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by (P. C. Minority)
Abern, Bern, Burnham, Shachtman

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The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism

I. The Origin of the Party Crisis

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

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

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

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

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

At the next meeting, however, with Cannon present and under his pressure, there was a general reversal of position of all but the present Minority members. Cannon, Lewit, Morrow, Gordon denounced Gould’s contribution as “hysteric,” “light-minded,” “irresponsible”; and contended that nothing in the situation called for a “statement” or drastic action.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The present party crisis began under the impact of the war. Nevertheless, though this crisis is probably the most severe that has occurred during several years at least, many of its features are recognizably similar to lesser crises of the past—some of which, like the curious debate at the July convention over the “organization secretary” were more or less carried to the party, others of which remained on the whole within leading committees. For one thing, there is roughly the same lineup of committee members as in the lesser disputes of the past couple of years. Secondly, the same
general sort of charges at once were made by both sides: the minority speaking of "routinism," "conservatism," "bureaucratism"; the majority of "irresponsibility," "light-mindedness," "petty-bourgeois instability," and so on.

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

II.

The War and the Party Crisis

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

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

Justified as such a feeling may be, an objective and scientific view must however conclude that what has happened is what was most likely to happen, even apart from the particular circumstances that were present in our own party. Indeed, in a certain sense, the occurrence of the crisis is understandable and might have been foreseen: if the war had left the party just where they were, it would not necessarily have been a sign of health but perhaps of senility or death; even pain can be felt only by a living organism; it is a dead animal that makes no response whatever.

Such a crisis affects the basically healthy and the basically unhealthy by the same criteria in that the latter is completely paralyzed by it while the former is able to emerge from the crisis without fatal consequences.

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

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

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

The outbreak of the second world war is not less but far more momentous in the history of mankind than the outbreak of the war of 1914. Indeed, in all probability the fate of mankind for centuries to come will be decided during this war and the period immediately following it. Small wonder, then, that in our own small group the party took the step of the way? And the war challenges us also, every moment, organizationally: Can we continue to exist as an organization, to act and to function? Can we find ways to make our program a reality in the minds of the workers, or at least of a significant sector of the workers? Can we assimilate in our ranks the genuine and militant anti-war fighters, from whatever quarter, who are not now with us? Can we—have we the will to—develop the technical and structural means to continue to live and to be active through the war itself?

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

The issue, then, is the war.

III.

What the Present Crisis Expresses

In every serious political dispute, it is a necessary part of the duty of a responsible politician to define the political character of the party as a whole, as a reflection of its various tendencies. In 1914, the outbreak of the war had a shattering effect upon every working class party in the world. In their bulk, the parties went over to their respective imperialists. But even within the left, ostensibly revolutionary wings, the Russian Bolsheviks not excluded, the outbreak of the war provoked the most profound crises. In spite of all that had been written and foretold, no one—neither Lenin nor anyone else—had anticipated the actual effect which the outbreak of the war would have. New groupings and re-groupments were to be found within every party; the old line was dissolved. Nor was a definitive solution to the various crises found in a day or a week. During the course of the entire war, even among those who stood committed to struggle against the war, a constant and changing debate went on as to just what struggle against the war meant concretely (Lenin, Liebknecht, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Debs . . .).

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The issue, then, is the war.

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

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

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

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

(2) Such an analysis would, however, be by itself inconclusive. It would leave the possibility that the present position of Cannon is an exception or an "accident." In order to show that Cannon
represents a bureaucratic conservative tendency, it is further nec-

essary to relate the position taken in the immediate dispute to
other positions and actions of the Cannon group both during recent
months and also in the past. If it is found that as a general rule in
the past two-three years Cannon has shown himself to be not
bureaucratic but democratic, not conservative but dynamic, espe-
cially as against other comrades, then the characterization of his
present position becomes at least doubtful. If, on the other hand,
we find in the usual polemical and bureaucratic, and conservative,
the characterization of his present position

and of the tendency he represents is reinforced and established.
We propose to make the analysis and to give some of the evidence.
Many members of the party, however, are in a position to come
to this conclusion with the usual polemical and bureaucratic, and
dynamic, and conservative, the characterization of his present
position and of the tendency he represents is reinforced and established.

