

A MARXIST
QUARTERLY

SUMMER
1955

Fourth
International

The I. W. W.

(On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding Convention)

by James P. Cannon



Belinski and Rational Reality

by G. V. Plekhanov

The Gold Coast Revolution

by George Lavan

The Year 1923

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Book Reviews

35 cents

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For a magazine cramped by such financial limitations as **Fourth International**, it is hazardous to promise definite articles for the next issue. We learned this again on checking our promises in the last issue and comparing them with the 32 pages in which to make good on them.

The main responsibility for our predicament over space in this issue rests, naturally, on the shoulders of James P. Cannon, whose absorbing and illuminating political estimate of the IWW heads the table of contents.

When we suggested that he write something about the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World, he replied that the proposal was "rather appealing" and that "I have thought a lot about this subject, and would have a lot to say about it that hasn't been said by others."

A soon as the mailman handed us the weighty manuscript we realized that Comrade Cannon had not exaggerated in indicating he could give us "a lot" — at least a lot for a single issue of our magazine.

But it turned out to be not "just history." Cannon's evaluation of the IWW is grounded on the Marxist concept of revolutionary socialist organization and on a lifetime of experience that began in the IWW itself. What he really gives us therefore is a deeper appreciation of the most burning problem facing the working class today — the problem of organizing a party capable of leading us into the new world of socialism.

That was why space considerations went, along with our last issue's announcement of the prospective table of contents. We mention the matter mainly as a reminder to anyone considering becoming a financial contributor to **Fourth International**. What a magazine we could put out with just a little more dough!

* * *

The sketches of St. John, Haywood and Doran are all taken from **The Liberator** of September 1918. Art Young was the artist. Together with John Reed, author of **Ten Days that Shook the World**, he covered the Chicago mass trial of IWW leaders and members for the socialist magazine. The caption under

the sketch of "Red" Doran is likewise from **The Liberator**. We thought it a good sample of the spirit of the Wobblies as they were.

* * *

Shouldn't the editor have condensed the first chapter of Plekhanov's study of Belinski, which appeared in the spring issue of **Fourth International**? This question is asked by Jeanne Morgan. She writes that she found the chapter rough going because of the obscurity today of the various figures Plekhanov takes up.

That's a standing problem we face in selecting material for the **Arsenal of Marxism**. Why include references to figures and issues of only academic interest today?

One reason why we think it better to include them is that an article sometimes achieves a historic importance that requires reprinting it in full. Engels explains this in the case of the **Communist Manifesto** which is published to this day with all the polemics against sects that died a century ago.

The other reason is our reaction to the vicious (and we mean vicious) Stalinist habit of condensing, slashing and excerpting from the Marxist classics, always with a tendentious aim. Why must they be the judges of what is applicable today and what has lost its timeliness? Why not the reader?

Our policy is to present the original as it went into the historic record; and, where it is within our means, to provide explanatory editorial notes. Sorry we couldn't do this for the first chapter of Plekhanov's work on Belinski.

Incidentally, Jeanne Morgan expresses her "admiration and pleasure with what must surely be a beautifully fluid translation."

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The I.W.W.

(On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding Convention)

by James P. Cannon

1. The Bold Design

WHEN the Founding Convention of the IWW — the Industrial Workers of the World — assembled in Chicago in June, 1905, the general strike movement initiating the first Russian revolution was already under way, and its reverberations were heard in the convention hall. The two events coincided to give the world a preview of its future. The leaders at Chicago hailed the Russian revolution as their own. The two simultaneous actions, arising independently with half a world between them, signaled the opening of a revolutionary century. They were the anticipations of things to come.

The defeated Russian revolution of 1905 prepared the way for the victorious revolution of 1917. It was the "dress rehearsal," as Lenin said, and that evaluation is now universally recognized. The Founding Convention of the IWW was also a rehearsal; and it may well stand out in the final account as no less important than the Russian action at the same time.

The founders of the IWW were indubitably the original inspirers and prime movers of the modern industrial unions in the mass production industries. That is commonly admitted already, and that's a lot. But even such a recognition of the IWW, as the precursor of the present CIO, falls far short of a full estimate of its historic significance. The CIO movement, at its present stage of development, is only a small down payment on the demands presented to the future by the pioneers who assembled at the 1905 Convention to start the IWW on its way.

The Founding Convention of the IWW brought together on a common platform the three giants among our ancestors — Debs, Haywood and De Leon. They came from different backgrounds and fields of activity, and they soon parted company again. But the things they said and did, that one time they teamed up to set a new movement on foot, could not be undone. They wrote a Charter for the American working class which has already inspired and influenced more than one generation of labor militants. And in its main essentials it will influence other generations yet to come.

They were big men, and they all grew taller when they stood together. They were distinguished from their contemporaries, as from the trade-union leaders of today, by the immensity of their ambition which transcended personal concerns, by their far-reaching vision of a world

to be remade by the power of the organized workers, and by their total commitment to that endeavor.

The great majority of the other delegates who answered the call to the Founding Convention of the IWW were people of the same quality. They were the non-conformists, the stiff-necked irreconcilables, at war with capitalist society. Radicals, rebels and revolutionists started the IWW, as they have started every other progressive movement in the history of this country.

In these days when labor leaders try their best to talk like probationary members of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, it is refreshing to turn back to the reports of men who spoke a different language. Debs, Haywood and De Leon, and those who stood with them, did not believe in the partnership of capital and labor, as preached by Gompers and Co. at the time. Such talk, they said in the famous "Preamble" to the Constitution of the IWW, "misleads the workers." They spoke out in advance against the idea of the permanent "co-existence" of labor unions and the private ownership of industry, as championed by the CIO leaders of the present time.

The men who founded the IWW were pioneer industrial unionists, and the great industrial unions of today stem directly from them. But they aimed far beyond industrial unionism as a bargaining agency recognizing the private ownership of industry as right and unchangeable. They saw the relations of capital and labor as a state of war.

Brissenden puts their main idea in a nutshell in his factually correct history of the movement: "The idea of the class conflict was really the bottom notion or 'first cause' of the IWW. The industrial union type was adopted because it would make it possible to wage this class war under more favorable conditions." (*The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism*, by Paul Frederick Brissenden, p. 108.)

The founders of the IWW regarded the organization of industrial unions as a means to an end; and the end they had in view was the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a new social order. This, the heart and soul of their program, still awaits its vindication in the revolution of the American workers. And the revolution, when it arrives, will not neglect to acknowledge its anticipation at the Founding Convention of the IWW. For nothing less than the revolutionary goal of the workers' struggle was openly proclaimed there 50 years ago.

* * *

The bold design was drawn by Bill Haywood, General Secretary of the Western Federation of Miners, who pre-

sided at the Founding Convention of the IWW. In his opening remarks, calling the convention to order, he said:

"This is the Continental Congress of the working class. We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working class movement that shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism." (*Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World*, p. 1.)

The trade unions today are beginning to catch up with the idea that Negroes are human beings, that they have a right to make a living and belong to a union. The IWW was 50 years ahead of them on this question, as on many others. Many of the old Gompers unions were lily-white job trusts, barring Negroes from membership and the right to employment in their jurisdictions. Haywood, in his opening speech, indignantly denounced the policy of those unions "affiliated with the A.F. of L., which in their constitution and by-laws prohibit the initiation of or conferring the obligation on a colored man." He followed, in his speech at the public ratification meeting, with the declaration that the newly-launched organization "recognizes neither race, creed, color, sex or previous condition of servitude." (*Proceedings*, p. 575.)

And he wound up with the prophetic suggestion that the American workers take the Russian path. He said he hoped to see the new movement "grow throughout this country until it takes in a great majority of the working people, and that those working people will rise in revolt against the capitalist system as the working class in Russia are doing today." (*Proceedings*, p. 580.)

Debs said: "The supreme need of the hour is a sound, revolutionary working class organization . . . It must express the class struggle. It must recognize the class lines. It must, of course, be class conscious. It must be totally uncompromising. It must be an organization of the rank and file." (*Proceedings*, p. 144,146.)

De Leon, for his part, said: "I have had but one foe -- and that foe is the capitalist class . . . The ideal is the overthrow of the capitalist class." (*Proceedings*, p. 147,149.)

De Leon, the thinker, was already projecting his thought beyond the overthrow of capitalism to "the form of the governmental administration of the Republic of Labor." In a post-convention speech at Minneapolis on "The Preamble of the I.W.W." he said that the industries, "regardless of former political boundaries, will be the constituencies of that new central authority the rough scaffolding of which was raised last week in Chicago. Where the General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World will sit there will be the nation's capital." (*Socialist Reconstruction of Society*, by Daniel De Leon.)

The speeches of the others, and the official statement adopted by the Convention in the Preamble to the Constitution, followed the same line. The Preamble began with the flat affirmation of the class struggle: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." Following that it said: "Between these two classes a struggle must go on until all the workers come

together on the political, as well as on the industrial field, and take and hold" the industries of the country.

These were the most uncompromising, the most unambiguous declarations of revolutionary intention ever issued in this country up to that time. The goal of socialism had been previously envisioned by others. But at the Founding Convention of the IWW the idea that it was to be realized through a struggle for power, and that the power of the workers must be organized, was clearly formulated and nailed down.

The men of 1905 spoke truer than they knew, if only as anticipators of a historical work which still awaits its completion by others. Between that date of origin and the beginning of its decline after the First World War, the IWW wrote an ineradicable record in action. But its place as a great progressive factor in American history is securely fixed by the brave and far-seeing pronouncements of its founding convention alone. The ideas were the seed of the action.

The IWW had its own forebears, for the revolutionary labor movement is an unbroken continuum. Behind the convention assembled in Chicago fifty years ago stood the Knights of Labor; the eight-hour movement led by the Haymarket martyrs; the great industrial union strike of the American Railway Union; the stormy battles of the Western Federation of Miners; and the two socialist political organizations — the old Socialist Labor Party and the newly-formed Socialist Party.

All these preceding endeavors were tributary to the first convention of the IWW, and were represented there by participants. Lucy Parsons, the widow and comrade-in-arms of the noble martyr, was a delegate, as was Mother Jones, the revered leader of the miners, the symbol of their hope and courage in trial and tribulation.

These earlier movements and struggles, rich and tragic experiences, had prepared the way for the Founding Convention of the IWW. But Debs was not far wrong when he said, in a speech a few months later: "The revolutionary movement of the working class will date from the year 1905, from the organization of the Industrial Workers of the World." (*Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, p. 226.)

2. An Organization Of Revolutionists

The IWW set out to be an industrial union movement uniting all workers, regardless of any differences between them, on the simple proposition that all unions start with — the defense of their immediate interests against the employers. As an industrial union, the IWW in its heyday led some memorable battles on the economic field, and set a pattern of organization and militant strike strategy for the later great struggles to build the CIO.

The CIO became possible only after and because the IWW had championed and popularized the program of industrial unionism in word and deed. That alone — the teaching and the example in the field of unionism — would be sufficient to establish the historical significance of the IWW as the initiator, the forerunner of the modern

industrial unions, and thereby to justify a thousand times over all the effort and sacrifice put into it by so many people.

But the IWW was more than a union. It was also — at the same time — a revolutionary organization whose simple and powerful ideas inspired and activated the best young militants of its time, the flower of a radical generation. That, above all, is what clothes the name of the IWW in glory.

The true character of the IWW as a revolutionary organization was convincingly demonstrated in its first formative year, in the internal conflict which resulted in a split at its second convention. This split occurred over questions which are normally the concern of political parties rather than of unions. Charles O. Sherman, the first general president of the IWW, was an exponent of the industrial-union form of organization. But that apparently was as far as he wanted to go, and it wasn't far enough for those who took the revolutionary pronouncements of the First Convention seriously. They were not satisfied with lip service to larger principles.

When the Second Convention of the IWW assembled in Chicago in September, 1906, Haywood was in jail in Idaho awaiting trial for his life; and Debs, never a man for factionalism, was standing aside. Vincent St. John, himself a prominent figure in the Western Federation of Miners, and a member of its delegation to the Second Convention of the IWW, came forward as the leader of the anti-Sherman forces, in alliance with De Leon.

As is customary in factional fights, all kinds of secondary charges were thrown about. But St. John stated the real issue motivating him and his supporters in his own invariably forthright manner. This resolute man was on the warpath at the Second Convention because, as he said:

"The administration of the I.W.W. was in the hands of men who were not in accord with the revolutionary program of the organization . . . The struggle for control of the organization formed the second convention into two camps. The majority vote of the convention was in the revolutionary camp. The reactionary camp, having the Chairman, used obstructive tactics in their effort to gain control of the convention . . . The revolutionists cut this knot by abolishing the office of President and electing a chairman from among the revolutionists." (*The I.W.W.: History, Structure and Methods*, by Vincent St. John.)

That action precipitated the split and consigned Sherman to a niche in history as a unique figure. He was the first, and is so far the only, union president on record to get dumped because he was *not* a revolutionist. There will be others, but Sherman's name will live in history as the prototype.

This split at the Second Convention also resulted in the disaffiliation of the Western Federation of Miners, the only strongly organized union the IWW had had to start with. The other members of the WFM delegation, already turning to conservatism, supported Sherman in

the split. But St. John, as was his nature and consistent practice, took his stand on principle.

Faced with a choice of affiliation between the widely advertised and well-heeled WFM, of which he was a paid officer, and the poverty-stricken, still obscure IWW, with its program and its principles, he unhesitatingly chose the latter. For him, as for all the others who counted in making IWW history, personal interests and questions of bread and butter unionism were secondary. The first allegiance was to revolutionary principle.

Sherman and his supporters, with the help of the police, seized the headquarters and held on to the funds of the organization, such as they were. St. John remarked that the newly elected officials "were obliged to begin work after the Second Convention without the equipment of so much as a postage stamp." (Brissenden, p. 144.) The new administration under the leadership of St. John, who was thereafter to be the dominating influence in the organization for the next decade, had to start from scratch with very little in the way of tangible assets except the program and the ideal.

That, plus the indomitable spirit of Vincent St. John, proved to be enough to hold the shattered organization together. The Sherman faction, supported by the Western Federation of Miners, set up a rival organization. But it didn't last long. The St. John wing prevailed in the post-convention conflict and proved itself to be the true IWW. But in the ensuing years it existed primarily, not as a mass industrial union of workers fighting for limited economic demands, but as a revolutionary organization proclaiming an all-out fight against the capitalist system.

As such, the IWW attracted a remarkable selection of young revolutionary militants to its banner. As a union, the organization led many strikes which swelled the membership momentarily. But after the strikes were over, whether won or lost, stable union organization was not maintained. After every strike, the membership settled down again to the die-hard cadre united on principle.

3. The Duality of the IWW

The IWW borrowed something from Marxism; quite a bit, in fact. Its two principal weapons — the doctrine of the class struggle and the idea that the workers must accomplish their own emancipation through their own organized power — came from this mighty arsenal. But for all that, the IWW was a genuinely indigenous product of its American environment, and its theory and practice ought to be considered against the background of the class struggle as it had developed up to that time in this country.

The experience of the American working class, which did not yet recognize itself as a distinct class, had been limited; and the generalizing thought, even of its best representatives, was correspondingly incomplete. The class struggle was active enough, but it had not yet developed beyond its primary stages. Conflicts had generally taken the form of localized guerrilla skirmishes, savagely con-

ducted on both sides, between separate groups of workers and employers. The political power brought to bear on the side of the employers was mainly that of local authorities.

Federal troops had broken the ARU strike of the railroaders in '94 — "the Debs Rebellion," as the hysterical press described it — and had also been called out against the metal miners in the West. But these were exceptional cases. The intervention of the federal government, as the executive committee of all the capitalists — the constant and predominant factor in capital-labor relations in modern times — was rarely seen in the local and sectional conflicts half a century ago. The workers generally made a distinction between local and federal authorities, in favor of the latter; — as do the great majority, in a delayed hangover from earlier times, even to this day.

The all-embracing struggle of all the workers as a class, against the capitalist class as a whole, with political power in the nation as the necessary goal of the struggle, was not yet discernible to many when the IWW made its entrance in 1905. The pronouncements of the founders of the IWW, and all the subsequent actions proceeding from them, should be read in that light. The restricted and limited scope of the class struggle in America up to that time, from which their program was derived, makes their prevision of 50 years ago stand out as all the more remarkable.

In the situation of that time, with the class struggle of the workers still in its most elementary stages, and many of its complications and complexities not yet disclosed in action, the leaders of the IWW foresaw the revolutionary goal of the working class and aimed at one single, over-all formula for the organization of the struggle. Putting everything under one head, they undertook to build an organization which, as Vincent St. John, its chief leader and inspirer after the Second Convention, expressed it, would be "all-sufficient for the workers' needs." One Big Union would do it all. There was an appealing power in the simplicity of this formula, but also a weakness — a contradiction — which experience was to reveal.

One of the most important contradictions of the IWW, implanted at its first convention and never resolved, was the dual role it assigned to itself. Not the least of the reasons for the eventual failure of the IWW — as an organization — was its attempt to be both a union of all workers and a propaganda society of selected revolutionists — in essence a revolutionary party. Two different tasks and functions, which, at a certain stage of development, require separate and distinct organizations, were assumed by the IWW alone; and this duality hampered its effectiveness in both fields. All that, and many other things, are clearer now than they were then to the leading militants of the IWW — or anyone else in this country.

The IWW announced itself as an all-inclusive union; and any worker ready for organization on an everyday union basis was invited to join, regardless of his views

and opinions on any other question. In a number of instances, in times of organization campaigns and strikes in separate localities, such all-inclusive membership was attained, if only for brief periods. But that did not prevent the IWW agitators from preaching the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in every strike meeting.

The strike meetings of the IWW were in truth "schools for socialism." The immediate issues of the strike were the take-off point for an exposition of the principle of the class struggle, for a full-scale indictment of the capitalist system all up and down the line, and the projection of a new social order of the free and equal.

The professed "non-political" policy of the IWW doesn't stand up very well against its actual record in action. The main burden of its energies was devoted to agitation and propaganda — in soap-box speeches, press, pamphlets and songbooks — against the existing social order; to defense campaigns in behalf of imprisoned workers; and to free-speech fights in numerous localities. All these activities were in the main, and in the proper meaning of the term, political.

The IWW at all times, even during strikes embracing masses of church-going, ordinarily conservative workers, acted as an organization of revolutionists. The "real IWW's," the year-round activists, were nicknamed Wobblies — just when and why nobody knows — and the criterion of the Wobbly was his stand on the principle of the class struggle and its revolutionary goal; and his readiness to commit his whole life to it.

In truth, the IWW in its time of glory was neither a union nor a party in the full meaning of these terms, but something of both, with some parts missing. It was an uncompleted anticipation of a Bolshevik party, lacking its rounded-out theory, and a projection of the revolutionary industrial unions of the future, minus the necessary mass membership. It was the IWW.

