17 |
| "Bureaucratism" | 18 |
| The "Clique" and the "Leader Cult" | 21 |
| The Proletarian Orientation | 23 |

SWP-1B - 1940 - Vol II #13

may a

THE STRUGGLE FOR A PROLETARIAN PARTY

by James P. Cannon

I. What the Discussion Has Revealed

Political struggles in general, including serious factional struggles in a party, do not take place in a vacuum. They are carried on under the pressure of social forces, and reflect the class struggle to one degree or another. This law is demonstrated in the most striking manner in the development of the present discussion within our party.

At the present time the pressure of alien class forces upon the proletarian vanguard is exceptionally heavy. We must understand this first of all. Only then can we approach an understanding of the present crisis in the party. It is the most severe and profound crisis our movement has ever known on an international scale. The unprecedented tension in the ranks signalizes a conflict of principled positions which is obviously irreconcilable. Two camps in the party fight for different programs, different methods and different traditions.

What has brought the party to this situation in such a short space of time? Obviously it is not a suddenly discovered personal incompatibility of the individual leaders involved; such trifles are symptoms of the conflict, not causes. Nor can a conflict of this depth and scope be plausibly explained by the flaring up of old differences of opinion on the organization question. In order to understand the real significance of the crisis it is necessary to look for profounder causes.

For those who understand politics as an expression of the class struggle—and that is the way we Marxists understand it—the basic cause of the crisis in the party is not hard to find. The crisis signifies the reaction in our ranks to external social pressure. That is the way we have defined it from the outset of the crisis—last September, immediately following the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact and the beginning of the German invasion of Poland. More precisely, we say the crisis is the result of the pressure of bourgeois democratic public opinion upon a section of the party leadership. That is our class analysis of the unrestrained struggle between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies in our party.

We define the contending factions not by such abstract general terms as "conservative" and "progressive." We judge the factions not by the psychologic traits of individuals, but by the programs they defend. The discussion has revealed not a difference of opinion about the application of the program—such differences frequently occur and usually have a transitory significance—but an attempt to counterpose one program to another. This is what has divided the party into two camps. Naturally, these terms, which we have used from the beginning of the discussion to characterize the two tendencies in the party, are meant as definitions and not epithets. It is necessary to repeat this in every debate between Marxists and petty-bourgeois politicians of all types; the one thing they cannot tolerate is to be called by their right name.

The leaders of the opposition consider it outrageous, a malicious faction invention, for us to place this class signboard above their faction, when their only offense consists in the simple fact that they turn their backs on the Soviet Union and deny it defense in the struggle against world imperialism. But our definition and description of such an attitude is not new. Back in the days when Shachtman was paraphrasing Trotsky and not Burnham, he himself wrote:

"At bottom, the ultra-leftists' position on the Soviet Union, which denies it any claim whatsoever to being a workers' state, reflects the vacillations of the petty-bourgeois, their inability to make a firm choice between the camps of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, of revolution and imperialism."

This quotation, from an article written in the New International by Shachtman two years ago, can be accepted as a scientific definition of the opposition combination and its present position, with only one small amendment. It is hardly correct to describe their position as "ultra-leftist."

The leaders of the opposition in the past have written and spoken a great deal along the lines of the above quotation. Year in and year out in innumerable articles, documents, theses and speeches the leaders of the opposition have been promising and

even threatening to defend the Soviet Union—"In the hour of danger we will be at our posts!"—but when the hour drew near, when the Soviet Union almost began to need this defense, they wretched on their promise.

So with the program in general, with the doctrine, the methods and the tradition of Marxism. When all this ceased to be the subject for literary exercises in times of tranquility and had to be taken as a guide to action in time of war, they forgot everything that had been said and written and started a frantic search for "new and fresh ideas." In the first half-serious test they revealed themselves as "peace-time Trotskyists."

And this shameful performance, this betrayal of Marxism, has taken place in the American section of the Fourth International even before the formal entry of American imperialism into the war. In the bible of the opposition, their document on "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," we are assured that the party crisis "was provoked by the war." That is not precisely accurate. America has not yet formally entered into the war, and thus far we have only a faint intimation of the moral and material pressure which will be brought to bear against the proletarian vanguard under war conditions. Not the war, but merely the shadow of the approaching war was enough to send Burnham, Shachtman and Abern on their mad stampede.

Gratuitously attributing to the party their own panic, these philosophers of retreat and capitulation express the opinion that comrades who read their document on the party regime "will draw from it cynical or discouraged or defeatist conclusions." They add: "The future is dark." And Burnham, who bared his petty-bourgeois soul in a special document entitled, "Science and Style," proclaims with malicious satisfaction—the wish is father to the thought—the downfall of the Fourth International. The reality is diametrically opposite to these lugubrious observations.

In the proletarian majority of the party there is not a trace of pessimism. On the contrary, there is universal satisfaction that the defection of a section of the party leadership revealed itself in time, before the war, and under conditions where it could be combatted openly and in free discussion and beaten down. The virtual unanimity with which the proletarian cadres have rallied to the defense of the party and the Fourth International, the militancy and irreconcilability with which they have met the attack of Burnham, Abern and Shachtman is living proof of the vitality and indestructibility of our movement. That is a good omen for the future. It gives us confidence that it will stand up against the real test of war when it comes. It gives grounds for the most optimistic calculation that the Fourth International will not only "survive," but conquer in struggle.

As for the "hard future"—the Bolshevik-Marxists never expected that the period of the death agony of capitalism could produce anything but crises and war with their inevitable repercussions in workers' organizations, including the party of the workers' vanguard. From these "hard" circumstances, the Fourth Internationalists only drew the conclusion that the grandiose social convulsions, which we foresaw and analyzed in advance, create the conditions out of which the oppressed masses, impelled by iron necessity, must carry through the social revolution and the reorganization of the world on a socialist basis. Only one thing is needed: a genuine Bolshevik party of the vanguard. Only Marxism can be the program of such a party. Burnham and his sorry disciples, the ex-Marxists, ex-Trotskyists, offer a program that has nothing in common with Marxism or the proletarian revolution. From this arises the fundamental conflict between the majority and the opposition, a conflict which is manifestly irreconcilable and to which all other questions, however important, are nevertheless subordinate.

In the course of a few months discussion the differences between the majority and the opposition have reached such depth and scope as to completely overshadow all questions of party regime. If all the alleged faults of the regime were true, and then multiplied ten times over, the whole question would pale into insignificance beside the principled differences which now clearly separate the two contending factions. The struggle of the opposition ostensibly began as a struggle against the "Cannon regime," and

as a defense, or at any rate as an anticipation, of the "changing" position of Trotsky. But in a short time it unfolded as a fundamental conflict with the Fourth International over all the questions of our program, our method and our tradition.

Abern, who voted at the plenum for the principled resolution of the majority on the Russian question and accused us of inventing and exaggerating differences, ended up, by the logic of his unprincipled combination, in the revisionist camp of Burnham. Shachtman, who at the plenum could only be accused of building a bridge to Burnham, became his attorney, writing "open letters" to Comrade Trotsky in his behalf, and directing the most venomous attacks against the proletarian majority of the party who remind him of his yesterday. Burnham, in his latest document on "Science and Style," speaks the language of a hate-inspired enemy of the proletarian revolutionary movement and of all those who remain faithful to it.

This is what has been revealed in a few months of political discussion.

II.

A New Stage in the Development of American Trotskyism

The body of doctrine and methods known as "Trotskyism" is indubitably the genuine Marxism of our time, the heir and continuator of the Bolshevism of Lenin and the Russian revolution and the early Comintern. It is the movement known as Trotskyism and no other that has developed Bolshevism in analyzing and interpreting all the great events of the post-Lenin period and in formulating the program for the proletarian struggle and victory. There is no other movement, there is no other school that has answered anything. There is no other school that is worthy of a moment's consideration by the proletarian revolutionists. Trotskyism, embodied in the Fourth International, is the only revolutionary movement.

But the road from the elaboration of the program to the organization of firm cadres, and from that to the building of mass parties of the Fourth International, is difficult and complicated. It proceeds through various stages of evolution and development as a continuous process of selection, attracting new forces and discarding others who fail to keep step. The American section of the Fourth International is right now in the midst of a crisis in this evolutionary process. If, as all signs indicate, we are moving toward a radical solution of the crisis, it is to be accounted for by the speed at which world events are marching and the immensity of their scope and the sensitivity of our party to their impact.

The second world war, no less than the first, strikes all organizations and tendencies in the labor movement with cataclysmic force. Our own organization is no exception. Like all others, it is being shaken to its foundations and compelled to reveal its real nature. Weaknesses which remained undisclosed in time of peace are rapidly laid bare with the approach of war. Numerous individuals and whole groupings, whether formally members of the Fourth International or sympathizers, are being submitted to the same tests. There will be casualties, which may seem to indicate a weakening of the movement. But that is rather the appearance of things than the reality. Trotskyism is the veritable doctrine and method of proletarian revolution; it reveals its true substance most unflinching in times of crisis, war, and revolutionary struggle. Those who have assimilated the program, the doctrine, the method and the tradition into their flesh and blood, as the guiding line of struggle, cling all the more firmly to the movement under the pressure of the crisis.

It is only those who took Bolshevism as a set of literary formulas, espousal of which gave one a certain distinction in radical circles without incurring any serious responsibilities; those who adopted Trotskyism as a form of "extreme radicalism" which never went beyond the bounds of sophisticated debate—it is such people who are most inclined to falter and to lose their heads under the pressure of the crisis, and even to blame their panic on that same "Trotskyism" which simply remains true to itself.

Everybody knows the crisis has dealt heavy blows to the imposing movement of Stalinism. With the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact the flight of the Stalinist fellow travellers began. They could stomach the Moscow Trials but not the prospect of coming into collision with the democratic government of U.S. imperialism. After the Soviet invasion of Poland and then of Finland the flight of the fellow-travellers became a rout. This wild migration attracted wide attention and comment. We ourselves contributed our observations and witticisms on this ludicrous spectacle. Up to now,

however, we have remained silent on an analogous phenomenon in our own "periphery." The flight of the more sophisticated, but hardly more courageous, intellectual fellow-travellers of American Trotskyism has been scarcely less precipitate and catastrophic.

With the approach of the war Trotskyism as a doctrine and as a movement began to lose its "respectability." Many of the intellectuals, sniffing danger, arranged a somewhat hasty and undignified departure. In truth, there is not much left of that considerable army of drawing room heroes who used to admire Trotsky's literary style and confound the less intelligent periphery of Stalinism with nuggets of wisdom mined from Trotsky's writings. The collapse of the Trotskyist "cultural front" was taken by some people, especially the ex-fronters themselves, to signify a collapse of our movement. In the journals of the class enemy to which they promptly attached themselves some of them have already worked up courage to write about Trotskyism as an "outmoded sectarian tendency." However, it is they who are "outmoded," not the movement of the proletarian vanguard, Trotskyism.

The petty-bourgeois intellectuals are introspective by nature. They mistake their own emotions, their uncertainties, their fears, and their egotistic concern about their personal fate for the sentiments and movements of the great masses. They measure the world's agony by their own inconsequential aches and pains. Insofar as our party membership consists in part of petty-bourgeois elements completely disconnected from the proletarian class struggle, the crisis which overtook the periphery of our movement is transferred, or rather, extended, into the party.

It is noteworthy that the crisis struck the New York organization of the party, thanks to its unfavorable social composition, with exceptional force and virulence, while the proletarian centers of the party remained virtually unaffected. The tendency of the petty-bourgeois elements to flee from our program and to repudiate our tradition is counterposed to a remarkable demonstration of loyalty to the program and to the party on the part of the proletarian membership. One must indeed be blind not to understand the meaning of this differentiation. The more our party revealed itself as a genuine proletarian party, the more it stood firmly by principle and penetrated into the workers' mass movement, the better it has withstood the shock of the crisis. To the extent that our party has sunk its roots in proletarian soil it has gained, not lost, during this recent period. The noise we hear around and about our movement is simply the rustling of the leaves at the top of the tree. The roots are not shaking.

The evolution and development of American Trotskyism did not proceed according to a preconceived plan. It was conditioned by a number of exceptional historical circumstances beyond our control. After the initial cadres had accustomed themselves to withstand the attacks and pressure of the Stalinists, the movement began to take shape as an isolated propaganda society. Of necessity it devoted an inordinate amount of its energy to the literary struggle against Stalinism. World events, one after another, confirmed our criticisms and prognoses. After the collapse of the Comintern in Germany, the failure of the successive 5-year plans to bring "socialism" in Russia, the monstrous excesses of the forced collectivization and the man-made famine, the murderous purges and the trials—after all this, which Trotsky alone had explained and analyzed in advance, Trotskyism became more popular in petty-bourgeois intellectual and half-intellectual circles. For a time it even became the fashion. Party membership conferred a certain distinction and imposed no serious hardships. Internal democracy was exaggerated to the point of looseness. Centralism and discipline existed only in the program, not in practice. The party in New York was more like a sophisticated discussion club than a combat party of the proletariat.

The fusion with the Muste organization, and later the entry into the Socialist Party, were carried out with the deliberate aim of breaking out of propagandistic isolation and stagnation and finding a road to wider circles. These actions brought hundreds of new recruits to the party, and gave us the possibility of expanding our activities. But the successes also brought their own contradictions. The membership of the Socialist Party in New York, including its left-wing and its youth organization, was primarily petty-bourgeois in composition; and, despite their good will, were not easy to assimilate. If our party organization in New York had been much larger, and predominantly proletarian in composition, the task would have been much easier. As it was, some of the new forces from the S.P. complicated the problem of proletarianizing the party and contributed fresh recruits to the petty-bourgeois clique of Abern.

At the same time, thanks to our deliberate orientation toward trade union work, the party in other centers of the country was developing in a proletarian direction. Penetration into the trade unions was bringing into the party fresh elements of proletarian fighters; and the contrast between the proletarian centers and the New York organization flared up in numerous skirmishes before it finally exploded in the present party crisis.

The approach of the war, with its forewarning of heavy difficulties and sacrifices for members of the party, brought with it a restlessness and dissatisfaction among many of the petty-bourgeois elements. These sentiments found authentic expression in a section of the leadership. They began to translate their own nervousness into exaggerated criticism of the party and demands upon it which could not be fulfilled in the circumstances. After the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact, the opposition became more articulate. It began to express itself in the form of a fight against our program and, eventually, in a revolt against the whole doctrine, tradition and method of Marxism and Bolshevism.

It would be utterly absurd, however, to characterize the party crisis as the result merely of political differences of opinion. We would not touch the core of the problem if we confined ourselves to a "political" characterization of the fantastic proposals and flip-flops of the opposition. Serious political struggles, such as these, are an expression of the struggle of classes; that is the only way to understand them. The leaders of the opposition, and a very large percentage of their followers, have shown that they are capable of changing their opinions on all fundamental questions of theory and politics over night. This only demonstrates quite forcibly that their opinions in general are not to be taken too seriously.

The driving impulses behind the opposition as a whole are petty-bourgeois nervousness at the prospect of impending struggles, difficulties and sacrifices, and the unconscious desire to avoid them at all costs. For some, no doubt, the frenzied struggle against our program and our tradition is simply a device to mask a capitulatory desertion of the revolutionary movement in a cloud of dust and controversy. For others, their newly discovered "political position," and their endless talk about it and around it are an unconscious rationalization of the same inner compulsion. In such cases it is not sufficient to stop at a political characterization of the outlandish propositions of the oppositionists. It is necessary to expose their class basis.

The present crisis in the party is no mere episode. It is not to be explained by simple differences of opinion such as have occurred at times in the past, and will always occur in a free and democratic party. The crisis is the direct reflection of alien class pressure upon the party. Under this pressure the bulk of the petty-bourgeois elements, and the petty-bourgeois leaders, lost their heads completely, while the proletarian sections of the party stand firm, and rally around the program with a virtual unanimity.

From this we can and must draw certain conclusions:

(1) It is not sufficient for the party to have a proletarian program; it also requires a proletarian composition. Otherwise the program can be turned into a scrap of paper over night.

(2) The crisis cannot be resolved simply by taking a vote at the convention and reaffirming the program by majority vote. The party must proceed from there to a real proletarianization of its ranks. It must become obligatory for the petty-bourgeois members of the party to connect themselves in one way or another with the workers' movement and to reshape their activities and even their lives accordingly. Those who are incapable of doing this in a definite and limited period of time must be transferred to the rank of sympathizers.

We stand at a decisive stage in the evolution of American Trotskyism from a loosely-organized propaganda circle and discussion club to a centralized and disciplined proletarian party rooted in the workers' mass movement. This transformation is being forced rapidly under pressure of the approaching war. This is the real meaning of the present party struggle.

III. Their Method And Ours

In the light of these facts, which show the contending factions already drawn up into two camps defending antagonistic and irreconcilable programs and methods, what possible interest can a supporter of the program of the Fourth International and of Marxism in general have in a "regime" of the petty-bourgeois opposition, or vice versa? The whole approach to the question

of the "regime" must be fundamentally different in each case, depending on the position taken on the question of the program. The aim of those who stand by our program can only be to correct the shortcomings of the regime, and to improve its functioning, in order to make it a more effective instrument of the program. The critics from the camp of the opposition, on the other hand, insofar as there is any sense or logic in their position, cannot have any real interest in our regime as such. Their fundamental aim is to substitute the present program by another program. For that they require not an improvement of the present regime, but its removal and replacement by another which will realize the revisionist program.

Thus it is clear that the question stands not organizationally in the first place, but politically. The political line is and must be the determining factor. It is and must be placed in the center of discussion. We held to this method in spite of everything, even at the cost of losing the votes of comrades who are interested primarily in secondary questions, because only in that way is it possible to educate the party and consolidate a reliable base of support for the program.

What is the significance of the organization question as such in a political party? Does it have an independent significance of its own on the same plane with political differences, or even standing above them? Very rarely. And then only transiently, for the political line breaks through and dominates the organization question every time. This is one of the first ABC lessons of party politics, confirmed by all experience.

In his notorious document entitled "Science and Style," Burnham writes: "The second central issue is the question of the regime in the Socialist Workers Party." In reality the opposition tried from the beginning of the dispute to make the question of the "regime" the first issue; the basic cadres of the opposition were recruited precisely on this issue before the fundamental theoretical and political differences were fully revealed and developed.

This method of struggle is not new. The history of the revolutionary labor movement since the days of the First International is an uninterrupted chronicle of the attempts of petty-bourgeois groupings and tendencies of all kinds to recompense themselves for their theoretical and political weakness by furious attacks against the "organizational methods" of the Marxists. And under the heading of organizational methods, they included everything from the concept of revolutionary centralism up to routine matters of administration; and beyond that to the personal manners and methods of their principled opponents, which they invariably describe as "bad," "harsh," "tyrannical," and — of course, of course, of course — "bureaucratic." To this day any little group of Anarchists will explain to you how the "authoritarian" Marx mistreated Bakunin.

The eleven-years' history of the Trotskyist movement in the United States is extremely rich in such experiences. The internal struggles and faction fights, in which the basic cadres of our movement were consolidated and educated, were, in part, always struggles against attempts to replace principled issues by organizational quarrels. The politically weak opponents resorted to this subterfuge every time.

This was the case from the first days. In the early years of our movement, from 1929 almost uninterruptedly up until 1933, Abern-Shachtman conducted a furious war of words against the "bureaucratic apparatus" of Cannon-Swabeck, which consisted at the time of one typewriter and no stenographer and no regularly paid functionary. The same hue and cry was raised by the faction of Abern-Muste against the Cannon-Shachtman "regime." Then Shachtman, who writes with equal facility on either side of any question, defended the "regime"—the same regime—in an eloquently written and needless to say lengthy document.