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

IV.

The Nature of Bureaucratic Conservatism

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

tion on the Russian question; and (b) the minority has been using
the Russian question as a cover for an under-handed attack on
the "regime."

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

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

"... (5) I, for my part believe that the passage through the Social-

ist Party was a salutary action for the whole development of our
party and that the 'regime' (or the leadership) which assured this
passage was correct, the position which at that time represented the
tendency of stagnation.

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

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

(1) The initiative in introducing the question of "regime" was
not taken by the minority but by the Cannon faction. On Septem-
ber 5 Burnham submitted to the Political Committee a resolution
on the character of the war (included in Internal Bulletin II, 2).
In sending copies of this resolution to members of the N.C., Cannon
accompanied it with a letter signed by himself. This letter did not
deal essentially with the political issues raised by Burnham, but
made a sharp organizational attack, contending that the raising of
the issues was irresponsible and scandalous and that the party
could not afford the "luxury" of a discussion. This letter was only
a pale written reflection of the "organizational" denunciations of
the past. Later on, however, Cannon has shown himself to be not
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is also correct. Though normally (not at all invariably) regime is or should be properly *subordinated* to policy, the automatic and necessary relationship between the two is a phantom of the imagin- ation, a phantom at the first sight, the reason for it is not to be sought in the "incorruptible habits" of the com- rade or group, but precisely in the fact of the outbreak of the war, the urgent and immensely important problems it raised, and the serious character of the disagreement over the answers that must be given to these questions—disagreements as contrasted with differences over relatively sec- ondary matters in the past—could impel the comrades of the minor- ity to present the questions, insoluble in the leadership itself, for fundamental decision by the membership, as a certain thing, to be expected—into what parliamentarians call a "question of membership, a refusal that often involved keeping the membership question—which could easily have been settled quietly on its merits, lead to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Finland—suppressed by Gold- man, the trap of the bureaucratic conservative group, was compelled to approve the plan. The plan was presented to the convention. In meetings of the ex-N.C. held during the present dispute, when the question of the incorrigible comrades who opposed S.P. entry, is mistaken,—that is, tend to undermine the established regime. That is why, express opinion. He published an article in the Internal Bulletin (II, 1) among other things, to "explain" his change in politics. This explanation (dealt with by Shachtman in Bulletin II, 3) is so feeble as to deceive no one. The fact is that Goldman, caught in the trap of the bureaucratic conservative group, was compelled to give a stranglehold on the "apparatus," to put a "commissar" in to policy, the automatic and necessary relationship between regime and policy; and this relation is the reverse of the normal. In the case of bureaucratic conservatism, policy is subor- dinated to regime, not the other way around. Let us see what this means. Bureaucratic conservatism is, put crudely and bluntly, *apparatus politics*. Its chief base, in any organization or movement, large or small, is the "apparatus." Objectively considered, the goal and pur- pose and aim of a bureaucratic conservative tendency is to preserve itself. To this aim all else is, in the last analysis, subordinated. To this aim, policy and political issues are subordinated. It is for this reason that the policies adopted by the bureau- cratic conservative tendency tend always toward being conserva- tive. It is the defender of the status quo—until the point where its own preservation becomes incompatible with the preservation of the status quo. Normally a bold move, an abrupt change, a re- orientation, the intrusion of something new, upset things as they are; that is, to undermine the established regime. That is why, to Cannon and his central core of supporters, it made a profound impression, a certain paradox arises: between regime and policy, and new steps, changes and re-orientations, are almost invariably characterized out of hand, without even consideration or discussion, as "irresponsible," "light-minded," "yielding to pressure," etc. This is the reason, moreover, why in a dispute with Cannon—especially of late years—the "organizational question" always makes its appearance almost at the start, from one side