4. Vincent St. John

The second split of the IWW, which broke off De Leon and SLP elements at the Fourth (1908) Convention, likewise occurred over a doctrinal question. The issue this time was "political action" or, more correctly, conflicting conceptions of working class action in the class struggle which — properly understood — is essentially political.

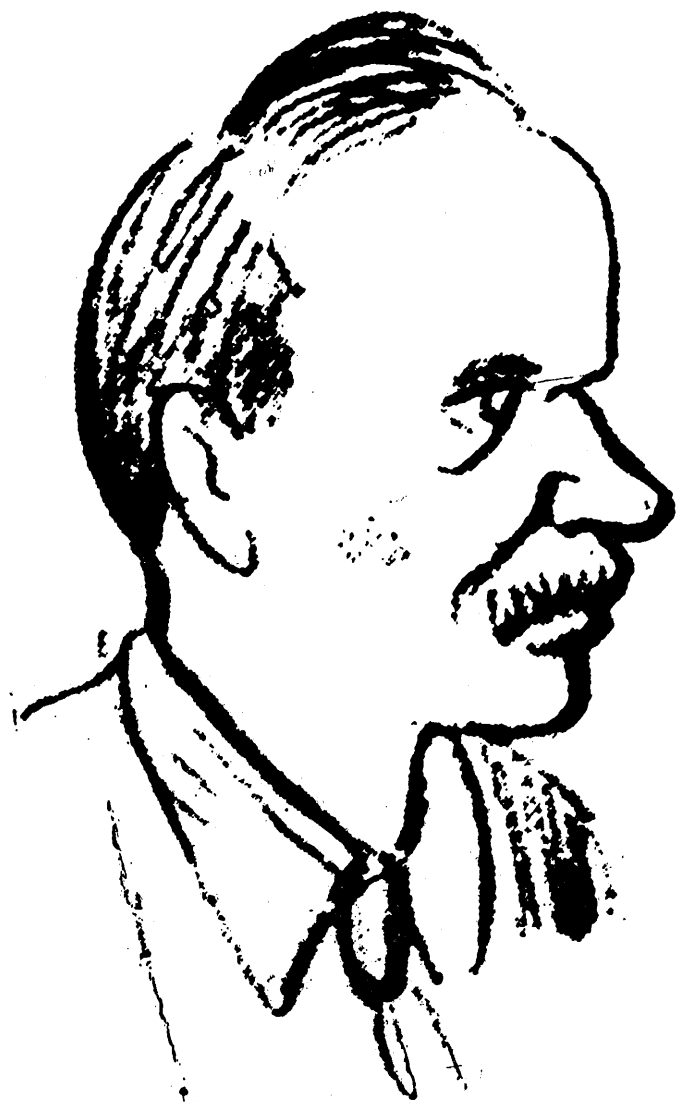
The real purpose of the split was to free the IWW from the Socialist Labor Party's ultra-legalistic, narrowly restricted and doctrinaire conception of "political action" at the ballot box; and to clear the way for the St. John conception of overthrowing capitalism by the "direct action" of the organized workers. This, by a definition which was certainly arbitrary and inexact, was declared to be completely "non-political."

In a negative gesture, the 1908 Convention merely threw the "political clause" out of the Preamble. Later, going overboard, the IWW explicitly disavowed "politics" altogether, and political parties along with it. The origin of this trend is commonly attributed to the influence of

French syndicalism. That is erroneous; although the IWW later imported some phrasemongering anti-political radicalism from Europe, to its detriment. Brissenden is correct when he says:

"The main ideas of I.W.W.-ism — certainly of the I.W.W.-ism of the first few years after 1905 — were of American origin, not French, as is commonly supposed. These sentiments were brewing in France, it is true, in the early nineties, but they were brewing also in this country and the American brew was essentially different from the French. It was only after 1908 that the *syndicalisme revolutionnaire* of France had any direct influence on the revolutionary industrial unionist movement here." (Brissenden, p. 53.)

The IWW brand of syndicalism, which its proponents insisted on calling "industrialism," never acknowledged French origination, and had no reason to. The IWW



VINCENT ST. JOHN

His public reputation was dimmed beside the glittering name of Bill Haywood, and this has misled the casual student of IWW history. But Vincent St. John was the organizer and leader of the cadres.

doctrine was *sui generis*, a native product of the American soil. And so was its chief author, Vincent St. John. St. John, as all the old-timers knew, was the man most responsible for shaping the character of the IWW in its heroic days. His public reputation was dimmed beside the glittering name of Bill Haywood, and this has misled the casual student of IWW history. But Vincent St. John was the organizer and leader of the cadres.

Haywood himself was a great man, worthy of his fame. He presided at the Founding Convention, and his magnificent utterances there have already been quoted in the introductory paragraphs of this article. The "Big Fellow" conducted himself as a hero of labor in his celebrated trial in Idaho, and again called himself thunderously to public attention in the great IWW strikes at Lawrence, Paterson and Akron. In 1914 he took over from St. John the office of General Secretary of the IWW, and thereafter stood at its head through all the storms of the war and the persecution. There is historical justice in the public identification of Bill Haywood's name with that of the IWW, as its personification.

But in the years 1906-1914, the years when the character of the IWW was fixed, and its basic cadres assembled, it was Vincent St. John who led the movement and directed all its operations. The story of the IWW would not be complete and would not be true if this chapter were omitted.

St. John, like Haywood, was a miner, a self-educated man who had come up to national prominence the hard way, out of the violent class battles of the western mining war. If "The Saint," as all his friends called him, borrowed something from the writings of others, and foreigners at that, he was scarcely aware of it. He was not a man of books; his school was his own experience and observation, and his creed was action. He had learned what he knew, which was quite a lot, mainly from life and his dealings with people, and he drew his conclusions from that.

This empiricism was his strength and his weakness. As an executive leader in practical situations he was superb, full of ideas — "enough to patch hell a mile" — and ready for action to apply them. In action he favored the quick, drastic decision, the short cut. This propensity had yielded rich results in his work as a field leader of the Western Federation of Miners. He was widely renowned in the western mining camps and his power was recognized by friend and foe. Brissenden quotes a typical report about him by a mine-owners' detective agency in 1906:

"St. John has given the mine owners of the [Colorado mining] district more trouble in the past year than any twenty men up there. If left undisturbed he would have the entire district organized in another year."

In dealing with people — "handling men," as they used to say — Vincent St. John had no equal that I ever knew. He "sized up" men with a quick insight, compounded of simplicity and guile, spotting and sifting out the phonies and the dabblers — you had to be serious to get along with The Saint — and putting the others

to work in his school of learning by doing, and getting the best out of them.

"Experience," "decision" and "action" were the key words in St. John's criteria. He thought a man was what he did. It was commonplace for him to pass approving judgment on an organizer with the remark, "He has had plenty of experience," or "He'll be all right when he gets more experience." And once I heard him say, with a certain reservation, of another who was regarded as a comer in the organization: "He's a good speaker, but I don't know how much decision he has." In his vocabulary "experience" meant tests under fire. "Decision" meant the capacity to think and act at the same time; to do what had to be done right off the bat, with no "philosophizing" or fooling around.

St. John's positive qualities as a man of decision and action were contagious; like attracted like and he created an organization in his own image. He was not a backslapper but a leader, with the reserve that befits a leader, and he didn't win men by argument alone. In fact, he was a man of few words. The Saint lived his ideas and methods. He radiated sincerity and integrity, and unselfishness free from taint or ostentation. The air was clean in his presence.

The young men who fought under his command — a notable cadre in their time — swore by The Saint. They trusted him. They felt that he was their friend, that he cared for them and that they could always get a square deal from him, or a little better, as long as they were on the square with the organization. John S. Gamba, in his book, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, a postscript to Brissenden's history, remarks: "I have heard it said that St. John, among outstanding leaders, was the best loved and most completely trusted official the I.W.W. have ever had." He heard it right.

The IWW, as it evolved under the influence of St. John, scornfully rejected the narrow concept of "political action" as limited to parliamentary procedures. St. John understood the class struggle as a ruthless struggle for power. Nothing less and no other way would do; he was as sure of that as Lenin was. He judged socialist "politics" and political parties by the two examples before his eyes — the Socialist Party bossed by Berger and Hillquit and the Socialist Labor Party of De Leon — and he didn't like either of them.

That attitude was certainly right as far as it went. Berger was a small-bore socialist opportunist; and Hillquit, although slicker and more sophisticated, wasn't much better. He merely supplied a little radical phraseology to shield the cruder Bergerism from the attacks of the left.

De Leon, of course, was far superior to these pretentious pygmies; he towered above them. But De Leon, with all his great merits and capacities; with his exemplary selflessness and his complete and unconditional dedication to the workers' cause; with the enemies he made, for which he is entitled to our love and admiration — with all that, De Leon was sectarian in

his tactics, and his conception of political action was rigidly formalistic, and rendered sterile by legalistic fetishism.

In my opinion, St. John was completely right in his hostility to Berger-Hillquit, and more than half right in his break with De Leon. His objections to the parliamentary reformism of Berger-Hillquit and the ultra-legalism of the SLP contained much that must now be recognized as sound and correct. The error was in the universal opposition, based on these poor and limited examples, to all "politics" and all political parties. The flaw in his conceptions was in their incompleteness, which left them open, first to exaggeration and then to a false turn.

St. John's cultivated bent to learn from his own limited and localized experience and observations in life rather than from books, and to aim at simple solutions in direct action, deprived him of the benefits of a more comprehensive theory generalized by others from the world-wide experiences of the class struggle. And this was true in general of the IWW as a movement. Over-simplification placed some crippling limitations on its general conceptions which, in their eventual development, in situations that were far from simple, were to prove fatal for the IWW. But this took time. It took the First World War and the Russian Revolution to reveal in full scope the incompleteness of the governing thought of the IWW.

5. The Long Detour

The IWW's disdain for parliamentarism, which came to be interpreted as a rejection of all "politics" and political organizations, was not impressed on a body of members with blank minds. The main activities of the IWW, in fields imposed upon it by the conditions of the time, almost automatically yielded recruits whose own tendencies and predilections had been shaped along the same lines by their own experiences.

The IWW plan of organization was made to order for modern mass production industry in the eastern half of the country, where the main power of the workers was concentrated. But the power of the exploiting class was concentrated there too, and organizing the workers against the entrenched corporations was easier said than done.

The IWW program of revolution was designed above all to express the implicit tendency of the main mass of the basic proletariat in the trustified industries of the East. The chance for a wage worker to change his class status and become an independent proprietor or a small farmer, was far less alluring there than on the western frontier, where such class transmigrations still could, and in many cases actually did, take place. If the logic of the class struggle had worked out formally — as it always does in due time — those workers in the industrial centers east of the Mississippi should have been the most class conscious and the most receptive to the IWW appeal.

But that's not the way things worked out in practice in the time when the IWW was making its strongest efforts. The organization never succeeded in establish-

ing stable unions among the workers in modern machine industry in the industrially developed East. On the contrary, its predominant activity expanded along the lines of least resistance on the peripheral western fringes of the country, which at that time were still under construction. The IWW found a readier response to its appeal and recruited its main cadres among the marginal and migratory workers in that region.

This apparent anomaly — which is really nothing more than the time lag between reality and consciousness — has been seen many times in international experience. Those workers most prepared for socialism by industrial development are not always the first to recognize it.

The revolutionary movement recruits first, not where it chooses but where it can, and uses the first recruits as the cadres of the organization and the carriers of the doctrine. Marxist socialism, the logical and necessary answer to developed capitalism, got its poorest start and was longest delayed in England, the pre-eminent center of world capitalism in the time of Marx and Engels, while it flourished in Germany before its great industrialization. The same Marxism, as developed by Lenin in the actual struggle for power — under the nickname of Bolshevism — is the program *par excellence* for America, the most advanced capitalist country; but it scored its first victory in industrially backward Russia.

The economic factor eventually predominates, and the class struggle runs its logical course everywhere — but only in the long run, not in a straight line. The class struggle of the workers in all its manifestations, from the most elementary action of a union organization up to the revolution, breaks the chain of capitalist resistance at the weakest link.

So it was in the case of the IWW. Simply having the right form of organization did not provide the IWW with the key to quick victory in the trustified industries. The founders, at the 1905 Convention, had noted and emphasized the helplessness of obsolete craft unionism in this field; that was their stated motivation for proposing the industrial union form of organization. But, for a long time, the same concentrated power that had broken up the old craft unions in modern industry was also strong enough to prevent their replacement by new unions in the industrial form.

The meager success of the IWW in establishing revolutionary industrial unions in their natural habitat was not due to lack of effort. Time and again the IWW tried to crack the trustified industries, including steel, but was beaten back every time. All the heroic attempts of the IWW to organize in this field were isolated and broken up at the start.

The employers fought the new unionism in dead earnest. Against the program of the IWW and its little band of agitators, they brought up the heavy guns of their financial resources; public opinion moulded in their favor by press and pulpit; their private armies of labor spies and thugs; and, always and everywhere, the police

power of that “political state” which the IWW didn’t want to recognize.

In all the most militant years of the IWW the best it could accomplish in modern mass production industry were localized strikes, nearly all of which were defeated. The victorious Lawrence textile strike of 1912, which established the national fame of the IWW, was the glorious exception. But no stable and permanent union organization was ever maintained anywhere in the East for any length of time — not even in Lawrence.

From the formulation of the industrial union program of the IWW at the 1905 Convention to its eventual realization in life in the mass production industries, there was a long rough road with a wide detour. It took 30 years of propaganda and trial-and-error effort, and then a mass upheaval of volcanic power generated by an unprecedented economic crisis, before the fortresses of mass production industry could be stormed and conquered by industrial unionism. But the time for such an invincible mass revolt had not yet come when the IWW first sounded the call and launched its pioneering campaigns.

Meantime, defeated and repulsed in the industrialized East, where the workers were not yet ready for organization and the corporations were more than ready to prevent it, the IWW found its best response and concentrated its main activity in the West. It scored some successes and built up an organization primarily among the seasonal and migratory workers there.

6. The Wobblies as They Were

There was no such thing as “full employment” in the time of the IWW. The economic cycle ran its normal ten-year course, with its periodic crises and depressions, producing a surplus labor army squeezed out of industry in the East. Unemployment rose and fell with the turns of the cycle, but was always a permanent feature of the times. An economic crisis in 1907 and a serious depression in 1913-1914 swelled the army of the jobless.

Many of the unemployed workers, especially the young, took to the road, as those of another generation were to do again in the Thirties. The developing West had need of a floating labor force, and the supply drifted toward the demand. A large part of the mobile labor population in the West at that time, perhaps a majority, originated in the eastern half of the continent. Their conditions of life were pretty rough.

They were not the most decisive section of the working class; that resided, then as now, in the industrial centers of the eastern half of the continent. But these migrants, wherever they came from, responded most readily to the IWW program for a drastic change in the social order.

The IWW was right at home among footloose workers who found casual employment in the harvest fields — traveling by freight train to follow the ripening of the grain, then back by freight train again to the transportation centers for any kind of work they could

find there; railroad construction workers, shipping out for temporary jobs and then shipping back to the cities into unemployment again; lumberjacks, metal miners, seamen, etc., who lived in insecurity and worked, when they worked, under the harshest, most primitive conditions.

This narrow stratum of the unsettled and least privileged workers came to make up the bulk of the membership of the IWW. It was often said among the Wobblies, only half facetiously, that the name of their organization, "Industrial Workers of the World," should be changed to "Migratory Workers of the World."

The American political system offered no place for the participation of this floating labor force of the expanding West. Very little provision of any kind was made for them. They were overlooked in the whole scheme of things. They lacked the residential qualifications to vote in elections and enjoyed few of the rights of political democracy accorded to settled citizens with a stake in their community. They were the dispossessed, the homeless outcasts, without roots or a stake any place in society, and with nothing to lose.

Since they had no right to vote anyway, it took little argument to persuade them that "political action" — at the ballot box — was a delusion and a snare. They had already been convinced, by their own harsh experiences, that it would take more than paper ballots to induce the exploiters to surrender their swollen privileges. The IWW, with its bold and sweeping program of revolution by direct action, spoke their language and they heard it gladly.

The IWW became for them their one all-sufficient organization — their union and their party; their social center; their home; their family; their school; and in a manner of speaking, their religion, without the supernatural trimmings — the faith they lived by. Some of Joe Hill's finest songs, it should be remembered, were derisive parodies of the religious hymns of the IWW's rivals in the fight for the souls of the migratory workers milling around in the congested Skid Row sections of the western and mid-western cities.

These were not the derelicts who populate the present-day version of the old Skid Row. For the greater part, they were the young and venturesome, who had been forced out of the main industries in more settled communities, or had wandered away from them in search of opportunity and adventure. They had been badly bruised and beaten, but not conquered. They had the courage and the will to fight for an alleviation of their own harsh conditions.

But when they enlisted in the IWW it meant far more to them than joining a union to promote a picayune program of immediate personal needs. The IWW proclaimed that by solidarity they could win everything. It gave them a vision of a new world and inspired them to fight for the general good of the whole working class.

These footloose workers, recruited by the propaganda and action of the IWW, became the carriers of its great, profoundly simple message wherever they traveled — the

message expressed in the magic words: Solidarity, Workers' Power, One Big Union and Workers' Emancipation. Wherever they went, they affirmed their conviction that "there is power in a band of working men," as stated in the singing words of Joe Hill — "a power that must rule in every land."

They felt themselves to be — as indeed they were — the advance guard of an emancipating army. But it was an advance guard separated from the main body of troops in concentrated industry, separated and encircled, and compelled to wage guerrilla actions while awaiting reinforcements from the main army of the proletariat in the East. It was a singing movement, with confidence in its mission. When the Wobblies sang out the swelling chorus of "Hold the Fort," they "heard the bugles blow" and really believed that "by our union we shall triumph over every foe."

Recruits enlisted in the main from this milieu soon came to make up the main cadres of the IWW; to provide its shock troops in all its battles, east and west; and to impress their own specific ideology upon it — the ideology which was in part the developed result of their own experiences, and in part derived from teachings of the IWW. These teachings seemed to formulate and systematize their own tendencies. That's why they accepted them so readily.

* * *

Many a worker recruited to the IWW under those conditions was soon on the move again, carrying his red card and his newly found convictions with him and



John T. Doran, known as "Red Doran," who concluded his five hour speech to the jury by saying: "It is customary with I.W.W. speakers to take up a collection; but under these circumstances, I think we will dispense with it."

transmitting them to others. All the progressive and radical sections of the labor movement were heavily influenced by the IWW in the years preceding the First World War.

