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By JAMES P. CANNON

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THE STRUGGLE FOR A PROLETARIAN PARTY

by James P. Cannon

I. What the Discussion Has Revealed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The leaders of the opposition in the past have written and spoken a great deal along the lines of the above quotation. Year in and year out in innumerable articles, documents, theses and speeches the leaders of the opposition have been promising and even threatening to defend the Soviet Union—"In the hour of danger we will be at our posts!"—but when the hour drew near, when the Soviet Union almost began to need this defense, they wavered on their promise.

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

And this shameful performance, this betrayal of Marxism, has taken place in the American section of the Fourth International even before the formal entry of American imperialism into the war. Is the bible of the opposition, their document on "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," a result of the war? No. The document was written two years before the September, immediately following the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact and the beginning of the German invasion of Poland. The reality is diametrically opposite to these lugubrious observations.

In the proletarian majority of the party there is not a trace of pessimism. On the contrary, there is universal satisfaction that the detection of a section of the party leadership revealed itself in time, before the war, and under conditions where it could be combatted openly and in free discussion and beaten down. The virtual unanimity with which the proletarian cadres have rallied to the defense of the party and the Fourth International, the militancy and irreconcilability with which they have met the party crisis "was provoked by the war." That is not precisely accurate. America has not yet formally entered into the war, and thus far we have only a faint intimation of the moral and material pressure which will be brought to bear upon the proletariat vanguard under war conditions. Not the war, but merely the shadow of the approaching war was enough to send Burnham, Shachtman and Abern on their mad stampede.

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

As for the "hard future"—the Bolshevik-Marxists never expected that the period of the death agony of capitalism could produce anything but crises and war with their inevitable repercussions in the workers' organizations, including the party of the workers' vanguard. From these "hard" circumstances, the Fourth Internationalists only drew the conclusion that the grandiose program of such a party. But our definition and description of such principles which now clearly separate the two contending factions. The struggle of the opposition ostensibly began as a struggle against the "Cannon regime," and
as a defense, or at any rate an anticipation, of the “changing” position of Trotsky. But in a short time it unfolded as a fundamental conflict with the Fourth International over all the questions of our program, and to some extent even over our tradition.

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

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

II.

A New Stage in the Development of American Trotskyism

The body of doctrine and methods known as “Trotskyism” is indubitably the genuine Marxism of our time, the heir and continuator of the Bolshevism of Lenin and the Russian revolution and the early Comintern. It is the movement known as Trotskyism and no other that has developed Bolshevism in analyzing and interpreting the great events of the post-Lenin period and in formulating the program for the proletarian struggle and victory. There is no other movement, there is no other school that has answered the theoretical needs of the movement. The tendency of the party remains virtually unaffected. The tendency of the petite-bourgeois elements completely disconnected from the proletarian class struggle, the crisis which overtook the spheres of our movement is (underground, or rather in the party).

It is noteworthy that the crisis struck the New York organization of the party, thanks to its unfavorable social composition, with exceptional force and virulence, while the proletarian centers of the party remained virtually unaffected. The tendency of the petite-bourgeois elements to desert from our program to the petty-bourgeois elements, the tendency of the party to desert from the socialist movement to the petty-bourgeois elements, the tendency of the party to desert from the socialist movement to the petty-bourgeois elements, the tendency of the party to desert from the socialist movement to the petty-bourgeois elements, the tendency of the party to desert from the socialist movement to the petty-bourgeois elements.

The evolution and development of American Trotskyism did not proceed according to a preconceived plan. It was conditioned by a number of exceptional historical circumstances beyond our control. After the initial cadres had accustomed themselves to withstand the attacks and pressure of the Stalinists, the movement began to take shape as an isolated propaganda society. Of necessity, the party must, during this period, be slow to illuminate the party and to the party on the part of the proletarian membership. One must indeed be blind not to understand the meaning of this diurnal party as a genuine proletarian party, the more it stood out by principle and penetrated into the workers’ mass movement, the better it has withstood the shock of the crisis. To the extent that our party has sunk its roots in proletarian soil it has gained, not lost, during this recent period. The noise we hear around and about our movement is simply the rustling of the leaves at the top of the tree. The roots are not shaking.

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The fusion with the Muste organization, and later the entry into the Socialist Party, were carried out with the deliberate aim of breaking out of propagandistic isolation and stagnation and finding a road to wider circles. These actions brought hundreds of new recruits to the party, and gave us the possibility of expanding our activities. But the successes also brought their own purges and the trials—after all this, which Trotsky alone had answered anything. There is no other school that is worthy of a consideration as a defense, or at any rate as an anticipation, of the “changing” position of Trotsky. But in a short time it unfolded as a fundamental conflict with the Fourth International over all the questions of our program, and to some extent even over our tradition.

People who were most inclined to faller and to lose their heads under the pressure of the crisis, and those who became panic on that same “Trotskyism” which simply remains true to itself. Everybody knows the crisis has dealt heavy blows to the imposing movement of Stalinism. With the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact the flight of the Stalinist fellow travellers began. They mistake their own emotions, their uncertainties, their fears, and their egotistic concern about their personal fate for the sentiments and movements of the great masses. They measure the world’s agony by their own inconsequential aches and pains. Insofar as our party membership consists in part of petty-bourgeois elements completely disconnected from the proletarian class struggle, the crisis which overtook the spheres of our movement is (underground, or rather in the party, or rather in the party).

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

As it was, some of the new forces from the S.P. complicated the problem of proletarianizing the party and contributed fresh recruits to the petty-bourgeois clique of Muste.
At the same time, thanks to our deliberate orientation toward trade union work, the party in other centers of the country was developing in a proletarian direction. Penetration into the trade unions was bringing into the party fresh elements of proletarian fighters; and the contrast between the proletarian centers and the New York organization flared up in numerous skirmishes before it finally exploded in the present party crisis.