In our battle with the centrist faction of Symes-Clement in the Socialist Party of California, the latter controlled the state committee and cheated and persecuted us by every possible bureaucratic trick, resorting finally to our expulsion; this did not stop them from protesting all the time against the "organizational methods" of Cannon. In the dispute over the Russian question, after our expulsion from the Socialist Party and preceding the formal constitution of the S.W.P., Burnham and Carter raised the organizational question against us in a special resolution inspired by the conception of Menshevism. Shachtman, who was on the Bolshevik side that season, collaborated with me in the drafting of a counter-resolution on the organization question and defended the "regime."

In the present party conflict, the most fundamental of all, the question of the regime is again represented as a "central issue." This time Shachtman is on the side of Burnham, attacking the regime which he defended yesterday and attacked the day before. The times changed, the attorney changed clients, but the war against "bureaucratism" in the most democratic party in the world is conducted in the same way and for the same ends as before. These "internal problems," says Abern in his letter to Trotsky of February 6th, "have never been resolved satisfactorily." He should know. He has been conducting the war without cessation for ten years—in the open when he could find prominent allies, by secret intrigues and sniping from ambush when he and his group stood alone. But he never yet got "satisfaction." His numerous organizational combinations, for the sake of which he was always ready to sacrifice any principle, always collapsed at the critical moment. In each case, a new stratum of party members who had mistakenly followed him, learned an instructive if painful lesson in the superiority of principled Marxist politics over organizational combinationism.

All the experience of our rich past has shown that no matter what temporary successes an organization combination may have in the beginning, in recruiting inexperienced comrades by fairy tales about the regime, the political line always breaks through in the end and conquers and subordinates the organization question to its proper place. It is this absolute law of the political struggle that has frustrated and defeated Abern every time and left him and his clique isolated and discredited at the end of every struggle.

Abern and his intimate circle of petty-bourgeois gossip-mongers never learned. But conscientious comrades whose inexperience and ignorance he exploited, who had no axe to grind, and who took his expositions of the organization question for good coin, have learned. That is the great gain from the past struggles. Those comrades of our younger generation who have had bad experiences with the attempt, under the tutelage of Abern, to substitute the organization question for the political line, and even to raise it to first place above the political line—it is precisely these comrades who are most immune to this kind of factional trickery in the present dispute. From their unfortunate experiences, and supplementary study, they have learned to brush aside the clap-trap about the regime at the beginning of every dispute; they have learned to probe to the bottom of the political differences, and to take their positions accordingly.

The lengthy document of the opposition on the organization question was not written for the informed and educated cadres of the party. It was written for the inexperienced and uninitiated. It was designed to catch them unawares and disorient them; to poison them with personal and factional animosity; and thus render them incapable of making an objective evaluation of the big political and theoretical disputes that underlie the conflict.

We, from the beginning of the present conflict, steadfastly refused to conduct the battle on this ground. We were determined at all costs to bring out the political and theoretical essence of the dispute. Many comrades objected to this strategy. They complained that inexperienced comrades were being disoriented by this story and that story, by one alleged grievance and another, and lined up in caucus formation before they had begun to seriously consider the political questions. In spite of that, instructed by the experience of the past, we stuck to our method. The subsequent development of the party discussion confirmed its correctness. The issues are pretty clear now. That is a great gain.

There is no doubt that quite a few comrades have been disoriented and won over to the opposition because, in the early stages of the discussion, we refused to be diverted from the fundamental political and theoretical struggle and allowed most of the gossip and chitchat about the "regime" to go unanswered. The opposition is welcome to the supporters gained by these means; this must be said in all seriousness and frankness.

We are living in serious times. We stand on the eve of grave events and great tests for our movement. People who can be disoriented and swept off their feet by rumors and gossip and unsupported accusations will not be very reliable soldiers in the hard days coming. The petty-bourgeoisie, after all, do everything on a small scale. The gossip and slander campaign of our opposition is not a drop in the bucket compared to the torrents of lies, misinformation and slander that will be poured over the heads of the revolutionary fighters in the coming days of the war crisis through the mighty propaganda mediums of the class enemy. And it is to be expected that for long periods of time we will be gagged and bound hand and foot and have no means of communi-

cation with each other. Only those who have thought out their principles and know how to hold to them firmly will be able to sustain themselves in such times. It is not difficult to foresee that those who succumbed already at the feeble anticipation of this campaign inside our own party can be engulfed by the first wave of the real campaign. Such comrades need not simply a reassurance about this or that fairy tale. They need a reeducation in the principles and methods of Marxist politics. Only then will it be possible to rely upon them for the future battles.

IV.

The Organization Question

As long as the real scope of the political and theoretical disputes remained undetermined the talk about the organization question contributed, and could contribute, nothing but confusion. But, now that the fundamental political issues are fully clarified, now that the two camps have taken their position along fundamental lines, it is possible and perhaps feasible to take up the organization question for discussion in its proper setting and in its proper place—as an important but subordinate issue; as an expression in organizational terms of the political differences, but not as a substitute for them.

The fundamental conflict between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies expresses itself at every turn in questions of the party organization. But involved in this secondary conflict are not little incidents, grievances, personal friction and similar small change which are a common feature in the life of every organization. The dispute goes deeper. We are at war with Burnham and the Burnhamites over the fundamental question of the character of the party. Burnham, who is completely alien to the program and traditions of Bolshevism, is no less hostile to its "organizational methods." He is much nearer in spirit to Souvarine and all the decadents, skeptics and renegades of Bolshevism than to the spirit of Lenin and his terrible "regime."

Burnham is concerned first of all with "democratic guarantees" against degeneration of the party after the revolution. We are concerned first of all with building a party that will be capable of leading the revolution. Burnham's conception of party democracy is that of a perpetual talking shop in which discussions go on forever and nothing is ever firmly decided. (See the resolution of the Cleveland Conference!) Consider his "new" invention—a party with two different public organs defending two different and antagonistic programs! Like all the rest of Burnham's independent ideas that is simply a plagiarism from alien sources. It is not difficult to recognize in this brilliant scheme of party organization a rehabilitation of Norman Thomas' ill-fated "all inclusive party."

Our conception of the party is radically different. For us the party must be a combat organization which leads a determined struggle for power. The Bolshevik party which leads the struggle for power needs not only internal democracy. It also requires an imperious centralism and an iron discipline in action. It requires a proletarian composition conforming to its proletarian program. The Bolshevik party cannot be led by dilettantes whose real interests and real lives are in another and alien world. It requires an active professional leadership, composed of individuals democratically selected and democratically controlled, who devote their entire lives to the party, and who find in the party, and in its multi-form activities in a proletarian environment, complete personal satisfaction.

For the proletarian revolutionist the party is the concentrated expression of his life purpose, and he is bound to it for life and death. He preaches and practices party patriotism, because he knows that his socialist ideal cannot be realized without the party. In his eyes the crime of crimes is disloyalty or irresponsibility towards the party. The proletarian revolutionist is proud of his party. He defends it before the world on all occasions. The proletarian revolutionist is a disciplined man, since the party cannot exist as a combat organization without discipline. When he finds himself in the minority, he loyally submits to the decision of the party and carries out its decisions, while he awaits new events to verify the disputes or new opportunities to discuss them again.

The petty-bourgeois attitude toward the party, which Burnham represents, is the opposite of all this. The petty-bourgeois character of the opposition is shown in their attitude towards the party, their conception of the party, even in their method of complaining and whining about their "grievances," as unflinchingly as in their light-minded attitude towards our program, our doctrine and our tradition.

The petty-bourgeois intellectual, who wants to teach and guide the labor movement without participating in it, feels only loose ties to the party and is always full of "grievances" against it. The moment his toes are stepped on, or he is rebuffed, he forgets all about the interests of the movement and remembers only that his feelings have been hurt; the revolution may be important, but the wounded vanity of a petty-bourgeois intellectual is more important. He is all for discipline when he is laying down the law to others, but as soon as he finds himself in a minority, he begins to deliver ultimatums and threats of split to the party majority.

The leaders of the opposition are running true to type. Having recited the whole dolorous catalogue of their petty and inconsequential and mostly imaginary grievances; having been repulsed by the proletarian majority in their attempt to revise the program; having been called in sociological and political terms by their right name—having "suffered" all these indignities—the leaders of the opposition are now attempting to revenge themselves upon the party majority by threats of split. That will not help them. It will not prevent us from characterizing their revisionist improvisations, and showing that their attitude on the organization question is not disconnected from their petty-bourgeois conceptions in general, but simply a secondary expression of them.

Organization questions and organization methods are not independent of political lines, but subordinate to them. As a rule, the organizational methods flow from the political line. Indeed, the whole significance of organization is to realize a political program. In the final analysis there are no exceptions to this rule. It is not the organization—the party or group—which creates the program; rather it is the program that creates the organization, or conquers and utilizes an existing one. Even those unprincipled groups and cliques which have no program or banner of their own, cannot fail to have a political program imposed upon them in the course of a struggle. We are now witnessing an illustration of the operation of this law in the case of those people in our party who entered into a combination to fight against the "regime" without having any clearly defined political program of differences with it.

In this they are only reproducing the invariable experience of their predecessors who put the cart before the horse, and formed factions to struggle for "power," before they had any clear idea of what they would do with the power after they got it.

In the terminology of the Marxist movement, unprincipled cliques or groups which begin a struggle without a definite program have been characterized as political bandits. A classic example of such a group, from its beginning to its miserable end in the backwaters of American radicalism, is the group known as "Lovestoneites." This group, which took its name from the characterless adventurer who has been its leader, poisoned and corrupted the American Communist movement for many years by its unprincipled and unscrupulous factional struggles, which were carried on to serve personal aims and personal ambitions, or to satisfy personal grievances. The Lovestoneites were able and talented people, but they had no definite principles. They knew only that they wanted to control the party "regime." As with Abern, this question always occupied first place in their calculations; the "political" program of the moment was always adapted to their primary aim of "solving the organization question satisfactorily,"—that is, in their favor.

They were wild-eyed radicals and ultra-leftists when Zinoviev was at the head of the Comintern. With the downfall of Zinoviev and the violent right swing of the Comintern under Bukharin, they became ardent Bukharinites as quickly and calmly as one changes his shirt. Due to an error in calculation, or a delay in information, they were behindhand in making the switch from Bukharin to Stalin and the frenzied leftism of the Third Period. To be sure, they tried to make up for their oversight by proposing the expulsion of Bukharin at the party convention they controlled in 1929. But this last demonstration of political flexibility in the service of rigid organizational aims came too late. Their tardiness cost them their heads.

Their politics were always determined for them by external pressure. At the time of their membership in the Communist Party it was the pressure of Moscow. With their formal expulsion from the Comintern a still weightier pressure began to bear down upon them, and they gradually adapted themselves to it. Today this miserable and isolated clique, petty-bourgeois to the core, is tossed about by bourgeois democratic public opinion like a feather in the breeze. The Lovestoneites never had any independent program of their own. They were never able to develop one in the

years since their separation from the official Communist Party. Today their paper, the Workers Age, is hardly distinguishable from a journal of left liberalism. A horrible example of the end result of unprincipled "organizational" politics.

The most horrible case of all, with the most immeasurably tragic final consequences, is that of the "Anti-Trotskyist" faction in the Russian Communist Party. It is unquestionable that the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev combination began its factional struggle against Trotsky without any clearly defined programmatic aim. And precisely because it had no program, it became the expression of alien class influences. The ultimate degeneration of the Stalinist faction, into a helpless tool of imperialism and a murderous opponent of the true representatives of the Russian revolution, is not, as our enemies say, the logical development of Bolshevism. It is rather the ultimate outcome of a departure from the Bolshevik-Marxist method of principled politics.

All proportions guarded, the degeneration of the Abern clique, from formal adherents to the program and doctrine of Marxism into factional supporters of revisionism, has followed the same pattern as the other examples cited. The present ideological and political hegemony of Burnham in the opposition bloc is the most striking proof of the political law that groups and cliques which have no program of their own become the instruments of the program of others. Burnham has a program of a sort. It is the program of struggle against the doctrine, the methods and the tradition of our movement. It was only natural, indeed it was inevitable, that those who combined with Burnham to fight against the "regime" should fall under the sway of his program. The speed with which Abern accomplished this transformation can be explained in part by the fact that he has had previous experience in ideological betrayal in the service of pickayune organizational ends, and in part by the fact that the social pressure upon our party is much heavier today than ever before. This pressure accelerates all developments.

V.

The Intellectuals and the Workers

The outspoken proletarian orientation of the majority is represented by Burnham as an expression of antagonism to "intellectuals" as such, and as an ignorant backwoods prejudice against education in general. In his major document, "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," he writes: "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.'" For reasons best known to themselves, Shachtman and Abern sign their names to this protest and take sides in a conflict where they have every right to proclaim neutrality.

The Workers' Age, organ of the Lovestoneites, which is following our internal discussion with unconcealed sympathy for the opposition, enters the scuffle as an interested partisan. Commenting on a remark in my published speech, to the effect that worker elements engaged in the class struggle understand the Russian question better than the more educated scholastics, the Workers' Age of March 9th says: "This is obviously aimed at Burnham, who has the 'misfortune' of being educated. What is this kind of a slur but the old Stalinist demagoguery contrasting the virtuous, clear-sighted 'proletarian' element to the wicked, confused 'intellectual'? It is the same kind of rotten, unprincipled demagoguery, make no mistake about it!"

Let us see. The question at issue is the attitude of proletarian revolutionists to educated members of the petty-bourgeois class who come over to the proletarian movement. This is an important question and deserves clarification. Burnham is indubitably an intellectual, as his academic training, profession and attainments testify. There is nothing wrong in that, as such, and we cannot have the slightest reason to reproach him for it. We are quite well aware, as Marx said, that "ignorance never did anybody any good," and we have nothing in common with vulgar prejudices against "educated people" which are cultivated by rascally demagogues to serve their own ends. Lenin wrote to Gorky on this point: "Of course I was not dreaming of 'persecuting the intelligentsia' as the stupid little Syndicalists do, or to deny its necessity for the workers' movement." It is a slander on the Marxist wing of the party to attribute such sentiments to us. On the other hand, we are not unduly impressed by mere "learning" and still less by pretensions to it. We approach this question, as all questions, critically.

Our movement, the movement of scientific socialism, judges

things and people from a class point of view. Our aim is the organization of a vanguard party to lead the proletarian struggle for power and the reconstitution of society on socialist foundations. That is our "science." We judge all people, coming to us from another class, by the extent of their real identification with our class, and the contributions they can make which aid the proletariat in its struggle against the capitalist class. That is the framework within which we objectively consider the problem of the intellectuals in the movement. If at least 99 out of every 100 intellectuals—to speak with the utmost "conservatism"—who approach the revolutionary labor movement turn out to be more of a problem than an asset it is not at all because of our prejudices against them, or because we do not treat them with the proper consideration, but because they do not comply with the requirements which alone can make them useful to us in our struggle.

In the Communist Manifesto, in which the theory and program of scientific socialism was first formally promulgated, it was already pointed out that the disintegration of the ruling capitalist class precipitates sections of that class into the proletariat; and that others—a smaller section to be sure, and mainly individuals—cut themselves adrift from the decaying capitalist class and supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress. Marx and Engels themselves, the founders of the movement of scientific socialism, came to the proletariat from another class. The same thing is true of all the other great teachers of our movement, without exception.

Lenin, Trotsky, Plekhanov, Luxemburg—none of them were proletarians in their social origin, but they came over to the proletariat and became the greatest of proletarian leaders. In order to do that, however, they had to desert their own class and join "the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands." They made this transfer of class allegiance unconditionally and without any reservations. Only so could they become genuine representatives of their adopted class, and merge themselves completely with it, and eliminate every shadow of conflict between them and revolutionists of proletarian origin. There was and could be no "problem" in their case.

The conflict between the proletarian revolutionists and the petty-bourgeois intellectuals in our party, as in the labor movement generally in the whole world for generation after generation, does not at all arise from ignorant prejudices of the workers against them. It arises from the fact that they neither "cut themselves adrift" from the alien classes, as the Communist Manifesto specified, nor do they "join the revolutionary class," in the full sense of the word. Unlike the great leaders mentioned above, who came over to the proletariat unconditionally and all the way, they hesitate half-way between the class alternatives. Their intelligence, and to a certain extent also their knowledge, impels them to revolt against the intellectual and spiritual stagnation of the parasitic ruling class whose system reeks with decay. On the other hand, their petty-bourgeois spirit holds them back from completely identifying themselves with the proletarian class and its vanguard party, and re-shaping their entire lives in a new proletarian environment. Herein is the source of the "problem" of the intellectuals.

The revolutionary workers' movement, conscious that it "holds the future in its hands," is self-assured, imperious, exacting in the highest degree. It repels all flirtations and half-allegiances. It demands from everyone, especially from leaders, "all or nothing." Not their "education," as the Lovestoneite sympathizers of our party opposition maintain, brings the intellectuals into conflict with the proletarian cadres of the party, but their petty-bourgeois spirit, their miserable halfness, their absurd ambition to lead the revolutionary labor movement in their spare time.

It is not true that the advanced militant workers are hostile to education and prejudiced against educated people. Just the contrary. They have an exaggerated respect for every intellectual who approaches the movement and an exaggerated appreciation of every little service he renders. This was never demonstrated more convincingly than in the reception accorded to Burnham when he formally entered our movement, and in the extraordinary consideration that has been given to him all this time. He became a member of the National Committee without having served any apprenticeship in the class struggle. He was appointed one of the editors of our theoretical journal. All the recognition and the "honors" of a prominent leader of the party were freely accorded to him.

His scandalous attitude towards the responsibilities of leader-

ship; his consistent refusal to devote himself to party work as a profession, not as an avocation; his haughty and contemptuous attitude toward his party co-workers; his disrespect for our tradition, and even for our international organization and its leadership—all this and more was passed over in silence by the worker elements in the party, if by no means with approval. It was not until Burnham came out into the open in an attempt to overthrow our program that the worker elements of the party rose up against him and called him to order. His attempt now to represent this revolutionary action as an expression of ignorant prejudice against him because of his "learning" is only another, and most revealing, exhibition of his own petty-bourgeois spirit and petty-bourgeois contempt for the workers.

A proletarian party that is theoretically schooled in the scientific doctrines of Marxism cannot be intimidated by anybody, nor disoriented by a few unfortunate experiences. The fact that the learned Professor Burnham revealed himself as just another petty-bourgeois may possibly engender a little more caution in regard to similar types in the future. But it will not change anything in the fundamental attitude of the workers' vanguard towards the intellectuals from the bourgeois world who approach the movement in the future. Instructed by this experience it is possible that the next one who comes along will have to meet stiffer conditions. It is hardly likely that in the future anyone will be permitted to make pretensions to leadership unless he makes a clean break with his alien class environment and comes over to live in the labor movement. Mere visiting will not be encouraged.

The American movement has had very bad experience with intellectuals. Those who have appeared on its horizon up to date have been a pretty shabby crew. Adventurers, careerists, self-seekers, dilletantes, quitters-under-fire—that is the wretched picture of the parade of intellectuals through the American labor movement as painted by themselves. Daniel De Leon stands out as the great exception. He was not merely an intellectual. He was a man and a fighter, a partisan incapable of any divided allegiance. Once he had decided to come over to the proletarian class, the stale atmosphere of the bourgeois academic world became intolerable for him. He departed from the university, slamming the door behind him, and never once looked back. Thereafter, to the end of his life, he identified himself completely with the socialist movement and the struggle of the workers. Revolutionary workers of the present generation remember him with gratitude for that, without thereby overlooking his political errors. Other, and we hope, greater De Leons, will come to us in the future, and they will receive a whole-hearted welcome from the party of the proletarian vanguard. They will not feel sensitive if we scrutinize their credentials and submit them to a certain apprenticeship. They will not be offended if we insist on an explicit understanding that their task is to interpret and apply the proletarian science of Marxism, not to palm off a bourgeois substitute for it. The new De Leons will readily understand that this preliminary examination is simply a precaution against the infiltration of intellectual phonies and does not signify, in any way whatever, a prejudice against intellectuals who really come to serve the proletarian cause.