The left-wing socialists were ardent sympathizers of the IWW, and quite a few of them were members. The same was true in large measure of the more militant trade unionists in the AFL. "Two-card men" were fairly numerous — those who belonged to the AFL unions for bread and butter reasons and carried the "red card" of the IWW for the sake of principle.

The IWW struck a spark in the heart of youth as no other movement in this country, before or since, has done. Young idealists from "the winds' four quarters" came to the IWW and gave it all they had. The movement had its gifted strike leaders, organizers and orators, its poets and its martyrs.

By the accumulated weight of its unceasing propagandistic efforts, and by the influence of its heroic actions on many occasions which were sensationally publicized, the IWW eventually permeated a whole generation of American radicals, of all shades and affiliations, with its concept of industrial unionism as the best form for the organization of workers' power and its program for a revolutionary settlement of the class struggle.

* * *

It was a long way from the pioneer crusade of the IWW among the dispossessed migratory workers on the western frontier, in the second decade of our century, to the invincible picket lines and sit-down strikes of the mass production workers in the eastern centers of concentrated industry, in the Thirties. A long way and not a straight one. But that's the route over which the message of industrial unionism eventually reached those places where it was most applicable and could eventually explode with the greatest power.

7. The Turning Point

The whole record of the IWW — or at any rate, the best part of it, the positive revolutionary part — was all written in propaganda and action in its first 15 years. That is the enduring story. The rest is anti-climax.

The turning point came with the entrance of the United States into the First World War in the spring of 1917, and the Russian Revolution in the same year. Then "politics," which the IWW had disavowed and cast out, came back and broke down the door.

These two events — again coinciding in Russia and America, as in 1905 — demonstrated that "political action" was not merely a matter of the ballot box, subordinate to the direct conflict of the unions and employers on the economic field, but the very essence of the class struggle. In opposing actions of two different classes the "political state," which the IWW had thought to ignore, was revealed as the centralized power of the ruling class; and the holding of the state power showed in each case which class was really ruling.

From one side, this was shown when the Federal Gov-

ernment of the United States intervened directly to break up the concentration points of the IWW by wholesale arrests of its activists. The "political action" of the capitalist state broke the back of the IWW as a union. The IWW was compelled to transform its principal activities into those of a defense organization, striving by legal methods and propaganda, to protect the political and civil rights of its members against the depredations of the capitalist state power.

From the other side, the same determining role of political action was demonstrated positively by the Russian Revolution. The Russian workers took the state power into their own hands and used that power to expropriate the capitalists and suppress all attempts at counter-revolution. That, in fact, was the first stage of the revolution, the pre-condition for all that was to follow. Moreover, the organizing and directing center of the victorious Revolution had turned out to be, not an all-inclusive union, but a party of selected revolutionists united by a program and bound by discipline.

The time had come for the IWW to remember Haywood's prophetic injunction at the Founding Convention in 1905: that the American workers should look to Russia and follow the Russian example. By war and revolution, the most imperative of all authorities, the IWW was put on notice to bring its theoretical conceptions up to date; to think and learn, and change a little.

First indications were that this would be done; the Bolshevik victory was hailed with enthusiasm by the members of the IWW. In their first reaction, it is safe to say, they saw in it the completion and vindication of their own endeavors. But this first impulse was not followed through.

Some of the leading Wobblies, including Haywood himself, tried to learn the lessons of the war and the Russian Revolution and to adjust their thinking to them. But the big majority, after several years of wavering, went the other way. That sealed the doom of the IWW. Its tragic failure to look, listen and learn from the two great events condemned it to defeat and decay.

The governing role of theory here asserted itself supremely, and in short order. While the IWW was settling down in ossification, converting its uncompleted conceptions about the real meaning of political action and political parties into a sterile anti-political dogma, the thinking of others was catching up with reality, with the great new things happening in the world. The others, the young left-wing socialists, soon to call themselves Communists, lacked the battle-tested cadres of the IWW. But they had the correct program. That proved to be decisive.

The newly formed Communist Party soon outstripped the IWW and left it on the sidelines. It was all decided within the space of two or three years. By the time of its fifteenth anniversary in 1920 the IWW had already entered the irreversible road of decline. Its strength was spent. Most of its cadres, the precious human material selected and sifted out in heroic struggle, went down with the organization. They had borne persecution admirably,

but the problems raised by it, and by all the great new events, overwhelmed them. The best militants fell into inactivity and then dropped out. The second-raters took over and completed the wreck and the ruin.

* * *

The failure of the main cadres of the IWW to become integrated in the new movement for the Communist Party in this country, inspired by the Russian Revolution, was a historical miscarriage which might have been prevented.

In action the IWW had been the most militant, the most revolutionary section of the workers' vanguard in this country. The IWW, while calling itself a union, was much nearer to Lenin's conception of a party of professional revolutionists than any other organization calling itself a party at that time. In their practice, and partly also in their theory, the Wobblies were closer to Lenin's Bolsheviks than any other group in this country.

There should have been a fusion. But, in a fast-moving situation, a number of untoward circumstances, combined with the inadequacy of the American communist leadership, barred the way.

The failure of the IWW to find a place in the new movement assembling under the banner of the Russian Revolution, was not the fault of the Russians. They recognized the IWW as a rightful part of the movement they represented and made repeated attempts to include it in the new unification of forces. The first manifesto of the Communist International specified the American IWW as one of the organizations invited to join. Later, in 1920, the Executive Committee of the Communist International addressed a special Open Letter to the IWW, inviting its cooperation.

The letter explained, in the tone of brothers speaking to brothers, that the revolutionary parliamentarism of the Communist International had nothing in common with the ballot-box fetishism and piddling reformism of the right-wing socialists. Haywood says of that letter: "After I had finished reading it I called Ralph Chaplin over to my desk and said to him: 'Here is what we have been dreaming about; here is the I.W.W. all feathered out!'" (*Bill Haywood's Book*, p. 360.)

In war-time France Trotsky had found his best friends and closest collaborators in the fight against the war among the syndicalists. After the Russian Revolution, in a notable series of letters, published later as a pamphlet, he urged them to join forces with the communists. The theses adopted by the Communist International at its Second Congress recognized the progressive and revolutionary side of pre-war syndicalism, and said it represented a step forward from the ideology of the Second International. The theses attempted to explain at the same time, in the most patient and friendly manner, the errors and limitations of syndicalism on the question of the revolutionary party and its role.

Perhaps the chief circumstance operating against a patient and fruitful discussion, and an orderly transition of the IWW to the higher ground of Bolshevism, was the

furious persecution of the IWW at the time. When the Russian Revolution erupted in the victory in November, 1917, hundreds of the IWW activists were held in jail under excessive bail, awaiting trial. Following their conviction a year later, they were sentenced to long terms in the Federal Penitentiary.

This imprisonment cut them off from contact with the great new events, and operated against the free exchange



BILL HAYWOOD

"This is the Continental Congress of the working class. We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working class movement that shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism."

of ideas which might have resulted in an agreement and fusion with the dynamically developing left-wing socialist movement headed toward the new Communist Party. The IWW as an organization was compelled to divert its entire activity into its campaign to provide legal defense for its victimized members. The members of the organization had little time or thought for other things, including the one all-important thing — the assimilation of the lessons of the war and the Russian Revolution.

Despite that, a number of IWW men heard the new word from Russia and followed it. They recognized in Bolshevism the rounding out and completion of their own revolutionary conceptions, and joined the Communist Party. Haywood expressed their trend of thought succinctly, in an interview with Max Eastman, published in *The Liberator*, April, 1921:

"'I feel as if I'd always been there,' he said to me.

'You remember I used to say that all we needed was fifty thousand real I.W.W.'s, and then about a million members to back them up? Well, isn't that a similar idea? At least I always realized that the essential thing was to have an organization of *those who know*.'

As class-conscious men of action, the Wobblies, "the real IWW's," had always worked together as a body to influence the larger mass. Their practice contained the essential idea of the Leninist conception of the relation between the party and the class. The Bolsheviks, being men of theory in all their action, formulated it more precisely and developed it to its logical conclusion in the organization of those class-conscious elements into a party of their own.

All that seemed clear to me at the time, and I had great hopes that at least a large section of the Wobblies would recognize it. I did all I could to convince them. I made especially persistent efforts to convince Vincent St. John himself, and almost succeeded; I didn't know how close I had come until later, when it was too late.

When he was released from the Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth on bond — I think it was in the early part of 1919 — The Saint stopped over in Kansas City and visited me. We talked about the Russian Revolution night and day. I believe he was as sympathetic at that time as I was. The revolution was an *action* — and that's what he believed in. But he had not yet begun to grapple with the idea that the Russian way would be applicable to this country, and that the IWW would have to recognize it.

His hostility to a "party" and "politicians," based on what he had seen of such things in this country, was the fixed obstacle. I noted, however, that he did not argue back, but mainly listened to what I had to say. A year or so later we had several other discussions in New York, when he was still out on bail before he was returned to prison in the fall of 1921. We talked a great deal on those occasions; or rather, I did, and The Saint listened.

In addition to my proselytizing zeal for communism in those days, I had a strong personal motivation for trying to win over Vincent St. John to the new movement. Coming from the syndicalistic background of the IWW, with its strong anti-intellectual emphasis, I had been plunged up to my neck in the internal struggles of the young Communist Party and association with its leading people. They were nearly all young intellectuals, without any experience or feel for the mass movement and the "direct action" of the class struggle. I was not very much at home in that milieu; I was lonesome for people of my own kind.

I had overcome my own "anti-intellectualism" to a considerable extent; but I knew for sure that the Communist Party would never find its way to the mass movement of the workers with a purely intellectualistic leadership. I was looking for re-inforcements for a proletarian counter-balance on the other side, and I thought that if I could win over St. John it would make a big difference. In fact, I knew it.

I remember the occasion when I made the final effort with The Saint. The two of us went together to have dinner and spend the night as guests of Carlo Tresca and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn at their cottage on Staten Island beach. We spent very little time looking at the ocean, although that was the first time I had ever seen it. All through the dinner hour, and nearly all through the night, we discussed my thesis that the future belonged to the Communist Party; and that the IWW militants should not abandon the new party to the intellectuals, but come into it and help to shape its proletarian character.

As in the previous discussions, I did practically all the talking. The Saint listened, as did the others. There was no definite conclusion to the long discussion; neither expressed rejection nor acceptance of my proposals. But I began to feel worn-out with the effort and let it go at that.

A short time later St. John returned to Chicago. The officials in charge of the IWW center there were hostile to communism and were embroiled in some bitter quarrels with a pro-communist IWW group in Chicago. I don't know what the immediate occasion was, but St. John was drawn into the conflict and took a stand with the anti-communist group. Then, as was natural for him in any kind of a crisis, once he had made up his mind he took charge of the situation and began to steer the organization definitely away from cooperation with the communists.

Years later — in 1926 — when Elizabeth Gurley Flynn herself finally came over to the Communist Party and was working with us in the International Labor Defense, she recalled that night's discussion on Staten Island and said: "Did you know you almost convinced The Saint that night? If you had tried a little harder you might have won him over." I hadn't known it; and when she told me that, I was deeply sorry that I had not tried just "a little harder."

The Saint was crowding 50 at that time, and jail and prison had taken their toll. He was a bit tired, and he may have felt that it was too late to start over again in a new field where he, like all of us, had much to learn. Whatever the reason for the failure, I still look back on it regretfully. Vincent St. John, and the IWW militants he would have brought along, could have made a big difference in everything that went on in the CP in the Twenties.

8. The Heritage

The eventual failure of the IWW to remain true to its original self, and to claim its own heritage, does not invalidate its great contributions in propaganda and action to the revolutionary movement which succeeds it. The IWW in its best days was more right than wrong, and all that was right remains the permanent acquisition of the American workers. Even some of the IWW propositions which seemed to be wrong — only because the times were not ripe for their full realization — will find their vindication in the coming period.

The IWW's conception of a Republic of Labor, based on occupational representation, replacing the present political state with its territorial form of representation, was a remarkable prevision of the course of development which must necessarily follow from the victory of the workers in this country. This new and different form of social organization was projected at the Founding Convention of the IWW even before the Russian Bolsheviks had recognized the Workers Councils, which had arisen spontaneously in the 1905 Revolution, as the future governmental form.

The IWW program of *industrial* unionism was certainly right, although it came too early for fulfillment under the IWW banner. This has already been proved to the hilt in the emergence and consolidation of the CIO.

The IWW theory of *revolutionary* unionism likewise came too early for general acceptance in the epoch of ascending capitalism in this country. It could not be realized on a wide scale in the time of the IWW. But *reformist* unions, in the present epoch of imperialist decay, have already become anachronistic and are confronted with an ultimatum from history to change their character or cease to be.

The mass industrial unions of workers, by the fact of their existence, instinctively strive toward socialism. With a capitalist-minded leadership, they are a house divided against itself, half slave and half free. That cannot stand. The stage is being set for the transformation of the reformist unions into revolutionary unions, as they were projected by the IWW half a century ago.

The great contradiction of the labor movement today is the disparity between the mass unions with their organized millions and the revolutionary party which still remains only a nucleus, and their separation from each other. The unity of the vanguard and the class, which the IWW tried to achieve in one organization, was shattered because the time was not ripe and the formula was inadequate. The time is now approaching when this anti-thetic separation must give way to a new synthesis.

This synthesis — the unity of the class and the socialist vanguard — will be arrived at in the coming period in a different way from that attempted by the IWW. It will not be accomplished by a single organization. The building of a separate party organization of the socialist vanguard is the key to the resolution of the present contradiction of the labor movement. This will not be a barrier to working class unity but the necessary condition for it.

The working class can be really united only when it becomes a class *for itself*, consciously fighting the exploiters as a class. The ruling bureaucrats, who preach and practice class collaboration, constitute in effect a pro-capitalist party in the trade unions. The party of the socialist vanguard represents the consciousness of the class. Its organization signifies not a split of the class movement of the workers, but a division of labor within it, to facilitate and effectuate its unification on a revolutionary basis; that is, as a class for itself.

As an organization of revolutionists, united not simply

by the immediate economic interests which bind all workers together in a union, but by doctrine and program, the IWW was in practice, if not in theory, far ahead of other experiments along this line in its time, even though the IWW called itself a union and others called themselves parties.

That was the IWW's greatest contribution to the American labor movement — in the present stage of its development and in those to come. Its unfading claim to grateful remembrance will rest in the last analysis on the pioneering role it played as the first great anticipation of the revolutionary party which the vanguard of the American workers will fashion to organize and lead their emancipating revolution.

This conception of an organization of revolutionists has to be completed and rounded out, and recognized as the most essential, the most powerful of all designs in the epoch of imperialist decline and decay, which can be brought to an end only by a victorious workers' revolution. The American revolution, more than any other, will require a separate, special organization of the revolutionary vanguard. And it must call itself by its right name, a party.

The experimental efforts of the IWW along this line remain part of the permanent capital of those who are undertaking to build such a party. They will not discard or discount the value of their inheritance from the old IWW; but they will also supplement it by the experience and thought of others beyond our borders.

The coming generation, which will have the task of bringing the class struggle to its conclusion — fulfilling the "historic mission of the working class," as the "Preamble" described it — will take much from the old leaders of the IWW — Debs, Haywood, De Leon and St. John, and will glorify their names. But in assimilating all the huge experiences since their time, they will borrow even more heavily from the men who generalized these experiences into a guiding theory. The Americans will go to school to the Russians, as the Russians went to school to the Germans, Marx and Engels.

Haywood's advice at the Founding Convention of the IWW still holds good. The Russian way is the way to our American future, to the future of the whole world. The greatest thinkers of the international movement since Marx and Engels, and also the greatest men of action, were the Russian Bolsheviks. The Russian Revolution is there to prove it, rulling out all argument. That revolution still stands as the example; all the perversions and betrayals of Stalinism cannot change that.

The Russian Bolsheviks — Lenin and Trotsky in the first place — have inspired every forward step taken by the revolutionary vanguard in this country since 1917. And it is to them that the American workers will turn for guidance in the next stages of their evolving struggle for emancipation. The fusion of their "Russian" ideas with the inheritance of the IWW is the American workers' prescription for victory.

Los Angeles, June, 1955.

Belinski And Rational Reality

by G. V. Plekhanov

Chapter III

"The latest philosophy is the product of all the preceding philosophies; nothing has been lost; all the principles have been preserved," said Hegel in concluding his lectures on the history of philosophy. "Before contemporary philosophy could arise, much time had to pass . . . What we are able quickly to survey in our recollection, took place actually at a slow pace . . . But the world-spirit does not stand still; it constantly strides forward precisely because this forward movement constitutes its nature. Sometimes it seems as if it is halted, as if it has lost its eternal urge to self-cognition. Actually, all the while, there is deep internal work taking place, not to be noticed until the results come to the surface, until the shell of old outlived views falls apart into dust and the world-spirit strides ahead in seven-league boots. Hamlet, turning to the ghost of his father, exclaimed, 'Well dug, old mole!' The same can also be said of the world-spirit, 'It digs well!'"

The author of *My Past and Thoughts* called Hegel's philosophy the algebra of progress. The correctness of this appreciation is amply confirmed by the above-cited views of the great thinker. The idealist philosophy, which solemnly proclaimed eternal forward movement as the nature of the world-spirit, could not be a philosophy of stagnation. On occasion Hegel expressed himself even more categorically. Let us cite that section of his lectures on the history of philosophy where he discusses the trial of Socrates.

In Hegel's opinion the spread of Socrates' views threatened to destroy the old Athenian way of life com-

This discussion by G. V. Plekhanov of one of the outstanding Russian intellectuals who came under the influence of Hegel in the 1830's, is presented here in an English translation for the first time. The opening installment of the essay appeared in the spring issue of *Fourth International*.

pletely. For this reason one cannot blame the Athenians for condemning to death the thinker whom they placed on trial and in whom they sensed a mortal enemy of their cherished social order. Nay more, it is necessary to say flatly that they were *obliged* to defend their social order. But it is likewise necessary to affirm that there was right on the side of Socrates. He was the conscious representative of a new and higher principle; he was a hero who possessed for himself the absolute right of the spirit. "In world history we find that this is the position of the heroes through whom a new world commences, and whose principle stands in contradiction to what has gone before and disintegrates the old order: they appear to be violently destroying the old laws. Hence individually they perish, but it is only the individual, and not the principle, which is annihilated in punishment . . . The principle itself will triumph later, if in another form."

Historical movement offers not infrequently the drama of two opposed rights coming into collision. The one power is the divine right of the existing social order and of the established relations; the other is the equally divine right of consciousness (self-cognition), of science, of subjective freedom. The collision between the two is a tragedy in the full sense of

the term—a tragedy in which there are those who perish but in which there are no guilty ones; each side being right in its own way. Thus spake Hegel.