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

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

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

It is necessary to expose their class basis.

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

From this we can and must draw certain conclusions:

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

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

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

III.

Their Method And Ours

In the light of these facts, which show the contending factions already drawn up into two camps defending antagonistic and irreconcilable programs and methods, what possible interest can the proletarian program of the Fourth International and of Marxism in general have in a "regime" of the petty-bourgeois opposition, or vice versa? The whole approach to the question of the "regime" must be fundamentally different in each case, depending on the position taken on the question of the program. The aim of those who stand by our program can only be to correct the shortcomings of the regime, and to improve its functioning, in order to make it a more effective instrument of the program. The critics from the camp of the opposition, on the other hand, insofar as there is any sense or logic in their position, cannot have any real interest in our regime, as such. Their fundamental aim is to substitute the present program by another program. For that they require not an improvement of the present regime, but its removal and replacement by another which will really be revisionist in character and tend to transform the party into a "bureaucratic apparatus" of Cannon.

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

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

In his notorious document entitled "Science and Style," Burnham writes: "The second central issue is the question of the regime in the Socialist Workers Party." In reality the opposition strikes at the core of the debate by disputing the very essence of the "regime" the first issue; the basic cadres of the opposition were recruited precisely on this issue before the fundamental theoretical and political differences were fully revealed and developed.

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

The eleven-years' history of the Trotskyist movement in the United States is extremely rich in such experiences. The internal struggles and faction fights, in which the basic cadres of our movement were consolidated and educated, were, in part, always struggles against attempts to replace principled issues by organizational questions of theory and politics over night. This only demonstrates that the present party crisis is no mere episode. It is not to be explained by simple differences of opinion such as have occurred at times in the past, and will always occur in a free and democratic party. The crisis is the direct reflection of alien class pressure upon the party. Under this pressure the bulk of the petty-bourgeois elements, and the petty-bourgeois leaders, lost their heads completely, while the proletarian sections of the party stood firm, and rally around the program with a virtual unanimity.

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

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

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

The lengthy document of the opposition on the organization question was not written for the informed and lucid cadre of the party. It was written for the inexperienced and uninformed. It was designed to catch them unaware and disorient them; to poison them with personal and factional animosity; and thus render them incapable of making an objective evaluation of the big political and theoretical dispute that has underlain this conflict.

We are living in serious times. We stand on the eve of grave events and great tests for our movement. People who can be disoriented and swept off their feet by rumors and gossip and unsupported accusations will not be very reliable soldiers in the hard events and great tests for our movement. Petty-bourgeoisism, after all, do everything on a small scale. The gossip and slander campaign of our opposition represents, is the opposite of all this. The petty-bourgeois character of the opposition is shown in their attitude towards the party, their tendency to be carried away by the idea of the struggle of the class enemy, and it is to be expected that for long periods of time we will be gagged and bound hand and foot and have no means of communica-

IV. The Organization Question

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

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

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

Our conception of the party is radically different. For us the party must be a combat organization which leads a determined struggle for power. The Bolshevist party which leads the struggle for power needs not only internal democracy. It also requires an impervious external wall and an iron discipline. Along with reorganizing the party in the most democratic party in the world, Burnham and the Burnhams over the fundamental question contributed, and could contribute, nothing but confusion. But, now that the fundamental political issues are fully clarified, now that the two camps have taken their position along fundamental lines, it is possible and perhaps feasible to take up the organization question for discussion in its proper place as an expression in organizational terms of the political differences, but not as a substitute for them.

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

No one who has thought out their principles and know how to hold to them firmly will be able to sustain themselves in such times. It is not difficult to foresee that those who succumbed already at the feeble anticipation of this conflict will find it in the party. Such comrades need not simply a reassurance about this or that fairy tale. They need a reeducation in the principles and methods of Marxist politics. Only then will it be possible to rely upon them for the future battles.
The petty-bourgeois intellectual, who wants to teach and guide the labor movement without participating in it, feels only loose ties to the party and is always full of "grievances" against it. The moment his toes are stepped on, or he is rebuffed, he forgets all about the interests of the movement and remembers only that his feelings have been hurt. A political program may be important, but the wounded vanity of a petty-bourgeois intellectual is more important. He is all for discipline when he is laying down the law to others, but as soon as he finds himself in a minority, he begins to deliver ultimatums and threats of split to the party majority.

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

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

In this they are only reproducing the invariable experience of their predecessors who put the cart before the horse, and formed factions to struggle for "power," before they had any clear idea of what they would do with the power after they got it. In the terminology of the Marxist movement, unprincipled cliques or groups which begin a struggle without a definite program have been characterized as political bandits. A classic example of such a group, from its beginning to its miserable end in the backwaters of American radicalism, is the group known as "Lovestoneites." This group, which took its name from the characterless adventurer who has been its leader, has been roused and corralled the American Communist movement for many years by its unprincipled and unscrupulous factional struggles, which were carried on to serve personal aims and personal ambitions, or to satisfy personal vanity. It was the Lovestoneites who added the last touches of a "solving the organization question satisfactorily,"—that is, in their favor.

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

Their politics were always determined for them by external pressure. At the time of their membership in the Communist Party it was the pressure of Moscow. With their formal expulsion from the Comintern a still weightier pressure began to bear down on them, and they gradually adapted themselves to it. Today they are driven by the revolution, which is tossed about by bourgeois democratic public opinion like a feather in the breeze. The Lovestoneites never had any independent program of their own. They were never able to develop one in the years since their separation from the official Communist Party. Today their paper, the Workers' Age, is hardly distinguishable from a journal of left liberalism. A horrible example of the end result of unprincipled "organizational" politics.