The genuine Marxist intellectuals who come to us will understand the cardinal point of our doctrine, that socialism is not simply a "moral ideal," as Burnham tries to instruct us in the year 1940—92 years after the Communist Manifesto—but the necessary outcome of an irreconcilable class struggle conducted by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. It is the workers who must make the revolution and it is workers who must compose the proletarian vanguard party. The function of the Marxist intellectual is to aid the workers in their struggle. He can do it constructively only by turning his back on the bourgeois world and joining the proletarian revolutionary camp; that is, by ceasing to be a petty-bourgeois. On that basis the worker Bolsheviks and the Marxist intellectuals will get along very well together.

VI.

The Case of Burnham

In the manner of all unreconstructed petty-bourgeois, for whom personal considerations, and especially personal grievances, real or imaginary, weigh heavier than the problems of the party and the class, our oppositionists industriously circulate the accusation that we have been "persecuting" Burnham. It is told around that Cannon especially, who is the "embodiment" of all things evil in the party, cannot tolerate any smart people in the leadership and wanted to "drive Burnham out of the party." There is

no doubt that this cry gained some sympathy from the humanitarians in the party and netted some votes for the opposition. Others, unappreciated aspirants for leadership, saw in the "persecuted" Burnham a symbol of their own heartbreaking tragedy. All the insulted and injured rallied to his defense with instinctive solidarity.

Nevertheless, this grievance is entirely imaginary. Burnham never encountered any personal hostility from the proletarian wing of the party. On the contrary, as the record amply demonstrates, he has always been handled with silk gloves and given all kinds of liberties that were denied to others. His qualities and abilities were appreciated in the highest degree and every step that he made in our direction, that is, toward Bolshevism and complete integration into the party, was welcomed and encouraged. Far from trying to "drive Burnham out," extraordinary efforts were made to draw him more completely into the party life. At the same time, the more experienced and discerning comrades understood very well that he was standing in an untenable position; that sooner or later he would have to make up his mind to come all the way with us or go back to the bourgeois world. The unavoidable decision, when it finally came, was of his own making.

In looking through my personal files the other day I ran across a letter from Comrade Dunne, addressed to me in California, November 21st, 1936. This letter is convincing evidence of good will toward Burnham. Vincent wrote: "I have received from Comrade Burnham quite a long letter of very good criticism about The Organizer and the election campaign. I think that Jim does a very good job and it is especially gratifying to know that he follows so closely and is able to speak in terms that indicate he is developing very swiftly. I will send you a copy of his remarks, most of which I believe are quite valid. I think that his estimation of the effects of my candidacy and its relation to the tasks of the union in the election is not very well thought out, but one could not expect this of him, having had little or no experience in the mass movement."

This letter strikingly illustrates the friendly attitude of the proletarian elements toward Burnham and the hopes entertained for his future development. At the same time it puts the finger very deftly on his weak spot—"no experience in the mass movement"—which, unfortunately, Burnham made no effort to remedy and which undoubtedly contributed very heavily toward his failure to assimilate himself into our movement. This letter shows that Dunne was willing to learn from the intellectual. Too bad it never occurred to Burnham that he might learn something from the leader of workers. Had he but known it, there was much he might have learned.

Comrade Dunne might have added another and even equally serious weakness in Burnham's position: his lack of experience in the party. One cannot learn all that needs to be known about a party and its inner life and functioning on weekly visits to the meetings of the Political Committee; and one cannot be a serious leader of the party in his spare time. The pre-war Social Democracy was a sprawling, slow-moving reformist organization which proceeded on the theory that it had unlimited time to advance to socialism at a snail's pace in a completely normal evolutionary process, uninterrupted by wars and revolutions. The leadership in the main corresponded to the character of the party. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, preachers, writers, professors—people of this kind who lived their real lives in another world and gave an evening, or at most two evenings, a week of their time to the socialist movement for the good of their souls—they were the outstanding leaders of the pre-war socialist party.

They decided things. They laid down the law. They were the speakers on ceremonial occasions; they posed for their photographs and gave interviews to the newspapers. Between them and the proletarian Jimmy Higgins' in the ranks there was an enormous gulf. As for the party functionaries, the people who devoted all their time to the daily work and routine of the party, they were simply regarded as flunkies to be loaded with the disagreeable tasks, poorly paid and blamed if anything went wrong. A prejudice was cultivated against the professional party workers. The real honors and the decisive influence went to the leaders who had professional occupations outside the party and who, for the most part, lived typical petty-bourgeois lives which were far removed from the lives of the workers they were presumably "leading."

When we organized the Communist Party in this country in 1919, under the inspiration of the Russian revolution, we put a stop to all this nonsense. We had the opinion that leadership of

the revolutionary movement was a serious matter, a profession in itself, and the highest and most honorable of all professions. We deemed it unworthy of the dignity of a revolutionary leader to waste his time on some piddling occupation in the bourgeois world and wrong for the party to permit it. We decreed that no one could be a member of the Central Committee of the party unless he was a full time professional party worker, or willing to become such at the call of the party. I think we had the right idea in 1919. It is all the more right at the present hour of the historic clock when the organization of the proletarian party on the highest possible basis of efficiency is the supreme problem of the revolution.

By and large there is no excuse for any exception to this rule unless the party itself, for reasons of its own, finds it advisable to have a prominent leader in this or that position outside the party to serve party ends. Naturally there are and have been and will be cases where the personal responsibilities of the individual cannot be provided for by the party, and he may have to seek an external occupation for economic reasons. That is the case right now with a great many party comrades who ought by right to be devoting their entire time to the party. But such situations have to be regarded as temporary expedients, to be cut short when the financial resources of the party improve.

It is only natural that a man of the outstanding talents and equipment of Burnham should play a leading role in the party. This was universally recognized. At the same time, it seems to me, it placed upon Burnham the obligation to put himself completely at the service of the party and make party work his profession. In the early days of our acquaintance with him I took it for granted that he had this end in view. Far from barring this road to him, I personally made numerous attempts to open it. I first broached the question to him in the summer of 1935. Even then he was highly critical of the administrative inefficiency of the Trotskyists; he even propounded the theory that this was an inherent weakness of Trotskyism. He was inclined to the opinion that our "regime"—which was then "embodied" by Shachtman and Cannon—was so pre-occupied with political ideas and with the conviction that they would prevail in spite of everything, that the organizational and administrative machinery for realizing the ideas was not given sufficient attention. (That was before Burnham discovered that Cannon has no political ideas and no interest in them.)

I proposed to him at that time, in the most friendly spirit, that he help us remedy the undoubted weakness. I proposed concretely that he make an end of the two-for-a-nickel business of instructing college students who have no intention of connecting themselves with the labor movement, and devote his energies and talents entirely to the party. After "thinking it over" for a day or so he rejected the proposal. The reason he gave was somewhat astounding: He said he was not fully convinced of the wisdom of devoting his life entirely to a cause which might not be victorious in his lifetime! Naturally, I could not give him any guarantees. . . .

After my return from California in the summer of 1937, when we were proceeding to form our party again after our expulsion from the S.P., I again raised with Burnham the question of his taking the post of National Secretary. Again I received a negative reply. In the pre-convention discussion which preceded our foundation convention in Chicago a little more than two years ago, Burnham began to develop his revisionist theory on the Russian question. In addition he began to raise the "organization question" in a manner that suggested a difference with us that was something far more profound than disagreement over this or that detail of our current work. In reality, his criticisms were directed not so much at the party regime as at the organization conceptions and traditions of Bolshevism.

He began to express a great deal of concern over "democracy" after the revolution, somewhat in the manner of those democrats who identify Stalinism with Bolshevism. We were greatly disturbed by these manifestations. They seemed to indicate quite clearly that Burnham was moving not toward us, but in an opposite direction. Comrade Shachtman and I, who were working very closely together at that time, had jointly elaborated the organizational resolution against the resolution of Burnham. He and I had several personal conversations about these alarming symptoms of Burnham's defection from the line of our movement. We had followed a deliberate course of minimizing personal friction. This was not so easy in view of the haughty and provocative attitude of Burnham, but we did succeed in keeping personal antagonisms down to a minimum. In one conversation which we had with Burnham during this period, he made it quite clear that his appre-

hensions were directed at our orthodox Bolshevism on the organization question, or at any rate at our interpretation of it. He expressed the opinion that we, as leaders of a future Soviet, would be too ruthless in our suppression of opposition.

However, he was by no means sure of himself on these points. He was obviously going through a difficult period of skepticism and internal conflict which was undoubtedly aggravated, if not inspired, by a hopeless contradiction between his personal life and his position as a party leader. However, it appeared to us that his Souvarinist views about Bolshevism and Stalinism were not by any means fully formed. His revisionist views on the Russian question had not yet led to counter-revolutionary conclusions with regard to defensism or defeatism. We hoped that he would survive his personal crisis and find his way to Bolshevism. To facilitate that, as I said before, we did everything to maintain friendly personal relations, without making any concessions whatever in principle, either on the Russian question or the organization question.

Shachtman and I worked hand in hand in this period, jointly defending the program of the Fourth International on the Russian question and jointly defending the "regime." At that time, with the knowledge and participation of Shachtman, I wrote a letter about the question of Burnham to Comrade Crux. I consider it necessary now to publish this letter. I think it will convince any objective comrade of at least two points: 1) That the conflict with Burnham, which has reached the present state of irreconcilability, was clearly foreshadowed more than two years ago; 2) That I personally wanted to do everything possible to maintain good relations with him and to preserve him for the revolutionary movement. Here I quote my letter to Comrade Crux in full:

100 Fifth Avenue
Room 1609
New York City

December 16, 1937

"Dear Comrade Crux,

"The trip to Minneapolis took two weeks out of my schedule at a very awkward time—the eve of the convention. Nevertheless, I think it was worthwhile. From all indications we succeeded, not only in frustrating the frame-up game of the Stalinists, but in dealing them a very heavy blow in the trade union movement, especially. In this case they counter-posed themselves, not merely to the "Trotskyites" as a group, but to the organized labor movement of Minneapolis. The results were devastating for them. And I must admit we helped the natural process along.

"Our comrades in Minneapolis were on the offensive all along the line. And it appears to me their position in the trade union movement is stronger than ever. Nationally, also, I think we came out of this skirmish victorious. The fact that Professor Dewey, in his radio speech, referred to the Minneapolis frame-up, is somewhat of an indication that our campaign recorded itself in the minds of a fairly wide circle of people who follow the developments in the labor movement.

"I now hope to be able to concentrate all my time and attention on the preparations for the convention. I am completely optimistic about it. I know that the active membership throughout the country, especially those engaged in mass work, and they are by no means few in number, are looking to the convention with great expectations and enthusiasm.

"We plan to orient the convention along the lines of our general perspectives and tasks, and our concrete work in the trade unions, putting the dispute over the Russian question in its proper proportions. The comrades in the field are up in arms at the perspective, indicated by the internal discussion bulletins, that the convention might resolve itself merely into a discussion of the Russian question.

"It has been decided that I should make the trade union report with the objective of raising this question to first place in the convention deliberations. Our comrades engaged in trade union work are securing modest successes in an unexpected number of places. And it is in precisely these places where the party is going forward, drawing in new members, and where the spirit of revolutionary optimism prevails.

"The general pessimism and spirit of defeatism, so strong now in the circles of intellectualistic and de-classed radicals, affects our organization primarily in New York. Here, it must be admitted, the social composition is not of the best, and that explains many things. As for the real workers, the harsh exigencies of the daily struggle do not permit them to speculate too much

on the sad state of the world, and they have no place whither to retire.

"I feel reasonably sure that the convention will be a success from the point of view of organizing and stimulating our mass work, and pointing the whole activity of the party in this direction. At the same time, of course, we will not slur over the principled disputes. I have had several talks with Comrade Shachtman on this matter. We are fully agreed, and firmly resolved, to fight for a clear and unambiguous Bolshevik answer to every question. We hope at the same time to conduct this uncompromising fight in such a manner, and in such a tone, as to avoid any serious disruption of personal comradely relations. We can restrain ourselves in this respect to the utmost because we are assured of the firm support of the overwhelming majority of the party, and in particular of the worker Bolsheviks.

"Regarding the suggestion that Comrade B. should be invited to visit you, both Max and I are of the opinion that this is totally excluded before the convention. In truth, I am very doubtful whether it will be feasible after the convention. We must wait and see the outcome of the convention.

"I feel it my duty to write you in complete frankness about this matter, and I do so with full confidence that my remarks will remain with you and your immediate co-workers.

"We do not want to do or say anything that would tend to sharpen personal relations. Both Max and I are going as far as possible to conciliate and smooth over everything, as long as it is not a matter of blurring principled lines. But that is just the nub of the matter. It appears to us that Comrade B. is undertaking to revolt from fundamental principles in general, and not only on the Russian question.

"As the convention approaches, we come more and more into conflict over the conception of the party. The questions of democracy, centralism, irreconcilability, stubborn resistance against the infiltration of alien moods and theories, the necessity of a brutal offensive against the intellectualistic calamity howlers, defeatists, and belly-achers in general—on all these questions, which, in the present situation spell the meaning of Bolshevism, we come more and more into profound, if politely conducted dispute. In such a time as this, when we must take arms against the world of enemies and disintegrating factors, Comrade B. is greatly handicapped by his background, his environment, and his training. He has a strong character, and of his ability, I need not speak, but it seems to me, that the disputes arising from the Russian question, and now from other questions, are not primarily—or, better, not fundamentally—intellectual or theoretical.

"Now, I must tell you, dear friend, that I think he is suffering from the intellectual soul sickness. Who can cure that? If he were completely identified with a group of worker Bolsheviks, and could be brought under the influence of their spirit in day to day struggle, one could have more hope. But there's the rub. He does not really feel himself to be one of us. Party work, for him, is not a vocation but an avocation. He is not in a position to travel the country, to take part in the action of our comrades in the field, to live with them, and learn from them, and come under their influence in his personal life. His social environment is entirely different. You know very well that the academic world of the real, as well as the pseudo, intellectuals, is weighted down now with the heavy pessimism in general, and with a new skepticism about everything. Without his really comprehending it, Comrade B. himself is affected by this pressure of his daily environment. Combine this with a great tendency on his part to deprecate his party co-workers, and to resist the idea of being influenced or taught anything, even by our international comrades, and you can see the problem doesn't promise any easy solution.

"I must say that I sensed for a long time the coming of this personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands everything and repels flirtations. By all rights, now, Comrade B., having established himself as one of the most prominent leaders of the party, and bearing in mind the party's indispensable need of a more active professional staff, should be preparing himself, at least, to become a functionary, with all that it implies. When I returned from California last spring, I had the hope that he would be ready for such a drastic decision. Indirectly, I suggested to him that with our break from the S.P., he should take over the office of national secretary. His failure to react to this suggestion at that time, although there was then no trace of serious differences, filled me with misgivings for the future.

"I have written you this extremely frank opinion because I

think it is necessary for you to know the nature of the problem, as I see it. Perhaps on that basis you can make suggestions or proposals which will help both us and Comrade B. in finding a common language and a common path.

Comradely,

(signed) J. P. Cannon

From this letter it is evident that my opinion of the petty-bourgeois attitude of Burnham was not suddenly formulated at the outbreak of the present factional struggle. The "intellectual soul-sickness"—that is the petty-bourgeois sickness.

But that is not yet the whole story. Shortly prior to the writing of the above letter I had occasion to be in Minneapolis (at the time of the Corcoran murder) as mentioned in the letter to Crux. There I had a discussion with a group of leading comrades about the disputes in the party and about the situation in the leading committee in New York. These comrades, whom the oppositionists now depict as ignorant intellectual-haters, emphasized very strongly to me in this discussion their desire that the dispute with Burnham be conducted in such a way as not to antagonize him unnecessarily, or to weaken unduly his position in the party. They made it clear that they valued his abilities very highly and wished assurances of comradely treatment for him that would facilitate his continued functioning as a party leader after the convention.

I assured them of my readiness to comply with their wishes in this respect. I expressed the opinion, however, that the real trouble with Burnham was not so much his mistaken political position as the more fundamental conflict between his bourgeois personal life and the increasingly exacting demands the party must make upon a leader. In such cases, I told them, I had frequently observed that people unconsciously seek to rationalize their personal difficulties and contradictions in the form of hastily arrived at "political differences" with the party. I said that if we could feel sure that Burnham was really one of us, if he would show some sign of determination on his part to resolve his personal contradictions and come to work in the revolutionary movement in earnest—in that case we could have much more ground to hope that the political differences between us would eventually be overcome in the course of comradely discussion and common work.

Shortly after the convention Burnham requested that Shachtman and I meet him at lunch away from the office to discuss a very important matter. At this meeting he told us that a comrade, who had attended the Minneapolis discussion, had reported my remarks to him. He emphasized, however, that it had been done in good faith and with the best of intentions. I expressed my regret that the question had been put to him in such a point-blank fashion before he might be ready to give an answer. However, the fat was in the fire, and there was nothing to do but face the issue.

Burnham stated frankly that he wasn't sure but that I might be right in my assumption that in his political disputes with us he was simply rationalizing his personal contradictions. He said it was a real contradiction, that he recognized it, and that he was not yet ready to solve it definitively. Instead of plunging deeper into party work, he wanted more time to consider the matter, and wanted to be released for the next period from all party duties except his regular literary work. We discussed the matter in a friendly way; we didn't give him any bureaucratic orders; we acceded to his demands.

The minutes of the political committee meeting for January 20, 1938 record the official disposition of the matter as follows:

"Cannon: Reports that Comrade Burnham, in the next period, wants to concentrate his work for the party on writing for the magazine and paper.

"Motion by Cannon: For the next period we consider Comrade Burnham's work to be specifically literary and editorial and that he be exempted from routine sub-committee work. Carried."

If some worker in the party, who is denied exemption from distasteful duties, reads this extract from the minutes of the Political Committee he may indeed draw certain conclusions about the existence of "second class citizens" in the party. But he will not find any evidence that our foremost party intellectual was placed in this category. (Incidentally, it can be learned from this account that the famous "New Year's meeting" on the auto campaign was not the only occasion when formal decisions of the P.C. were prepared beforehand in informal discussions. There were many such occasions and there will be many more in the future. It is the normal method of any serious "collective leadership.")

What changed since then? What happened to break off all personal and political collaboration and eventually bring us to the present situation? On my part, nothing changed; my course today is the same as it was then. Burnham moved steadily in an opposite direction. And Shachtman, soon after the conversation recorded above, began to shift over into the orbit of Burnham. We drifted apart and now stand in opposite camps. Burnham, as his article "Science and Style" testifies, has broken completely with Marxism and Bolshevism and the proletarian revolution. Shachtman, who yesterday defended Bolshevism against Burnham, today defends Burnham against Bolshevism. Let them try to explain these developments by references to the "bureaucratism" of Cannon and the machinations of a "clique." These are simply excuses invented after the fact. All my efforts, as I believe I have demonstrated, were exerted toward a different end.

VII.

The Evil of Combinationism

The opposition is the worst and most disloyal of all types of factional formations in a revolutionary workers party: an unprincipled combination. Combinationism is the worst offense against the party because it cuts across the lines of political principle; it aims at an organizational decision which leaves the political and principled disputes unclarified and undecided. Thus, insofar as the combinationist struggle is successful, it hampers the education of the party and prevents a solution of the dispute on a principled basis. Unprincipled combinationism is in every case the denotation of petty-bourgeois politics. It is the antithesis to the Marxist method of political struggle.

Marxists always begin with the program. They rally supporters around the program and educate them in its meaning in the process of the struggle. The political victories of the Marxists are always in the first place victories for their program. The organizational phase of the victory in every case, from the election of a definite slate of candidates in a party faction fight up to and including the seizure of power in an armed struggle, always has one and the same significance: to provide the means and the instrument for carrying out the political program. Marxist politics is principled politics. This explains, among other things, the homogeneity of the Marxist formation, regardless of whether it is a faction in a party on a small scale, or a full-fledged and fully developed party directly facing the parties of the class enemy. It is this homogeneity of the Marxist organization which makes possible its firm discipline, its centralization and its striking power.