or the other. To imagine, as does Crux, that this is due to an "incorruptible" habit of the incorrigible comrades who opposed S.F. entry, is mistaken, for it is at variance with the facts. As a matter of fact, Abern, who with Weber led the fight against entry, has during the past three years up to the outbreak of the present dispute, gone to the most extreme lengths to avoid all disputes and to quiet them when they arise; and others, and usually those who fought for entry, who have been concerned in the disputes of the past years. The fact is that most if not all of the leaders of the minority have proceeded in the past period from the standpoint that com- rade, in the conflict between regime and policy, the failure to alter the regime may have a more damaging long-term effect even than the adoption, temporarily, of a false or inadequate policy, especially in those cases where policy is only a secondary consideration in the mind of the regime. We make these remarks not to suggest that the majority has in the present a correct policy—which it most certainly does not have, but to lose and destroy formalism of the concep- tion that regime and policy are mechanically, necessarily and auto- matically united, and particularly against the conception that re- gime flows directly and harmoniously from policy. (D) However, bureaucratic conservatism is unique among all political and ideological tendencies, indeed the only one that holds with equal weight, as such, the political and organizational questions—as contrasted with disagreements over relatively sec- ondary matters in the past—could impel the comrades of the minority to present the questions, insoluble in the leadership itself, for fundamental decision by the membership, as a certain thing, to be expected—into what parliamentarians call a "question of membership, a refusal that often involved keeping the membership question—which could easily have been settled quietly on its merits, lead to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Finland—suppressed by Gold- man, the trap of the bureaucratic conservative group, was compelled to give a stranglehold on the "apparatus," to put a "commissar" in to policy, the automatic and necessary relationship between regime and policy; and this relation is the reverse of the normal. 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As a matter of fact, Abern, who with Weber led the fight against entry, has during the past three years up to the outbreak of the present dispute, gone to the most extreme lengths to avoid all disputes and to quiet them when they arise; and others, and usually those who fought for entry, who have been concerned in the disputes of the past years. The fact is that most if not all of the leaders of the minority have proceeded in the past period from the standpoint that com- rade, in the conflict between regime and policy, the failure to alter the regime may have a more damaging long-term effect even than the adoption, temporarily, of a false or inadequate policy, especially in those cases where policy is only a secondary consideration in the mind of the regime. We make these remarks not to suggest that the majority has in the present a correct policy—which it most certainly does not have, but to lose and destroy formalism of the concep- tion that regime and policy are mechanically, necessarily and auto- matically united, and particularly against the conception that re- gime flows directly and harmoniously from policy. (D) However, bureaucratic conservatism is unique among all political and ideological tendencies, indeed the only one that holds with equal weight, as such, the political and organizational questions—as contrasted with disagreements over relatively sec- ondary matters in the past—could impel the comrades of the minority to present the questions, insoluble in the leadership itself, for fundamental decision by the membership, as a certain thing, to be expected—into what parliamentarians call a "question of membership, a refusal that often involved keeping the membership question—which could easily have been settled quietly on its merits, lead to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Finland—suppressed by Gold- man, the trap of the bureaucratic conservative group, was compelled to give a stranglehold on the "apparatus," to put a "commissar" in to policy, the automatic and necessary relationship between regime and policy; and this relation is the reverse of the normal. In the case of bureaucratic conservatism, policy is subor- dinated to regime, not the other way around. Let us see what this means. Bureaucratic conservatism is, put crudely and bluntly, *apparatus politics*. Its chief base, in any organization or movement, large or small, is the "apparatus." Objectively considered, the goal and pur- pose and aim of a bureaucratic conservative tendency is to preserve itself. To this aim all else is, in the last analysis, subordinated. To this aim, policy and political issues are subordinated. It is for this reason that the policies adopted by the bureau-
V.