All proportions guarded, the degeneration of the Abern clique, from formal adherents to the program and doctrine of Marxism into factional supporters of revisionism, has followed the same pattern as the other examples cited. The present ideological and political hegemony of Burnham in the Opposition bloc is the most striking proof of the political law that groups and cliques which have no program of their own become the instruments of the program of others. Burnham has a program of a sort. It is the program of struggle against the doctrinal methods and the tradition of our movement. It was only natural, indeed it was inevitable, that those who combined with Burnham to fight against the "regime" should fall under the sway of his program. The speed with which Abern accomplished this transformation can be a measure of his political flexibility. It is obvious that he is now to serve personal aims and personal ambitions, or to satisfy his feelings have been hurt; the revolution may be important, but the wounded vanity of an intellectual is more important. He is all for discipline when he is laying down the law to others, but as soon as he finds himself in a minority, he begins to deliver ultimatums and threats of split to the party majority.

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V. The Intellectuals and the Workers

The outspoken proletarian orientation of the majority is represented by Burnham as an expression of antagonism to "intellectuals" as such, and as an ignorant backwoods prejudice against education in general. In his major document, "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," he writes: "Above all, an 'anti-intellec
tual' and 'anti-intellectuals' attitude is drummed into the minds of party members. The faction associates are taught, quite literally, to despise and scorn 'intellectuals' and 'intellectualism.' For reasons best known to themselves, Shaachtman and Abern sign their names to this protest and take sides in a conflict where they serve every right to proclaim neutrality.

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

The Case of Burnham

In The Communist Manifesto, in which the theory and program
of scientific socialism was first formally promulgated, it was
already pointed out that the disintegration of the ruling capitalist
class precipitates sections of that class into the proletariat; and
that others—a smaller section to be sure, and mainly individuals—
out themselves adrift from the decaying capitalist class and
supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and
progress. Marx and Engels themselves, the founders of the move-
ment of scientific socialism, came to the proletariat from another
class. The same thing is true of all the other great teachers of
current movement, exception.

Lenin, Trotsky, Plechanov, Luxembourg—none of them were
proletarians in their social origin, but they came over to the
proletariat and became the greatest of proletarian leaders. In
order to do that, they had to desert their own class and
join "the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in
it's hands." They made this transfer of class allegiance uncondi-
tionally and without any reservations. Only so could they become
genuine representatives of their adopted class, and merge them-
selves completely with it, and eliminate every vestige of the
petty-bourgeois contempt for the workers. The genuine Marxist intellectuals who come to us will under-
stand the cardinal point of our doctrine, that socialism is not sim-
ply a "moral ideal," as Burnham tries to instruct us in the year
1940—92 years after the Communist Manifesto—but the necessary
outcome of an irreconcilable class struggle conducted by the
proletarian vanguard. It is the workers who must make the
revolution and it is workers who must compose the proletarian
vanguard party. The function of the Marxist intellectual is to aid
the workers in their struggle. He can do it constructively only
by turning his back on the bourgeois world and joining the
proletarian revolutionary camp; that is, by ceasing to be a petty-
bourgeois. On that basis the worker Bolshieviks and the Marxist
intellectuals will get along very well together.

The American movement has had very bad experience with
intellectuals. Those who have appeared on its horizon up to date
have been a pretty shabby crew. Adventurers, carseasts, self-
seekers, dilettantes, quitters—under-fire—that is the wretched pic-
ture of the parasite of intellectual movements through the American labor
movement as painted by themselves. Daniel De Leon stands out
as the great exception. He was a man and a fighter, a partisan incapable of any divided
allegiance. Once he had decided to come over to the proletarian class, the
state atmosphere of the bourgeois academic world became intoler-
able for him. He departed from the university, slamming the
door behind him, and never once looked back. Thereafter, to the
end of his life, he identified himself completely with the Marxist
movement and the struggle of the workers. Revolutionary worker-
ners of the present generation remember him with gratitude for that,
without thereby overlooking his political errors. Other, and
we hope, greater De Leons, will come to us in the future, and
they will receive a whole-hearted welcome from the party of the
proletarian vanguard. They will not feel sensitive if we scrutinize
their credentials and submit them to a certain apprenticeship.
They will not be offended if we insist on an explicit understand-
ing of their credentials and submit them to a certain apprenticeship.

The conflict between the proletarian revolutionists and the
petty-bourgeois intellectuals in our party, as in the labor move-
ment generally in the whole world for generation after genera-
tion, does not at all arise from ignorant prejudices of the workers
against them. It arises from the fact that they neither "cut
themselves adrift" from the alien classes, as the Communist
Manifesto specified, nor do they "join the revolutionary class," in the
full sense of the word. We quote the great leader mentioned above, who came over to the proletariat unconditionally and all
the way, they—half-way between the class alternatives.
Their intelligence, and to a certain extent also their knowledge,
impels them to revolt against the intellectual and spiritual stagn-
ation of the petty-bourgeois world, and decide to cleave the class
structure. On the other hand, their petty-bourgeois spirit holds them back
from completely identifying themselves with the proletariat class
and its vanguard party, and re-shaping their entire lives in a
new proletarian environment. Herein is the source of the "prob-
lem" of the intellectuals.