Petty-bourgeois politics is always a hodge-podge. It never attains to a fully developed and consistent program. Every petty-bourgeois formation, whether faction or independent party, has this characteristic feature. It fights at best for partial aims, and slurs over contradictions and differences within its ranks in order to preserve a formal unity. Petty-bourgeois groupings struggle, not in the name of great principles, but for organizational objectives. To this end, they almost invariably unite people of different views and tendencies, and subordinate the clarification of their differences to success in the organizational struggle. This explains their lack of internal discipline, and their aversion to centralism which is incompatible with a heterogenous political composition. This determines their tendency to fall apart in the course of a severe struggle, or soon after it, even though they may have gained a momentary organizational victory.

Petty-bourgeois politics is the politics of futility, of the debasement of theory, of the miseducation of the rank and file, of diversion from the primary and decisive questions—the questions of principle—to all sorts of considerations of a secondary order, including the struggle for organizational control. The present struggle between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies in our party is a classic illustration of the contrast between principled political methods and unprincipled combinationism.

It was clearly established early in the discussion that the opposition represented a combination of at least three different political tendencies on the Russian question, with only one thing in common upon which they had agreement, namely, opposition to the "party regime." The present factional struggle formally began at the party plenum last October over the Russian question; more precisely, over two aspects of one and the same question: The nature of the Soviet State and its defense. The "defensist," Abern, voted for our motion, characterizing the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state, and declaring for its unconditional defense against imperialism. The "defeatist," Burnham, had already introduced a document into the political committee declaring: "It

is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers' state in any sense whatsoever," and denying it any defense whatever "in the present war." As for the "doubtist," Shachtman, he "abstained" from "raising at this time the problem of the class nature of the Soviet State," and left the question of its defense to future developments.

To the basic theoretical question of the class nature of the Soviet Union, the criterion by which all Marxists determine their attitude toward a given state, and to the basic political question of its defense, the three leaders of the opposition each gave a different answer. That did not prevent them from forming a faction. Their inability to give a common answer as to the character of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union did not prevent them from forming a common faction to fight against the "regime" in our party. In their eyes all questions are subordinate to this.

Combinationism violates the Marxist tradition so crudely that its practitioners always feel obliged to cover their operations by deceptions and denials. Our present combinationists follow this familiar routine. They quote the "statement" made by Abern at the Plenum to explain his vote both for our precise motion and the ambiguous resolution of Shachtman:

"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 unfoldment 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 judgments accordingly on the merits of any issue."

Thus they say, they "dispose in passing of the Cannonite contention that the minority is an 'unprincipled bloc.'" "In passing," the statement proves the opposite. The sections of the statement which I have underlined make this clear. Shachtman's ambiguous resolution was under fire from the majority at the plenum as a "bridge" to the defeatist position of Burnham. Abern's statement was a reply to this criticism, an explanation that he understood Shachtman's resolution as "not invalidating the basic party position" of "unconditional defense" for which he had voted, and a declaration that he would "leave to the next period" the "unfoldment or otherwise"—of what? The majority's assertions "as to the bridge character of the Shachtman resolution"! It so "unfolded," and not otherwise. Shachtman soon turned up, bag and baggage, in the defeatist camp of Burnham. And Abern—who was going to wait and see if Shachtman's position was a "bridge"? He, the "unconditional defensist" of the October Plenum, nonchalantly crossed the "bridge" to "unconditional defeatism." And then he blandly asks, in his open letter to Trotsky, "What is wrong with that?"

To hold one political position and unite organizationally with people who hold a diametrically opposite position against others with whom one has declared fundamental agreement; and then, in a few months' time, to reverse one's original position; and then to maintain that nothing has happened—of course, there is nothing "wrong with that." Nothing wrong, that is, if one is a cynical combinationist who has no respect for the party, and its Marxist tradition, and the intelligence of its members. But in the eyes of a Marxist it is a betrayal of principle—an unpardonable crime against the party.

There was a time when Shachtman knew how to characterize such conduct and to set forth, as he explained, "The established Marxian view on this question." In the Internal Bulletin of the Workers Party, No. 3, Feb., 1936, in an article entitled "Marxist Politics or Unprincipled Combinationism?," Shachtman wrote:

"Finally, writing about the case of Mill, who had also made a 'little organizational bloc'—just a temporary one!—with a group in the French Left Opposition which he had defined as non-Marxist, against another group which, although he called it Marxist, was charged by him with having bad 'organizational methods'; Mill, who logically concluded this political practice by passing over to the Stalinists—Trotsky summarized the situation in a letter written October 13, 1932: 'For Mill, principles are in general clearly of no importance; personal considerations, sympathies and antipathies, determine his political conduct to a greater degree than principles and ideas. The fact that Mill could propose a bloc with a man whom he had defined as non-Marxist against comrades whom he had held to be Marxists, showed clearly that Mill was politically and morally unreliable and that he was incapable of keeping his loyalty to the flag. If he betrayed on that day on a small scale, he was capable of betraying tomorrow on a larger

scale. That was the conclusion which every revolutionist should have drawn then. . . .'"

Nothing need be added to that devastating paragraph. The lawyer's arguments Shachtman is now employing to defend the methods he condemned in 1936 do not change the quality of the methods, or the Marxist appraisal of them, in any respect whatever. We will teach the party members to despise such methods and raise a political and moral barricade against them.

VIII.

Abernism: The Case History of a Disease

Almost since the beginning of the Trotskyist movement in this country, more than eleven years ago, its normal development and functioning has been impeded by an internal disease which poisoned the blood-stream of the party organism. The name of this disease is Abernism. The characteristics of Abernism, as they have been consistently and uninterruptedly manifested for more than ten years, are: clique politics; ceaseless dissemination of gossip and complaints about the party regime; subordination of principled questions to organizational and personal considerations; unprincipled combinationism in every faction fight; and ideological treachery.

This internal malady has been always present and always harmful. In "normal" times when there were no open factional struggles, it lay dormant, sapping the vitality of the party. At every sharp turn, whenever serious political differences flared up in faction fights, the malady always immediately assumed an extremely virulent form, complicating the ideological struggles in the highest degree and pushing them to the brink of split.

The Abern group is a permanent family clique whose uninterrupted existence and perfidious practices are known to all the older members of the party. For more than ten years it has waged a now open, now concealed, but never interrupted factional struggle against the party leadership. At one time or another in the past, most of the leading comrades have differed and formed temporary factional groupings in the struggle for conflicting political views. Upon the settlement of the disputes, peace was made and good collaboration resumed; the opponents quite often became the best of friends, bearing no grudges. But Abern, without a platform, without once bringing forward any independent political position, never became reconciled, never ceased his inexplicably consistent factional struggle.

In the present dispute Abern is only repeating his time-worn practices. He enters into an organizational combination; he trades off his position on the Russian question for a bloc against the regime; he poisons the atmosphere of the discussion; and now, as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to "carry on this fight to the end." And by the end, he obviously means now what he has always meant in similar situations in the past, not a democratic decision by a majority of the party at a convention but a destructive split of the party ranks.

The indefensible record of Abern is written in the history of our party. The young comrades must know this history and not permit it to be slurred over. This knowledge will help them to avoid the treacherous pitfalls of clique politics and combinationism. Shachtman is very busy these days with the attempt to pass off the rich history of our past as a series of quarrels from which no lessons are to be derived. That is not true. We did not fight over trifles. Shachtman objects to references to the record of the past only because it speaks so damningly against his present course. He invents for the present factional struggle the myth of a "Cannon clique" as a super-clever ruse to ward off an examination of the record of a real clique whose indictment he himself wrote in documents which today retain their validity. If some comrades have been shocked and astounded by the nonchalance with which Abern, the "orthodox Marxist," entered into a combination with the revisionist, Burnham, a review of the history of the party will show them that such actions on the part of Abern are nothing new. In his past struggles against the party leadership, Abern did not hesitate to combine with the sectarian, Oehler; with the non-Marxist, Muste; and even with Stalinist agents in the party. Abern in the present fight is only continuing a singularly consistent course.

The attempt of the opposition penmen to revise our history as well as our program is, so to speak, a "concession" to Abern, whose record as a clique-fighter and combinationist taints any faction he supports. But Shachtman and Burnham write too much

and forget too soon what they have written. They themselves have characterized the Abern group as an unprincipled and disloyal clique; they have exposed and condemned its unprincipled combinationism; they have recorded its history. They want now to rule out all references to this history, especially to the documents which they themselves wrote, as of no pertinence to the present discussion. That is because they have not yet found anything in the "history" of Abern in our movement which is worthy of their defense.

We say, and we prove, that Abern is resorting in the present critical situation to the same practices and methods that he has always employed in previous party crises. They try to switch the issue by accusing us of raking up out-lived political differences which have no bearing on the present dispute. No, that is not the case. We are not talking about the past political errors of Abern, although every time he ventured to give his "organizational struggle" against the party regime a political expression he committed nothing but errors. We are not talking about his opposition to the entry into the Socialist Party; or, further back, his attempt to obstruct the fusion with the Musteites; or, still further back, his ill-fated and hastily-ended ventures on the trade union question. We are not trying to connect these outlived struggles with the present life-and-death struggle on the Russian question.

Our specific references are to those features of Abern's past conduct which have a direct relation to the present—his methods; his clique politics; his unprincipled combinationism; his betrayals of principle to serve factional ends. These are the practices he resorts to in the present struggle; these have been his invariable practices in the past. Consequently a review of the past, in this respect is absolutely pertinent to the present struggle. That section of party membership which has gone through the past experiences knows this record very well. That is why Abernism is abhorred by the basic cadres of the party. The newer party members and the youth need to know this record, they need to understand its indissoluble connection with the present, in order that they may settle accounts definitively with this corrupting tendency at the forthcoming convention.

Since the very beginning of the present factional struggle Shachtman and Burnham have suffered from the most embarrassing contradiction, as a result of their combination with Abern. They could not defend the past record of the Abern group. On the other hand, they could not dispense with Abern since his group is the organizational backbone of the combination. They tried to solve the problem by denying the existence of the Abern clique altogether. The "Abern question," says Shachtman, waving his wand—that is "spurious"—"that does not exist." "Cannon knows what every informed party leader, and many members, know, namely, that for the past several years at least there has been no such thing as an 'Abern group.'"

That is good news, only it isn't true, and nobody "knows" it better than Shachtman and Burnham. We shall prove it out of their own mouths. The existence of this clique, its nature and method of functioning, were established and recorded with deadly accuracy by none other than Burnham, not "several years" ago, but a bare three months before the beginning of the present faction fight. In a document submitted to the Political Committee of the party on June 13, 1939, Burnham wrote:

"Some years ago Abern built up a following on primarily personal rather than political grounds. This has been kept alive and still lives, nourished by extensive personal and correspondence contact, mutual aid and protection in matters of party tasks and posts, by joint distribution of gossip and information including confidential information, and by enmity to Cannon. Whatever party posts Abern fills are always ably administered, but at the same time administered in such a way as to help the maintenance of his clique." (My emphasis). ("Toward Brass Tacks").

What prompted Burnham to put in writing in an official document this devastating characterization? What prompted him to establish with such precision the origin, methods, motivations and present existence of the Abern clique? He was simply recording as a matter of course a circumstance which "every informed party leader," including Shachtman, "knows." The fact that he did not look ahead a few months to the time when the opposition bloc would need the collaboration of Abern and find it necessary to deny the existence of his clique, and to denounce the very mention of it as "spurious"—that only testifies to the short-sightedness of Burnham. It does not in any way alter the facts he recorded.

* * * * *

Shachtman practices deliberate fraud on the party when he

tries now to deny these facts which none of us have ever been able to forget. They were always a constant source of irritation and disturbance in the party leadership, even in "normal" times, and a threat to its unity in every serious faction fight. The non-existent clique of Abern was the subject of repeated conversations in the leadership, particularly between this same Shachtman and Burnham—and Cannon. Burnham, more than once, characterized Abern as an incipient "American Stalin," referring thereby to his unceasing intrigues, his disloyalty, his factionalism devoid of principled considerations, and his petty motivations, alien to the spirit of communism, of spite and "revenge."

None of us who really knew Abern placed a very high estimation on his contributions to the leadership of the party. If we agreed to accept him as a member of the Political Committee, it was not for his political contributions; he never made a single one. Assuredly it was not because there was "no such thing" as an Abern group. On the contrary, it was precisely because we knew he represented a group that we accepted him into the Political Committee as a concession to this group, in an attempt to satisfy it and at the same time to disarm it by showing that we did not discriminate against defeated opponents. We accepted him in the Political Committee, for another reason, not because we trusted him but because we wanted to have him in a place where we could watch him most carefully. Such are the facts of the matter, and nobody knows them better than Shachtman.

When we had matters of an extremely confidential nature to consider, not once and not twice, but repeatedly, we disposed of these matters informally without taking them before the official P.C. Reason? We did not rely on Abern to respect the confidences of the P.C. On more than one occasion when we slipped up on this precaution we had reason to regret our carelessness. Time and again confidential information was transmitted by Abern to the members of his clique—that is one of the privileges enjoyed by these persecuted "second class citizens"—and then passed on to wider circles, sometimes into the hands of our enemies.

Equally fraudulent is Shachtman's attempt to prove the non-existence of the Abern group by reference to the fact that the Political Committee elected after the Chicago convention "had on it four 'ex-Abernites' out of a total of seven members, i.e., a majority!" The four "ex-Abernites" were Abern, Widick, McKinney, and Gould. In the first place, there was no design to give them a majority; Widick was elected not as a member of the P.C. but as a candidate, nominated by Shachtman, as the minutes state, "for the reason that he would be able to serve as labor secretary until Farrel Dobbs could take up his duties." Dobbs was elected as the regular member of the P.C. but was not able to serve for other reasons which prevented his coming to the center. Goldman, proposed as first candidate, was likewise unable to come to New York at that time. In the second place, the selections for this P.C. were made on a functional rather than on a political basis. McKinney at that time District Organizer of New York, was considered necessary on the P.C. because of his functions. As for Gould, his selection was made by the National Committee of the Y.P.S.L. These facts from the record, omitted by Shachtman, are sufficient to show that there was no design to put a majority of ex-Abernites on the committee.

The circumstance that four Abernites eventually found their way onto the committee, because of a selection by function and because of the inability of Dobbs or Goldman to come to the center, and the fact that we raised no objection to this result, does not in any way prove the "non-existence" of the Abern clique. It only proves that they were not deprived of functions because of their past offenses. Moreover, this somewhat accidental composition of the P.C. was deliberately accepted as a test of the individuals concerned; as an effort to break them away from their clique formations and associations by integrating them into the directing body of the party. For example, in the case of Widick, we felt by assigning him to trade union work, a field completely alien to the petty-bourgeois gossip circles of the Abern clique, the activity in this broader field could operate to cure him of his clique sickness and make a party man out of him.

Gould, as stated, came to the committee as a representative of the National Committee of the Y.P.S.L. But when Gould, during the Chicago convention, inquired as to our attitude toward him as National Secretary of the Y.P.S.L. we gave him certain explicit conditions, laid down by Shachtman. At a meeting between the three of us Shachtman told Gould bluntly: "We are willing to support you if you are going to be a party man in the Y.P.S.L., but not if you are going to be an Abernite. We don't want the Y.P.S.L.

to become a plaything of Abernite clique politics. We don't want your work as leader of the Y.P.S.L. to be regulated by the moods and subjective politics of Abern." That is how much Shachtman really believed at the time of the Chicago convention that "there has been no such thing as an 'Abern Group.'" Shachtman's attempt to give a contrary impression in his "Open Letter to Trotsky" represents simply a deliberate perversion of the facts in order to deceive the party. Shachtman declared the Abern clique "dissolved" only when he needed it in its undissolved reality for purposes of a combination against the party regime.

* * *

Shachtman writes on many subjects he doesn't fully understand, but on the question of the Abern clique, its origin, its methods, its disloyalty and its standing threat to the unity of the party—on this subject he long ago qualified as an authority. And what he wrote yesterday on this subject, when he had no factional necessity to conceal the truth, is fully applicable today, for the Abern group has not changed in any respect whatever.

In February, 1936, near the end of the protracted factional struggle over entry into the Socialist Party, when the opposition combination of Muste-Abern was threatening us with a split, Shachtman summed up the history of the struggle, and the history of the Trotskyist movement in America, in a mimeographed document of 70 single-spaced pages which occupied the space of two whole internal bulletins of the party. The burden of its contents are indicated by the title, "Marxist Politics or Unprincipled Combinationism?" From beginning to end it is a sustained polemic against the Abern clique. The purpose of the document, as stated in the introduction, was to educate the youth in the struggle against clique politics and unprincipled combinationism.

"It is meant (wrote Shachtman) above all for the militant, knowledge-hungry youth of our movement. In a sense it is dedicated to them. . . . The youth must be trained in the spirit of revolutionary Marxism, of principled politics. Through its blood stream must run a powerful resistance to the poison of clique politics, or subjectivism, of personal combinationism, of intrigue, of gossip. It must learn to cut through all the superficialities and reach down to the essence of every problem. It must learn to think politically, to be guided exclusively by political considerations, to argue out problems with themselves and with others on the basis of principles and to act always from motives of principle." (Internal Bulletin of the Workers Party, No. 3, Feb. 1936, page 2.)

And when Shachtman wrote about clique politics then he was not referring to an imaginary clique of Cannon. He was fighting shoulder to shoulder with Cannon against a clique that existed in reality then as it exists now. Shachtman has never enlightened us as to the precise origin of the so-called "Cannon clique." On the origin of the Abern clique he gave much more definite information. He promised to prove and did prove that "it was formed in the dark of night without a political platform and without ever, in the two whole years of its existence, having drawn up a clear political platform; that its basis of existence is that of an unprincipled personal combination, of a clique that refuses to live down ancient and completely outlived personal and factional animosities; that its principal aim is to 'smash Cannon' (and Shachtman, because of his association with the latter)." Idem. Page 22.)

In reality, the clique he is speaking of was "formed in the dark of the night" in the first days of the Left Opposition, not "two years," but seven years before the above-quoted article of Shachtman was written. Shachtman post-dates the origin of the Abern group to the time of his break with it. The Abern group is always being "broken up" by the defections of people who learn something from an unfortunate experience, and then immediately reconstituted with the basic core intact. Then it begins to draw in new recruits from the ranks of the inexperienced and the uninformed, who mistake gossip, personal grievances, and "organizational questions" for revolutionary politics.

What, according to Shachtman, were the recruiting methods of this clique? Then as now: ". . . It has not gained a single partisan by the methods of open honest ideological confrontation of its opponents. Its methods are different: It says one thing in letters, poisonous 'information notes' sent out secretly by Abern but which they never dare put before the party publicly, and says another thing openly." . . . (Page 61).

What did the clique represent politically? The ever-dynamic Shachtman, who keeps a straight face while he signs with Abern joint indictments of the "conservatism" of Cannon, had this to

say about the politics of the up-and-coming Abern and his group: "It represents political sterility, passivity, negativness, timidity, fear of bold innovations—a species of conservative (Hear! Hear!) sectarianism." (Page 61).

Again: "If we were commanded to give a summary characterization of the Abern-Weber faction, our formula would confine itself to two words that describe its political pre-disposition and its organizational methods: a conservative clique." (Page 62).

What does it represent? "It represents an unhealthy and sinister current in our blood stream—the stream of revolutionary Marxism, which bases itself on principled methods, which detest clique politics and personal combinationism. Its morals, its manners, its customs, its methods, make it an alien system in our movement." (Page 63).