Bureaucratic Conservatism in Action

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

First, as to the conservatism of its policy: Conservatism in policy can be shown in either of two different ways—either by a failure to change a past policy when changes in events call for such a change, or by a failure to apply concretely a general position which itself may still be correct in its general form. The former type is more easily recognized than the latter. In 1935, after the consolidation of power by Hitler, revolutionists refused to change the earlier policy of "working as a faction of the Comintern" to the policy of building a new party, they were displaying the first type of conservatism. The second type can be equally fatal for the progress of the movement. For example, a given situation might call imperiously for the application of a united front tactic toward some particular organization. This application might be opposed conservatively by those who would not at all call into question the "general policy" of the united front; indeed, these would probably be just the ones who would most solemnly "reaffirm" the "fundamental position" of the International on the united front.

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

Does anyone doubt this? Then let him tell us what the position has been. The record of the committee speaks clearly for itself. The majority has some general and abstract remarks in its motions about "the class character of the Soviet state" and about "reaffirming our fundamental position on the defense of the Soviet Union." But to this day it has not answered the actual questions. To this day it has not characterized the Polish invasion, or the Baltic adventures or the moves toward Finland. To this day it has not characterized the present war, or the role of Russia in the war.

To this day it has not even stated whether in the case of the invasion of Poland or similar threatened invasions we are for the "unconditional defense" of the Red Army. For the position it is obligated to state as a group, as the leadership (majority) of the party, it substitutes a number of individual positions, mutually exclusive and contradictory.*

It has not answered these questions. Much less has it given any concrete guidance for the future. It does not say what we should be telling the Finnish workers and soldiers, or the Red Army soldiers facing the invasion of Finland. For weeks it prevented even mention of Finland and the role of Russia to Finland; and of course has had nothing to say about India itself. And while the majority was denounced for raising the "remote" question of India, it was peremptorily asked to state its position on the defense of Odessa from a British warship going through the Dardanelles and up the Black Sea, presumably on the grounds that this was indeed the immediate and not a "remote" question. Events finally compelled the majority to permit the minority to raise, in part, the Indian question—though this question is at least as burning as any other in connection with the present phase of the war. The minority has done nothing whatever—save to reaffirm "fundamentals."

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

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

But it is no less clear that the majority has sided with bureaucratic conservatism in the present dispute. This may be unambiguously shown in four ways:

(a) At the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the beginning of the war crisis, it was unanimously recognized by the committee that at the very least a "reexamination" of our position was called for. At the light of the new events. Nevertheless, for weeks, the majority bitterly opposed any party discussion, and delayed as long as possible the calling even of an N.C. plenum—in spite of the fact that the need for a discussion and the wish of the membership for a discussion was repeatedly stated throughout the membership, and up the Black Sea, presumably on the grounds that this was indeed the immediate and not a "remote" question. Events finally compelled the majority to permit the minority to raise, in part, the Indian question—though this question is at least as burning as any other in connection with the present phase of the war. The minority has done nothing whatever—save to reaffirm "fundamentals."

(b) During the entire first period of the dispute, the majority (in public and in private, in committee and out) hurled charges of "irresponsibility," "light-mindedness," "instability" at the opposition, and compelled the minority to permit the minority to raise, in part, the Indian question—though this question is at least as burning as any other in connection with the present phase of the war. The minority has done nothing whatever—save to reaffirm "fundamentals."

(c) At the time of the Polish invasion, the minority (in public and in private, in committee and out) charged the General Secretary with "irresponsibility," "instability," "insubordination," and "misrepresen-

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*Although this was written before the actual invasion of Finland, the charge is not invalidated but substantially confirmed by the actions of the majority. As is shown in the following discussion, in the Cannon group, characteristically, evaded taking a clear-cut position on the invasion by the device of supporting several positions, containing a reminiscence of those it succeeded in rejecting. Under. Russian conditions, this is, to formulate a specific position without any concrete position, and condemned it for "throwing the party into a crisis on the eve of war," while at the same time making no reply whatever to the opposition on the political points it raised. We have here the classic response of the bureaucrat to political criticism: no answer to the criticism, charges of irresponsibility and disruption against the critic (for further analysis of this attitude, see Trotsky's article on the P.S.O.P. in the October 1939 New International).

In the few weeks elapsing since the opening of the discussion, with the contending groups having scarcely had the opportunity to state their positions fully before the membership—in other words, with the discussion really in its first stages—the Cannon faction has enormously sharpened the atmosphere with the most violent attacks ever known in our eleven years of existence. Bureaucratic and misrepresentation of an opponent is developing in exact proportion to the majority's inability to give a political defense of its political position. Every day now sees increasing at-
though, in the political rationalizations which were cooked up later, their votes were counted as part of the “justification” for the lineup of the new P.C.*

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

VI.