The revolutionary workers' movement, conscious that it "holds
the future in its hands," is self-assured, imperious, exacting in
the highest degree. It repels all flirtations and half-allegiances.
It demands from everyone, especially from leaders, "all or
nothing." Not their "education," as the Lovestoneite sympathizers
of our party opposition maintain, brings the intellectuals into
conflict with the proletarian cadres of the party, but their petty-
bourgeois spirit, their miserable fainthat, their abstract ambition to
lead the revolution, and the turn of the revolution in its spare time.
It is not true that the advanced militant workers are hostile
to education and prejudiced against educated people. Just the
contrary. They have an exaggerated respect for every intellectual
who approaches the movement and an exaggerated appreciation of
every little service he renders. This was never demonstrated
more convincingly than in the reception accorded to Burnham
when he formally entered our movement, and in the extraordinary
consideration that has been given to him all this time. He became
a member of the National Committee without having served any
apprenticeship in the class struggle. He was appointed one of
the editors of our theoretical journal. All the recognition and the "honors" of a prominent leader of the party were freely ac-
corded to him.

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

A proletarian party that is theoretically schooled in the scien-
tific doctrines of Marxism cannot be intimidated by anybody,
nor disoriented by a few unfortunate experiences. The fact that
the leader, Professor Burnham revealed himself as just another
petty-bourgeois may possibly engender a little more caution in
regard to similar types in the future. But it will not change any-
thing in the fundamental attitude of the workers' vanguard to-
wards the intellectuals from the bourgeoisie world who approach
the movement in the future. Constructed by this experience it is
possible that the next one who comes along will have to meet
stiffer conditions. It is hardly likely that in the future anyone will
be permitted to make pretensions to leadership unless he makes
a clean break with his alien environment and does not signify
in any way whatever, a sentiment which alone can make them useful to us in
our struggle.

VI.
The Case of Burnham

In the manner of all unreconstructed petty-bourgeois, for whom
personal considerations, and especially personal grievances, real
or imagined, weigh heavier than the proletarian interest of the
class, our oppositionists industriously circulate the accusa-
tion that we have been "persecuting" Burnham. It is told around
that Cannon especially, who is the "embodiment" of all things evil
in the party, cannot tolerate any smart people in its leadership and wanted "to drive Burnham out of the party.
There is
no doubt that this cry gained some sympathy from the humanitarians in the party and netted some votes for the opposition. Others, unappreciated aspirants for leadership, saw in the "persecuted" Burnham a symbol of their own heartbreaking tragedy. All the insulted and injured rallied to his defense with instinctive solidarity.

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

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

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

Comrade Dunne might have added another and even equally serious weakness in Burnham's position: his lack of experience in the party. One cannot learn all that needs to be known about a party and its inner life and functioning on weekly visits to the meetings of the Political Committee; and one cannot be a serious leader of the party in his absence. Comrade Dunne was highly critical of the administrative inefficiency of the Trotskyists; he even propounded the theory that this was an inherent weakness of Trotskyism. He was inclined to the opinion that our "preacher"—which was so "embodied" by Shachtman and Cannon—was so pre-occupied with political ideas as to think that they would prevail in spite of everything, that the organizational and administrative machinery for realizing the ideas was not given sufficient attention. (That was before Burnham discovered that Cannon has no political ideas and no interest in them.)

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

After my return from California in the summer of 1937, when we were proceeding to form our party again after our expulsion from the S.P., I again raised with Burnham the question of his "preacher"—which was so "embodied" by Shachtman and Cannon—was so pre-occupied with political ideas as to think that they would prevail in spite of everything, that the organizational and administrative machinery for realizing the ideas was not given sufficient attention. (That was before Burnham discovered that Cannon has no political ideas and no interest in them.)

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

However, he was by no means sure of himself on these points. He was obviously going through a difficult period of skepticism and introspection. This was undoubtedly aggravated, if not inspired, by a hopeless contradiction between his personal glories and his position as a party leader. However, it appeared to us that his Suvorinian views about Bolshevism and Stalinism were not by any means fully formed. His revisionist views on the Russian question had led to counter-revolutionary conclusions with regard to defense or defeatism. We hoped that he would survive his personal crisis and find his way to Bolshevism.

To facilitate that, as I said before, we did everything to maintain friendly personal relations, without making any concessions whatever in principle, either on the Russian question or the organization question.

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

100 Fifth Avenue
Room 1609
New York City
December 16, 1937

Dear Comrade Crux,

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

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

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

We plan to orient the convention along the lines of our general perspectives and tasks, and our concrete work in the trade unions, putting the dispute over the Russian question in its proper proportions. The comrades in the field are up in arms on the sad state of the world, and they have no place whither to retire.

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

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

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

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

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

"Now, I must tell you—dear friend, that I think he is suffering from the intellectual soul sickness. Who can cure that? If he were completely identified with a group of worker Bolsheviks, and could be brought under the influence of their spirit in day to day struggle, he could survive. But, there's the rub. He does not feel himself to be one of us. Party work for Comrade B. is not a vocation but an avocation. He is not in a position to travel the line. And it appears to me their position in the trade union movement is stronger than ever. Nationally, also, I think we came out of this skirmish victorious. The fact that Professor Dewey, in his radio speech, referred to the Minneapolis frame-up, is somewhat of an indication that our campaign recorded itself in the minds of a fairly wide circle of people who follow the developments in the labor movement.

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"I must say that I sensed for a long time the coming of this personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devours men. Demands personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B.
think it is necessary for you to know the nature of the problem, as I see it. Perhaps on that basis you can make suggestions or proposals which will help both us and Comrade B. in finding a common language and a common path.