In the above-cited document and in others issued in the faction fight at the time, Shachtman proved to the hilt that the unprincipled clique of Abern, blind to all goals except to "smash Cannon," combined with the ultra-left Oehlerites, with Muste, and even with thinly disguised Stalinist agents in the party! Each of these combinations had a terrible aftermath. The Oehlerites broke with the party and the Fourth International and became bitter enemies. Undeterred by that, Abern in combination with Muste, deliberately prepared to torpedo the party with another split. Faced, then as now, with the certain prospect of being in a minority at the convention, Abern steadfastly refused, then as now, to give the party any assurance that he would accept the decisions of the convention under the principle of democratic centralism. On the contrary, he moved forward with a deliberate plan to split our ranks at a most crucial turning point in our history, when we were gathering our forces for a complicated maneuver to break out of our isolation by entering the Socialist Party.

What was the motive of this perfidious program? What was the motive of his drive for split in the old fight of 1933, in the days of our isolation and stagnation, when a split of our meager forces might very well have sounded the death knell of our young movement—a split that was only averted by the intervention of our international organization and the break of Shachtman, Lewit and others away from Abern? What is the motive of the threat of a split in the American section of the Fourth International on the eve of the war and the historic opportunity and test of our movement?

These are the questions which began as unspoken thoughts in the minds of the experienced comrades of our party in the course of this discussion. As the struggle developed, and the perfidious program of Abern became more clearly revealed, the thought became a whisper, and the whisper is today becoming a shout! On guard for the unity of the party! On guard against sinister designs to disrupt our ranks at the most critical moment of our history!

* * *

Why did not Abern carry out his plans for a split in 1936? For two very good reasons—both outside his control: 1) The faction was reduced to a small minority; 2) An anti-split tendency paralyzed it from within.

Weber, who had been associated with Abern in the factional struggle, and whose personal influence had been a cover for him, drew back from the prospect of a split. He made a demonstrative break with the split program of Abern and Muste, and came out firmly for the unity of the party. An example for others in the present critical situation! An example of party loyalty which has not yet received its due acknowledgment. Weber was denounced by Abern and his circle as a "traitor." To this day he is "socially ostracized" by the clique, because he demonstrated in the most critical and responsible situation that his highest loyalty was to the party. How shameful and criminal it is to denigrate Weber in order to cover Abern in references to that fight. "Weber did not play the least shabby role in the dispute of those years," says the document of Burnham, Abern, Shachtman and Bern, entitled "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism." Monstrous perversion of history! Weber played the role of a party-loyal man and helped the party to frustrate the designs of those who would have split it. That action alone far outweighed the errors Weber committed in the faction struggle. Shachtman and Burnham so acknowledged it at that time. Their attempt to pronounce a different judgment now discredits them, not Weber.

How far one can travel on the path of betrayal by substituting combinationism for principled politics is not revealed for the first time by Abern's present bloc with the anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet

Burnham against the party and the Fourth International. I have said that in the faction fight of 1935-36 he not only combined with the ultra-leftist Oehlerites and the Christian Socialist Muste against the "Cannon-Shachtman regime," but that he included in his combination some political agents of Stalinism in the ranks of the Workers Party. And these were not hidden provocateurs such as may penetrate into any honest organization or group without disclosing their political identity; there is no reason to doubt that we have such agents in our own ranks. Abern's Stalinist allies in the Workers Party showed their political orientation repeatedly and consistently and over a long period of time. They were consistently fought by the loyal comrades in the Allentown branch and by the Cannon-Shachtman faction in the National Committee, and just as consistently covered and protected by the Abern-Muste caucus. They were kept in the caucus and even on its leading body.

The Muste-Abern-Stalinist combination went so far as to combine in the elections to the local Unemployed Leagues in Allentown with official representatives of the Stalinists against the members of their own party! Here is the way the situation was described in Bulletin No. 5 of the Cannon-Shachtman group in the Workers Party, issued under date of January 28, 1936:

"The Musteite, Reich, who has been under criticism for the past year for his pro-Stalinist orientation, finally went so far as to boost a Stalinist meeting at which Mother Bloor and Budenz were to speak. This took place at a meeting of delegates of the Unemployed League of Allentown. The P.C., upon investigation of the matter came to the conclusion that the Allentown Branch in merely censuring Reich, had taken entirely too mild an attitude toward such a crime. The P.C. ordered his suspension for 3 months, with the proviso that he should retain the right to vote on convention resolutions and convention delegates. . . . They decided to defy the decision of the P.C. . . .

"In the elections to the Lehigh County Executive Board of the Unemployed League, (the Muste-Abern) caucus decided to make a clean sweep of their party factional opponents. Three incumbents in office, supporters of our tendency, were taken off the slate for re-election and a slate of six Musteites to fill all 6 places involved in the election was passed by the Musteite majority of the branch, a majority at the meeting of 22 to 21. On appeal of the minority to the P.C., it was decided to correct the slate, to let the three incumbents stand for re-election and to let the Musteite candidates for the other offices stand. This was a fair division corresponding to the actual relation of forces and also to the merits of the individual candidates. This decision was also flatly violated. The Musteites ran in the election against our comrades, and WITH THE AID OF THE STALINIST VOTES, defeated our comrades in the election. . . ."

Reich and Hallet, the Stalinist agents at Allentown, together with Arnold Johnson, a member of the national leading group of the Abern-Muste caucus, were closely connected with Budenz, the ex-Musteite who had joined the Stalinist party. Naturally, they were driving with full force to split the party and destroy the possibility of a successful entry into the S.P. The central aim of Stalinist provocateurs in the ranks of the Fourth International in all countries has always been to provoke demoralizing splits at critical turning points. As we drew near the convention of the party, the Abern-Muste faction was reduced to a small minority and balked in its split program by the party-unity stand of Weber and others. Thereupon the Stalinist agents, obviously acting under instructions, decided to show their colors. On the day our party convention opened the Stalinist allies of Abern—Johnson, Reich and Hallet—presented a joint letter of resignation, denouncing us as "counter-revolutionists," and announcing that they were "joining" the Communist Party. This letter was published in the Daily Worker the next day.

It is impossible to describe the impression this turn of events made on the convention. What a disastrous outcome of combinationist politics! It is safe to say that never in the history of the revolutionary movement was a faction so discredited and disgraced as the combinationist faction of Abern-Muste at that convention. The catastrophic climax made an unforgettable impression on the minds of young comrades who were getting their first serious lessons in revolutionary politics. Not a few young comrades who had been trapped in the combinationist labyrinth began their re-education at that convention. They learned a profound lesson there. When great principles and political positions are involved in a party dispute nobody will ever catch them again with monkey-chatter about the "regime."

Frustrated and beaten, his faction reduced to a demoralized handful, Abern "submitted" to the decisions of the convention under the principle of democratic centralism, not out of party loyalty but out of helplessness. Even in doing so, he made one final characteristic gesture of venomous spite. Weber, who had been one of the recognized leaders of the opposition, was denied a place on the slate of candidates to represent the minority in the new National Committee. That was designed to "punish" him for putting party loyalty above the interests of the faction and coming out strongly for party unity. It goes without saying that the majority of the convention would not tolerate such a contemptible procedure. The majority withdrew one of its own candidates in Weber's favor. That is the way all of us, Shachtman and Burnham included, appraised the "role" of Weber "in the dispute of those years" when everybody's "role" was clear beyond any misunderstanding.

* * * *

That party convention in the early Spring of 1936 settled the question of entry into the S.P. The leadership and the great majority of the party turned their attention to the new problems and new tasks. Muste forsook the bloc with Abern against Cannon in order to make a bloc with the Lord against another devil. Abern turned to the task of holding his clique together at all costs by his notorious correspondence-school method of "keeping the comrades informed" of all the most confidential matters of the leading committee.

This sordid business of unceasing intrigue and persistent disloyalty, continued after the convention, was known to all the informed comrades in leading circles and was recorded from time to time in correspondence between them. During an absence from the city a few weeks later on account of illness I received a letter from Burnham stating:

"A letter received last night from Meyers contains the following: 'We learned from ——— that you are going to the I.C.L. conference. We learned in the presence of non-members of our tendency that your trip is confidential within the Political Comm. She gives Abern as her authority for that information and some more besides.' A letter received at the same time from Kerry contains the following: '. . . Last night in the presence of several comrades and an outsider, Comrade ——— stated that we had ceased to work for the Fourth International. I took exception to the statement and challenged her to produce evidence. . . . She stated that she had received information from a member of the Pol. Comm., that at a recent meeting of the Pol. Comm. this very question was discussed and resulted in a confirmation of her amazing contention. I flatly denied the truth of the contention, and said that I couldn't and wouldn't believe it. Thereupon she proceeded to produce a letter written by Abern and read the part upon which she based her contention. It was to the effect that there was to be a conference of the I.S. and that Jim Cannon was to attend this conference but the entire matter was to be kept very secret and confidential. That Comrade Trotsky was to participate in this conference and it was preparatory to a conference to be called by the I.C.L., etc. . . . She stated that the fact that our participation in this conference was to be secret, we had ceased to work for the Fourth Intern. Even to the point of affirming allegiance to the Second . . .'"

That is one incident out of dozens that are known to all the leading comrades. Burnham knew what he was talking about when he stated in the document submitted to the Political Committee last June that the Abern clique "has been kept alive and still lives," among other things, "by joint distribution of gossip and information including confidential information." On November 17, 1936, when Burnham was in sharp conflict with me over some questions of policy and procedure in the S.P., but long before the idea of a bloc with Abern had yet dawned in his mind, he wrote to me in California: "We all know Abern's perspective

As usual, he fights for his perspective with his clique methods, stirring up trouble, throwing monkey wrenches when no one is looking, fishing in the stirred up waters. We saw some of it in the first six weeks. The clamping down at our leading committee just before you left, and Muste's defection slowed him up some. But he continues in his own way; reports come filtering in."

In that same letter, before the clique of Abern had been miraculously dissolved and the "clique" of Cannon just as miraculously invented, he wrote about my methods of fighting for a position with which he disagreed: "Naturally, you do not fight for it nor carry it out as Abern does. You are no cliquist; you favor in your rough Irish fashion 'the Bolshevik fist.'" Naturally, Burnham's

opinion at that time of my roughness was somewhat exaggerated, as subsequent events showed. Indeed, my methods in those disputes were very mild, even pacifistic. But Burnham was 100 per cent right when he said there was nothing "cliquist" about them. And that evaluation would be 100 per cent correct today, or any other time.

The whole party remembers with gratitude and appreciation the magnificent work that was done by our comrades in the Trotsky Defense Committee, in 1936-37. The success of the task required the collaboration not simply of all the members of our tendency, but of the Thomasite Socialists and, also, of a wide circle of unattached liberals and radicals. Tact and discretion and a broad policy were necessary; it would have been fatal to conduct this tremendous enterprise as a narrow "Trotskyist" faction affair. By and large, I think, these dangers were avoided without sacrificing too much in the political content of the Committee's work. But at one stage, during the absence of Novack and the illness of Morrow, Abern was placed temporarily in charge of the office. According to the testimony of all the comrades involved, he immediately converted the office into a factional headquarters, not of the Trotskyist faction as a whole, but of a faction of the Trotskyist faction. Morrow was compelled to return to the office before he had recovered from his illness on the demand of the conscientious office manager, Comrade Pearl Kluger.

Abern has always been completely blind to the interests of the party, and even to the larger interest of the general movement, when the interests of his own petty and contemptible clique were involved. It is such occurrences as the one which transpired in the Trotsky Defense Committee that Burnham had in mind when he said the posts that Abern fills are always "administered in such a way as to help in the maintenance of his clique."

In the early summer of 1937 it became evident that our faction struggle in the Socialist Party was coming to a head. A highly confidential meeting of the leading committee of our faction was held to discuss our strategy and make our plans for the unavoidable and necessary split. A few days later Jack Altman had a complete report of this meeting, including its confidential aspects, what this one had said, what the other one had said, and what had finally been decided—all our "military" secrets. Altman published this report broadcast in the ranks of the Socialist Party, and it caused us no little embarrassment and damage. The report of our confidential meeting, which Altman published, consisted of a letter written by Abern to a factional associate in another city who was not even a member of the National Committee and who had no right whatever to the information that was withheld from other comrades for the time being, for obvious reasons. According to Abern, the letter went astray in the mails and fell into Altman's hands.

Needless to say, this betrayal of confidence, on top of all the experience that had gone before, aroused the greatest indignation in the leading circles of our party. Drastic action against Abern was seriously contemplated. Indignation mounted still higher a short time later when it was discovered that a highly confidential letter dealing with our strategy in the split struggle with the S.P. bureaucrats, a letter meant only for the small directing group of our faction, was made known to individual members of the party and discussed throughout the party ranks in New York. We went so far on that occasion as to appoint a control commission (Cannon and Shachtman!) to investigate the leak. The control commission established by the unimpeachable testimony of comrades that Abern had made the contents of this letter known to them. If we did not take drastic disciplinary action against Abern at that time it was only because we were in the very thick of a desperate struggle with the S.P. centrists, and, whether wisely or not, deemed it best to pass over an act of disloyalty once again in order to concentrate all energy and attention on the struggle against the centrist enemy. Besides, our terrible "regime" never punished anybody for anything, and for some incomprehensible soft-headed reason did not want to spoil its record.

* * * *

In the "War and Bureaucratic Conservatism" we are presented with a touching picture of a reformed and purified cliquist who, "during the past three years," has not only ceased to make trouble in the party on his own account, but has even played the part of a benevolent policeman settling the disputes instigated by others. "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." (Page 6).

The truth is simply that the Abern clique was so discredited by its past performances that it did not dare to conduct any struggles in the open. The Abern clique has never had a political platform and has never in its ten years history undertaken to conduct an open struggle without influential allies to furnish the political program and the "face." Originally it had Shachtman, then Muste and Spector, and now Burnham — and Shachtman again. Between times the clique keeps under cover, peddles its gossip, mutters grievances and complaints about the regime, disorients young and inexperienced comrades—and lays in wait for the outbreak of a conflict among the influential leaders. Thereupon it seeks to peddle its support for the political program of the opposition—any program—in return for a combination on the "organization question."

When this opportunity is lacking, the Abern group, like a Balkan state, "avoids disputes," not from good will, but from helplessness and fear to stand on its own feet. The entire history of our movement, not merely "the past three years," has shown that the Abern clique, the Balkan state of the party, keeps under cover when there is peace in the party, but is always ready for war the moment it can find a powerful ally to "guarantee its borders" and even open up the prospect of a little extension of "territory."

Clique politics and combinationism and the Abern group which represents and symbolizes these odious practices, are indeed, as Shachtman wrote in 1936, "a sinister current in the blood stream of the party." They contribute not to the education but to the corruption of the party. The party must cure itself of this disease in order for it to live and go forward to the accomplishment of its great tasks. The attempt of the opposition combination to slur over the record of the Abern clique has made necessary this extensive account of its real history, compounded from beginning to end of unassailable and irrefutable facts. The Abern clique, like all cliques, thrives in the dark. It was necessary to drag it out into the light of day and show the party what it is and what it has always been. The threat of split in the present situation, to which the perfidious group of Abern has contributed in the highest degree, is a final warning to the party: clique politics and combinationism cannot be tolerated any longer! In order for the party to live, clique politics and combinationism must be destroyed. The forthcoming convention of the party is confronted by this unpostponable task.

IX.

The Question of the Party Regime

In this section, I intend to discuss the question of the party "regime" and to take up the arguments and accusations contained in that fantastic Winchellized document called "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism." I should remark at the outset, in justice to Winchell, that he gained his outstanding reputation as a gossip by a more or less careful attitude towards the accuracy of the tidbits he retailed. The gossip column of the opposition lacks this distinction. I picked it up for a critical reading, pencil in hand, with the intention of marking the outstanding points. I soon put the pencil aside, for I found myself marking almost every line of every page.

In the entire document of approximately 25,000 words there is not a single honest paragraph. Those incidents which are reported accurately are only half told. Those which are reported fully and correctly are misunderstood. Suspicions and prejudices are dished up as statements of fact, and spiced by not a few direct falsehoods. Everything that happened over the period they report is tendentiously distorted and misinterpreted. And the most important facts and incidents are passed over in silence. The whole concoction is dishonest from beginning to end—a typical product of that petty-bourgeois politicianism which counterposes falsifications, petty complaints, personal accusations and morsels of gossip to principled arguments.

Bolshevism has not been the only honest political movement of modern times merely because of the superior moral quality of the Bolsheviks—their moral superiority is incontestable—but because, as the only authentic Marxists of our time, they alone correctly interpret and defend the immediate and historical interests of the workers in their struggle for emancipation. There is no contradiction between the theories and politics of the Bolsheviks and the interests of the workers and of their vanguard party. They can tell the truth—the whole truth. They have no need for the lies and falsifications, the half-truths, distortions and subter-

fuges, which are the stock in trade of petty-bourgeois politicians of all kinds.

~~Reversing the political method of the Marxists, who always put the political questions first and subordinate the organization questions to them, our petty-bourgeois opposition, like every other petty-bourgeois group, has devoted the main burden of its arguments to a criticism of the party regime, that is, the leadership and its "method" of leading the party. It was this question and not the Russian question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime.~~

Such questions, in the best case, are secondary in importance to the theoretical and political issues in dispute and had to be subordinated to them in the discussion. It would have been absurd for us, in the early stages of the discussion, to take time out to answer this trivia. However, now that the fundamental questions have been sufficiently clarified, it is timely to take up the secondary questions for consideration and to give to the oppositionist critics the reply they have so insistently demanded. In this field, also, there is something to be learned; first, about the facts as against the fiction; second, about the important points of difference as against the trivial incidents that are piled mountain high; and third, about the intimate connection between the disagreements on these points and our conflict with the opposition bloc on the fundamental questions.

If we sift out the great mass of material in the documents of the opposition devoted to the regime, attempt to classify the various complaints and grievances and criticisms and put each in its appropriate pile, we eventually break down the indictment of the party regime into the following main divisions.

- 1) The regime (the leadership) is conservative in its politics.
- 2) It is bureaucratic in its methods.
- 3) The present leading group (the majority of the National Committee) is in reality dominated by a "clique" which stands above the Committee and rules the party in an irregular and unconstitutional manner.
- 4) The "clique," however, has a "leader cult" and is itself dominated by a single person, the others being merely "hand raisers."
- 5) The single person who stands above the "clique" and above the Committee, and who exercises a "one-man leadership" in the party, is Cannon.

They place me in mid air on the apex of a nonexistent pyramid. The first necessity is to get down to earth. From that more solid point of vantage it is not difficult to answer all the most important points of the indictment and to explain the situation in the party leadership in terms of reality. If, in doing so, I must undertake the not very pleasant task of speaking a great deal about myself and the part I have played or failed to play in the making of party history, the Party comrades must understand that I do so only because the question has been posed in this personal way. I will not evade even the personal accusations or leave them unanswered. We have no reason to evade anything because all the truth and all the right is on our side. Our mistakes and our shortcomings, which are plentiful enough, are barely touched by the criticisms of the opposition. Their attack is directed at our merits, not our faults.

The main criticisms cover the whole period since the Chicago Convention, more than two years ago. On the theory or assumption that all was bad they assign responsibility for everything that was done or not done to the present majority of the National Committee, or as they call it, "the Cannon regime." But nobody has been able to discover any great difference between the methods of the party regime of the past couple of years or so and all the years that preceded them since the beginning of our movement. The oppositionists do not attempt to make any such distinction. It is the record as a whole that is under attack. The question of the regime, says Abern in his letter to Trotsky, "has never been resolved satisfactorily during all these years." And Johnson, the lyrical historian of our movement, who has seen nothing and knows everything, writes: "For ten years the leadership has been Cannon's." (If Johnson, as it may be assumed, is referring to the entire history of the Fourth Internationalist movement in America, it should be pointed out that it began not ten years ago, but eleven and one-half years ago.)