What Hides the Role of the Cannon Clique?

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

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

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

2) The second is the case (and no one will seriously dispute it) it might seem to retute, in itself, our contention that the Cannon tendency is conservative, unless we were saying that Trotsky’s politics in general are also conservative.

3) Everyone knows that Comrade Trotsky is the outstanding theoretician of the Fourth International. It is entirely probable that every revolutionist should give the maximum weight to his opinions: other things being equal, more weight than to those of any other individual. Nine times out of ten, perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred, we find ourselves on the right course when we carry out the line “firmly.” (On what basis, in passing, is Cannon ready to make “my judgment accordingly on the merits of any issue.” No reasoning there on the basis of those who voted against the Shachtman resolution? If so, the vote was 14 to 11, not 16 to 9."

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

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

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*Let us dispose of passing of the Cannonite contention that the minority is a well-disciplined bloc. It is not, as the facts show, but added a statement making clear the meaning of his vote. A loyal voting for the Cannon motion, also subscribed to the Abem statement. It is a move of the same kind as that made by Lenin during the struggle for the PSUC majority, when he wrote: “The question of the party regime that is discussed by Cannon now—is not a political matter, but the relationship of the party to the international proletariat. The minority does not at all deny the right of those who have a political majority to elect committees in accordance with the majority, nor does it deny that Cannon had an N.C. majority. It nevertheless maintains the charge that Cannon’s reorganization of the P.C. was bureaucratic. Let us examine the facts.

On what do Cannon’s opponents base their majority? Does he establish it on the basis of those at the plenum who voted against the Shachtman resolution? If so, the vote was 14 to 11, not 16 to 9."

*No, in the plenum resolution, Koch paid the admission that it was not the N.C. majority but the Shachtman bloc that had been enforced. Let us briefly review the main facts:

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

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

For a genuine revolutionary politician, the thought of another candidate for the leadership changes the slogans and programs (and sometimes even the transition slogan for "A sliding scale of wages and hours"!) into a substitute for politics of his own—regardless of who that other may be. The idea of another can be correctly accepted only intelligently, only critically. Otherwise, what we have is not a policy really understood and capable of being utilized as a guide to action, but merely the ceremonial slogans and political slogans of other parties.

For the factional conflict, Trotsky's politics function precisely as a substitute for politics of their own. As a bureaucratic conservative group, they merely utilize Trotsky's politics, as they utilize politics in general, as an instrument of their regime. Thus, a policy which, as advocated by Trotsky, has a progressive character takes on a sterile and conservative connotation in their hands. This is not at all a psychological comment, but a political judgment; and it can be demonstrated by the evidence.

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

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

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

What is clearer than the present dispute. Granted their policy (that is, Trotsky's policy) in the abstract, in general, they are unable to use it for anything but the purposes of internal polemic. Neither in committee nor in their public writings and speeches have the made a single illuminating analysis of a single concrete event; they have merely a number of times been wrong. The "sign of the cross with proper piety. "All or none!"—100 per cent acceptance of the program just as it stood, and nothing more. Cannon went even to the preposterous extreme of putting through a motion in the P.C. that there is no difference between Trotsky's politics and Stalin's politics (and the motion that two plus two does not equal four). It took nearly a year to force through the concession that the movement and slogans arising in the labor movement for "Thirty hours, thirty dollars," "Thirty hours' work at forty hours' pay," etc., were concretizations of the general transition slogan for "A sliding scale of wages and hours"!

It took a year before it was possible to treat the slogan for a workers' guard as suitable for anything but the most vague and general educational propaganda. As a consequence of this thoroughly sterile approach, the transition program has as a whole not to this date become a significant living factor in our movement.

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

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

To begin with, Trotsky is not only capable of being wrong but has a number of times been wrong. The habit of automatic, uncritical acceptance of Trotsky's views eliminates the basis for fruitful discussion and development.