Comradely, (signed) J. P. Cannon"

From this letter it is evident that my opinion of the petty-bourgeois attitude of Burnham was not so much formulated at the outbreak of the present factional struggle. The "intellectual sourness"—that is the petty-bourgeois personal life and the inability of the party demands the party must make upon a leader. In such cases, I told them, I had frequently observed that people unconsciously seek to rationalize their personal difficulties and contradictions in the form of hostile reactions on the party. I said that if we could feel sure that Burnham was really one of us, if he would show some sign of determination on his part to resolve his personal contradictions and come to work in the revolutionary movement in earnest, then in case we could have much more ground to hope that the political differences between us would eventually overcome in the course of comradely discussion and common work.

Shortly after the convention Burnham requested, that Shachtman and I meet him at lunch away from the office to discuss a very important matter. At this meeting he told us that a comrade, who had attended the Minneapolis discussion, had reported my remarks to him. He emphasized, however, that it had been done in good faith and with the best of intentions. I expressed my regret that the question had been put to him in such a point-blank manner. He assured them of my readiness to comply with their wishes unnecessarily, or to weaken unduly his position in the party. They made it clear that they valued his abilities very highly and wished assurances of comradely treatment for him that would facilitate his continued functioning as a party leader after the convention.

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

VII.

The Evil of Combinationism

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

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

Petty-bourgeois politics is always a hodge-podge. It never attains to a fully developed and consistent program. Every petty-bourgeois formation, whether faction or independent party, has this characteristic feature. It fights at best for partial aims, and shrugs off contradictions and differences within its ranks in order to preserve a formal unity. Petty-bourgeois politics is in every case the antithesis to the Marxist method of political struggle. It is the antithesis to the Marxist method of political struggle. Petty-bourgeois politics is always a hodge-podge. It never attains to a fully developed and consistent program. Every petty-bourgeois formation, whether faction or independent party, has this characteristic feature. It fights at best for partial aims, and shrugs off contradictions and differences within its ranks in order to preserve a formal unity. Petty-bourgeois politics is in every case the antithesis to the Marxist method of political struggle. It is the antithesis to the Marxist method of political struggle.
is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers' state in any sense whatsoever," and denying it any defense whatever in the present question. As for the "slappist" Shachtman, he "stained" from "raising at this time the problem of the class nature of the Soviet State," and left the question of its defense to future developments.

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

There was a time when Shachtman knew how to characterize the "slavish" character of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union, the criterion by which all Marxists determine their support for the party and its Marxist tradi-

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

"The Stalin regime in the Soviet Union, the criterion by which all Marxists determine their support for the party and its Marxist traditions, and the intelligence of its members. But in the eyes of a Marxist it is a betrayal of principle—an unpardonable crime against the party.

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

"Finally, writing about the case of Mill, who had also made a 'little organizational bloc'—just a temporary one!—with a group in the French Left Opposition which he had defined as non-Marxist, against another group which, although he called it Marxist, was regarded by Mill himself having having bad relations with Mill, who logically concluded this political practice by passing over to the Stalinists—Trotsky summarised the situation in a letter written October 13, 1933: 'For Mill, principles are in general clearly of no importance; personal considerations, sympathies and antipathies, determine his political conduct to a greater degree than principles and ideas. The fact that Mill could propose a bloc with a man whom he had defined as non-Marxist against comrades whom he had held to be Marxists, showed clearly that Mill was politically and morally unreliable and that he was incapable of keeping his loyalty to the flag. If he betrayed on that day on a small scale, that was the conclusion which every revolutionist should have drawn: then ...'"

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

VIII.

Abernism: The Case History of a Disease

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

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

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

In the present dispute Abern is only repeating his time-worn practices. He enters into an organizational combination; he trades off his position on the Russian question for a bloc against the regime; he poisons the atmosphere of the discussion; and now, as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announced his intention to "carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'carry on this fight as always before at every critical stage, he works deliberately in the direction of a split. In his letter to Comrade Trotsky, dated January 29th, he announces his intention to 'car
and forget too soon what they have written. They themselves have characterized the Abern group as an unprincipled and disorderly clique; they have exposed and condemned its unprincipled combination; they have recorded its history. They want now to rule out all references to this history, especially to the documents which they themselves wrote, as of no pertinence to the present discussion. That is because they have not yet found anything in the "history" of Abern in our movement which is worthy of their defense.

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

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

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

"That is good news, only it isn't true, and nobody "knows" it better than Shachtman and Burnham. We shall prove it out of their own mouths. The existence of this clique, its nature and method of functioning, were established and recorded with deadly accuracy by none other than Burnham, not "several years" ago, but a bare three months before the beginning of the present faction fight. In a document submitted to the Political Committee of the party on June 19, 1939, Burnham wrote:"

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

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

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

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

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

"It is meant (wrote Shachtman) above all for the militant, knowledge-hungry youth of our movement. In a sense it is dedicated to them. . . . The youth must be trained in the spirit of revolutionary Marxism, of principled politics. Through its blood stream must run a powerful resistance to the poison of clique politics, or subjectivism, of personal combinationism, of intrigue, of gossip. It must learn to cut through all the superficialities and reach down to the essence of every problem. It must learn to think politically, to be guided exclusively by political considerations, to argue out problems with themselves and with others on the basis of principles and to act always from motives of principle."

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

In reality, the clique he is speaking of was "formed in the dark of the night" in the first days of the Left Opposition, not "two years," but seven years before the above-quoted article of Shachtman was written. Shachtman post-dates the origin of the Abern group to the time of his break with it. The Abern group is always being "broken up" by the defections of people who learn something from an unfortunate experience in an uncomprehended situation that its basis of existence is that of an unprincipled personal combination, of a clique that refuses to live down ancient and completely outlived personal and factional animosities; that its principal aim is to "smash Cannon" (and Shachtman, because of his association with the latter)."