As the reader can see, his philosophy was truly in its nature an algebra of progress, although this was not always understood by those progressives who were contemporaries of Hegel. Some were confused by his terminology, beyond laymen's comprehension. The famous proposition: *What is real is rational; what is rational is real*, was taken by some as a philosophic expression of the crassest kind of conservatism. Generally speaking, this was a mistake. For, according to Hegel's logic, far from everything that exists is real. The real stands higher than mere existence ("*die Wirklichkeit steht hoher als die Existenz*"). Accidental existence is real existence; reality is *necessary*: "reality unwinds as necessity." But as we have already seen, according to Hegel, not only what already exists is necessary. By its uninterrupted mole's work, the world-spirit undermines what exists, converts it into a mere form, void of any real meaning, and makes necessary the appearance of the new, tragically destined to collide with the old.

The nature of the world-spirit is to stride forward eternally. Hence in social life, too, what is necessary and rational, in the final analysis, is only uninterrupted progressive movement, only the constant foundering, more or less rapidly, of everything old, everything outlived. This conclusion is inescapably suggested by the entire character and meaning of Hegelian philosophy as a dialectical system.

Hegel's philosophy, however, was not just a *dialectical* system; it also proclaimed itself to be *the system of absolute truth*. But if absolute truth *has already been found*, then it follows that the goal of the world-spirit—self-cognition—*has already been attained*, and its forward movement loses all meaning. This claim of possessing the absolute truth was thus bound to bring Hegel into contradiction with

his own dialectic; and put him in a posture hostile to further successes of philosophy. More than this, it was bound to make him a conservative in relation to social life as well. By his doctrine, every philosophy is ideally the expression of its times (*"ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfasst"*). Since Hegel had found the absolute truth, it therefore follows that he lived at a time which corresponded to the "absolute" social order, i. e., a social order expressing the absolute truth, discovered by theory. And inasmuch as absolute truth doesn't age and thereby turn into error, it is therefore evident that every inclination to change a social order that expressed the absolute truth would be a rude sacrilege, an impertinent uprising against the world-spirit. In this "absolute" order there are, to be sure, some partial improvements to be made, removing partial imperfections inherited from the past. But on the whole this order must remain as eternal and immutable as the eternal, immutable truth of which it was the objective expression.

A profound thinker, the greatest genius-intellect of the first half of the 19th century, Hegel was still a child of his times and country. Germany's social position was favorable for a calm, theoretical study of the march of world events; but it was quite unfavorable for the *practical* application of results gained by theory. As touches practice, the bold German theoreticians remained not infrequently the meekest of philistines. There was not a little philistinism in even such great men as Goethe and Hegel. In his youth Hegel sympathized warmly with the French Revolution; but with the passage of years, his love for freedom waned, while the urge waxed to live in peace with the existing order, so that the July 1830 revolution depressed Hegel very much.

One of the "left" Hegelians, the well-known Arnold Ruge, later criticized the philosophy of his teacher for always limiting itself to a contemplation of phenomena and never striving to pass over to *action*; for co-habiting peacefully with slavery in practice, while proclaiming freedom as the great goal of historical development. These criticisms, one must ad-

mit, are justified; Hegel's philosophy did suffer from the indicated shortcomings.

These shortcomings—which, by the way, were expressed in the claim to absolute truth—are to be noted in the lectures on the history of philosophy which we have already cited and which are filled with courageous and vigorous striving forward. In these same lectures Hegel tries to prove that in modern society, in contrast to the ancient, philosophic activity can and should be limited to the "inner world," the world of ideas, because the "outer world" (social relations had arrived nowadays at a certain rational order, "has composed itself" and "has become reconciled with itself" (*"ist so mit sich versoehnt worden"*)).

The conservative side of Hegel's views was expressed most graphically in his *Philosophy of Right*. Whoever reads this work attentively will be struck by the genial profundity of many thoughts Hegel expresses. But at the same time it is readily to be noted that Hegel here, more than anything else, tries to reconcile his philosophy with Prussian conservatism. Particularly instructive in this connection is the famous introduction in which the doctrine of rational reality is given a meaning not at all the same as in the *Logic*.

Whatsoever exists, does so by reason of necessity. To know the necessity of a given phenomenon is to discover its rationality. The process of scientific knowledge consists in this, that the spirit striving toward self-cognition recognizes itself in what exists, recognizes its own reason. Philosophy must grasp what is. In particular the science of right must grasp the rationality of the state. Far from Hegel was any intention "to construct a state such as it ought to be." Constructions of this sort are silly; a world "as it ought to be" does not exist; more accurately, it exists only as a particular, personal opinion, and personal opinion is a "soft element," easily giving way to personal whim, and frequently changing under the influence of caprice or vanity.

Whoever understands reality, whoever has discovered the reason hidden in it will not rise up against it, but

will reconcile himself with it and take joy in it. (We ask the reader to note that the expression, "reconciliation with reality"—*"die Versoebnung mit der Wirklichkeit"*—is used by Hegel himself.) Such a person doesn't renounce his subjective freedom; but this freedom manifests itself not in *discord* but *harmony* with the existing state. In general, discord with what exists, discrepancies between cognitive reason and the reason that is embodied in reality are evoked only by an incomplete comprehension of this reality, by lapses of abstract thought. Man is a thinking being; his freedom, his right, the foundation of all his morality are lodged in his thought. But there are persons who regard as free only that thought which diverges from everything commonly accepted. Among such people the highest and most divine right of thought is converted into rightlessness. These people are ready to sacrifice everything to the whim of their personal judgment. In law which subjects man to certain *obligation* they perceive only the *dead, cold letter*, only *fetters* placed upon subjective conviction. They pride themselves on their negative attitude to reality; but their attitude testifies only to a weakness of thought and to an utter inability to sacrifice the caprice of personal judgment for the sake of social interests. It was long ago said that while half-knowledge weakens belief in God, true knowledge, on the contrary, strengthens it. The same may also be said concerning people's attitude to the reality about them: Half-knowledge rouses them against reality; true knowledge reconciles them with it. That's how Hegel reasons here.

(It is interesting to juxtapose this view of the greatest German idealist with the views of a contemporary, the French genius Saint-Simon. "The philosopher," wrote the Frenchman, "is not only an observer; he is an activist of the first order in the world of morals because what governs human society are his views on what the world should become." (*Travail sur la gravitation universelle.*)

It is perfectly correct that the science of right need not at all occupy itself with "the state as it ought

to be"; its task is to comprehend what is and what was, and to elucidate the historical development of state institutions. Hegel is fully justified in attacking those superficial liberals (today we would call them, subjectivists) who, incapable of linking "ideals" with the reality about them, remain permanently in the realm of impotent and unrealizable subjective dreams. But Hegel doesn't attack only liberalism of this sort. He rises up against every progressive tendency which does not stem from official sources.

Moreover, "what exists" by the mere fact of its existence is already recognized by him here as necessary, and hence "rational." An uprising against what exists is proclaimed to be an uprising against reason. And all of this is bolstered by arguments as far removed as heaven is from earth from the above-adduced arguments concerning the fate of Socrates and the right of self-cognition and of subjective freedom. From a thinker who attentively probes into the social development of mankind and who arrives at the conclusion that movement forward constitutes the reason of the world-spirit, Hegel becomes converted into an irritable and suspicious custodian, ready to shout, "Help! Police!" at every new exertion of the mighty and eternal "mole" who undermines the structure of old concepts and institutions.

It follows from this that if Hegel's doctrine that everything real is rational was understood by many in a completely wrong way, then he was himself primarily to blame for this, for he invested his doctrine with a very peculiar and *not at all dialectical* interpretation of the Prussian social order of his day and proclaimed it as the embodiment of reason. It may therefore seem strange that Hegel's philosophy did not lose its influence over the thinking people of those days. But strange as it may seem, the fact is that the uprising against the conservative conclusions drawn by Hegel from his essentially wholly progressive philosophy did not come until much later. In the epoch of the publication of the *Philosophy of Right*, opposed to Hegel were only a few superficial liberals, while everybody

who was serious, everything young and energetic followed him with enthusiasm, despite his self-contradictions, and without even noticing them. The explanation for this is, of course, to be found in the immature development of social life in Germany of that day.

But in the previous century, in Lessing's epoch, this life was even less developed, and yet the then dominant philosophic concepts bore no resemblance whatever to those of Hegel. Had it been possible for Hegel to have appeared at the time, no one, assuredly, would have followed him. Why is this? Because "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and because only the 19th century posed before thinking mankind the great task to which Hegel's philosophy promised to provide the answer, namely:

The scientific study of reality, the scientific elucidation of mankind's historical development, in social, political and intellectual relations as a necessary and therefore lawful process.

As we have already stated, only such an interpretation of history could eliminate the pessimistic outlook on history as the kingdom of blind accident. Young minds everywhere, wherever the underground work of the "world-spirit" was being accomplished even on a tiny scale and wherever the "mole" was preparing the soil for new social movements, were bound to throw themselves eagerly into the study of Hegelian philosophy. And the more serious the demands of theoretical thought were in the young minds, and the stronger the urge was in the young hearts to sacrifice personally for the sake of common interests, all the more complete should have been, as it actually was, the infatuation with Hegelianism.

The uprising that came later against the conservative conclusions Hegel drew was absolutely justified. But it ought not to be forgotten that in the theoretical sense it was justified only to the extent that it based itself on Hegel's dialectic, i.e., primarily on the interpretation of history as a lawful process; and on the understanding of freedom as the product of necessity.

Chapter IV

Let us now return to Belinski.

In approaching the history of his intellectual development, we must note first of all that in his early youth he rose up indignantly against the Russian reality of those days. As is well known, the tragedy which he wrote during his stay in the University and which caused him so much unpleasantness was a passionate, if scarcely artistic, protest against serfdom. Belinski was wholly on the side of the serfs.

"Can it be that these humans were born into this world only to serve the whims of other humans, the same as themselves!" exclaims one of his heroes. "Who gave this fatal right to some people to enslave to their will the will of others, other beings just like them and to take away from them the sacred treasure of freedom? . . . Merciful God, Father of Men, tell me, was it Your all-wise hand that created on earth these serpents, crocodiles and tigers who feed on marrow and meat of their kin and who drink like water their blood and tears?"

This tirade would have done credit, in its passion, to Karl Moor himself. And actually Belinski was under the strongest influence of Schiller's early works, *The Robbers*, *Cabal and Love*, *Fiasco*. As he put it, these dramas made him "wildly hostile to the social order, in the name of an abstract ideal of society, torn out of geographic and historical conditions of development, and erected in mid-air." This influence, incidentally, was not exerted on him only by the works of Schiller we listed above. "*Don Carlos*," said Belinski, "threw me into an abstract heroism, which made me scorn everything else; and in this condition, despite my unnatural and intense ecstasy, I was quite conscious of myself as a cipher. The *Maid of Orleans* plunged me into the same abstract heroism, into the same social and general abstraction, empty, faceless, of the substance but with nothing individual about it."

We ask the reader to note this interesting testimony of the famous critic about himself. His youthful infatuation with "an abstract ideal of

society" is a most important page in the history of his intellectual development. Up to now the attention it merits has not been paid to it. So far as we know, no one has stressed this circumstance that a gifted and passionate youth filled with "abstract heroism" was at the same time "*conscious of himself as a cipher.*" Such consciousness is extremely painful. It must have evoked, on the one side, equally painful doubts over the workability of the abstract ideal; and, on the other, attempts to find a *concrete* soil for his social inclinations.

This tormenting cognition of oneself as a "cipher" was not peculiar at the time to Belinski alone. The aspirations of the advanced intelligentsia of the 1820's had shortly before suffered a cruel shipwreck, and sorrow and despair reigned among the thinkers. It is customary in our country to repeat that Nadezhdin had a strong influence on the development of Belinski's views, at all events in the first period of Belinski's development. But was there much solace in the views of Nadezhdin himself? Early Russian life appeared to him as a "sleeping forest of faceless names colliding in a void of lifeless chaos." He even doubted that there was any real living in the course of Russia's thousand years of existence. Mental life started in our country only with Peter the Great; up till then everything European came to our country "by way of ricochets, through thousands of leaps and tangents and therefore reached us in weak, dying out reverberations."

"Up to now our literature has been, if I may use the expression, a *corvee* of the European; it has been worked over by Russian hands but not in a Russian way; it exhausted the fresh, inexhaustible juices of the young Russian spirit in order to educate foreigners and not ourselves." The notes to be heard here are almost those of Chaadayev. (Not having Nadezhdin's articles at hand, we are compelled to quote from Mr. Pypin's book, *Belinski, His Life and Correspondence*; vol. I, p. 95. Needless to add we have borrowed from the same work most

of the facts relating to Belinski's intellectual development, but we have grouped these facts differently.)

In his famous first article, "Literary Dreams," Belinski obviously expressed a rather rosy outlook about our future, if not our past or present. Pointing out that what we need is not literature, which will make its appearance in its own due time, but enlightenment, he cries out:

"And this enlightenment will not become ossified, thanks to the sleepless solicitude of the wise government. The Russian people are clever and amenable, diligent and zealous about everything that is good and beautiful, once the hand of Czar-Father points out the goal to them, once his sovereign voice summons the people to this goal!"

The single institution of domestic tutors was bound, as he put it, to perform genuine miracles in the sense of enlightenment. Besides, our nobility has finally become convinced about giving their children a solid education, while our mercantile estate "is rapidly taking shape and in this connection is not far behind the highest estates." In a word, the cause of enlightenment prospers among us: "The seeds of the future are ripening today."

All this was, of course, written in perfect sincerity. At the time Belinski wrote this article he wanted to believe, and carried away by enthusiasm while writing, he did believe that enlightenment would swiftly engulf Old Mother Russia. But in calmer moments, when the flame of enthusiasm had cooled, he could not fail to see that the foundations on which his faith rested in a swift growth of enlightenment in Russia were somewhat shaky. Besides, could even the successes of enlightenment—however "swift" they might be—satisfy a man "hostile to the social order" in the name of an ideal, and permeated with "abstract heroism"? Such perspectives were not needed by such a man. In brief, the rapturous tone of "Literary Dreams" was the product of a momentary flash-fire and did not at all exclude a depressed mood on the author's part, a mood resulting from the touchy recognition of himself as a cipher, and from the unresolved contradiction between the abstract ideal, on the one side, and

the concrete Russian reality on the other.

In July 1836 Belinski journeyed to the village of B--kh in Tversk province, and there with the aid of a hospitable host, a well-known "dilettante of philosophy" or "friend of philosophy," M. B. (Bakunin) became acquainted with the philosophy of Fichte, for the first time if we are not mistaken. "I seized hold of the Fichtean outlook with vigor and fanaticism," he says. And this is understandable. As Belinski put it, his eyes always saw double: there was life ideal and there was life real. Fichte convinced him that "life ideal was nothing else but life real, positive and concrete, whereas the so-called real life is a negation, a phantom, a nullity, a void." In this way the vexing contradiction between the abstract ideal and concrete reality found the sought-for philosophic solution. It was solved by reducing to zero one of the sides of the antinomy.

Having proclaimed reality a phantom, Belinski was able to wage war against it all the more vigorously in the name of the *ideal* which now turned out to be the only reality worthy of the name. In this "Fichtean" period, Belinski sympathized strongly with the French. "We know of an episode in Belinski's life at the time," says Mr. Pypin. "At a big gathering, completely unfamiliar to him, in talking about the French events of the 18th century, he expressed an opinion which embarrassed his host by its extreme bluntness." (*loc. cit.* vol. I, p. 175). Later on, recalling this episode in a letter to an intimate friend, Belinski added:

"I do not at all repent of this phrase, and I am not at all embarrassed by it. It expressed, in good conscience and with the fullness of my violent nature, the state of my mind at the time. Yes, that is *how* my thoughts ran then . . . Sincerely and in good conscience I expressed in this phrase the tense condition of my spirit through which *of necessity* I had to pass." It would seem that Belinski could now rest from the doubts that tormented him. Actually he now suffered almost more than before.

In the first place he came to doubt

his own capacity for philosophic thought. "And I learned about the existence of this concrete life only to come to know my impotence, to familiarize myself with it. I came to know paradise only to become convinced that the only possible life for me was an approach to its gates, not the delights of its harmony and scents, but only pre-perceptions." Secondly, the denial of reality, as is evident, did not long rid him of *old theoretical doubts*, either. Real life was proclaimed a phantom, a nullity and a void. But there are phantoms and phantoms. From Belinski's new standpoint, French reality was no less a phantom than any other, including the Russian. Yet there were manifestations in French social life with which he warmly sympathized, as we know; while in Russia there was nothing of the sort. Why then were the French "phantoms" so unlike our native ones?

"Fichteanism" had no answer to this question. And yet it was a simple variant of the old vexing question: Why did concrete reality contradict the abstract ideal? and how to remove this contradiction? It turned out that proclaiming reality a phantom availed in essence exactly nothing; and, as a consequence, the new philosophic outlook proved dubious, if not altogether a "phantom." After all, Belinski had cherished it precisely to the extent to which it apparently promised to supply simple and convincing answers to the questions that beleaguered him.

Later, in one of his letters (June 20, 1838) Belinski expressed a conviction that he "hated thought." "Yes, I hate it as an abstraction," he wrote. "But can thought then be acquired without being an abstraction? Should one always think only in moments of candor, and the rest of the time think nothing at all? I understand how silly such a proposition is, but I am by nature an enemy of thought." These simple-hearted and touching lines characterize best of all Belinski's attitude to philosophy. He could not rest content with "abstractions." He could be satisfied only with a system, which itself stemming from social life and explainable by this life, would, in its turn, explain life and offer the possibility for broad and fruitful action

upon life. His supposed hatred of thought consisted precisely of this. He hated, understandably enough, not philosophic thought in general, but only such thought as, contented with philosophic "contemplation," turned its back upon life.

"At that time we sought in philosophy everything in the universe, except pure thought," says Turgenev. This is absolutely correct, especially in relation to Belinski. He sought in philosophy the way to happiness, "the road to happiness," as Byron's Cain put it. Not to personal happiness, of course, but the happiness of his near and dear ones, the weal of his native land. Because of this many have imagined that Belinski did indeed lack "philosophic talent," and it became customary to look down upon him with a certain patronizing air by people who, so far as ability for philosophic thought is concerned, are not fit to untie his shoelaces. These smug fellows forgot or never knew that in Belinski's day the road to social happiness was sought in philosophy by virtually all of the intellectuals in Europe. That is why philosophy then had such enormous social significance.

Today when the road to happiness is *no longer* pointed out by *philosophy*, its progressive meaning has been reduced to zero; and nowadays the lovers of "pure thought" can tranquilly occupy themselves with it. We wish them success with all our heart, but this does not prevent us from having our own opinion concerning Belinski's "philosophic talent." We think that he had an *extraordinary instinct for theoretical truth*, left unfortunately undeveloped by systematic philosophic education, but an instinct which, nonetheless, indicated to him quite correctly the most important tasks of social science of his day. "Belinski was one of the highest philosophic organisms I ever met in my life," said one of the best educated Russians of that era, Prince Odoyevski. Our conclusion is that Belinski was one of the highest "philosophic organisms" ever to appear on our literary scene.