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

The Cannon group, we have said, accepts automatically, in words at least, the politics of Trotsky. But this does not mean that it is guided by them. The Cannon group, unlike the Trotsky group, have not developed—and it cannot be under the regime of bureaucratic conservatism—the Fourth International in this country is foredoomed to sterility.

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ment of the membership with the sluggishness and apathy of the leadership, with its failure to elaborate or carry out a program of action, in particular, the failure to make a living reality out of the "Transition Program" point out. Thus, while it is true that the preparations for the convention are routine to the core, providing for no critical examination of the past or program for the future. The articles by Cannon, many of the ideas in which were a collective product even though they were not as a personal contribution, were written essentially for the purpose of wording off the necessary criticism of the party leadership's stewardship between the two conventions. No clearer proof of this assertion is required than the fact that following the convention nothing more was heard of the "program of action" contained in the articles. They were a defense mechanism for preserving the regime from criticism, nothing more.

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

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

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

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

The New York organization has been slipping away from the Cannon influence? Luckily, just before a local convention, Cochran turns up in New York; and, though the P.C. has not known about it, it happens that his work in auto (three months before defined as the main core of the YPSL leadership) by a happy chance, felt compelled to tell Cannon in an interview about the bad things are. Thus Cannon supporters in New York are not so many and not doing so well as in the old days? Murray Weiss, fortunately, is no longer needed so urgently in California and is especially assigned to New York; while auto has so thoroughly quieted down that George Clarke also is no longer required in the Detroit area.

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

And none of this is done with mirrors.

(3) The second which obscured the role of Cannon is the cover which has been provided for him by other N.C. members, in particular by members of the present opposition. This has had, for many party members, one of two effects, both of which serve to cover Cannon: it has led some party members, who decided for themselves that the party leadership was conservative and bureaucratic, to place responsibility on the leadership as a whole; or for others, who did not believe that this, that the members of the N.C. was conservative and bureaucratic, felt that the failure of such members to separate themselves from Cannon proved Cannon himself to be neither bureaucratic nor conservative. (It may also be, that some N.C. members even now supporting Cannon—such as Goldman—still serve as)

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

(i) In the first place, the present N.C minority, while opposing Cannon's organizational conceptions and actions as bureaucratic, does not in the least counterpose to them an anarchist conception of organization. We believe in centralism as well as democracy for the party; and we believe it leads to nothing but chaos when every dispute in a leadership is at once "taken to the ranks." We believe that there is a certain order in the party structure, and that this is as it should be. When disputes arise in the leadership, we believe that, in most cases, the possibilities of solving these disputes in the leadership should be explored and exhausted before they are taken to the ranks; and at the very least that they should not be taken to the membership until the differences—if there continue to be differences—are clarified and crystallized. A party pays a heavy cost for membership disputes, in terms of the lessening of positive external action. "Financial" and partial, relating to "the regime" would provoke a crisis in the press. There is to be only one full-time editorial worker and one "constructive convention." The convention ends, but the new "program of action" contains in the articles. They were a defense mechanism for the party leadership's stewardship between the two conventions. It is true that, with the exception of a partial and inadequate discussion at the convention, we have not spoken out and have therefore undoubtedly served as a cover for Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism. Why not? This party must understand the reason for this silence, in order not to be misled by such suggestions as the one to the effect that we speak now in order to divert attention from an allegedly false policy.

(ii) The problem of Cannon's conservatism in politics has also been before the committees. We have cited one important in-

neatly for the purpose of warding off the necessary criticism of the party leadership's stewardship between the two conventions. It is true that, with the exception of a partial and inadequate discussion at the convention, we have not spoken out and have therefore undoubtedly served as a cover for Cannon's bureaucratic conservatism. Why not? This party must understand the reason for this silence, in order not to be misled by such suggestions as the one to the effect that we speak now in order to divert attention from an allegedly false policy.

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

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

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

(v) These four are, we think, legitimate reasons for having hesitated to bring the dispute for open discussion and decision by the full party membership. We do not wish to pretend that only legitimate reasons motivated Cannon's opposition to the movement of the July convention because of conjunctural agreement on a question temporarily in political dispute. Cannon need not be troubled by such considerations, since his policy is the instrument of his regime, and since often the political dispute is for him simply the means of shifting the impending attack on his regime.