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

What was the motive of this perfidious program? What was the motive of his drive for split in the old fight of 1933, in the days of our isolation and stagnation, when a split of our meager forces could not very well have wounded the death knell of our young movement—a split that was only averted by the intervention of our international organization and the break of Shachtman, Lewit and others away from Abern? What is the motive of the threat of a split in the American section of the Fourth International on the eve of the war and the historic opportunity and test of our movement?

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

Why did not Abern carry out his plans for a split in 1936? For two very good reasons—both outside his control: 1) The faction was reduced to a small minority; 2) An anti-split tendency paralysed him from within. Why had he been associated with Abern in the factional struggle, and whose personal influence had been a cover for him, drew back from the prospect of a split. He made a demonstrative break with the split program of Abern and Muste, and came out firmly for the unity of the party. An example for others in the present critical situation! An example of party loyalty which has not yet received its due acknowledgment. Weber was denounced by Abern and his circle as a "traitor." To this day he is "socially ostracized" by the clique, because he demonstrated in the most critical and responsible situation that his highest loyalty was to the party. Hew shameful and criminal it is to denigrate Weber in order to cover Abern in references to that fight. "Weber did not play the least shabby role in the dispute of those years," says the present leader of Burnham-Ataern. Shachtman,.Muste, and Born, entitled "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism." Monstrous perversion of history! Weber played the role of a party-loyal man and helped the party to frustrate the designs of those who would have split it. That action alone far outweighed the errors Weber committed in the faction struggle. Shachtman and Burnham so acknowledged it at that time. Their attempt to pronounce a different judgment now discredits them, not Weber.

How far one can travel on the path of betrayal by substituting combinationism for principled politics is not revealed for the first time by Abern's present bloc with the anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet
Burnham against the party and the Fourth International. I have said that in the faction fight of 1935-36 he not only combined with the ultra-leftist Ceherties and the Christian Socialist Mutsche against the "Cannon-Shachtman regime," but that he included some of the political agents of Stalinism in the ranks of the Workers Party. And these were not hidden provocateurs such as may penetrate into any honest organization or group without disclosing their political identity; there is no reason to doubt that we have such agents in our own ranks. Abern's Stalinist allies in the Workers Party shared their political orientation repeatedly and consistently and over a long period of time. They were consistently fought by the loyal comrades in the Allentown branch and by the Cannon-Shachtman faction in the National Committee and consistently covered and protected by the Abern-Mutsche caucus. They were kept in the caucus and even on its leading body.

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

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

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

Reich and Hallett, the Stalinist agents at Allentown, together with Andrew Johnson, a member of the national leading group of the Workers Party, issued under date of January 28, 1936:

"As usual, he fights for his perspective with his clique methods, looking, fishing in the stirred up waters. We saw some of it in the elections to the local Unemployed Leagues in Allentown, in the Workers Party, issued under date of January 28, 1936:

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"As usual, he fights for his perspective with his clique methods, looking, fishing in the stirred up waters. We saw some of it in the elections to the local Unemployed Leagues in Allentown, in the Workers Party, issued under date of January 28, 1936:

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

"In the election to the Lehigh County Executive Board of the Unemployed League, (the Mutsche-Abern) caucus decided to make a clean sweep of their party factional opponents. Three incumbents in office, supporters of our tendency, were taken off the slate for re-election and a slate of six Mutscheites to fill all 6 places involved in the election was passed by the Mutscheite majority of the branch, a majority at the meeting of 22 to 21. On appeal of the minority to the P.C., it was decided to correct the slate, to let the three incumbents stand for re-election and to let the Mutscheite candidates for the other offices stand. This was a false division corresponding to the actual relation of forces and also to the merits of the individual candidates. This decision was also flitly violated. The Mutscheites ran in the election against our comrades, and WITH THE AID OF THE STALINIST VOTES, defeated our comrades in the election. ..."
opinion at that time of my roughness was somewhat exaggerated, as subsequent events showed. Indeed, my methods in those disputes were very mild, even when passions were running high. The accusation was 100 per cent right when he said there was nothing "cliquist" about them. And that evaluation would be 100 per cent correct today, or any other time.

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

Abern has always been completely blind to the interests of the party, and even to the larger interest of the general movement, whatever the interests of his own petty and contemptible clique. The party on his own account, but has even played the part of a reformer, a letter meant only for the small directing group of the party to live, clique politics and combinationism must be destroyed, not merely "the past three years," has shown that the Abern clique, the Balkan state of the party, keeps under cover, but is always ready for war the moment it can find a powerful ally to "guarantee its borders" and even open up the prospect of a little extension of "territory."

Clique politics and combinationism and the Abern group which represents and symbolizes these odious practices, are indeed, as Shachtman wrote in 1936, "a sinister current in the blood stream of the party." They embody all the errors and faults of the centrist enemy. The party to live, clique politics and combinationism must be destroyed, it has always been. The threat of split in the present situation, to which the pernicious group of Abern has contributed in the highest degree, is a final warning to the party: clique politics and combinationism cannot be tolerated any longer! In order for the party to live, clique politics and combinationism must be destroyed.

The forthcoming convention of the party is confronted by this unstoppable task.

IX.
The Question of the Party Regime

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

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

Bolshevism has not been the only honest political movement of modern times merely because of the superior moral quality of the Bolsheviks—their moral superiority is incontestable—but because, unlike the other authentically new movements of our times, it has not ceased to make trouble in the party on his own account, but has even played the part of a benevolent policeman settling the disputes instigated by others. As a matter of fact, Abern, who with Weber led the fight against entry, has during the past three years up to the outbreak of the present dispute, gone to the most extreme lengths to avoid all disputes and to quiet them when they arose. (Page 6).