For better or for worse, the vexing questions gave Belinski no rest, throughout the "Fichte period." These

questions were exactly the ones to which the German poet demands an answer in his beautiful poem where he asks: "Why is the just man forever doomed to bear the cross? And why is the rich man everywhere met with honor and acclaim? Who is responsible? Or is it that the power of truth cannot attain everything on earth? Or are we just its playthings?"

Modern social science has definitely solved these questions. It recognized that "not everything as yet is attainable to the power of truth," and it explained why "truth" still weighs so little when it comes to social relations, especially the relations between classes. From the standpoint of modern social science the questions that excited and tormented Belinski may seem quite naive.

But for his times they were not at all naive; the best minds of his day were occupied with them. These questions flow logically from the root question of why accident proves so often stronger than reason. And it is not hard to understand that Belinski could be satisfied only with a philosophy that would give him plain and firm answers to precisely these questions.

Why can crude physical force mock with impunity the finest, the noblest aspirations of human beings? Why do some nations flourish, while others perish, falling under the rule of harsh conquerors? Is it because the conquerors are always better than and superior to the conquered? Hardly so. Often this happens for the sole reason that the conquerors possess more troops than the conquered. But in that case by what is the triumph of force justified? And what meaning can "ideals" have, which never leave their supra-galactic province while leaving our poor, practical life a prey to all sorts of horrors?

Call these ideals *abstract*, and reality *concrete*, or vice versa, proclaim reality an abstraction, and ideals the reality—you will in either case be compelled to grapple with these questions, provided, of course, you are not gifted with Wagner's "philosophic talent," i.e., are not bathed in "pure thought," and provided you do not belong to a coterie of *decadents* cap-

able of amusing themselves with wretched "formulas of progress" which solve nothing and disturb nobody. As is well known, Belinski was neither a Wagner nor a decadent. And this, of course, does him great honor; but for this honor he paid dearly. The "Fichtean period" he afterwards called the period of "disintegration." Understandably, he had to strive to free himself from this onerous condition; and it is equally understandable that this struggle had to lead to a break with Fichte's philosophy.

For lack of data, the history of this break unfortunately remains little known. But it is known that by the middle of 1838 Belinski was already strongly under the influence of Hegel, although he had as yet become acquainted only with certain parts of Hegel's system. It is also known that during this period he was already conciliating with that reality against which he had warred so resolutely before. His mood at the time is illuminated quite clearly by a letter from Piatigorsk he wrote on August 7, 1837 to one of his young friends. He hotly urges his friend to take up philosophy.

"Only in it will you find answers to the questions of your soul; only philosophy will bring peace and harmony to your soul and make you a gift of happiness beyond anything the mob suspects; a happiness which external life can neither give you nor deprive you of."

Politics has no meaning in Russia because "Russia is destined to a fate entirely different from that of France, where the political bent of the sciences and of the arts, as well as the character of the citizens has its meaning, its lawfulness and its good side." Russia's entire hope lies in the spread of enlightenment and in the moral self-perfection of her citizens. "If each of the individuals who make up Russia were to attain perfection by way of love, then Russia would, without any politics, become the happiest country in the world." This view is, of course, perfectly non-Hegelian, but, as we have already said, Belinski's acquaintance with Hegel was quite incomplete at the time. What is important to us is this, that Belinski

came to *conciliate with Russian reality* by way of *elucidating her historical development*, even if he did so incorrectly, and, in general, very superficially.

Why does our social life bear no resemblance to that of France? Because Russia's historical destiny bears no resemblance to France's historical destiny. Such an answer made impossible any parallels whatever between Russia and France. And yet these parallels, only a short while before, were bound to bring Belinski to depressing and almost hopeless conclusions. At the same time, such an answer made possible conciliation not only with Russia's social life but also that of France, for instance, those events toward the end of the 18th century which Belinski quite recently had regarded with such passionate sympathy. Everything is good in its place. And as we saw, he justified the "political bent" of the French. Incidentally, his infatuation with the "absolute" truth of German philosophy causes him no longer to respect this bent. The French possess "no eternal truths, but daily truths, i.e., new truths for each day. They want to derive everything not from the eternal laws of human reason, but from experiment, from history." This made Belinski so indignant that he sent the French to "the devil." French influence, according to him, never brought anything but harm; and he proclaimed Germany as the New Jerusalem of contemporary mankind, urging the thinking Russian youth to turn their eyes to Germany with hope and trust.

But it would be a gross mistake to present as a *custodian* the Belinski who had "conciliated" with Russian reality. At that time, too, he was far removed from conservatism. He likes Peter the Great precisely because of his resolute break with the state of affairs that existed in his day. "The emperors of all nations developed their people by resting on the past, on tradition; Peter tore Russia loose from the past, destroying her tradition." Let us agree that such talk would sound strange on the lips of a custodian of the old order. Neither was Belinski at all inclined to idealize

contemporary Russian life; he finds many imperfections in it, but he explains these imperfections by the youth of Russia.

"Russia is still an infant, who still needs a nurse whose heart is filled with love for her foster-child and whose hands hold a rod, ready to punish pranks." He now conciliates even with serfdom; but does so only up to a given point. He conciliates only because he considers the Russian people not mature enough as yet for freedom. As he wrote, "the government is emancipating little by little." And this circumstance gladdens him as much as the fact that owing to the absence of primogeniture in our country, our nobility "is dying out by itself, without any revolutions, without domestic convulsions."

Genuine custodians of the old order viewed matters through entirely different eyes; and had one of them read the foregoing letter of Belinski, he would have found it full of the most "nonsensical ideas," Belinski's negative attitude to politics notwithstanding. And this would be entirely correct from the "custodial" point of view. Belinski made peace not with reality but with the sorry destiny of his abstract ideal.

Only a short while before he was tormented by the realization that this ideal could find no application to life. Now he renounces it, convinced that it can lead to nothing except "abstract heroism," a barren hostility toward reality. But this doesn't mean that Belinski turned his back on progress. Not at all. It simply means that he was now prepared to serve progress in a different way from that in which he had prepared to serve before. "Let us emulate the apostles of Christ," he exclaims. "They entered into no conspiracies, and founded no open or clandestine political societies in spreading the teachings of their Divine Teacher. But they refused to renounce Him before czars and judges; and feared neither fire nor the sword. Meddle not in things that do not concern you, but remain true to your cause; and your cause is—the love of truth . . . To hell with politics, long live science!"

(To be continued)

The Gold Coast Revolution

by George Lavan

THE STRUGGLE of the African peoples for independence has reached high points on opposite sides of the continent—in the East in the Mau Mau guerrilla bands of Kenya, in the West in the Convention Peoples Party of the Gold Coast.

This article will deal with the developments in West Africa, particularly the rise to power of the Convention Peoples Party in the Gold Coast under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah.

British imperialism in this part of Africa has had to make concession after concession on the parliamentary and constitutional planes. In fact the Gold Coast appears close to that political independence within the British commonwealth attained at the end of World War II by India, Pakistan and Ceylon.

Two things, however, should be kept in mind. First, the Gold Coast has not yet achieved dominion status, though it has been promised for 1956. Second, imperialism does not consist solely or primarily of political domination. The content of imperialism is economic. Latin America, for instance, remains in a semi-colonial relation to Yankee imperialism although nominally politically independent. Britain's "granting" of political independence is a concession to nationalism made on the calculation or understanding that British economic interests remain basically unmolested. This was the pattern of independence achieved by India, Pakistan and Ceylon.*

Thus in the Gold Coast where the Convention Peoples Party espouses general socialist ideas, its rapid march

toward full self-government is based on the confidence British imperialism has that the grip of its corporations and banks will not be broken by the nationalist movement—that and the fear the British have of a socialist revolution if it made no concessions.

The most interesting problem in the case of the Gold Coast is why the nationalist movement there has been able to force political concessions from the British overlords while elsewhere in Africa the national aspirations of the people have met with redoubled repressions, as in Kenya and the Union of South Africa. To show that this reaction of the British was not confined to Africa, one should note that a movement for self-government was smashed by brute force in British Guiana, South America.

The Gold Coast, originally a collecting base and shipping point for the slave trade, is one of the oldest imperialist possessions in Africa. The colony, happily, was never settled by white colonists. Until the early part of this century, this part of Africa was considered "the white man's grave" because of the prevalence of terrible tropical fevers. Thus after the slave trade had ended, the colony saw only a relative handful of British traders, administrators, missionaries, mining engineers, etc. For this blessing it has been suggested that one of the first acts of the government, when full independence is achieved, be the erection of statues to the Anopheles and Aedes-Aegypti mosquitoes—the respective bearers of malaria and yellow fever.

In the absence of European settlers, the people of the Gold Coast were not robbed of their agricultural lands and herded onto reservations to rot in poverty or to become landless

laborers and share-croppers on large white-owned plantations, as in Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa.

Cocoa was introduced into the colony by Tetteh Quarshie, an African who had worked on a cocoa plantation on the Spanish island of Fernando Po where it had been brought from Mexico, its land of origin. Returning to the Gold Coast in 1876, Quarshie brought some cocoa seeds along, planted them, sold seeds to other African farmers.

The spread of cocoa farming, with which the British had absolutely nothing to do, became immensely profitable—for the British. This crop is one of the largest dollar earners for the British empire. In 1951 dollar earnings of the Gold Coast and neighboring Nigeria from cocoa exports alone amounted to 112 million pounds sterling (\$313,600,000)—more than the dollar earnings of New Zealand, Pakistan and Ceylon combined.

While imperialism exploits the landless people of East and South Africa primarily as wage-workers and share-croppers, in West Africa it exploits the African peasants in a historically older fashion—as independent producers of commodities. The British trading monopolies applied with a vengeance the ancient mercantile adage, "Buy cheap; sell dear." Prices listed for raw cocoa by huge combines such as Unilever were sometimes even lower than the farmers' cost of production. The same companies sold the Africans manufactured goods at profiteering prices. The conversion of the country's economy to a virtual one-crop system has meant that almost everything, including much of the food, has to be imported.

During the last war the British took direct control of the purchase and marketing of the cocoa crop. Today Nkrumah's government controls the purchase and sale of the crop through a marketing board which has a majority of Africans on it. It fixes a price which allows for a stabilization fund in case the world market price should suddenly fall. This fund may also become a means of subsidizing mod-

* Even so, these new entities remain within the British Commonwealth, and military and naval agreements further tie them to British policy.

ernization of the country and establishment of many needed social services for the population.

In the 1930's a new spirit became manifest in the nationalist movement of West Africa. In face of the growing radicalization, the intellectuals began giving a socialist coloration to their nationalist aspirations. Trade unionism spread among the city workers. The great depression had sped political development in the most advanced of Britain's African colonies. Anti-sedition laws and prosecutions, though tried, could not stop it.

In October 1937, after repeated representations to London had failed to secure relief from the double squeeze of the import-export commercial monopolies; a nationwide strike of cocoa farmers and simultaneous boycott of British goods was begun. This action lasted eight months and was remarkable for the solidarity of peasants and city workers and for its militancy.

In 1948 another nationwide boycott of foreign merchants was organized in an effort to force down exorbitant prices. On the day a settlement was negotiated a war veterans' organization staged a peaceful march to the Governor's residence to present a petition. The unarmed marchers were fired on by the police. When the news of the killings reached downtown Accra it met a populace already angered by the fact that many of the merchants had not reduced prices as agreed in the boycott settlement. All the furious hatred against British imperialism burst forth. The manifestations lasted for days. They spread to other towns. When the police had shot their way back into control, deaths totalled 29 and wounded 237.

In the ensuing repression the leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC)—which had neither called the boycott nor sponsored the veterans' march—were deported to a remote section of the colony. This organization was a broad movement which included all shades of Gold Coast nationalism. In the leadership were the "respectable" elements of nationalism—African politicians, businessmen, lawyers, etc. Also in it were some young militants, including Kwame Nkrumah, who had been hired

to breathe some life into the UGCC's organizational work. He had but recently returned to the Gold Coast after studying in the U.S. and England where he had associated with anti-imperialists and socialists.

The bourgeois nationalist leaders had no desire for serious conflict with British imperialism. At the most they sought concessions for that thin upper stratum of the Gold Coast population which they represented. Conversely they had no close ties with the poor, uneducated, un-Europeanized peasants, workers and prospectless youth.

The persecution of the UGCC had given it great prestige with the masses. But a conflict now developed within it. The old leaders wanted to compromise. Nkrumah, utilizing his position as secretary, proceeded to organize the youth and plebian masses of the country in demonstrations against the repression. The conflict came to a head over the new Constitution which the British Colonial Office offered in hope of allaying discontent.

The Coussey Constitution was drawn up by handpicked Uncle Toms and a few of the moderate leaders of the UGCC. While it offered concessions and provided for increased African representation, this was but camouflage for the real control which remained firmly in the hands of the imperialists.

The conflict in the UGCC between the leaders, who were on the Coussey committee, and Nkrumah and his youth, who were bitterly critical, ended in a split.

Vilified by the right wing as "the man who stabbed his country in the back," Nkrumah raised the slogan of "Self-Government Now" and founded the Convention Peoples Party (CPP). Most of the UGCC branches were under the influence of the youth and they disaffiliated and joined the new party. The UGCC soon became a paper organization headed by the most distinguished figures of the African upper and professional classes. The CPP had the members and started a campaign to organize the masses of the colony.

The Coussey Constitution was presented to the country on Oct. 26, 1949. Within a month the CPP and the

Trade Union Congress convoked a Ghana* Representative Assembly in Accra, the capital. It was a de facto Constituent Assembly. Some 80,000 people, representing over 50 organizations of labor, farmers, cooperatives, youth, women, etc., attended. This Assembly declared the Coussey Constitution unacceptable to the country and demanded "Self-Government Now." Moreover, it drew up its own plan of self-government—national and local—and presented it to the British authorities.

The British now tried bribery and cajolery. The CPP leaders, however, refused to compromise. After protracted negotiations, they announced that they would call for a campaign of non-violent non-cooperation to last until the imperialists allowed the people of the Gold Coast an official Constituent Assembly to draw up their own Constitution.

Upon this ultimatum, the British went into action. The CPP press was shut down on charges of sedition. Nkrumah was fined for contempt of court. Every month saw new prosecutions of CPP leaders on manufactured charges.

Finally the CPP announced the deadline—midnight Jan. 8, 1950. The campaign of "Positive Action" (non-cooperation) coincided with a period of labor unrest. Faced with this double threat, the Governor declared martial law. This lasted two months. Public meetings were forbidden, mail censored, travel restricted. Europeans were deputized and armed with clubs and revolvers. These "storm troopers" beat up Africans without provocation, shot many people, raided the CPP offices and confiscated its property. All opposition voices were silenced. Nkrumah and other CPP leaders were hunted down and imprisoned.

When the reign of terror was lifted, the CPP leaders who had escaped the police set about rebuilding their party. They discovered that the fighting spirit of the masses was unbroken. Within two weeks they essayed a public rally in Accra. Over 50,000 people attended. By April they entered can-

* The nationalists have rebaptized their country Ghana.

didates in the contest for the Accra Town Council. The CPP won all seven seats by overwhelming majorities. This was the beginning of an unbroken chain of electoral successes which culminated in the first general elections under the Coussey Constitution in February 1951. Of the 38 seats to be filled by popular vote, the CPP won 34. In the district where the imprisoned Nkrumah was put up as candidate he received of a total vote of 23,122 all but 342 ballots. The British Governor was forced to release Nkrumah from jail and to receive him as the head of the dominant CPP delegation in the Assembly.

The new Constitution had been carefully concocted to allow the people of the Gold Coast the illusion of more power through an increased number of directly elected representatives. But these were counterbalanced by representatives of electoral colleges, a number designated by chieftainship councils subservient to the Governor, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Mines as well as ex-officio members appointed by the Governor. Finally the British Governor retained veto power over decisions of the Assembly.

The British imperialists had not foreseen the emergence of a single party backed by the whole population. It had relied on the African upper and professional class, the different nationalities in the colony, the tribal rivalries and the Governor's power over the chieftains, to keep the African members of the Assembly well divided.

The CPP's overwhelming victory upset the calculation. The will of the people was so apparent and its appetite so whetted by victory that more and more had to be conceded to the CPP. A change in the Constitution to allow direct election of all 104 representatives in the Assembly was won by the CPP in 1954. Before he resigned, Churchill decided officially to recognize Nkrumah as Prime Minister—a post never envisaged by the Coussey Constitution.

Certainly the story of the Gold Coast independence movement and its victories is an inspiring one. Certainly the people must be credited for cour-

age and determination, and the leadership of the CPP for boldness and commendable distrust of the imperialists.* Assuming that all goes well and dominion status is soon achieved, what then?

The opinion that dominion status is certain has already caused cracks to appear in the formerly solid support enjoyed by the CPP. African businessmen and chiefs, who had climbed on the CPP bandwagon, are now beginning to raise their heads in opposition. Diverging economic interests have begun to cause a differentiation along class lines within the nationalist movement.

The crafty imperialist political manipulators have their hands in this. Similarly they are encouraging centrifugal tendencies within the colony—fostering what has been dubbed a "Pakistan" movement in the Moslem Northern Territories, an economic antagonism between the coastal region and the interior farming province of Ashanti. Moreover an irredentist movement exists in the Transvolta area where the Ewe people were cut in half by the boundary line drawn at the end of World War I dividing the Gold Coast from Togoland.

It may well be that the grip of British imperialism on the Gold Coast economy will increase rather than decrease in the coming period. There are already indications of this since the CPP went into office four years ago.

The projected Volta River hydroelectric plan will be one of the biggest industrial enterprises in tropical Africa. Involved is not only the construction of a whole complex of aluminum smelters and processing installations to exploit the tremendous bauxite deposits of the Gold Coast, but railroads and a new port. The total capital expenditure runs to some 140 million pounds sterling. A four-way partnership is planned—the governments of the Gold Coast and Great Britain, the huge capitalist monopolies, Aluminum Ltd. of Canada and the British Aluminum Company.

* Since its advent to office the CPP has never ceased to denounce the Constitution as bogus and to demand full and immediate self-government.

It is significant that George Padmore, the leading authority on imperialism in Africa and a mentor of Kwame Nkrumah, after a detailed analysis of the Volta River project, sees the British getting almost all the economic benefits of the project and the people of the Gold Coast practically nothing.

The Volta River project will considerably alter the mode of exploitation of the Gold Coast and deepen British penetration. This is in line with the openly discussed plan of British imperialism to make up for its losses in Asia by increased investment and exploitation of Africa.