11

The Clique and Its Leader

The leading members of the Cannon faction are well known as such. They are not new recruits, either to the party or to the faction. They include such comrades as Lewit, Gordon, Dunne, Skoglund, Weber, Turner, Clarke, Cochran, Morrow, Wright, Weiss, etc.

We have called this faction a clique. We do so not for the sake of employing an epithet with unpleasant associations against our opponents, but, as always, in the effort to give an exact and scientific political description.

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

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

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

After Schachtman finished, Comrade Dunne presented a slate. He offered so motivation for it whatever. He simply presented it for the delegates to take and like. An adjournment was proposed by Cochran, and voted. As at a signal, 30 or 35 delegates then proceeded like a man to the back of the hall, where they held a secret committee meeting.

Two other points were of interest in connection with this revealing incident. Cannon did not go to the back of the hall—nor does he usually on such occasions. Why not? Isn't the selection of a slate a sufficiently crucial problem to occupy the talents of the best leaders of the party—above all a slate, presumably, for war-time? Or is Cannon so purely interested in "politicai ideas" that he doesn't care a fig for them? Is this doubted? It can be confirmed by a single incident. At the July convention, Weiss (as already referred to in another connection) was a member of the convention committee which sponsored the proposal for an organizational secretary. Weiss in the convention committee, favored the plan and voted for it. But Weiss is also a supporter of the Cannon clique. In his ten minute speech on the convention floor, when the point came up on the agenda, Weiss disclosed that he had "changed his mind" (not on the merit of the issue, he admitted, but because he had "had to put it out of my head") ". But the greater part of his speech, as convention delegates and visitors will remember, was a song of adulation to his leader. He had observed Cannon, he told us, for many years. On organizational questions, he declared, he had found Cannon right 999 times out of 1000 (caveat emptor can be inferred). Cannon had been wrong in the final 1 out of the 1000, but if so, he, Weiss, did not know it. Weiss, in spite of his honest opinion on the issue, was another victim caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap.

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

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

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

VIII.

Cannon’s “Theory of Crises”

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

1. Cannon’s first theory was that the leaders of the opposition are “irreconcilable,” “subjective,” and using their own inner doubts to “throw the party into a crisis.” This theory may be observed, is what Cannon has said at the outset of every even minor conflict in the party during the past several years. Let us note:

(a) Even if this were true, it would be of very minor significance politically. Granted that we are responsible and light-minded (a rather cavalier charge against comrades few of whom are either new or untried in the movement), this is at most a psychological comment. The political analysis must show into what kind of false political position our “irresponsibility” throws us.

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

2. The second theory of Cannon was that the position of the minority is an expression of “the pressure of democratic imperialism” (and that all justifiable means must be used to overcome this pressure). It is only a crisis of the party, above all its lack of genuine proletarians, is a tragic weakness in the side of one’s mouth, to smoke large cigars, or to sprinkle one’s speeches with resounding curse words.

3. The third theory of Cannon, advanced at a New York membership meeting, is that the present minority constitutes a “stinking bourgeois minority” prominently in the Cannon faction in many political analysis. Our party, true enough, is subject to the pressure of democratic imperialism, and we must guard against it. Fortunately, this pressure has not yet had serious and crystallized results in our ranks. Where it has been manifested concretely—when Cochran in Cleveland jumped head over heels into the Keep Americas Out of War Club, when the comrades in Toledo slipped reformist versions of our transition slogans into the unemployment pamphlet they sponsored, when a couple of months ago our Minneapolis comrades supported a resolution at the Minnesota State A. F. of L. convention hailing William Green as a fighter against war—in these concrete cases we find that it is the members who are primarily involved, or involved at all.

4. The fourth theory of Cannon is as follows: The present decision of the party in favor of the petty-bourgeois, middle-class elements (the minority) and the proliatarian elements (the majority). A lucid and satisfying theory indeed! What we—the majority says to itself, licks its chops—have in the party is: the class struggle. Thus the majority can get compensation by participation in “its own” class struggle for the party’s inadequacies in the real struggle which is proceeding in its own way in the outside world.