Since I am far from repudiating the record of these past eleven and one-half years; since I consider it on the whole good, not bad;

since, to speak frankly, I believe that our party, modelled on the Russian Bolshevik Party, has been built more firmly and stands nearer than any other to the pattern of its great prototype—"it is the second party in history which has built itself on Bolshevik lines," says the ineffable Johnson—since I hold these opinions of our eleven and one-half years work and achievements, I have no reason whatever to disclaim any part of the responsibility that can rightfully be assigned to me. But it is historically inaccurate, and prejudicial to a real understanding of the present fight in the party leadership, which has its roots in the past, to assign all the credit, or, if you please, all the blame, to me. Many people contributed to the building of the party. No party in history was ever more democratic, more exempt from apparatus compulsion or restrictions of any kind, than ours. In this free, democratic atmosphere our movement developed as a social organism in which many different forces, tendencies and individuals had the fullest opportunity to reveal their real qualities, and to make their contributions to the development of the party and the shaping of its leading cadre.

But our party, no more than any other, could escape the influence and pressure of its hostile class environment. From the beginning of our movement this pressure has been expressed to one degree or another in the struggle of tendencies within the party. Our party has not been a homogeneous Bolshevik Party, as the superficial Johnson implies, but an organization struggling to attain to the standard of Bolshevism, and beset all the time by internal contradictions. The present internal struggle is simply the climactic paroxysm of this long internal struggle of antipathetic tendencies.

The leadership of the party (the regime) has never, since the beginning, been monopolized by a single person or even by a single tendency. In times of open factional struggle the majority has always depended upon the minority to one degree or another and been compelled to share responsibilities with it. In times of party peace the central leadership rested not upon a single person but upon a grouping of individuals of different types with points both of agreement and of conflict among them. An equilibrium in this leading group, never too stable, was continuously propped up by the device of mutual compromises and concessions.

The party "regime" since the Chicago Convention—more correctly, since 1935—has not been represented by a single harmonious and homogeneous group, but rather by an unstable coalition. This coalition held together, despite considerable internal friction, in the absence of fully matured political differences. It fell apart only when the inherent tendencies of its different component parts were compelled to reveal themselves under the pressure of the approaching war crisis. The friction, the instability, and the disagreements and conflicts only occasionally broke out into open struggle, and were far more often adjusted by mutual compromises and concessions. This situation, the opposition leaders now try to explain retroactively as the result of the machinations of a secret "clique." In reality, all this simply testifies, on the one hand, to the lack of homogeneity in the leading committee; and on the other hand, to the fact that the fundamental differences in general orientation had not yet been definitively established. It required the pressure of the crisis engendered by the approaching war to reveal with full clarity the political physiognomy of the groups and the individuals in the coalition leadership. This is shown in the gradual, long-drawn-out development of the conflict before it exploded in the open in the present faction fight.

It is precisely in times of crisis that the real character of a leader shows itself most clearly. But these inner qualities of the individual are often adumbrated beforehand, and are usually observed by those who are in a position to see things in a close view as they develop from day to day over a long period of time. This has been the case with the representatives of the two camps involved in the present struggle, and it has not taken us by surprise. The leaders of the two camps did not come to their present positions by accident. Neither did the two antagonistic tendencies in the party ranks—the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois—rally around the contending factions in the party leadership without a deep instinctive feeling that this was for them in each case the necessary alignment. The polarization in the leadership produced almost immediately a similar polarization in the party ranks. Each faction in the now-divided leadership attracted to itself those elements whose inner tendencies they most truly represent.

The leadership which has now fallen apart into factions can properly be said to have been consolidated in the struggle against the Muste-Abern combination and the sectarian Oehlerites. It

took over the direction of the party at the convention in the spring of 1936. During the entire period of our work in the Socialist Party, that is, for a whole year, I was, as is known, absent from the center, in California. The administration and political direction of our faction in the S.P. was in the hands of the present minority, primarily of Burnham and Shachtman. True, I attempted to participate in this direction by correspondence, but without much success. It was during this period that the leaders of the present opposition first showed to me their abominable and intolerable bureaucratic conception of leadership as a function that belongs exclusively to the people in the office at the center. My criticisms and proposals "from the field" got scant consideration.

My stay in California, my personal relations with the comrades there, and my collaboration with them in fruitful political and propagandistic work and in trade union activity, will always remain a happy memory. At the same time, I must say, my futile attempts to participate by correspondence in the work of the New York center; my inability to get from them the slightest sign of understanding, or consideration or comradely aid for the heavy tasks we were undertaking in California; their callous and stupid bureaucratic disregard of our local opportunities, problems, and difficulties; their narrow-minded, suspicious, office-leaders' hostility to the launching of "Labor Action"; their mean-spirited sabotage of this enterprise, and their attempt even to construe it as a "maneuver" against them—all that stands out as perhaps the most infuriating experience of all my activity in the revolutionary movement. I cannot think of it even to this day without bitter resentment.

"Go fight City Hall"—says the New York push-cart peddler with ironic despair when he means to say: "It is hopeless; you can't get justice or even a hearing from the office-proud officials there." The people who were running things in the New York center in those days taught me an unforgettable lesson in how not to lead the activities of field workers from the office. I understand how the comrades of our auto fraction felt when they encountered the same attitude from "the office." I know their white-hot anger, because I, myself, have lived it. Down with office leadership! To hell with office leadership! You can never build a proletarian movement from an office!

* * * *

The great bulk, though not all, of the concrete criticisms of the opposition are directed at the "regime" which was formally constituted at the Chicago Convention and which continued in office up till the second convention last July. Very well, whose regime was it?

This not unimportant question must have occurred to the opposition leaders when they finished writing their indictment. After painting in endless pages of denigration a horrific picture of party weakness, sickness and failure, and assigning all the responsibility to the "party regime," and thereby to "Cannon," they suddenly and unexpectedly reminded themselves that the picture must be a bit one-sided. They tacked on a parenthetical remark: "In closing: We do not blame Cannon for all the ills of the party." Naturally, I appreciate this generous gesture "in closing." But the real picture will be still clearer, it will be a more accurate representation of reality, if a few concrete details are added.

The Political Committee which was responsible for the direction of the party during that entire period consisted of six members of the present opposition—plus Cannon. The other members were Burnham, Shachtman, Abern, Widick, McKinney, Gould. Does the history of the international labor movement offer anywhere a more bizarre performance than six out of seven members of a decisive committee—all of them "leaders" by their own admission—complaining about the committee's methods of operation, and blaming the seventh member? What were the noble six doing when the seventh member was leading the party astray? Did Cannon have more than one vote? Was anything ever decided, or could anything be decided, without their agreement? Were any decisions made, any statements issued, any political directives given, anybody expelled, without their vote? Was anybody, anywhere, at any time, appointed or removed from the terrible "apparatus" without their sanction? Let them wriggle all they will, they can't get away from the fact that the P.C., the "regime" about which they are complaining, was their P.C.—plus Cannon.

Moreover, at least a good one-third of the time I was absent from New York, on trips to the field or abroad. Perhaps during those intervals, the six Trilbies, free from the influence of any Svengali, introduced radical improvements in the functioning of the Committee, substituted "progressive" politics for "conserva-

tism" and eliminated bureaucratic practises? No, those were just the times when things really went to hell on a bicycle.

On one of these occasions the emancipated P.C. interpreted our Labor Party policy in New York to mean that we could support candidates of the American Labor Party regardless of their endorsement by capitalist parties. The P.C. minutes of September 23, 1938 read: "We give specific critical support to all independent candidates of the A.L.P., irrespective of whether such candidates have also received endorsement by any other parties or groups. Carried." This policy, fathered by Burnham, would have obligated us to support LaGuardia, an enrolled member of the American Labor Party, justified the Thomas-Altman socialists in our big fight and split with them over precisely this issue, and deflected the party from the class line of supporting the Labor Party only as an expression of independent class politics. This absolutely untenable position was changed on my initiative, with the support of Shachtman, after our return from the World Congress.

On another occasion, during my absence in Europe, they produced the monstrosity of the auto crisis, an incident unique in the entire history of our movement, insofar as it combined political ineptitude with bureaucratic procedure, each in the highest degree imaginable.

The debacle of the auto crisis sealed the doom of the committee. Burnham and Shachtman attempted to compensate themselves for the wounds inflicted upon their vanity by the auto fraction by working up an intrigue against me; they began to mutter for the first time about a "Cannon clique" whose members had no "respect" for the P.C. The committee as a whole fell into a state of permanent paralysis, lost its authority, and no longer had a justification or a right to existence. The coup de grace administered to it by the post-convention plenum was indeed a "stroke of mercy."

The record shows that the present majority of the National Committee was not solely, nor even primarily, responsible for the party regime from the Chicago Convention to the July Convention in New York. That is true also of the interim Political Committee which existed between the July Convention and the October plenum. The majority of the members of this committee also belonged to the present minority. It was only at the October Plenum, when the fundamental dispute over the Russian question was brought to the fore, that the Political Committee was re-organized and the present majority of the National Committee took full responsibility for its composition.

It is established that during the whole period from the Chicago Convention to the Plenum last October the present minority constituted a majority in the directing body of the party. Surely this little detail must be taken into account in evaluating the criticisms which have been directed against the party regime. To be sure, the members of the majority, and I personally, bear part of the responsibility. To the extent that the present minority, or a part of them, supported our propositions and our methods, or we theirs, we bear the full responsibility and do not in any way disavow it. Nobody led us astray. The individual members of the present minority may disclaim responsibility for their actions and repudiate themselves as much as they please. As for us, we repudiate nothing that was done with our participation and approval.

X.

"Conservatism"

The attempt of Burnham, the exponent of "experimental politics," to define the party regime as conservative, and to elevate the question of conservatism to a political principle, contributes only confusion to the party discussion. Different meanings can be given to this word, not all of them derogatory in certain situations. The substitution of such general terms, devoid of class content and class political meaning, for the precise terminology of Marxism in describing groups and tendencies, and their class basis and characteristics, cannot help to clarify the disputes and educate the party. To be conservative, that is to stand still, when there are good opportunities to go forward, is undoubtedly a fault. On the other hand, to stand one's ground when others are retreating is a virtue not to be despised. This kind of "conservatism," which we show in standing firmly on the basic principles of Marxism and the program of the Fourth International, while others are running away from them, has been very aptly characterized as necessary for the preservation of the party.

If conservatism is to be defined as meaning a tendency to routine, sluggishness, slowness in perceiving opportunities to move

forward and hesitation in grasping these opportunities—in this sense it cannot be denied that our movement as a whole, and the "regime" along with it, has been by no means free from sin. Such tendencies are immanent in every group which has a "sectarian" origin and is compelled by circumstances to live a long time in isolation. Many sections of the Fourth International fell victim to this sickness to such a degree as to bring about their disintegration.

The tendency is very strong in all isolated groups to console themselves with the monotonous repetition of adherence to great principles without seeking ways and means and new opportunities to apply them. It expressed itself in full flower in our international movement as a whole, and also in the American section, in the resistance of the sectarian groupings to the famous "French turn" and the general orientation from a propaganda circle to mass work.

Conservatism, of a sort, expressed itself in the tendency, to which we all more or less succumbed in the hard years of isolation, to routine, lackadaisical procedure, over-caution, and an inclination to be satisfied with extremely modest accomplishments. There is no doubt that the present majority also is subject to justified criticism on this score. I personally do not believe that we could have changed anything fundamentally in the position of our party, and in the relation of forces between it and its rivals, by any amount of hustling and bustling in this past eleven and one-half years. I do believe that if we had displayed more energy, more initiative, more daring, we could be perhaps twice as strong numerically as we are today and in a better position for further advancement. We must frankly acknowledge these defects and strive to overcome them. I doubt, however, that our minority can help us. What we need is not so much the wisdom of precept as the inspiration of example. That is always their weak point. They are far better talkers than doers. Unlike Lenin's Bolsheviks, they do not match the word with the deed.

I have said that all of us, including the majority, have shown insufficient energy, initiative, etc. By that we acknowledge that we are not Bolsheviks in our habits and practices, but only striving to become such; slovenliness and slackness are Menshevik traits. But our theory, Marxism, is the only revolutionary theory in the world; there is nothing conservative about it. Can we be justly indicted for conservatism in our politics, that is, in the application of our theoretical principles? I do not believe our record justifies such an indictment. The essence of politics is to understand the realities of a given situation, to know what is possible and what is excluded; above all, to know what to do next—and to do it.

In the first period of the Trotskyist movement of America, when we were an isolated handful against the world, we deliberately restricted ourselves to propaganda work and avoided any kind of pretentious maneuvers or activities beyond our capacity. Our first task, as we saw it, and correctly, was to build a cadre; only then could we go to the masses. The old-timers can well recall how we were pestered in those early days by the bustling windbags of the Weisbord type, who promised us a short-cut to the mass movement—if we would only abandon our "conservative" propagandistic routine, substitute a grandiose program of activities for the modest tasks we had set for ourselves, and in general take up "mass work"—as though it were a simple matter for our decision. Some of the hysterical agitation of our present minority is strangely reminiscent of the biather of this revolutionary jitterbug. By sticking to our modest propagandistic tasks we recruited a cadre on the basis of fundamental principles. In the next period, when new opportunities opened up, we were prepared for a decisive turn towards more expansive activity in the mass movement, and made it. As for Weisbord, who had worn himself out with his own agitation in the meantime, he fell by the wayside.

Did we overlook some opportunities for the application of the new orientation towards mass work? Undoubtedly we did. Except in a few localities, we let the great movement of the C.I.O. pass over our heads. But we did grasp some of the main opportunities. The moment the Muste movement began to take shape as a political organization, we approached it for fusion and successfully carried it out. In one operation we cleared a centrist obstacle from the path and enlarged our own forces. When the ferment in the Socialist Party offered favorable opportunities for our intervention, we steered a course directly toward it, smashed the resistance of the sectarians in our own ranks, entered the Socialist Party and effected a fusion with the left wing. We seized opportunities to penetrate the trade union movement in several

localities and industries and today have the firmest proletarian bases of the party there.

The main core of the present majority was in the forefront of all these progressive enterprises. This record cannot properly be described as conservative. Just the contrary. We must admit that by far not enough was done with the most basic task of all, the penetration of the trade union movement. But what was done in this field was done almost entirely by us. That speaks not only for our dynamically progressive political line but for what is still more important, our proletarian orientation. It is precisely the petty-bourgeois elements in the party, above all the clique of Abern, now shouting at the top of their voices against our "conservatism," who have displayed from beginning to end the most conservative tendencies and the greatest aversion to any real participation in the turbulent mass movement of the workers.

The opposition, following Burnham, began to designate us as conservative only when we refused to accept a revision of the program of the Fourth International on the Russian Question after the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact, and instead, reaffirmed our fundamental position. Their whole case rests on this. From it they construe a conservative tendency in our whole past record. They also rail at our stick-in-the-mud attitude toward the fundamental concepts of Marxism—the class theory of the state, the class criterion in the appraisal of all political questions, the conception of politics, including war, as the expression of class interests, and so forth and so on. From all of this they conclude that we are "conservative" by nature, and extend that epithet to cover everything we have done in the past.

Such "conservatism," which they consider a fault, we hold to be a virtue. We aim to "hold on" firmly to these principles which have been verified in the test of the greatest historic events, and which in our view constitute the only program of proletarian liberation. We have carefully examined the substitutes offered to us by Burnham. They are not the products of his own manufacture. He is not the inventor or originator of anything. The offerings of Burnham are shoddy stuff, and if you inspect them closely you will see on every item the trade mark of another class. Burnham is merely the broker of shop-worn merchandise that has been palmed off on the workers time and again by bourgeois ideologists and always to the detriment of their struggle. We will have none of it. We stick to our own program. We accept no substitutes. If this be conservatism, make the most of it.

XI. "Bureaucratism"

In all the documents and speeches of the opposition, the party leadership is represented as bureaucratic in the most invidious sense of the term. More precisely, the party regime is depicted, sometimes by insinuation, sometimes openly and directly, as Stalinist in character. Burnham, who denies the inevitability of socialism, is nevertheless convinced that Stalinism develops "inevitably" out of Bolshevism. From that viewpoint he indicts us in the name of supra-class morality as "a cynical group of small time bureaucrats" who constitute "the rotten clique of Cannon." ("Science and Style.") And Johnson, who learned all about Bolshevism and Stalinism from Souvarine, assures the party that, "He (Cannon) is showing more nakedly the Stalinist conceptions of party struggle and party discipline which he brought with him from the Third International into the Fourth." The lengthy document on "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism" was written to sustain this fundamental thesis of the opposition: The party regime is Stalinist in character.

The argument is not a new one. Every opposition in our movement, since its inception more than a decade ago, has sung the same song and has always attracted supporters on that basis, as the present opposition attracts them. Why? The explanation is simple.

Stalinism has not only disoriented its own supporters but, to a considerable degree, also its opponents. Many of them see in Stalinism only bad methods. (They overlook the privileged social grouping and the anti-proletarian policy which these bad methods are designed to serve.) Victims of this superficial view of Stalinism never lack, at least up till now they have never lacked, unscrupulous demagogues to exploit their prejudices and to cry "Stalinism" when they run out of political or theoretical arguments. Shachtman, together with Abern, played this demagogue's role in the early years of the Left Opposition in this country, before our tiny movement had yet attained an "apparatus," to say nothing of a

privileged stratum controlling the apparatus. By 1935, however, Shachtman found himself on the side of "Stalin-Cannon" in the struggle for entry into the Socialist Party; and the "anti-Stalinist" fol-de-rol was being directed against him, as a leading representative of the party "regime." Thereupon in self-defense, Shachtman—always acutely sensitive to anything that touches him personally—thought better of the matter and submitted the charge of "Stalinism" to an analysis. This analysis is worth quoting here. Neither the regime nor the old arguments launched against it have changed in any fundamental respect since he argued on the other side of the question.

In an article entitled "The Question of 'Organizational Methods,'" signed by Shachtman under the date of July 30, 1935, and published in the Workers Party Internal Bulletin, No. 1, he answers the argument about "Stalinism" as follows:

"But then (it is now argued by some), didn't Lenin launch a struggle against Stalin purely because of the latter's organizational methods, his rudeness and disloyalty, and propose on those grounds to remove him from his post? To this reference is added the broad insinuation that we here constitute a similar bureaucracy, with similar methods, who must be fought as mercilessly as Lenin and Trotsky fought Stalin.

"The analogy does not even limp because it hasn't a leg to stand on. It is of the most superficial nature and betrays a failure to understand the problem of the Stalinist bureaucracy and Lenin's attitude towards its central figure. (1) It is not true that Lenin opposed Stalin solely on organizational grounds. The famous testament is prefaced by the significant observation that the rule of the proletariat is based upon a collaboration of two classes. This creates the whole environment for the growth of a Soviet Bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, in the period of its degeneration, in the midst of a constantly self-reproducing capitalism, represents the pressure of alien classes. Because of this fact, the bureaucracy tends more and more to bear down upon the proletarian kernel of the country; it shows an increasing contempt for it and a growing inclination to lean upon enemy classes. Stalin was the personification of this bureaucratic tendency. If the testament is read in connection with the noted articles and letters Lenin wrote shortly before his death, the political and class connection will become apparent. If nothing is learned from the testament except that "Stalin is rude—remove him!"—then, indeed, nothing has been learned.

(2) The bureaucracy in the Soviet Union is a social phenomenon. It has deep roots in Russia's past and present historical development. It has close class connections. It has tremendous material and intellectual power at its disposal—power to corrupt, to degenerate, to undermine the proletarian base of the Union. To speak of our pitiful little 'bureaucracy' in the Workers' Party—or any section of it—in the same breath with the Stalinist bureaucracy, can be excused only on the grounds of political infantilism.