The truth is simply that the Abern clique was so discredited by its past performances that it did not dare to conduct any struggles in the open. The Abern clique has never had a political platform and has never in its ten years history undertaken to conduct an open struggle without influential allies to furnish the political program and the "face." Originally it had this function, the Grace and Specht faction, that played the part of Shachtman again. Between times the clique keeps under cover, peddles its gos- sip, mutters grievances and complaints about the regime, dis- orients young and inexperienced comrades—and lays in wait for the outbreak of a conflict among the influential leaders. Therefore the party must cure itself of this disease in order for it to live and go forward to the accomplishment of its great tasks. The attempt of the opposition combination to slip over the record of the Abern clique has made necessary this extensive account of its real history, condemned from beginning to end of unassailable and irreproachable facts. The Abern clique, like all cliques, thrives in the dark. It was necessary to drag it out into the light of day and show the party what it is and what it has always been. The threat of split in the present situation, to which the pernicious group of Abern has contributed in the highest degree, is a final warning to the party: clique politics and combinationism cannot be tolerated any longer! In order for the party to live, clique politics and combinationism must be destroyed.
fugue, which are the stock in trade of petty-bourgeois politicians of all kinds.

Reversing the political method of the Marxists, who always put the political questions first and subordinate the organizational questions last, the petty-bourgeois opposition, like every other petty-bourgeois group, has adopted the opposite notion. Its arguments are in favor of a criticism of the party regime, that is, the leadership and its "method" of leading the party. It was this question and not the Russian question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime.

Such questions, in the best case, are secondary in importance to the theoretical and political issues in dispute and had to be subordinated to them in the discussion. It would have been absurd for us, in the early stages of the discussion, to take time out to answer this trivia. However, now that the fundamental questions have been sufficiently clarified, it is timely to take up the secondary questions for consideration and to give to the oppositionist critics the reply they have so insistently demanded. In this field, also, there is something to be learned; first, about the facts as against the fiction; second, about the important points of difference as against the petty-bourgeois question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime. Such questions, in the best case, are secondary in importance to the theoretical and political issues in dispute and had to be subordinated to them in the discussion. It would have been absurd for us, in the early stages of the discussion, to take time out to answer this trivia. However, now that the fundamental questions have been sufficiently clarified, it is timely to take up the secondary questions for consideration and to give to the oppositionist critics the reply they have so insistently demanded. In this field, also, there is something to be learned; first, about the facts as against the fiction; second, about the important points of difference as against the petty-bourgeois question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime. Such questions, in the best case, are secondary in importance to the theoretical and political issues in dispute and had to be subordinated to them in the discussion. It would have been absurd for us, in the early stages of the discussion, to take time out to answer this trivia. However, now that the fundamental questions have been sufficiently clarified, it is timely to take up the secondary questions for consideration and to give to the oppositionist critics the reply they have so insistently demanded. In this field, also, there is something to be learned; first, about the facts as against the fiction; second, about the important points of difference as against the petty-bourgeois question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime. Such questions, in the best case, are secondary in importance to the theoretical and political issues in dispute and had to be subordinated to them in the discussion. It would have been absurd for us, in the early stages of the discussion, to take time out to answer this trivia. However, now that the fundamental questions have been sufficiently clarified, it is timely to take up the secondary questions for consideration and to give to the oppositionist critics the reply they have so insistently demanded. In this field, also, there is something to be learned; first, about the facts as against the fiction; second, about the important points of difference as against the petty-bourgeois question which united the leadership of the bloc, and it is indubitable that the bulk of their supporters—who are predominantly petty-bourgeois elements without much political experience—were recruited for the faction by arguments centering around the questions of the regime.
took over the direction of the party at the convention in the spring of 1936. During the entire period of our work in the Socialist Party, that is, for a whole year, I was, as is known, absent from the center, in California. The administration and political direction of our faction in the S.P. was in the hands of the present minority, primarily of Burnham and Shachtman. True, I attempted to participate in this direction by correspondence, but without much success. It was during this period that the leaders of the present opposition first showed to me their abominable and intolerable bureaucratic concept of leadership as a function that belongs exclusively to the people in the office at the center. My criticisms and proposals "from the field" got scant consideration. My stay in California, my personal relations with the comrades there, my position from the outside, all this worked with the political and propagandistic work and in trade union activity, will always remain a happy memory. At the same time, I must say, my futile attempts to participate by correspondence in the work of the New York center; my inability to get from them the slightest sign of understanding, or consideration or comradely aid for the heavy tasks we were undertaking in California; their callous and stupid bureaucratic disregard of our local opportunities, problems, and difficulties; their narrow-minded, malicious, office-leaders' hostility to the launching of "Labor Action"; their mean-spirited sabotage of this enterprise, and their attempt even to construe it as "a maneuver" against them—all that stands out as perhaps the most infuriating experience of all my activity in the revolutionary movement. I cannot think of it even to this day without bitter resentment.

"Go fight City Hall"—says the New York push-cart peddler with ironic despair when he means to say: "It is hopeless; you can't get justice or even a hearing from the office—prive officials there." The people who were running things in the New York center was the same one that might have been able to lead the activities of field workers from the office. I understand how the comrades of our auto faction felt when they encountered the same attitude from "the office." I know their white-hot anger, because I, myself, have lived it. Doing battle against office leadership! To hell with office leadership! You can never build a proletarian movement from an office! *

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

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

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

Moreover, at least a good one-third of the time I was absent from New York, on trips to the field or abroad. Perhaps during those intervals, the six Tribunes, free from the influence of any Svengali, introduced radical improvements in the functioning of the Committee, substituted "progressive" politics for "conservatism" and eliminated bureaucratic practices? No, those were just the times when things really went to hell on a bicycle.