Up to now the particular mode of exploitation enabled the British—reluctantly to be sure—to grant considerable concessions to the CPP. The Kenya Africa Union and the People's Progressive Party of British Guiana raised similar political demands. Yet both were ruthlessly smashed by military force. In Kenya, where the land question dominates everything, any political expression by the Africans constitutes a posing of the land question. In British Guiana too, a colony of sugar plantations and landless agricultural laborers, any political expression by the Negro and Indian masses immediately poses the land and labor questions. It is clear that with large-scale direct exploitation of the Gold Coast's natural resources and labor, the relation of the Gold Coast to Great Britain will shift toward the pattern of Kenya, British Guiana, the Union of South Africa and the Rhodesias. The growth of capital investment can give the independence struggle in the Gold Coast a qualitatively different aspect.

The Gold Coast people must beware of falling into the unhappy category of a colony that has achieved formal political independence only to stop in its revolutionary course. The spectacle of nearby Liberia, which is formally independent of the big powers (but not of the Firestone Rubber Co.), should be a constant reminder. Formal independence is not enough. The people of the Gold Coast must carry their revolution forward or it will degenerate.

The Year 1923

by James P. Cannon

The Reshaping of the Leadership

May, 19, 1954.

Dear Sir:

QUESTION 3B — *The re-shaping of the leadership after the legalization of the party.*

The police raid on the Communist Party Convention at Bridgeman in August, 1922, seemed at the moment to justify the contention of the leftist faction (Goose Caucus) that political conditions made a legal Communist Party impossible and that the underground Communist Party would have to be maintained in all its functions. I was told later, although I did not hear it myself, that Ruthenberg's first reaction to the police raid on the Convention was a declaration that he had changed his position and would abandon the program to legalize the party at that time.

The raid on the Bridgeman Convention however, turned out to be merely an episode, probably even an accident, or an attempt of Harding's Attorney General Daugherty to create a diversion. It contradicted the general sentiment in the country away from the fierce persecution of radicals which had marked the second Wilson administration. The elections in the fall of 1922 showed a trend toward liberalism. This was further confirmed by the circumstance that the Workers Party was permitted to expand its communist propaganda activities without any molestation by the authorities; and the Trade Union Educational League, under the leadership of Foster, developed wide-scale public activities.

These two factors — the expansion of the activities of both the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League — strengthened the trend of the party toward Americanization and the legalization of all its

A student who is doing research work on the history of early American communism asked James P. Cannon, as well as other participants, a number of questions about the events and prominent figures of the pioneer movement. Cannon's answers, which began in the summer 1954 issue of **Fourth International**, are continued here.

activities. The Communist Party itself (the underground "illegal" organization) had nothing to do but "control" this legal work, conducted by other organizations. It had no real functions of its own.

At the same time, the decision of the Comintern shortly after the Bridgeman Convention, in favor of the legalization of the party, rejected the "underground in principle" theory and demolished the leftist faction based on this erroneous theory. The leaders of this lost cause — Katterfeld, Wagenknecht, Minor, Amter, Gitlow, etc. — were badly discredited. Their authority as political leaders was shattered by their demonstrated misjudgment of the political situation in the country and by the Comintern's rejection of their erroneous theory.

On the other hand, the development and expansion of the legal work of the Workers Party and the TUEL, in which the "liquidators" were most prominent, plus the decision of the Comintern in their favor, raised the prestige of the leaders of the liquidators in the eyes of the party membership.

I don't think the history of the movement records another instance in which one group scored such a complete and unqualified victory in every respect, while its opponents suffered such an annihilating defeat, as

happened in the settlement of this conflict.

Normally and logically, this outcome of the long struggle should have led to the consolidation of an expanded authoritative leadership, consisting of those who had played the most prominent part in the victorious struggle and had worked generally together to bring about the victory. The necessary components of this new leadership combination were the following:

(1) The Lovestone-Cannon combination (plus Weinstone and Bittleman), which had played the decisive role in the internal fight to establish the Workers Party and develop it as the principal medium for communist activity and propaganda in the transition period when virtually the whole responsibility fell upon them.

(2) Ruthenberg, who had returned from prison in the spring of 1922 and became the national secretary of the Workers Party, with greatly enhanced prominence and prestige, as a result of his prison term, and his vigorous development of the legal communist activity.

(3) Foster, who had joined the party in 1921 and had begun to develop the party trade-union activity on a broad scale for the first time.

That's the way it worked out in practice, by and large and in the long run. But those individuals mentioned, who had come into the decisive positions of national leadership in a genuine process of natural selection, were not destined to cooperate as a united body for very long. An *artificial* factor upset the equilibrium and played a decisive part in disrupting the new leadership combination before it had a good chance to coalesce.

This artificial factor was John Pepper. He first came to this country in the summer of 1922 and soon began to regulate party affairs with the arbitrary authority of a receiver appointed by the court to take over a bankrupt concern. His only trouble was that this particular concern was by no means bankrupt, and the receiver's operations met with challenge and opposition which limited his ten-

ure to a rather short term. But while it lasted it was a real merry-go-round which left everybody dizzy.

In other writings I have seen various references to Pepper as a "representative of the Comintern." Was this really the case? What was Pepper's real status in the American movement and what, if any, authority did he have as a representative of the Comintern?

Strange as it may seem, that was never completely clear. I, at least, never knew for sure; and up till the present no one has ever explained it to me. I don't think anyone in the American party ever really knew. The officially accredited representative of the Comintern to the American party in the summer and fall of 1922 was the Pole, Valetski. Pepper came along at about the same time. We were told in Moscow that he had been shipped to America in one of the moves to break up the raging faction fight in the emigre leadership of the defeated Hungarian Communist Party, and that his assignment was to work with the Bureau of the Hungarian Federation of the party in the U. S.

As far as I know, that's all the official authorization he ever had. But Pepper, a manipulator deluxe, was never one to be stopped by the formal rules and regulations which act as restraints on ordinary mortals. That man worked fast. He was a European to his finger tips, dripping with the sophistication and facility of continental political journalism. But when it came to getting things done in a hurry and making his way around natural obstacles, he was more American than any hustler or corner-cutter I ever knew or heard about, and that covers a lot of territory.

I was absent from the country, as delegate to the Comintern, during the first six or seven months of Pepper's activities in the American party. He began his operations first in the Bureau and editorial board of the Hungarian Federation of the party and soon took over the whole works there. I was also told that he acted as some kind of assistant for Valetski, along with Boris Reinstein, without claiming any authority of his own. In these two positions he rapidly

familiarized himself with the factional struggle and with all the leading people engaged in it. From that small toe-hold, he moved rapidly into the center of things; got himself elected or co-opted into the Central Committee of the Communist Party; and by the time I arrived back home, along about the first of February in 1923, he seemed to be in full charge of everything, deciding everything, including the positions and the fate of individuals who pleased or displeased him, and vice versa.

He was quick as a flash. His first stunt was to latch on to the Comintern decision and become its most energetic and vociferous interpreter — before the delegates, who had fought for the decision before the Comintern, had a chance to return and make their report. He proceeded to lead the fight for the liquidation of the underground party, and got it all over with in jig time. He became the reporter for the Central Committee before innumerable membership meetings and delegate bodies of the underground party, speaking at first, I was told, in German, with Ruthenberg as translator. (It wasn't long before he was making speeches in English, talking faster and more furiously in the newly acquired language than any of those who knew no other.)

I never heard that he claimed to be the official representative of the Comintern at those meetings where the bewildered and demoralized leftists were getting the bad news. But I don't doubt for a minute that he allowed that impression to be given out. It was not concealed that he was "from Moscow," and that was enough to clothe him with a counterfeited authority.

He was an orator of dazzling facility and effectiveness, and he used his remarkable talents in this field to the maximum. His method and de-

sign was to single out the more stubborn, more independent-minded leaders of the leftist for political annihilation, while offering rehabilitation and favor to the weaker capitulators. Katterfeld, for example, sectarian in his thinking, but a sincere communist of firm character and incorruptible integrity who had given a lot to the movement, was virtually destroyed by Pepper. There were other victims of his onslaughts too. The factional fights before that had been rough enough, but the game of "killing" opponents, or people who just seemed to be in the way, really began with Pepper.

Most of the leaders of the liquidators went along with this savage game of Pepper's, as it seemed to clear the field of all opposition to their monopoly of the leadership. But Pepper had other designs in his strategy. The most prominent liquidators were ensconced in the formal positions of leadership — with a string attached. The string was Pepper as an independent personal influence with a fanatical following of his own, and this string could more properly be called a rope.

Pepper rehabilitated all the defeated undergrounders who had capitulated, along with the seceding leftists who had returned to the party, and welded them together into a band of servitors who owed their political existence to him. In a very short time Pepper had an unavowed faction of his own. This gave him a power which all had to recognize.

With his faction of personal followers and dependents as a lever, he operated as an independent force in dealing with the stronger, independent leaders such as Ruthenberg, Foster and Lovestone.

Yours truly,

James P. Cannon.

The Pepper Regime

May 27, 1954.

Dear Sir:

QUESTION 3B (continued) — *The re-shaping of the leadership after the legalization of the party.*

If, to borrow the terminology of

the economic cycle, the years 1920-21 can be called American communism's period of depression, and 1922 the beginning of the upturn, then the year 1923 can be described as the year of the boom. This boom was partly real and largely speculative,

short-lived and fatally headed for a bust. It was the Pepper era.

The party's ill-starred adventures of that period are a matter of published record, easily available to the interested student. So also are the policies which inspired the adventures. The fantastic view of American realities, as well as the fantastic theories of what to do about it, are permanently embalmed in the voluminous writings of Pepper published that time. And let nobody make the mistake of thinking that Pepper's writings of that time can be passed off as the eccentric contributions of an individual not binding on the party.

Pepper ran the party with an iron hand in those hectic days, and what he wrote was party policy; what he said went. He "politicalized" the party to beat hell, and influenced his opponents almost as much as his supporters. Pepper was the chief fabricator of the policy which led to the resounding fiasco of the "Federated Farmer-Labor Party" — but the others went along.

This newcomer, who established himself as a combination czar and commissar over a somewhat bewildered party while he was still learning the language, in the brief span of a few months, did not confine himself to journalism and the formulation of the party's external policies. He operated on two fronts. His domination of the internal affairs of the party was no less total, and his policy in this field no less fantastic, than in the field of external policy.

However, Pepper's internal "regime," like his external politics, lacked a solid foundation in the realities of the situation, and was likewise destined for explosive disaster. His personal dictatorship — that's what it was, and it wasn't a benevolent dictatorship either — was bound to be a short-lived affair. But this nightmarish transition period of 1923, between the time when Pepper took over and "coordinated" everything and everybody (almost) under his bizarre regime, and the emergence of the Foster-Cannon opposition, was a humdinger while it lasted.

This period was another real turning point in the party's development.

And, as far as I know, the real story has never been told, precisely because the role of Pepper has been slurred over. That is not true history. Pepper was the central and decisive influence in 1923.

The truth in this case is stranger than fiction. When one stops to consider his handicaps as a newly-arrived foreigner with a false passport, obliged to work under cover and to learn the language as he went along, Pepper's performance stands out as truly remarkable. In the limited space I can devote to my recollections, I, at least, feel obliged to give the devil his due. I use this figure of speech advisedly, for I think his work, on the whole, was evil. He was a phony, but by far the most brilliant phony I ever knew. He sparkled like an Arkansas diamond.

Beginning with 1923, party history began to enact itself in a different form, which cannot be adequately understood by a study of the records and documents alone. It was the real beginning of the "crisis of the leadership" which was never solved, and which was destined to culminate, after a long-drawn-out struggle, in a three-way split.

If, from the inception of the left-wing movement until the formation of the Workers Party at the end of 1921, the conflict of issues overshadowed the conflict of personalities and subordinated them to its uses, the same hardly applies, at least not to the same extent, from 1923 to 1929.

By 1923, the transitory figures in the leadership, who had fared badly in the rough-and-tumble struggles of the earlier years, had been thrust aside or reduced to secondary rank. A definite, limited number of people had emerged and gained universal recognition as the authentic leaders of the movement of that time. There was no single leader among them recognized by the others, and able, by his personal authority, to act as coordinator. The official version, which later assigned this role to Ruthenberg, as the "founder" and "outstanding leader," is official claptrap. Ruthenberg was one of several.

They were all one-sided products of a primitive movement; they needed each other and complemented each

other in various ways; but unfortunately they didn't fit together in a team very well. There was probably more conflict than cooperation between them. They would have had trouble getting along in any case, and Pepper's intervention aggravated and complicated the problem.

This was the line-up in the year 1923: Ruthenberg, returned from prison and widely recognized as the outstanding public figure of the party, was firmly established as National Secretary. Foster, with his glittering prestige as the leader of the great steel strike, had come into the party with both feet, beginning as the unquestioned leader of the trade union work. Both men had turned forty. They were fully formed and at the height of their powers.

Pepper was in the situation; in fact, he was on top of it. He also was about forty, fully matured, and equipped with a rich European experience and political sophistication, plus a European culture — which distinguished him among the American shoemakers. Lovestone, who had graduated from City College into party leadership without any detours, was no longer a boy and was developing his malevolent talents with an amazing precocity. I, myself, had turned thirty and had assimilated a considerable experience in the mass movement as well as in the party. I didn't know much, but I was not in the least overawed by the others.

The relationship between those named people put its stamp on everything that happened in the party in the next six years. This relationship — of mutual dependence and antagonism, of cooperation and conflict — propelled the party forward and pulled it back, held it together and ripped it apart, like an incongruous mechanism working for both good and evil.

There were many others who played important parts — the young party was loaded with eager talents and personalities in those days — but, in my opinion, the central figures I have mentioned were by far the most significant and decisive in the whole story. Three of them — Foster, Lovestone and Pepper — are each worth a book. Each of them was remarkable

in his own way, and would unflinchingly have made a big stir and commotion in any milieu. I, who had plenty to do with them, and have no favors to thank them for, would be the last to deprecate their exceptional qualities.

Despite all the trouble I had with them, I have always been disposed to look at them objectively. For that reason my impressions and opinions of them, my estimate of their strength and weaknesses, and my theory of their basic motivations, is probably different from that of others. I will undertake to formulate my impressions of these people in the shape of sketches as soon as I clear a few other questions out of the way.

In the new factional alignment and the factional struggle which began in the middle of 1923, and lasted for six solid years, the conflict of personalities in the leadership undoubtedly played a big part. That must be admitted. But it is not the whole story, for the quarrels of the leaders occurred under circumstances not of their making and outside their control. The tendentious accounts which represent party history of that time as a gang fight of unprecedented duration, with personal power and aggrandizement as the motivation common to all, and factional skulduggery as the accepted

means to the end, contain perhaps a grain of truth. But no more than that.

The people involved did not operate independently of external conditions in the country. They were prisoners of an objective situation which conditioned and limited everything they did or tried to do. Personalities, it is true, played a big role; but only within this framework.

In 1923 American capitalism, fully recovered from the economic crisis of 1921, was striding into the first stage of the long boom of the Twenties. At that time the leaders of this pioneer movement of American communism—all of them without exception—were revolutionists. Their attempt to build a revolutionary party quickly—and that's what they were all aiming at—ran up against these unfavorable objective circumstances. The conservatizing influence of the ascending prosperity on the trade-union movement, and on the great mass of the American workers generally, doomed the party to virtual isolation in any case.

The basic thesis of the Comintern, that the First World War had signaled the beginning of the dissolution and collapse of capitalism as a world system, was the commonly accepted thesis of all the party leaders. But the extent to which capitalism could profit in the new world at the expense of the old, and furiously expand while the other was declining, was not fully comprehended at the time.

Later, when this conjunctural advantage of American capitalism was recognized, it was mistaken for permanence by the majority. This led to the conservatization of the leadership and the tacit abandonment of the revolutionary perspective in this country. This, in turn, set the stage for the conquest of the party by Stalinism, with its pie-in-the-sky theory of "Socialism in one country," in Russia, that is, not in the United States.

But nothing of that kind was foreseen, or even dreamed of, by anybody in 1923.

The historian who considers the whole subject important, and wants to do a thorough, objective job, has indeed taken upon himself an enormous task. In addition to the mountainous labor of research, which is apparently

already behind you, you have the even more difficult task of selection, of separating the important from the incidental; of distinguishing between the formally stated issues and the clash of personalities, and at the same time, relating them to each other—to say nothing of fixing the place of this tiny, but vital political organism in booming self-confident, capitalist America of the Twenties; and of estimating the significance of the party, and what happened inside it, for the future history of this country.

But that's your problem. I really sympathize with you, even if you did take it upon yourself without anybody forcing you. Your task is formidable, and in my opinion, important. I have no doubt that many historians to come will probe deeply into the records of the pioneer communist movement in this country, and trace many great events to their genesis in these first faltering attempts to construct the revolutionary party of the future.

Most of what has been written on the subject is false and tendentious. Your own researches will have convinced you of that. You, as the first to undertake the task of the historian seriously, have the opportunity and the responsibility, whatever your own point of view may be, to set a pattern of objectivity and truthfulness. The young party whose early history you are exploring, deserves that and can stand it.

In spite of everything, it meant well for the workers, for the country and for the world. It can stand the truth, even when the truth hurts. It deserves and can bear the report of a historian who obeys the prescription of Othello: "Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."

* * *

I note from your numerous questions about Foster that you are reaching for the heart of the mystery in his case. I knew Foster—close up—precisely in that period when he decided to make the transformation from a trade-union leader to a party politician, and to pay whatever price it might entail in formal subservience to Moscow.

I thought I knew Foster in his bones thirty years ago, and still think so. His later evolution, sickening as it

By James P. Cannon

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became to those who had known and respected him as a rebel, never surprised me at any stage. The basic decision he made at that time conditioned him for his step-by-step de-

generation. He could not have made the decision, however, unless the tendency was inherent in his character.

Your truly,
James P. Cannon

Overthrow of the Pepper Regime

May 28, 1954

Dear Sir:

QUESTION 3B (conclusion)—*The overthrow of the Pepper regime.*

With the formal liquidation of the underground Communist Party, and the transfer of all functions and powers to the National Committee of the Workers Party early in 1923, the old factional alignments fell apart. Outwardly the party was united. The National Committee, in which the former liquidators' faction heavily predominated, led the party as a united body. There was no formal falling out and break-up of the collaboration between the various elements who had composed the liquidators' faction as a whole. It was quite evident, however, that a shake-up and reshuffle in the central nucleus of the leadership was taking place, without anything being openly said about it or the reasons for it.