That quotation deserves study by the comrades in the party who want to probe to the bottom of this light-minded talk about "Stalinism" in connection with the regime in our party. The whole paragraph deserves study line by line and word by word. I have underlined a couple of especially important sentences. "The bureaucracy tends more and more to bear down upon the proletarian kernel of the country." That is the universal characteristic of every privileged bureaucracy. It is precisely in order to serve their own special privileged interests, as against the interests of the proletarian mass, that every labor bureaucracy ties itself up in one way or another with "enemy classes." As Shachtman aptly says, it "leans upon" enemy classes and "bears down" upon the proletariat. It is in order to carry through this policy, against the interests and against the will of the proletarian mass, that bureaucratic formations of the privileged groups and bureaucratic methods become necessary. That is true not only of the Stalinist bureaucracy; it is true also of the trade union bureaucracy, the bureaucracy of the parties of the Second International and of all reformist labor organizations.

Now I want to put two questions to the leaders of the Opposition:

1. Where and when did the regime in our party "bear down" on the proletarian kernel? Name me one branch, or one trade union fraction, that has complained in the discussion of bureaucratic mistreatment by the party leadership. The whole discussion, with its voluminous documentation, and its innumerable speeches, has not brought to light a single such case insofar as the present majority of the National Committee is concerned!

The air has been shattered with the shrieks of the individual leaders of the petty-bourgeois faction—God, how they suffered!

But not a word of complaint has come in from "the proletarian kernel" of the party. From all parts of the country, during the discussion, I received letters from rank and file comrades asking "information" about the bureaucratism in the party, but nobody among them volunteered to give any information. A very strange animal, this bureaucratism, like the purple cow; everybody hears about it, but nobody knows about it. Nobody, that is, except a coterie of thin-skinned petty-bourgeois intellectuals, half-intellectuals and would-be intellectuals who magnify a few pin-pricks suffered by their individual persons into a murderous bayonet charge against the rank and file of the party.

I say that bureaucratism in the real sense of the word is not known in our party! Some of our best friends, hearing this stupid and venomous charge repeated over and over again, and reasoning that "where there is so much smoke there must be some fire," may be thinking: "Perhaps a little self-criticism would be in order here." **Not on this point!** The proletarian majority of the National Committee has plenty of political faults and sins to account for; it has to admit a great deal of inefficiency, neglected opportunities, slackness in discipline, etc. But bureaucratic mishandling of the party units or the trade union fractions—none whatsoever!

Practically every proletarian branch of the party supports the majority! Every trade union fraction in the party from Coast to Coast, with the sole exception of a couple of white collar fractions in New York City, supports the majority unanimately, or almost unanimately! This is not by accident. Bureaucratism strikes, first and last, at the proletarian sections of every organization; bureaucratism "bears down upon the proletarian kernel." If the proletarian sections of the party were instinctively drawn to the majority and repelled by the opposition from the first day of the discussion, it is because, among other reasons, they are most sensitive to every concrete manifestation of bureaucratism. It is because they judge the "organization question" not by what they read in ponderous documents, and still less by what somebody buzzes in their ear, but by what they see and know from their own experiences with the party leadership and its different sections.

2. You call the apparatus of the party a bureaucracy, Messrs. Abern, Burnham and Shachtman? You go further and describe it as "Stalinist" in character? Very well, gentlemen. Tell us, please, what is the social basis of this "Stalinist" bureaucracy in the American Section of the Fourth International? What are its privileges? Where is manifested its "inclination to lean upon enemy classes"—What classes? What special interests does it have to serve which compel it to "bear down upon the proletarian kernel?" Shachtman, in 1935, in the document cited above, informed Oehler-Abern-Muste that "the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union is a social phenomenon." What kind of a "social phenomenon" is our "pitiful little bureaucracy"?

After all, what is the "apparatus" of our party? What is this selection of people whom the self-sacrificing Burnham disdainfully calls "a cynical group of small-time bureaucrats" and a "rotten clique"? Let's take up this question, once and for all, and have it out. The "apparatus" that is, the National Committee and the functioning full-time staff of party workers, is not an economically privileged group and has no special interests of its own that are different from the interests of the party members as a whole. The reality is quite different. The full-time functionaries of the party are those comrades who are distinguished either by exceptional ability, which propels them into professional party work by the universal consent and approval of the party membership, or by the capacity for self-sacrifice, or both—those comrades who are willing to undertake functions as party workers for less compensation than even the most poorly paid worker as a rule can secure in private employment.

The rank and file of the party knows this very well and doesn't want to hear any more denigration of the professional party workers, especially from people who shrink from the sacrifices and duties of professional party work. Our party is not a party like the social democracy. We will not permit our movement to be led by spare time heroes while the coolie work is done by the professional functionaries, who in addition, have to stand the abuse of the "lords" who come around to visit the party once a week. The party honors and respects its professional staff. It considers the occupation of a professional revolutionist to be the most honorable of all occupations. The highest aspiration and ambition of every young party member should be to qualify himself for such a profession in life.

Our party "apparatus" is neither a bureaucracy, nor a faction,

nor a clique. It is a selection of people who fulfill different functions according to their merits and capacities and experience and their readiness to serve the party at the cost of severe economic penalties. There has been no element of "patronage" in their selection; the very suggestion of such a thing is an intolerable insult, especially when it comes, as it usually does, from well-situated dilettantes who never missed a dinner appointment for the revolution. Neither can it be justly maintained that there has been any factional discrimination or favoritism in the selection of party functionaries. The opposition has been represented, and well represented, especially in the editorial and office positions in the centre.

The oppositionists themselves testify to this: "It is true that the members of the minority occupy many posts. . . . 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." Then what are they complaining about? What kind of a bureaucracy is it that "has not the least objection" to anybody having any function he can "handle" even in "prominent posts"? Try to discover such a situation in a real bureaucracy—the Stalinist or Lewis-Green bureaucracies, for example. Their "posts" are almost invariably assigned to supporters of the "regime," and by no means to "anybody." If the party field workers are, almost without exception, supporters of the majority, it is not in repayment for "favours." It is rather because the petty-bourgeois minded type of secondary leaders, who gravitate naturally to the opposition, tend to shy away from field work, with its arduous duties and economic uncertainties. They prepare for civil war by first preparing for the civil service. A candidate for leadership in the camp of the majority, on the other hand, isn't taken very seriously until he has done a good stretch of field work, and shown what he can do and what he can learn in direct contact with workers in the class struggle.

As for the prominent trade unionists, they have attained positions of prominence in their field, not by "appointments" from New York, but by their own activities and merits which have been recognized by the workers. If the field workers and the trade unionists of the party tended from the outset of the fight to "take sides" against the office leaders of the opposition, it is not because they are addicts of some preposterous fascistic "leader cult" but, rather, from considerations of an opposite nature. The nature of their work, which is directly and immediately affected from day to day by the actions and decisions of the central party leadership, gives them a more intimate understanding of its real qualities. This determines a more critical attitude on their part than is the case of those party members, remote from the class struggle, who judge the leaders solely by their articles and their speeches. The party trade unionists know all the party leaders too well—they know people too well—to be "slavish idolators" of anybody, or to expect perfection from anybody. If the performance of the leaders of the majority at the centre is by no means satisfactory to them—and that is no doubt the case—they are in no hurry to exchange them for others whose performance has been worse. They are practical people; if they have to choose between evils, they take the lesser evil.

The fact that our party has no socially privileged bureaucracy, that its internal life is dominated by democracy rather than bureaucracy, does not of course obviate the possibility of bureaucratic practises and bureaucratic tendencies on the part of individuals and even of groups. But it is just these very critics of the opposition who have manifested such tendencies most crassly, and more times than once. Indeed, the tendency of the petty-bourgeois leaders is towards bureaucratic practises. From the nature of the faction it could hardly be otherwise. There are glaring instances which show how they manifested this tendency when they had a free hand and were able to act without the counteracting influence of the majority. Their conduct in the auto crisis is a classic example of intolerable bureaucratic procedure from beginning to end. And the end is not yet, for they have not yet acknowledged or corrected their indefensible procedure; they still refer to the auto crisis only in an attempt to explain away their own actions, to justify themselves at the expense of their critics, and to switch the issue and turn the attack against their critics.

In "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism" they have space in a document of approximately 25,000 words for only one paragraph on the auto crisis. And this single paragraph is devoted, not to a discussion of the crisis and their conduct in it, but to a completely extraneous matter so as to make it appear that "Cannon," who was three thousand miles away at the time of the auto crisis,

was nevertheless responsible for their debacle in this situation, as for everything else. In a remarkable article that belongs now to party history, "The Truth About the Auto Crisis," Comrade Clarke has written the full account of the auto crisis, an account which is verified and documented at every point. That article will speak for itself, and will be source material for every discussion in the future over the concrete meaning of bureaucratic practises on the part of an office leadership.

Here I wish to make only a few general observations on this unsavory affair. The present minority were in full charge of the Political Committee; the seventh member, who had been responsible for all of their troubles, was across the wide ocean, and in no position to hamper or restrict their operations in any way. The auto crisis was a real test of the regime—their regime. It was a real test of their capacity to lead the party and to lead workers in a difficult and complicated situation. What did they do? They began by bungling the policy. This policy, cooked up in Burnham's study, prescribed a course of action for our fraction which was contrary to the movement of the workers in the industry, and which, if it had been followed out, would have swept our comrades out of the auto union in the space of a few weeks' time. When the whole auto fraction, which included the ablest trade unionists in the party and four members of the N.C., rose up against them they "reaffirmed" their former position by a vote of three to two, with one abstaining, called that the decision of the party, and appealed to discipline and formal authority!

When they finally yielded to the pressure of the auto fraction, supplemented by the pressure of all N.C. members who had opportunity to express themselves, they did it in a contemptible fashion. They washed their hands of the affair, and placed upon the auto fraction the full responsibility for carrying out the new policy. Then they made a spiteful attack on the auto fraction in a statement sent to the branches which also "warned" that the auto comrades would have bad luck with their policy and that the "line of the party"—that is, the line of Burnham, Widick and Abern—would be proved to be correct. Then, in typical Lovestoneite fashion, the typical fashion of any group of arrogant petty-bourgeois intellectuals, they turned the attack against the field workers who had corrected the false policy and shown their independence in protesting against it, announcing the discovery that they were mere "hand raisers" who belonged to a "rotten clique" of "small time bureaucrats." It would be hard to find in the history of our movement a comparable example of haughty, ungracious and spiteful bureaucratism in a concrete situation. Bureaucratism indeed "bears down" upon the "proletarian kernel" of the party. But this proletarian kernel proved to be hardy and resistant and capable of asserting itself. That is its real crime in the eyes of the offended petty-bourgeois leaders—from-an-office.

Another example of unadulterated bureaucratism of the same type was shown in the proposals of Burnham and Shachtman in regard to the election policy of the Minneapolis branch last spring. Incalculable damage might have been done to the party and to the relations between the central leadership and the Minneapolis branch if these proposals had not been frustrated. The branch had originally nominated its own independent candidate for mayor. When a conference of trade unions nominated a labor candidate, the branch decided to withdraw its candidate and support the labor candidate. I was directed by the P.C. to investigate the matter while on a visit to the Minneapolis branch at that time. On my visit, I inquired about the conference which had nominated the labor candidate. I was told that it had been a well-attended conference of important unions and that the labor candidate was sponsored by them. I expressed the opinion that the action of the comrades in withdrawing their own candidate in this case, and supporting the labor candidate, was fully in accord with party policy and so reported to the P.C. at its meeting on May 2nd. Burnham promptly made a set of motions against the action. I quote the minutes of the Political Committee of May 2, 1939:

"Motions by Burnham: (1) That the P.C. considers the action of the Minneapolis local in withdrawing its own candidate from the mayoralty primaries and going over to support of Eide as (a) an opportunist concession to the conservative trade union bureaucrats, and (b) with respect to the support of Eide, a practise in conflict with the party's position in favor of genuinely independent working class political action.

"(2) The secretary is instructed to communicate with the Minneapolis local and present a thorough analysis of the action in the light of the above motion.

"(3) A carefully worded explanatory article on this situation

and the point of view of the P.C. with reference to it shall be published in the Appeal."

A truly astounding proposal! Without further parley with Minneapolis, Burnham wanted to repudiate their policy publicly in the columns of our official organ in the midst of an election campaign. Shachtman expressed himself as ready to vote right then for Burnham's motion. (It was obvious that these two people, who are ostensibly opposed to all informal consultations between committee meetings, had discussed the matter among themselves and "convicted" Minneapolis in advance.) In this incident they showed the same traits as in the auto crisis a few months earlier, and demonstrated that they had learned nothing from that experience. The political line of Burnham's motion was absolutely incorrect; the Minneapolis comrades were right; and the proposed procedure—an out-of-hand repudiation in the public press of the party—was abominably bureaucratic.

Fortunately, on this occasion there were restraining influences in the Political Committee. Goldman, present as an N.C. member, moved: "That we instruct the secretary to write the Minneapolis local, asking for a full explanation of their action in withdrawing Comrade Hudson as candidate for Mayor and in supporting Eide." His motion was accepted and action deferred until more detailed information could be sent by the Minneapolis comrades. The P.C. minutes of May 16th, two weeks later, record further developments:

"Letter received from Minneapolis giving details as to the Minneapolis election situation.

"Question raised by Burnham of need for information on several points.

"Motion by Burnham: To ask the Minneapolis party for further information and that we lay over the document until that information is received. Carried."

The Minneapolis question was again on the agenda briefly and is recorded in the P.C. minutes of May 31st.

"Letter from Minneapolis read, answering the last questions addressed to them on the election policy.

"Motion: That the matter be laid over to the next committee meeting when Comrade Burnham will be present, since he made the original motion on this point. Carried."

The matter was finally disposed of at the P.C. meeting of June 6th. The minutes of this date cover the matter as follows:

"Summary by Cannon of further information received from Minneapolis regarding the election situation.

"General discussion.

"Withdrawal by Burnham of his motion presented in the meeting of May 2nd, 1939, with following statement: 'The further information that we have received indicates that the opinion which I formerly held and formulated in motions to the effect that support of Eide in the Minneapolis elections is incompatible with our labor party policy is incorrect and I, therefore, wish to withdraw the motion.'

"Motion by Cannon: That the P.C. considers that the action of the Minneapolis branch in withdrawing their candidate and supporting the candidacy of Eide was politically correct under the circumstances. Carried unanimously."

A truly illuminating chronicle of political irresponsibility and bureaucratism. Let every local organization of the party that is sensitive to the slightest danger of bureaucratic practices ponder over this incident. If Burnham-Shachtman had prevailed, the action of the Minneapolis comrades would have been repudiated in the Socialist Appeal, and they would have been publicly discredited. They would have had no alternative but to withdraw their support of Eide, the labor candidate, and re-enter their own independent candidate. Then, five weeks later, and about one week before the election, they would have been blandly informed that, after more thorough investigation, the P.C. motions were "withdrawn" and the Minneapolis branch free to make another flip-flop in public and support the candidacy of Eide after all. Perhaps the P.C. might even have been generous enough to repudiate its repudiation of the policy of the Minneapolis comrades. However, that is quite a speculative assumption. Even after Burnham had been compelled to withdraw his motion of censure he didn't have the decency, as the record shows, to make a positive motion of approval.

The leaders of the petty-bourgeois faction complain a good deal about the way their "prestige" has been undermined in the proletarian sections of the party. But the most malevolent enemy could not deal heavier blows to their influence and authority than

they dealt themselves by such practices and methods as they employed in the auto crisis and in the case of the Minneapolis local elections.

XII. The "Clique" and the "Leader Cult"

The opposition has made no effort to establish the existence of a party bureaucracy as a privileged group whose interests are antagonistic to the interests of the rank and file, and whose policy, designed to serve these interests, must be imposed upon the party by bureaucratic means. Neither have they attempted to find any social basis for a ruling "clique" with its "leader cult." Yet, the Marxists analyze every labor bureaucracy or clique and explain its methods by first uncovering its social basis. It was by this method that Trotsky and the Bolshevik-Leninists disclosed the real nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the first instance, not as an accidental formation created by the arbitrary will or personal traits of an individual but as a social phenomenon, which did not begin with a "leader cult" but came to it from necessity.

The Stalinist bureaucracy represents privileged social groupings which have appeared for the first time in history on the basis of a workers' state. The Marxists alone—that is, the Trotskyists—found the key to the real mystery of Stalinism. They first revealed its social base. Then they demonstrated that its privileges and special interests collide irreconcilably with the interests of the masses in their march towards socialism. In order to serve their special interests the Stalinist bureaucracy was compelled to introduce a line of policy which contradicted the program and tradition of the party. In order to impose such policy upon the party and upon the country, they were compelled to suppress party democracy, to force their line through by means of bureaucratic violence, and to concentrate all power in the party apparatus.

But the conflicts of class interests in the country, and the numerous rivalries and conflicts of interest between the various privileged groups, found a distorted expression in factional struggles within the apparatus itself. This unsettled the regime and created possibilities for the intervention of the party rank and file, and of the working mass in general. The Left Opposition for a time made its way through just such fissures in the apparatus and threatened its overthrow. This demonstrated to the bureaucracy the iron necessity of a still narrower concentration of power. The conflicting privileged groups required a means for the arbitration and regulation of their conflicts without the intervention of the masses, and in such a way as to unite them all against the masses. Out of this necessity, after the revolutionary wing of the party had been annihilated, emerged the single, all-powerful leader, the arbitrator, the Soviet Bonaparte, Stalin.

Stalin thus appears as a "leader" of an entirely different type from Lenin, who also enjoyed exceptional authority, and one who arrived at his position by an entirely different practice. Lenin, the Marxist, the revolutionist, truly expressed the interests of the masses and maintained his position by the consent and even the love of the most conscious section of the proletariat. Lenin consequently leaned upon the masses and required party democracy to mobilize their support against the privileged elements within the country and in the party. Stalin, the revisionist, the betrayer of the revolution, came to his position not by the voluntary will of the masses but in a struggle of the privileged groups against them. Stalin is not the "leader" because the people "love" him; it is obligatory to "love" him because he is the dictatorial power, the Soviet Bonaparte, whose prestige must be artificially inflated and promoted in order to strengthen his position as the arbitrator, defender and best representative of the privileged elements in the population. If anyone disagrees, there is the G.P.U. to convince him.

All the "methods" of Stalinism grew from the necessities of an unstable and highly privileged bureaucracy which cannot maintain itself by other methods, and dares not permit democratic procedures that would permit the masses to intervene. As for the Stalinist bureaucracies in the parties of the Comintern, they are simply the extensions of the Russian social phenomenon, its foreign agents. The main social base of the bureaucratic gang in the American Communist party is in the Soviet Union. That explains the peculiarities which distinguish it from the bureaucracies of the trade union movement, the reformist political parties, etc.

When the light-minded oppositionist leaders attempt to estab-

lish an identity, or even an analogy, between our party staff and the Stalinist bureaucracy, they are constructing a house of cards which falls to pieces at the first touch. Turning their backs on the sociological analysis from which Marxism construes its politics, these self-styled "independent thinkers" reveal themselves, on this question, also, as nothing but slavish imitators of the philistine journalists and petty-bourgeois moralists who have judged Stalinism by its methods and techniques, without understanding the social basis and role of Stalinism which dictates the employment of these techniques.

Many superficial anti-Stalinist journalists, noticing the political similarities of Stalinism and Fascism—bureaucratic violence, one-man dictatorship, "totalitarian" suppression of all opposition—easily arrive at the conclusion that Stalinism and Fascism are identical. The same people, mostly social democrats and radicals disillusioned in the proletarian revolution, observing that the Fourth International also has a leader of outstanding influence and authority, and without bothering to inquire whether this personal authority has a different source and significance, hasten to equate the defenders and betrayers of the Russian Revolution and to announce: "Stalinism and Trotskyism—the same thing."

The theory that the distinguishing feature of Stalinism is its "leader cult" was the brilliant contribution of Brandler-Lovestone at the time when they were defending the domestic policies of the Stalinist party in the Soviet Union, denouncing the Fourth International's advocacy of a political revolution there as counter-revolutionary, and explaining that all the trouble was simply the result of a "bad regime" in the Stalinist party. It was their contention that if a reasonable amount of democracy was introduced into the Stalinist party, and the "cult of the leader" replaced by a situation in which Stalin could be "first among equals," everything would be all right, including the mass-murder of the Trotskyists.