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

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

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

A political party cannot continue as a living organism in a period of crisis above all a war crisis, merely with a policy of "re-affirming our past position." More and more we find that the Cannon faction resists every new idea, every experiment. Let us grant that half at least of the new ideas and proposed experiments are wrong. Still we can better afford to make mistakes than to do nothing. What is revealing is that the Cannon associates always have as their first response to a new idea—"hysteria," "romanticism," "tight-mindedness." In small things as in great: Whether it is the attempt actually to do something about building a "workers' guard" or even to hold, in New York, an out-of-door May Day meeting (which Goldman and Cannon opposed as not feasible and sure to flop—though, as usual with experiments we try, it far more than justified itself when carried out). We must not "rush into" taking concrete positions on concrete questions of the day—the embargo or the invasion of Poland or municipal ownership of New York subways or what is going on in India—because, forsooth, we "might be mistaken" or "might violate our fundamental position" or "involve ourselves in speculation." Bureaucratic conservativism, by its very nature, is sterile. Its self-preserving objective allows it to be skillful in organizational maneuvers, but blocks the outward road; if it tries the outward road, it is only because its inner difficulties have compelled it to seek external solution; and its expansion is also therefore conservative and bureaucratic above all.

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

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

What, we ask, is the perspective of the Cannon group? We know very well what are its intentions with regard to the coming special convention. It has become increasingly plain that the Cannon regime is preparing a split. The party must not be taken in for a moment by some elaborate "unity resolutions" which Cannon presents and has the party attitude. Distinctly in answer to the political questions of the day, and to reply to all proposals for new organizational steps by denouncing them as "hysteria"?

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

X.

The Alternative

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

There is in our presentation a certain possibility of distortion, hard to avoid in a polemical document. Just as we reject a "Messian theory" of how to make the party succeed, so we equally reject any "Devil theory" of what is wrong with the party. We do not for a moment contend that Cannon has been engaged in any deliberate "plot," that he, as an individual, has consciously conspired to impose upon the party a bureaucratic conservative stranglehold, with himself as leader. Not at all. Of all the victims, it is Cannon who is himself most painfully caught in the bureaucratic conservative trap. We know Cannon's virtues and services and abilities—better, with a juster appreciation, we imagine, than many of his own most slavish ideotards. And it is his greatest virtue of all—his complete resistance to assimilate the best of the youth. It has never even noticed the youth, the disinherited generation who above all have "nothing to lose but their chains" and their hopeless social situation. And the youth is in its overwhelming bulk against Cannon and his policies at his height.

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

BURNHAM AND DIALECTICS

January 3, 1940

Dear Friends,

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

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

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

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

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

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

W. BORK

Cayoacan D. F.

TROTSKY TO SHACHTMAN

Jan. 4, 1940

Dear Friends,

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

With best wishes

L. TROTSKY

December 20, 1939

Dear Comrade Shachtman,

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

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

Or do you? I should be happy . . .

L. TROTSKY

ON PARTY UNITY AND FINLAND

January 5, 1940

Dear Joe,

Thank you for your interesting information. In the case of necessity or of advisability, Jim could publish our correspondence and that with Wright concerning the split matter. This correspond-
ence shows our firm desire to preserve the unity of the party in spite of the sharp factional struggle. I mentioned in my letter to Wright that even as a minority the Bolshevik wing of the party should in my opinion remain disciplined and Jim answered that he wholeheartedly agreed with that view. These two quotations are decisive for the matter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

With warm wishes and greetings for all friends,

L. TROTSKY

CANNON AND TROTSKY ON PARTY UNITY

LETTER TO JOHN G. WRIGHT

December 19, 1939

Dear Friend,

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

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

With best comradely greetings and wishes,

Yours,

Coyoacan, D. F.

L. TROTSKY

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

L. TROTSKY

New York, Dec. 21, 1939

Dear Comrade Trotsky:

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

Fraternally,

J. P. CANNON

Dear Comrade Trotsky:

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