Under the facade of over-all unity a new regime was shaping up, with Ruthenberg and Foster as the two outstanding public representatives of the movement and Pepper as the real boss of the party behind the scenes, and Lovestone as his first lieutenant. I agreed with the first part of the new arrangement but didn't care for the second part, and did not see exactly how I could fit into the new scheme of things. I wasn't very much worried about it at first, however, as my plans did not call for activity in the Center for the time being. I wanted to see the party and the country before settling down in one spot again.

* * *

I had returned to this country only about the first of February, 1923, after an absence of eight months. A few weeks after my return, I left New York on an extended speaking tour which covered the entire country and kept me on the road for nearly five months. The subject of my public lectures was "The Fifth Year of the

Russian Revolution." I also spoke at party membership meetings on the Fourth Congress and on the trade-union question.

I was fully absorbed by the tour, revelling in the work which I have always loved most of all and which has always given me the greatest personal satisfaction—the work of propaganda. New York was out of my mind as I traveled the great country, giving out all I had in my speeches, and receiving in return the warm inspiration of new crowds and new acquaintances. Some friendships which began on that tour stuck for good.

I had little or nothing to do with the fateful decisions on party policy which were made and carried out in the first half of the year 1923, and recall them now as an observer rather than as a participant. This is not to say that I opposed the general line of the decisions. I was certainly in favor of the labor-party policy and considered that the practical alliance with the labor progressives, for the promotion of this movement, was correct and most advantageous to us. If I had no part in the decisions made in New York from week to week, I raised no objection to them and did not even suspect that they were driving inexorably to the catastrophic blow-up at the Chicago Convention of the Federated Farmer Labor Party in July.

I did not attend this Convention. I was speaking in the Pacific Northwest at the time; and if I remember correctly, I read the news reports of the split with Fitzpatrick and the formal launching of the ill-fated Federated Farmer Labor Party in Portland, Oregon. My first reaction, which never changed, was decidedly unfavorable. I could not agree with the optimistic assurances in our press to the effect that a great success had been scored at Chicago. The big "victory" looked like a big mistake to me.

I had been covering the country from one end to the other for months, and I knew very well that we were a small minority, with no more than a toehold in the labor movement. I knew how unrealistic it was to imagine that we could lead a mass labor party by ourselves, without the collaboration of a substantial wing of the trade-union bureaucracy. I can't speak for others, but my own attitude of abstention and watchful waiting in the internal party situation began to change to active opposition to the Pepper regime, specifically and definitely, right after the Chicago Convention, and over that issue.

* * *

What puzzled me, however, was Foster's support of the adventure. I could understand how the others, who had never had any connection with the labor movement and had no real knowledge of its tendency, could indulge in flights of fancy. But I respected Foster as a realist, and as a man who knew the labor movement through and through. I could not understand how he could deceive himself about the certain consequences of a break with the Fitzpatrick forces, and a decision of the Workers Party to create a labor party all by itself, with a few uninfluential non-party individuals as decorations.

A short time later I stopped at Duluth for a lecture on the last lap of my tour and met Foster, who was there for a trade-union conference and picnic at the same time. We spent the afternoon discussing party affairs under a shade tree in a corner of the picnic grounds. That conversation was the genesis of the Foster-Cannon Opposition. There were no formal commitments, but that's where the faction began.

Foster opened the conversation by giving me the official party line, and predicting that the trade-union delegates at the Chicago Convention, representing some hundreds of thousands of members, would affiliate their locals to the new party. I told him rather bluntly, right at the start, that I knew better; and that he, who knew the realities of the labor movement better than anybody, couldn't really deceive himself by such fantasies. He

soon admitted that he was troubled by second thoughts and doubts about the prospects. I got the impression that he was glad to find someone to whom he could express his real sentiments and get some encouragement to resist the fatal course of the official policy.

He agreed that, without the support of the Chicago Federation of Labor, the trade-union delegates to the Chicago Convention would not be able to affiliate their locals and central bodies to the new "Farmer-Labor Party," and in most cases would not even try. I pressed him for an explanation of how he, of all people, could have sanctioned the precipitate break with Fitzpatrick over such a disadvantageous issue; and, if the break couldn't be avoided, why he agreed to plunge ahead anyway with the launching of the new so-called labor party.

His answer has always stuck in my memory as a bit of wisdom worth repeating, and I have often had occasion to repeat it. He said substantially as follows:

"You know, it's a funny thing. When people, who all want the same thing, get together in a closed room they tend to see what they want to see and they can talk themselves into almost anything. In the party caucus at the convention so many of our people, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, spoke so emphatically about our strength here, there and everywhere, including the Chicago Federation of Labor, that I got carried away myself and was convinced against my will and better judgment."

Then he added: "The trouble is, we've got the hang over, but the others in New York are still living in a fool's paradise. Something has to be done to change this course, or we will soon fritter away all the gains of our trade-union work up to now."

* * *

A short time later I was back in New York, making no secret of my disgruntlement. I wrote a few articles for the weekly Worker at that time (summer of 1923), in which I tried to give a different impression of the present realities in the American La-

bor movement, the weakness of our forces and the tactical inadvisability of a definite split with the "progressives." I concluded one of the articles by stating that we should work in the direction of "a new rapprochement with the progressives." These articles were understood by everybody as an indirect criticism of the prevailing party policy, and they encouraged a lot of other people to express themselves along the same lines. I heard many declarations of approval and support for my stand in the party ranks.

At a meeting of the Political Committee shortly afterward, with Foster present, Pepper singled me out for the brass-knuckles treatment. He sought, by a combination of denunciation and ridicule, to put an end to my critical opposition forthwith. I didn't care for that treatment and said so. (We native American revolutionists had always been strongly individualistic and accustomed to free speech.) Ruthenberg, Lovestone and the others kept quiet during this skirmish. Foster, however, mildly indicated that he was beginning to re-evaluate the Chicago experience and the whole course of policy following from it.

* * *

Foster told me, after the meeting, that he was quite apprehensive about the whole situation, especially about Pepper's evident intention to bluff things through and make a bad situation worse. He saw the danger of all our trade-union positions crumbling. It was then that he began to relate the new turn of events to his own position in the party. I don't recall him saying so specifically, but I think it was at that time that Foster made his basic decision to throw his full energy into the party and to fight it out with Pepper for the leadership.

Prior to that time, he had devoted himself exclusively to the work of the Trade Union Educational League and was not publicly an avowed member of the party; he had taken no part in the internal fight for the legalization of the party, although he had let it be known where his sympathies lay; and the people most closely associated with him in the work of the TUEL,

Browder in the first place, had taken an active part in the party fight.

Foster's original design, I think, had been to play the part of the outstanding mass leader, not publicly identified with the party, operating with a wide area of independence and getting the full support of the party on his own terms. He had once remarked to me: "Debs never wasted any time on caucuses. He built up his prestige among the masses. Then, after the party politicians had made their decisions in caucus, they first had to inquire what Debs thought about them before they could carry them out."

Things weren't working out that way in our party in 1923. Foster saw that when the showdown came, the party controlled everything; and that if he really wanted to control the trade-union work and keep it within the bounds of realism, he would have to have a big hand in the control of the party itself. I don't know whether he had already made up his mind, then, to shift the main axis of his activity from the TUEL work to the party; but that's what it came to in a very short time.

* * *

Before long the new factional alignments began to take shape, and the struggle for "control of the party," which was to last for six years, with many consequences unforeseen and undreamed of by the original initiators, was underway. I, for my part, was quite definite in my opinion that a real factional struggle was in the offing; and I went to work, seeking points of support in the party, without delay. I considered then, and still consider, that my course was completely consistent with that which I had taken at the National Left Wing Conference in 1919 and had persisted in ever since.

I thought it was not enough to legalize the party and get it out of its self-imposed underground isolation. The party had to be Americanized and "trade unionized" at the same time, if it was ever to become a factor in the labor movement and in American life generally. The party had to recognize realities, and adjust itself to them. It had to proletarianize itself, not merely in its membership,

but in its leadership, too. A party regime dominated by "intellectuals," who knew nothing of the labor movement and had no roots in American reality, could only lead the party from one adventure to another until there was nothing left of the movement as a bona fide expression of American radicalism. Above all, the party needed an indigenous native leadership capable of surviving and maintaining its continuity in the harsh process of natural selection.

All that meant, in short: the dictatorial regime of Pepper had to be overthrown.

* * *

We began to fight along those lines, without bothering to formulate our program in theses or resolutions. The theses and resolutions came later—plenty of them, too many of them—but all of them put together never counted half so much as the informal program we started with. That was what the long war was really about.

Our first demand was that the party headquarters be moved from New York, which was an island to itself, to Chicago, the proletarian center of the United States. This demand was no mere eccentricity of residential preference. It symbolized the American-proletarian-trade-union orientation and was so understood in the party.

The Pepper Majority soon yielded to our demand to move the party headquarters to Chicago—why I never knew—and by the early fall of 1923 we were on our way. The national center of the party remained in Chicago for four years. Before leaving New York, however, I did all I could to fix some political fences there.

* * *

Disappointment over the Pyrrhic victory at the July Convention of the Federated Farmer Labor Party, and dissatisfaction with the Pepper regime which was extending its dictatorial operations in all directions, was much more extensive than the party majority knew. Their misjudgment of reality in the labor movement had its counterpart in their complacent assumption that all was well for them in the party ranks.

I knew from the beginning, from

extensive conversations with innumerable conversations with innumerable people who were important in the party in various ways, that we would have substantial support if the fight should break out into the open. I must admit that I helped things along in this direction, for I was an indefatigable propagandist against the drift of party policy in general and the dictatorial internal regime in particular.

* * *

The most important success on this front at that time, and the one that I aimed at first, was the alliance with the leaders of the Jewish Federation. The leadership of this section of the party was itself divided into two factions. One was headed by Bittleman, who represented the original communists; the other by Olgin, who represented the considerable forces which had been brought into the party through the merger with the Workers Council group when the Workers Party was constituted in December, 1921. These two factions were at each other's throats in almost daily combat over control of the Freiheit, the Jewish daily paper.

I sought to enlist the support of both factions for a new party alignment, and succeeded without any difficulty whatever. In my first extensive talk with Bittleman he expressed full agreement with our aims, and thereafter he remained an influential participant in all the future developments of the struggle.

Olgin and his associates were particularly grateful to me for my fight, first to include their group in the fusion which brought about the formation of the Workers Party, and later for the liquidation of the underground party, to which they had never belonged and whose secret "control" they had deeply resented.

* * *

There was a sound basis for our alliance with the Jewish leaders. It may seem incongruous that a new fight for "Americanization," with an outspoken proletarian, trade-union, Midwestern orientation, and a native American leadership, should begin with an alliance with the Jewish leaders who were all New Yorkers and

intellectuals to boot. But it was not as contradictory in life as it looks in cold print.

The Jewish communists were, by far, more assimilated in American life than the other foreign language groups; they had a more realistic appreciation of the decisive significance of a party leadership which would appear to be a genuine American product. They wanted to be a part of a larger American movement, and not merely the leaders of a futile sect of New Yorkers and foreign-born communists. I think this was their main motivation in allying themselves with us, and it was a politically sound motivation on their part.

In addition, their speedy agreement on the alliance was probably facilitated, subjectively, by some burning grievances of their own against the regime of Pepper. The furious factional dogfight among themselves had been referred to the Political Committee several times. Pepper, seeking new worlds to conquer, came up with a solution for the factional struggle which infuriated both sides. Pepper sought to "take over" the Jewish Federation and the Freiheit by appointing a Political Committee "commissar" over the paper. His assignment was to create a third Pepper faction, incorporating a few capitulators from the other two warring factions, and thrusting the rest aside.

* * *

The unfortunate individual selected for this formidable task, which no realistic party politician would have touched with a ten-foot pole, was Gitlow. His lot was not a happy one. Besides having antagonized the main leaders of both sides by his ill-fated fight against the liquidation of the underground party, Gitlow was not at home in the Yiddish language and had no qualifications as a writer in this field. This latter circumstance was particularly galling to the Freiheit staff. They were first-class literary men and took a justifiable pride in their special qualifications in this respect.

The Bittleman and Olgin factions continued their own struggle for control. But after their alliance with us, they subordinated it to the larger

struggle for a change of the party regime.

On the part of Foster and myself there was nothing really incongruous in the alliance either. We didn't have to make any concessions in regard to our basic aims, because the Jewish leaders fully supported them. On the other hand, our objections to a party leadership dominated by intellectuals did not extend to "anti-intellectualism" and the lunacy of imagining that intellectuals should not be included in the leading staff.

Foster, at that time, was very little acquainted with the various important personalities in the party outside its trade-union section. He left the business of dealing with them, in these preliminary stages of the fight, to me. He was well satisfied with the results; and this assurance of substantial support in the party cadres gave him more courage to take a stronger stand in the Political Committee after we set up shop in Chicago.

* * *

The fight did not break out into the open all at once. As is so often the case in the first stages of a factional struggle, friction and conflict in the Political Committee smoldered for a period of months, flared up and died down over one issue and another; attempts were made to patch things up; compromises were made with retreats on both sides. But every time the dead horse of the "Federated Farmer-Labor Party" was lugged into the room we would have a violent collision. Then, at the next meeting, other business would be dispatched with matter-of-fact objectivity and agreement. I remember Pepper remarking at one meeting: "Isn't it strange that we always have a peaceful meeting when the 'Federated' is not on the agenda?"

At the Plenum, held a month or so before the scheduled Convention, the two groups in the Political Committee presented separate resolutions. But after a discussion at the Plenum, which was at times heated, we agreed on a compromise to present a common resolution to the Convention. Precisely what the differences were in the two resolutions, and what we finally agreed upon for a common resolution,

is more than I can remember, and I haven't the interest to burrow through the old records and verify the point. It didn't make any real difference anyway.

The real conflict was over control of the party, between two groups who had different ideas about what to do with the party; not merely with respect to one issue or another, at one time or another, but over the whole course, the whole orientation, and the type of leadership that would be required over a long period. Separate resolutions, on some single political issues of the day, could not fully illuminate this basic conflict; nor could unanimous compromise resolutions obliterate it.

* * *

As the 1923 Convention approached, a muffled struggle broke out in the New York and Chicago membership meetings, and it was extended into the district conventions which selected the delegates to the National Convention. In that pre-convention period I saw Pepper give a demonstration of personal power and audacity, under the most adverse circumstances, which always commanded my admiration—even though we were on opposite sides of the party barricades, so to speak.

He was illegally in the country; it was dangerous for him to appear anywhere in public, or even to become personally known and identified by too many people; and he had had only about a year to study the English language. Despite that, at one tense general membership meeting in Chicago, where the fight broke out in real earnest and we were concentrating heavy fire on his regime, he appeared at the meeting, unannounced, to give us a fight. Facing a hostile crowd, which was excited to the brink of a free-for-all, he took the floor to debate with us—in English!—and his speech dominated the debate from his side of the meeting. It was a magnificent performance that failed.

He did the same thing at a closed session of the Convention, after it had been clearly established that the Foster-Cannon Opposition had better than a two-to-one majority. He came to a closed session of the Convention, especially arranged at his request, in

a desperate attempt to turn the tide. He spoke powerfully and effectively. I recall Foster remarking to me, with admiration mixed with animosity—Foster really hated Pepper—"This room shakes when that man talks."

But Pepper's heroic efforts on this occasion were of no avail. The ranks of a new majority were solidified in the course of the Convention struggle, and a new leadership, giving the predominant majority in the Central Committee to the Foster-Cannon combination, was elected by the Convention.

* * *

That didn't end the fight, however, and we were not finished with Pepper. The Pepperites did not accept defeat. They seemed to feel that somehow or other they had been cheated out of their rightful control of the party by some kind of a fluke. The majority, on the other hand, were convinced that justice had been done and were resolved that it should not be undone.

The two factions in the leadership, which previously had been held together by informal understandings among key people on both sides, began to harden into solid, definitely organized and disciplined caucuses. These caucuses were gradually extended into the ranks, and eventually included almost every member in every branch, on one side or the other. We were lining up for a six-year war—but we didn't know it then.

Yours truly,
James P. Cannon

By Leon Trotsky

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Lippmann Displays His Statesmanship

by David Miller



The Public Philosophy, by Walter Lippmann. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. 185 pp. 1955. \$3.50.

The Public Philosophy is a slim volume of political intellection of exceptional symptomatic significance for our time. Lippmann is distinguished from the vast majority of his journalistic colleagues by a candor, education, and sophistication which place him clearly in a class of one. This is a political, who, in defense of Eisenhower's role in organizing the proposed European Army, could speak freely of the fact that the real function of that army is not an impossible and improbable defense against the Russians, but a defense against "internal disorders."

In this, his latest work, Lippmann once again displays his statesmanship in his very point of departure. The major premise of his argument here is the overriding organic crisis of modern western society. For a leading American publicist, this is indeed an extraordinary confession.

The origin of this crisis, its diagnosis and his prescription can be briefly summarized, according to Lippmann, through its two roots: universal suffrage, and the dominant utopian conception of the perfectibility of man and of his lot on earth.

Ever since universal suffrage emerged, parliamentary democracy has been rendered impotent in face of its problems by the vast cleavage between the limited horizons, the short-run empiricism, the narrow petty individualism of the masses, and the historic needs of society. Administratively, this conflict results in a paralysis of leadership (of the executive) which loses its capacity for action when met by the unsocial, irresponsible, short-sighted demands of that mass-dominated institution, the legislature. Examples of this behavior in the U.S. would presumably include the continuing public opposition to Universal Military Training, to high taxes, to "police actions," and, most notoriously for Lippmann, the opposition to U.S. entry into World War II.

Principles, not petty individual needs must govern political decisions. Which principles? Those in the objective public

interest; i.e., those principles which "men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, and acted disinterestedly and benevolently." (By definition, any substantial conflict of interest is quite impossible.) This is the Public Philosophy. But for Lippmann the vast majority of men are manifestly incapable of meeting the demands for objectivity and selflessness implicit in such a system. "In a literal sense, the principles of the good society must be unpopular until they have prevailed sufficiently to alter the popular impulse." Hence the contradiction.

In times of peace and stability, traditional democracy may stagger on; in periods of crisis, the conflict of public vs. short-run individual need can well have fatal consequences. In fact, crises, when resolved are normally resolved by the action of a minority, says Lippmann, pointing to the fact that the Constitution was adopted, in an atmosphere of social crisis, by a small minority. Plainly, the enfeebled executive of a democratic society can only perform its function if it is freed from the debilitating embrace of the popular hydra.

Indeed, in the last analysis, if the enlightened minority does not intervene to stem the crisis of executive impotence, we face the threat of fascism. For, to Lippmann, fascism is the response of the masses, who, disgusted with parliamentary debility, and preferring effective government to the indecision and frailty of a representative system, choose vital dictatorship in a crisis.

Lippmann's resolution for the problem will, by now, hardly come as any surprise. It is nothing less than constitutional dictatorship, euphemistically labeled State Constitutionalism. The electors should choose the executive, but once chosen he must be free of them and subject only to the office (much, says Lippmann, as were the Popes and Kings, in principle).