It was these same profound and original thinkers—Brandler-Lovestone and the leaders of the Brandlerist off-shoot, the German S.A.P. (Walcher and Co.)—who first put in circulation the theory that the movement of the Fourth International is afflicted with the "cult of the leader." The fact that Trotsky had at his disposal neither an army nor a G.P.U. nor control of employment to terrorize, nor money to corrupt people into "loving" him and acknowledging him as the supreme leader—these trifling details of difference were left entirely out of consideration. When one leaves the ground of Marxism he invariably overlooks precisely those details which are primary and fundamental and decisive. The centrists who had broken with Stalinism only after Stalinism had rejected their advances for the thousandth and first time, were determined at all costs not to fall under the control of another "leader." They were hell-bent for "independence"—from Trotsky, that is, from Trotsky's ideas which they could not successfully combat or refute. And they demonstrated their independence by uniting with the Norwegian Labor Party and the London Bureau on the road to the People's Front and social patriotic betrayal in the "war of democracy against fascism."

The petty-bourgeois opposition in our party did not invent the theory that we have a "leader cult" and a "one-man regime" in the American party and in the Fourth International; they borrowed that, as they borrowed everything else, from alien sources. In the first days of the present discussion in our party the Lovestoneites, searching for kindred spirits, issued "An Appeal to Members and Followers of the Socialist Workers Party." The "Appeal" invited any waifs and strays we might have to join the Lovestoneite organization. The inducement? "There you will find an organization that works out its own policies, independently and democratically, to meet the needs and interest of the workers and not to follow a 'party line' laid down by the 'leader' in Moscow or in Mexico City." (Workers' Age, Oct. 21, 1939). I reprint this quotation here as a free advertisement, so that those who are really interested in the commodity of "independence" from the "leader cult" will know where they can get the original article.

Offering grist to the mill of these shysters, Shachtman published a notoriously falsified account of our October Plenum for the purpose of showing that the majority of our party leaders, who have been sifted out and selected by the democratic action of the membership after more than ten years of common political work, are nothing but a collection of religious holy-rollers who take things on faith. In Internal Bulletin No. 3, Shachtman wrote:

"At the plenum the majority presented for a vote the docu-

ment of comrade Trotsky which had arrived only a few hours earlier. There could not have been an opportunity for any comrade to reflect on this document. Some of them had not even had a chance to read it. Moreover, it was physically impossible for anybody to have read it in full for the simple reason that one page of the manuscript was accidentally lost in transit. Nevertheless, read or unread, studied or unstudied, complete or incomplete, the document was presented for a vote and finally adopted by the majority on the grounds, as one comrade expressed it, of faith in the correctness of Comrade Trotsky's position."

Shachtman's account is false both in fact and in interpretation. (1) A synopsis of comrade Trotsky's document, "The U.S.S.R. in War" was known to all members of the National Committee Plenum not "a few hours earlier" but two weeks earlier. The plenum voting took place October 1. Under date of September 12 Trotsky wrote us: "I am writing now a study on the social character of the U.S.S.R. in connection with the war question . . . The fundamental ideas are as follows: . . ." He then stated his ideas in outline form—nobody could misunderstand them. This outline was mimeographed and sent to all members of the N.C. on September 14, more than two weeks before the Plenum, under the heading: "Plenum Material." Thus, all concerned knew, well in advance of the Plenum, the main line of the thesis elaborated in the finished document.

(2) The document was not "presented for a vote and finally adopted by the majority," as Shachtman says. The adopted motion reads as follows: "The Plenum endorses the political conclusions of the document of Trotsky on 'The U.S.S.R. in War' and instructs the Political Committee to publish it as an evaluation and elucidation of the new events on the basis of our fundamental position." An earlier motion "to endorse the document" as a whole was changed, and restricted to an endorsement of "the political conclusions," precisely because some comrades, who fully agreed with the conclusions, wanted to study the document more thoroughly before voting to endorse it in its entirety. The procedure of the Plenum majority in this matter was directly opposite to Shachtman's slanderous report.

(3) "A page was missing"—and therefore the line of the document could not be accepted without a resort to "faith." This contemptible piece of petty fakery is designed for those who think one inspects a political document like a proof-reader and accepts it only if every word and every comma are in place. The line of the document was clear to all, the political conclusions, which were endorsed, were succinctly stated. That is enough for a serious revolutionist to determine his attitude toward any political document. Shachtman knows this as well as we do. He quibbles about a "missing page" only to support the alien thesis that the leaders of the party are not thinking revolutionists but weak-minded addicts of religious "faith."

I have taken the space to cite the record in this instance and to expose Shachtman's falsifications at some length because it is out of such flimsy material that our enemies, the Lovestoneites and their like, construct their thesis of a "leader cult" in the Fourth International. They did not fail to seize upon Shachtman's tid-bit. It was gleefully reprinted by the same Workers' Age—it was written for their benefit—with the sarcastic remark that they were doing so "merely for the purpose of illustrating how widely the atmosphere in that party (the S.W.P.) differs from the uncritical, totalitarian, leader worshipping spirit of Stalinism."

But, it may be objected, the opposition complains of a "leader cult" only in the Socialist Workers' Party, not in the Fourth International. No, no, no, that is not what they mean. It is the Fourth International, and its "leader cult," and its "leader," that Burnham is shooting at. "Cannon," after all, is only a faith-stricken "leader cultist" himself, who "upon all occasions without exception, accepts the politics of Trotsky, accepts them immediately and without question." Cannon at best, you see, qualifies only as a "Gauleiter," not as the one and only "Fuehrer."

Burnham brought this conception of the Fourth International from the American Workers Party. Here is what he wrote in the days when the fusion negotiations with the Muste organization were in progress in 1934:

"The A.W.P. also distrusts the dependence of the Communist League and the Fourth International on a single individual. No organization except perhaps a fascist organization should have a single individual occupying the position that Trotsky does in fact occupy in the Communist League. And it is worth noting from history that Trotsky, though an incomparably brilliant political analyst, has never been a person able to function effectively in a

party. After all, Trotsky has failed." (Memorandum of James Burnham issued by the National Office of the American Workers Party.)

* * * *

Burnham, according to his highly moral custom, "withdrew" this thesis, that is, he kept it in reserve until such time as he would find the courage to proclaim it openly in our ranks. Shachtman and Abern, by their support, have given him this courage. But they have not added any merit to the thesis, nor cleansed it of its dirty trademark as the invention of the enemies of the Fourth International.

As for the "clique" and the "leader cult" in our party, the theory is just as shallow as the Brandler-Lovestone theory applied to our international organization, and the evidence just as flimsy. When we speak about a real clique in our movement—the Abern clique—we give a detailed and documented account of its operations over a long period of time and prove that it left a trail as wide as a cross-country highway. Our accusers are much more sparing in their evidence. "Do you doubt the existence of the Cannon clique?" they ask—"It can be confirmed by a single incident." Let us take this "single incident" apart and see what it really proves.

As we came to the end of the concluding session of the July convention and reached the last point on the agenda, the election of the new National Committee, Shachtman arose to present a slate. It was very late, the delegates were tired and restless, and many of them wanted to get a few hours sleep in preparation for their departure the following day. Naturally, this could not deter Shachtman from making a speech. Naturally, also, the speech was detailed and lengthy and full of pious homilies, pronounced on the assumption that the delegates didn't know what they wanted with regard to the composition of the new N.C. and had to be told. Stripped of pretentious and hypocritical verbiage, Shachtman's slate amounted to a proposal to shift the center of gravity in the National Committee by the addition of a number of New York professional "youth" whose experience has been confined pretty largely to the class room and the office of the Y.P.S.L.

Without making a speech—the delegates had openly manifested their impatience by frequently interrupting Shachtman—Comrade Dunne then presented another slate weighted on the other side. Dunne's slate corresponded in its general tendency more to the desires of the majority of the delegates. They knew the leading people, they had listened to endless hours of debate on the organization report, and it is sheer impudence to assume that they had given no thought to the composition of the new National Committee in the light of the debate. An adjournment for consultation was requested, and then—horror of horrors!—"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 is wrong or abnormal about that procedure? The "30 or 35 delegates," that is, a majority of the convention, obviously wanted to make some amendments to the Dunne slate. How else could they do it except by an open consultation?

The opposition tries to isolate the elections to the N.C. from everything that had preceded and led up to it in the convention. These proceedings, especially the debate on the organization report, clearly intimate a brewing struggle between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies, the struggle which broke out with such violence a few months later. These intimations did not pass unnoticed by the delegates from the proletarian centers. They didn't know everything, but they sensed the direction in which the conflict was moving and began to align themselves accordingly. So also did the minority of the delegates who automatically rallied around the Shachtman slate without the formality of a caucus consultation. Dunne and Shachtman each signify certain things in the party. Any speeches they may make at the eleventh hour of a convention change nothing. Shachtman will never know it, but speeches are judged not only by what is said but also by who says it.

I personally took no part in the caucus on the slate, as the opposition's document testifies, and for definite reasons. I was anxious to avoid a struggle in the party as long as the differences had not been clearly defined in specific resolutions. At the beginning of the convention I proposed that a nominating commission, consisting of representatives from the main delegations, be set up to sift out the nominees and present a slate to the convention on the basis of the qualifications of the individual candidates and their support in the ranks. I consider it best for the central leaders of the party not to interfere too much in the selection of the

personnel of the N.C. Members of the N.C., in order to have real authority, should be pushed up from below, not lifted from the top.

I know that Comrade Dunne would not have presented a slate to the convention if Shachtman had not taken the initiative. Dunne's original slate, drawn up during Shachtman's speech, was not entirely satisfactory to some of the delegates as a definitive list. Consequently, they promptly moved for an adjournment in order to permit a consultation between the delegations which supported the general tendency of the Dunne slate. The fact that they openly asked for this consultation, and that they held it in the back of the convention hall in the sight of everybody, only demonstrated that they knew what they wanted in general and that they were not hiding anything from anybody. If there were any secret maneuvers or clique operations at the convention it was not on the side of the majority. On their part everything was regular, proper, and open and above-board. This "single incident," which was to "prove" the existence of a secret clique, in fact indicated the direct opposite. All the other "incidents" are on the same order.

Cliques and cliquism and permanent factions are abhorrent to proletarian revolutionists who seek the realization of their socialist aims through a workers' mass movement led by a mass party. The only permanent formation that can claim our allegiance is the party. Factions are for us only temporary groupings, to be dissolved in the party when the immediate issues in dispute are settled. To speak of cliques, that is, groupings of chums and friends without a principled basis—we did not wage an educational struggle against such abominations since the inception of our movement to wind up with a clique of our own. The accusation is sheer slander without a trace of justification in fact.

XIII.

The Proletarian Orientation

One of the capital crimes charged against the party majority was the famous "New Year's meeting," at which the plans for the auto campaign were worked out. Comrade Clarke has dealt with this incident at length in his admirable article on the auto crisis. "Cannon," says the document of the minority, "never repudiated it (the meeting) or what it symbolized." That is correct. I go further and say that this meeting, initiated by us and later "repudiated" by Burnham and Shachtman, does indeed "symbolize" the difference between their orientation and their methods and ours. We established new trade union connections; we conceived a plan to utilize these connections for an intensification of our work in the auto union; we invited the two political leaders of the present opposition to an informal discussion of the plan and the assignment of personnel before taking the proposals in finished form before the Political Committee for official action. Their role in the whole affair, including their criticism, was a negative one.

The leaders of the opposition confine their remarks to only one aspect of the meeting, and, in my opinion, to the least important aspect—the procedure. The meeting is cited as one of their big "proofs" of the existence of a secret clique which decides things and substitutes itself for the official leading body of the party. If it was a clique operation, why then, were Burnham and Shachtman invited to participate in it? A more reasonable interpretation would be that the informal meeting with them was designed to secure their collaboration in the working out of the plans before they took finished form. That interpretation would be entirely correct, as far as our motivations were concerned. Burnham and Shachtman raised no objection to participation in the meeting; their discovery that it was a bad business was made long after the fact. Such informal meetings, prior to official meetings of the P.C., have been held dozens and scores, if not hundreds, of times in the past; it is the normal method of collaboration in a genuinely functioning "collective leadership." Only long afterward did Burnham and Shachtman discover that there was something wrong in the procedure and ask, with an air of violated virtue: "By what authority did this body sit as the deciding body, usurping the functions of both P.C. and N.C.?" The New Year's meeting committed no usurpations whatever, either "by authority" or otherwise. The plans formulated at the meeting were fully reported to the regular meeting of the P.C. on January 3 and formally decided by that body, and by that body alone. The informal meeting prepared the plans—the official meeting of the P.C. decided on their adoption. That is the way we have handled important matters hundreds of times in the past; that is the way we will handle them hundreds of times in the future. There was nothing wrong or irregular about the procedure.

But this simple and straight-forward explanation of a common

method of operation among the members of any serious leading body will not do for our mystery writers. There was something sinister afoot; nobody is going to delude our perspicacious Hawkshaws with the cock and bull story that Smith and Dunne had travelled 1300 miles simply to give our trade union work an impetus in the auto field. They remind their readers that Cannon, forgetful about the interests of his "clique," "was about to leave for Europe." And here they pluck out the heart of the mystery: "This meeting was designed to sterilize the P.C. during his absence." That was undoubtedly a very devilish "design." But why was the whole meeting confined to the auto situation? The P.C. and the party as a whole were already pretty well "sterilized" in this field; the plan was to fertilize its work and provide the means for it to expand and grow. The only other question discussed at the meeting was the assignment of Shachtman to full-time editorship of the Socialist Appeal. To be sure, that was a certain imposition upon him, as his stubborn resistance testified, but it did not infringe in the least upon the powers and prerogatives of the P.C. in all fields where it had been operating with unsterilized "authority" before Cannon "was about to leave for Europe." The meeting discussed, and the P.C. later ratified, not questions of policy but plans of organizing our trade union work in the auto field and the personnel of the field staff. And since four members of the N.C. were to be in the field, it placed the direction of the organizing campaign in their hands. Is that an abnormal procedure infringing upon the rights of the P.C.? Not at all. Trade union campaigns, if they are to be lifted from the pages of our press and realized in life, must be directed by those who specialize in trade union work and concentrate their attention and energy upon it.

If our critics are not satisfied with this explanation, and still consider that in some Machiavellian way or other they were hornswoggled, and the P.C. "sterilized," when the "clique" dispatched one of its members to France and others to the auto field—if they still feel this way about it, I offer them a simple proposal to even the score. Let them establish some contacts with workers or trade unionists in some trade or industry; let them work out a plan to utilize these contacts to extend and develop our trade union work in this field; let them come to the P.C., with or without prior consultation with us, and propose that the plan be approved and that they be put in charge of the campaign. I will promise in advance to vote with both hands to adopt their plan and place the whole campaign under their direction. They can hold me to this promise regardless of whether their plan contemplates the organization of steel workers, sailors, hod-carriers or the janitors of City College or New York University.

This fair offer is not likely to be accepted. Their orientation towards trade union work is literary; ours is more real. That is the meaning of the much discussed "New Year's meeting." We regarded, and still regard, the New Year's meeting as a stage in the development of an ambitious plan to expand our trade union work. They see it in retrospect only as a "maneuver" against them. They don't even understand that our maneuver was aimed exclusively at the auto bosses and their labor agents.

The conflict between the proletarian and petty-bourgeois tendencies in the party was expressed for a long time primarily in this difference of orientation. In the present discussion it has taken programmatic form. We have been compelled to reinforce our fight for a proletarian party, proletarian in composition and rooted in the workers' mass movement, by an irreconcilable struggle for a proletarian program. It was this revelation of programmatic differences which caused the muffled struggle, already evident at the last convention, to break out in the open on a wider front. At the last convention both sides undoubtedly sensed the coming storm. But we on our side hardly expected it to break out so soon, and with such force and irreconcilability, on what we have always considered the fundamental questions of our program and doctrine. From this point of view, the articles which I wrote in the Socialist Appeal before the last party convention, in behalf of a proletarian orientation, require supplementation and emphasis on the programmatic side.

The document of the opposition refers to these articles as "articles on 'organization.'" That is a superficial and incorrect appraisal of their content. They further state that "many of the ideas . . . were a collective product even though they were printed as a personal contribution." That is not correct either. If the ideas I expounded in those articles had really been common ideas, I could have been well content, as in so many other cases, to leave the actual writing to those whose hands were free from ad-

ministrative and other duties which occupied me quite fully at the time. The contention that the articles "were written essentially for the purpose of warding off the necessary criticism of the party leadership between the two conventions," is wholly without foundation. I agreed with most of the criticisms and the articles represented my personal opinion of the way to improve the situation.

I still think those articles point the road to the future for our party. Our basic problem still remains, as stated there, to "turn our faces, in the right direction. That means, first of all, to turn our backs on the pessimists and calamity howlers, the soul-sick intellectuals and tired radicals who whine and dawdle around the fringes of the movement and even, to a certain extent, infest our ranks." I still think that "most contemptible of all are those who seek to cover their desertion and retreat by hurling newly invented 'ideological' disagreements with Marxism over their shoulders. Taken altogether they are an unattractive and uninspiring aggregation. It is nothing less than a monstrous travesty to consider them as in any way reflecting the movement of workers emancipation which, by its very nature, is alien to all pessimism and defeatist tendencies. It is criminal folly to waste time or even to argue the question with these runaway boys and heralds of defeat before the battle."

I wrote before the last party convention: "Our convention must let the dead bury the dead and turn the face of the party to the workers who are the real source of power and inspiration and well-grounded optimism. We have said this before. More than once we have incorporated it in resolutions. But we have not made the turn in forthright fashion. That is why we are lagging behind. That is the main reason we are suffering a certain stagnation. That is why we are even flirting with the danger of a degeneration of the party along the lines of conservative passivity, introspection and futility."

I wrote: "The proletariat of the United States is the source of unlimited power, it can lift the whole world on its shoulders—that is the unshakable premise of all our calculations and all our work . . . the workers of America have power enough to topple over the structure of capitalism at home and to lift the whole world with them when they rise!"

Those words—the theme of all my pre-convention articles last year—hold good today. In retrospect, they read more prophetically than I knew at that time. I did not know how deep, how great, was the "danger of degeneration" implicit in the bad composition of the party in New York and its inadequate contact with the mass movement of the workers.

I said in that article: "Our program has withstood all the tests of theory and experience and stands unassailable." I must admit that I wrote these words on the assumption that I was stating a truism to which we all subscribed, and that the differences between us concerned only matters of orientation, emphasis and application. I could not know that within a few months the ambitious plan of expansion adopted by the convention on my motion would be disrupted and crowded off the agenda by a factional civil war in the party.

I, along with other comrades, expected future trouble from the intellectualist wing of our leadership. But we did not foresee that they would undertake to lead an insurrection against our fundamental program, our doctrine, our tradition, and our organizational methods. This demonstration compelled us to put aside—to postpone—the execution of our ambitious plans for external work until the hegemony of Marxism in the party had again been established by struggle. That struggle is now drawing to a close. The victory of Marxism, and thereby of the proletarian tendency, is already assured. On that basis the party convention can and will again decide to implement the proletarian orientation by measures no different in basic content than those adopted at the convention last July.

The convention will meet and conduct its work under the sign of the proletarian orientation. That is the way to meet the coming war. Preparation for war means, for us, not some esoteric special task. It means turning the face of the party to the workers, penetrating deeper into the trade unions. It means taking drastic measures to proletarianize the composition of the party membership. And, in the light of the experience of the faction struggle, the proletarian orientation means above all—and in order to make all possible—a firm decision to continue on all fronts the implacable war against any and all opposition to the doctrine and program of proletarian revolution—Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism.

New York,

April 1, 1940.

JAMES P. CANNON