In real life in the France of today where the crisis, in Lippmann's terms, is most evident, precisely this solution has already been proposed. We know it as DeGaulism.

But to what are we to attribute the social irresponsibility of the masses and the venality of the legislature? asks

Lippmann. Not to "some vicious mole of nature in them," but rather to the utopian demands and expectations of this same mass — its belief in the perfectibility of man, in the emancipation of man through the dissolution of class society, and in its rejection of the defeatism implicit in the modern philosopher's *La Condition Humaine*. To this dominant theme of the modern mass movement, encompassing the revolutionary ideology of all from Robespierre to Lenin, Lippmann gives the generic name "Jacobinism."

Torn by anomy and the atomization of life, now physical as well as spiritual in face of the impotence of the contemporary state, the struggle of modern man to right himself must end in either of two equally disastrous courses, Jacobinism or fascism. To prevent these utopian efforts at reconstruction, the enlightened minority, in the name of the Public Philosophy, must assume the reins of power.

In the subsequent attempt to spell out the concrete meaning of this Public Philosophy, there emerges an unabashed rehash of Catholic political theory — natural law, the feudal-Catholic conception of duties paralleling the rights of property, the joint church-state responsibility for education, family, wealth distribution, etc. Leo XIII, Yves Simon, and Mortimer Adler are clearly the inspirers of Lippmann's mature thought. (And Catholic reviewers have not disguised their jubilation on this score.)

The Public Philosophy can hardly be considered a vital book on its own merits. Its theoretical poverty and undisguised reactionary perspectives can, in themselves, be of little interest to the labor movement. Lippmann's class bias is too evident. Denying any distinct objective, class interests in society, the unconcealable conflict is represented as one between the intelligent, realistic few, and the primitive selfish majority. The implacable hostility of the masses to war, he labels social irresponsibility — in face of the genuine social irresponsibility of the U.S. ruling class in its H-bomb program.

Whatever importance the book may have stems from its symptomatic significance, as an indication of the loss of

confidence and the consequent drift into totalitarian patterns of a serious, representative, conservative political.

As socialists, we have long been familiar with this development, so that, for example, we were not puzzled at the phenomenon of liberals providing the spearhead of the attack on the Bricker amendment, in the name of a strong executive and in protest against the encroachment by the legislature upon the prerogatives of the executive. We understand thoroughly their opportunism, their fear of the public, their lack of courage to espouse the "hard" unpopular measures that America's ruling class requires to meet its goals. Abdication of their responsibilities as representatives in favor of the President, is, for the liberals, certainly less risky than having to vote openly for more Korean adventures.

Lippmann understands and approves such "statesmanship." At the same time he bemoans the massive popular disillusionment with parliamentary democracy (closing his eyes to the vital connection between these two phenomena). Yet his own book is a part of, a capitulation to, the very pattern he claims to deplore.

Toynbee and Schweitzer can speak, and have spoken, of the organic crisis of western civilization. But in the last analysis they are "just preachers," and modern churchgoers are seldom really ill at ease at a Sunday sermon about Hell and Salvation. Lippmann, however, is a responsible practical political. His surrender of democratic perspectives at this time, his recognition of the depth of our crisis and its inherence in the internal relations of capitalist society, can only be understood as a reflection of the increasing sensitivity of the ruling class to the mounting danger to them at home; i.e., to the real dimensions of the crisis of our time.

A Revolutionary Novel

by Trent Hutter

A Fable, by William Faulkner. Random House, New York, 1954. 437 pp. \$4.75.

When Faulkner's most recent and most

important novel came out some months ago, the bourgeois critics reacted uneasily. They called *A Fable* confused; less effective, as a whole, than his earlier novels; too difficult to understand. Yet they admitted that parts of it are powerful; for example, the fateful encounter between the old General and the corporal, who is his illegitimate son and Faulkner's modern incarnation of Christ.

The bewilderment of the critics is due to the book's revolutionary impact. For this outspoken anti-war novel about a mutiny in World War I is not what is generally called a religious novel, despite the parallel between the corporal and Christ, between his followers and the apostles. Nor is it simply a pacifist novel illustrating that war is bad and peace is good, describing the horrors of war, the degradation of man, as some other excellent novels have done.

Faulkner forces us to look beyond the surface of the murderous game. Although actual mutinies broke out in the French Army in 1917, following the Russian Revolution, mutinies that were crushed by Petain, the soldiers' revolt in Faulkner's novel, which is supposed to take place in 1918, never happened on the Western Front. Yet *A Fable* is charged with realism.

In other words, Faulkner's symbolic story deals with the real nature of the forces behind modern imperialist war. This is all the more noteworthy since the author started to write the book during World War II when patriotic propaganda must have been dinning in his ears and finished it during the Korean War when the propagandists were again clanging their cymbals.

The German general in *A Fable* is more fearful of a military success won by exploiting the French mutiny, and advance that might result in the German soldiers becoming infected by the revolutionary virus, than of Germany's military defeat. The Allied commanders get together with the German general. Both sides agree to a short truce allowing the Allies to liquidate the mutiny so that the war can then be resumed according to the rules of inter-imperialist warfare.

The incident is Faulkner's invention; the general truth it puts in artistic form is not. The "fable" is very real in its dramatic, concentrated reflection of the tendencies of the high command and the dialectics of war.

The central problem in *A Fable* is the destiny of man, the conflict between inertia and revolutionary will. The corporal is Christ-like, but only insofar as he represents Christ the revolutionist. He does not try to offer consolation through promises of a better world beyond the one we live in, a better life after death. He does not "render unto Caesar . . ." His action is a challenge to Caesar and is meant to be a challenge. When his father, the General, offers to share the world with him if he recants and "renders unto Caesar" the right to wage war and to rule the world, the corporal prefers a martyr's death.

Both the General and the corporal believe that "man will prevail." But to the adroit old General's conservative principle, to his profound pessimism over what

he calls man's "folly," that conservative pessimism which makes him an unselfish, ascetic defender of the existing "order" against "disorder" and revolt, the corporal, a determined, taciturn, illiterate peasant, opposes the refusal to accept as eternal necessity the conditions of a given system, "man's baseless hopes and his infinite capacity — no: passion — for unfact," as the General calls the revolutionary spirit.

Much more ought to be said about this novel. It's not easy reading; the style is complex; and certain chapters may seem rather obscure at first. But radicals will be able to understand *A Fable* much better than the bourgeois critics did. The book is demanding on the reader but well worth the effort, for *A Fable* is undoubtedly one of the outstanding masterpieces of contemporary literature, one of those great novels that speak of man's paramount problems.

DuBois's Early Study Of the Slave Trade

by George Lavan

The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, by W. E. B. DuBois. Social Science Press, New York. 339 pp. Reprinted 1954. \$6

Students of American history owe the Social Science Press a vote of thanks for reprinting DuBois's study of the slave trade to this country. This book is one of the classic works on the role of slavery in American economics and politics. It was written by Dr. DuBois 60 years ago as his doctorate thesis at Harvard. Its great historical merit was immediately recognized and it became volume one of the Harvard Historical Series. It has, unfortunately been out of print for decades and though it was a standard entry in serious bibliographies dealing with colonial, ante-bellum U.S. history and Negro history, students had difficulty finding a copy even in libraries.

In looking back over the writing of American history in the past half century, two names stand out: Charles A. Beard and W. E. B. DuBois. Certainly it is a unique and rewarding experience for the latter to witness the republication of a work he wrote as a young man sixty years ago.

The author, in this case, however, has done more. He has re-read this first labor of his life and written a critical appraisal of it. He notes, as have all subsequent critics, that the extensive and intensive research into source materials, on which the work is based, was well and scrupulously done. He criticizes the

monographic method for the academic limitations it imposes. However, the main point of his "Apologia" is his "ignorance in the waning 19th Century of the significance of the work of Freud and Marx."

The fact that despite this ignorance, which was the fault not of the author but of the universities of the time, this book is still a precious mine for the student is high tribute indeed to the aspiring young Ph.D.'s scholarship and honesty.

Back in 1896 DuBois, in common with all other inheritors of the Abolitionist tradition, regarded the anti-slavery conflict as a clear example of a moral struggle. Moral enlightenment and progressive religion and democracy, according to this view, had been arrayed against the darker forces of cruelty, avarice and ethical benightedness.

While in the course of his book, DuBois faithfully brings in the ethical aspects of the movements against the slave trade and notes here and there that greater moral awareness or courage at this or that point might have had happier results, this does not seriously interfere with the study. He had chosen a subject for investigation that by itself largely nullified all attempts at an idealist interpretation.

His idealist points are forced into negative formulations for the most part: there was a lack of sufficient ethical force here, moral enlightenment had not spread sufficiently there, etc.

For the transatlantic slave trade, outlawed in 1808 by Congress, continued without serious hindrance until the Civil War. In tracing the various debates, legislation, violations, defiances and court actions, the author furnishes a mass of economic and political material that enforces an impression on the reader more materialist than idealist.

The study is extremely comprehensive. It begins with Great Britain securing the Assiento, the treaty monopoly with Spain for furnishing slaves to the New World. Then it traces the divergent interests of the colonists who, from fear of insurrections not moral principles, tried to limit the import of slaves, and the pressure of the British merchants and their government to continue the trade unabated.

A masterful account of the conflict of interests among the colonies over the slave trade during the Revolution then follows. In his account of the compromise reached on this question in the drawing up of the U.S. Constitution, DuBois briefly anticipates the treatment Beard was to give 16 years later in his landmark work **The Economic Interpretation of the Constitution**.

The constitutional compromise was Article I, Section 9 which allowed the

federal government to place a maximum duty of \$10 on each slave imported but which forbade any prohibition of the trade for 21 years (1808).

The effect of the successful revolution of the slaves in Haiti on American slavery, receives one of its best treatments in American history in this book. The panic-stricken stopping of the slave trade by various state enactments, the continued fear and prohibition of importation of West Indian slaves after the trade with Africa had been restored is all chronicled in the state laws, debates, etc.

The representatives of the slave-importing states at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 had, of course, no way of foreseeing the industrial revolution that brought mass production of textiles in England and called forth in America the invention of the cotton gin and ever greater demands for raw cotton. If they had, they would not have agreed to the date of 1808 for federal outlawing of the slave trade.

The rise of the cotton kingdom and Southern control of the federal government meant that the nominal banning of the slave trade was never seriously enforced. DuBois carefully traces all the moves, dodges, hamstringing of enforcement by inadequate appropriations of money and naval patrol vessels. He also traces the flare up of sectional antagonisms over the issue.

Finally, as the South moved toward the idea of secession and the founding of a greater slave empire in the Western Hemisphere its extreme wing dropped all pretense and began agitating for the repeal of legislation prohibiting the transatlantic slave trade.

The installation of Lincoln and a Republican administration marked the first determined effort by the federal government to suppress the slave trade. After six months of coordinated work in 1863 it was evident the job was not the insuperable task previous administrations had made it out to be. Five slavers were captured and condemned, four slave traders were convicted and punished. Arrangements were made with Great Britain for effective patrol of the African coast. The slave trade to the United States was finally suppressed.

In addition to a lengthy bibliography, the book has a chronological conspectus of colonial and state legislation on the slave trade for the period 1641-1787; a similar conspectus of state, national and international legislation for 1788-1871; and a record of typical cases of vessels engaged in the trade to America in the years 1619-1864.

This book is an invaluable tool for the student of Negro history or U.S. history in general.

Soviet Policies In China 1917-1924

by Joseph Hansen

Soviet Policies in China 1917-1924, by Allen S. Whiting. Columbia University Press. 1954. 350 pp. \$5.

Just as the generals have drawn back to reassess the military requirements for putting the house flags of American Business on every part of an unreceptive globe, and the diplomats have given up chip-on-the-shoulder protocol for a try at appearing amiable, so the scholars are taking their first real look at the views and organizations and actions of those they list in the opposing class camp.

Scholarly research is evident on every page of Whiting's book — obscure source materials, comparison of variant texts, relentless probing of minutia — and much, I confess, is quite fascinating since it deals with the early years of Soviet policy in China.

The best chapter is "Before November: Lenin on China." Whiting rates Lenin as the one Bolshevik leader most concerned before the November 1917 revolution about China and especially about the problem of the revolutionary role of the Chinese peasantry.

However, Whiting suffers from the current academic thesis: that Soviet policies today represent a continuation of Leninism and that they are, moreover, imperialist.

So Whiting scarcely indicates the great debate in the communist movement and in top Soviet circles in the middle 20's over what policy to follow in China. To argue that Whiting is interested only in the period 1917-1924 is to admit the academic narrowness of the book. How can you understand anything about Soviet history, including its foreign policy, without understanding Trotsky's theory and program of permanent revolution and the opposing theory of "socialism in one country" around which the usurping caste rallied under Stalin's leadership? And especially the big changes in Soviet policy in China — how can they be understood except as reflections of shifts in Soviet leadership representing corresponding shifts in basic theory and program?

Whiting's account breaks off precisely when the life-and-death struggle between the Leninist vanguard and the Stalinist counter-revolution flared violently in to the open, particularly over the great issues of the Chinese revolution.

But 1924 was as far as Whiting's thesis required him to go. He wanted first to try to demonstrate that the Soviet government, the Communist Interna-

tional and the Chinese Communists followed different, even contradictory policies in Lenin's time. The purpose of this, I suppose, is to try to belittle the importance of the shifts and turns under the Stalinist degeneration.

By thus eliminating the question of the differences under Lenin and Stalin, Whiting finds what he considers to be the constant in the seeming maze of contradictions in Soviet policy toward China. This was — after the first year or so of “a program of self-denial” — a foreign policy that “can only be characterized as imperialistic in aim. . .” Although “the most dramatic aspects of Comintern policy evolved after Lenin's death, the groundwork was laid during the years 1917 to 1924.”

All of Whiting's “proofs” that the Soviet Union acted imperialistically in China are based on nothing but interpreting the defense of the young and beleaguered workers' state as “imperialistic” wherever that defense involved interests extending beyond Soviet borders such as the Chinese Eastern Railway.

One wonders just how valuable such a book is to the bourgeois statesmen. How much can they depend for guidance on the opinions of a scholar incapable of telling when the policy of the Soviet government is anti-imperialist, as in Lenin's day, and when it plays into the hands of imperialism as in times and places where Stalin could deliver, or when even in contradiction to Stalin's major foreign policy it became anti-imperialist as in the defense of the Soviet Union against the German armies?

An Objection --

Editor:

In a review of my recent book *The Permanent Revolution in Science*, Paul Abbot says in the spring issue of your magazine, “according to Schanck Marx saw free enterprise and monopoly ‘as the basic trends’ in capitalist society out of whose conflict a third force tends to rise.” He goes on to say “students of Marx are well aware” and then gives a different formulation. Perhaps this student of Marx should read Marx, for the formulation accredited to Schanck was taken from *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Karl Marx, page 164 and 165, which reads as follows:

“But we all know that competition was engendered by feudal monopoly. Thus primarily competition has been the contrary of monopoly, and not monopoly the contrary of competition. Therefore modern monopoly is not a simple antithesis; it is, on the contrary the true synthesis” and “Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly. The monopolists are made by competi-

tion, the competitors become monopolists. If the monopolists restrict competition among the workers; and the more the mass of workers grows as against the monopolists of one nation, the more keen becomes the competition between the monopolists of different nations” etc.

Nor do I see any contradiction between this statement and the one given regarding the conversion of labor power into a commodity, it is certainly the basic dynamism of the above process. Moreover what impresses me about this original formulation is how the modern chemists and physicists are just catching up to it in their own notions of interpenetration of processes.

Very truly,

Richard L. Schanck

-- In Reply

Editor:

If I understand Mr. Schanck correctly, in the final paragraph of his letter he concedes the point I tried to make in evaluating his book; namely, that “the conversion of labor power into a commodity . . . is certainly the basic dynamism” that distinguishes the capitalist form of commodity production from commodity production in general. If Mr. Schanck would agree, we might formulate it perhaps more accurately by saying that it was in the conversion of labor power into a commodity that capitalist production as such had its origin and subsequent development.

The point is crucial to a correct understanding of Marx's view. While historically the conversion of labor power into a commodity was a protracted, bloody and complex process, theoretically it is very simple. The basis of feudal economy was the production of the peasant and the independent artisan, both of whom possessed the means of production in fact if not always in legal title. They were expropriated by the capitalist.

This left them with nothing but their labor power, a power that is not productive until it is coupled with the means of production. But the means of production in the hands of the capitalist enable him to take the finished product, and thereby to impose his aim (profit-making) and his will (organization of production) on the worker.

The concentration and centralization of the means of production in the hands of ever fewer capitalists is a consequence of this basic condition and not its cause.

If you consider the tendency toward monopoly to be primary and also consider it to be evil, then it is consistent to put the struggle against monopoly as first in your social and political program. This is what Mr. Schanck seems to me to

do in his book, justifying it by considering free enterprise and monopoly as “the two basic trends” in capitalist society and ascribing this view to Marx.

A Marxist, on the other hand, basing himself on the most fundamental condition, puts the class struggle first on his agenda. Marx foresaw that this struggle between workers and capitalists would finally result in a revolution that, by expropriating the expropriators of the feudal peasant and artisan, would place the workers once again in full control of the means of production — not as small farmers or independent artisans but organized as a state power that takes over the means of production as developed under capitalism. Under workers power, planning will be introduced on a world scale, enabling man to bring rationality, order and science into his economic life.

I hope that this explains why I differed so sharply from Mr. Schanck's program which calls for no more than opposition to monopoly, not a struggle to transcend it.

I am not sure what edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy* Mr. Schanck took his quotations from. The undated International Publishers edition, published in the Soviet Union, gives what appear to me to be a better translation, particularly of the final sentences:

“Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly. Monopolies are made from competition; competitors become monopolists. If the monopolists restrict their mutual competition by means of partial associations, competition increases among the workers; and the more the mass of the proletariat grows as against the monopolists of the nation, the more desperate competition becomes between the monopolists of different nations.” (p. 128)

Even here where Marx is primarily concerned with exposing the pretentiousness and falseness of Proudhon's “dialectics” and of demonstrating in contrast how his own dialectical method is grounded in the actual historical process, it is quite clear that what is basic to Marx is the class struggle. The association of the capitalists causes an increase in competition among the workers over jobs, but as the mass of workers grows so grows their own association counter to that of the monopolists.

Marx himself expresses his basic view in what seems to me unmistakable language throughout *The Poverty of Philosophy*, especially in the final section, “Strikes and Combinations of Workers,” where he spells out precisely why the workers unite, why they strike, and why their struggle is inherently a political struggle that in the long run means the workers coming to power and reorganizing society from top to bottom.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Abbott

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