On one of these occasions the emancipated P.C. interpreted our Labor Party policy in New York to mean that we could support the candidates of the American Labor Party, although endorsed by capitalist parties. The P.C. minutes of September 23, 1936 read: "We give specific critical support to all independent candidates of the A.L.P., irrespective of whether such candidates have been endorsed by any other parties or groups. Carried." This policy, fathered by Burnham, would have obliged us to support LaGuardia, an enrolled member of the American Labor Party, justified the Thomas-Altman socialists in our big fight and split with them over precisely this issue, and deflected the attention from the election to supporting the Labor Party as an expression of independent class politics. This absolutely untenable position was changed on my initiative, with the support of Shachtman, after our return from the World Congress.

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

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

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

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

X.

"Conservatism"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Such "conservatism," which they consider a fault, we hold to be a virtue. That it drove the opposition from this party. That it has been verified in the test of the greatest historic events, and which in our view constitute the only program of proletarian liberation. We have carefully examined the substitutes offered to us by Burnham. They are not the products of his own manufacture. He is merely the broker of shop-worn merchandise that has been palmed off on the workers time and again by bourgeois ideologists and always at the detriment of their struggle. We will have none of it. We stick to our own program. We accept no substitutes. If this be conservatism, make the most of it.

XI.

"Bureaucratism"

In all the documents and speeches of the opposition, the party leadership is represented as bureaucratic in the most invidious sense of the term. More precisely, the party regime is depicted, sometimes by insinuation, sometimes directly and directly, as Stalinist in character. Burnham, who denies the inevitability of socialism, is nevertheless convinced that Stalinism develops "inevitably" out of Bolshevism. From that viewpoint he indict us in the name of Trotskyism moral of "a bureaucrat group" which has been verified in the test of the greatest historic events, and in which we all more or less succumbed in the hard years of isolation, participation in the turbulent mass movement of the workers.

The tendency is very strong in all isolated groups to console themselves with the monotonous repetition of adherence to great principles without seeking ways and means and new opportunities to apply them. The offerings of Burnham are shoddy stuff, and if you inspect them closely you will see on every item the trade mark of another class. Burnham is merely the broker of shop-worn merchandise that has been palmed off on the workers time and again by bourgeois ideologists and always at the detriment of their struggle. We will have none of it. We stick to our own program. We accept no substitutes. If this be conservatism, make the most of it.

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

Stalinism has not only disoriented its own supporters but, to a considerable degree, also its opponents. Many of them see in Stalinism only bad methods. (They overlook the privileged social groupings and the anti-proletarian policy which these bad methods are designed to serve.) Victims of this superficial view of Stalinism never lack, at least up till now, to be deceived, unscrupulous demagogues to exploit their prejudices and to cry "Stalinism" when they run out of political or theoretical arguments. Shachtman, together with Abern, played this demagogue's role in the early years of the Left Opposition in this country, before our tiny movement had yet attained an "apparatus," to say nothing of a
Our party "apparatus" is neither a bureaucracy, nor a faction, leaders of the petty-bourgeois faction — God, how they suffered! The air has been shattered with the shrieks of the individual profession in life. Every young party member should be to qualify himself for such a honorable of all occupations. The highest aspiration and ambition of not brought to light a single such case insofar as the present ma-
the occupation of a professional revolutionist to be the most hon-
its voluminous documentation, and its innumerable speeches, has 
the discussions of bureaucratic 
professional functionaries, who in addition, have to stand the abuse 
private employment.

Now I want to put two questions to the leaders of the Opposi-
known this very well and doesn't 

(1) Is it not true that Lenin opposed Stalin in his onslaught on organizational grounds. The famous testament is prefixed by the significant observation that the rule of the proletariat is based upon a collaboration of two classes. This creates the whole environment for the growth of a Soviet bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, in the period of its degeneration, in the midst of the constant turnover of the non-bureaucratizing capitalism, represents the pressure of alien classes. Because of this, the bureaucracy, the apparatus, tends more and more to bear down upon the proletarian kernel of the country; it always in an increasing contempt to it and a growing inclination to lean upon enemy classes. Stalin was the personification of this bureaucratic tendency. If the testament is read in connection with the noted articles and letters Lenin wrote shortly before his death, the political and class connection will become apparent. If nothing is learned from the testament except that "Stalin is rude — remove him!" then, indeed, nothing has been learned.

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

That quotation deserves study by the comrades in the party who want to place themselves on organizational grounds. The statement of the"Socialist" that "the best organization of the party is not an economically privileged bureaucracy. It is precisely in order to serve their own special privileged interests, and amongst the interests of the proletariat mass, that every labor bureaucracy ties itself up in one way or another with the "enemies" classes. As Shachtman aptly says, it "tears upon" enemy classes and "bears down" upon the proletariat. It is in order to carry through this policy, against the interests and against the will of the proletariat mass, that bureaucratic members of the privileged groups and bureaucratic methods become necessary. That is true only of the Stalinist bureaucracy; it is true also of the trade union bureaucracy, the bureaucracy of the parties of the Second International and of all reformist labor organizations.

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

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

The air has been shattered with the shrieks of the individual leaders of the petty-bourgeois faction — God, how they suffered! But not a word of complaint has come in from "the proletarian kernel" of the party. From all parts of the country, during the discussion, I received letters from rank and file comrades asking "information" about the bureaucracy in the party, but nobody among them volunteered to give any information. A very strange animal, this bureaucracy, like the purloined letter — everybody hears about it, but nobody knows about it. Nobody, that is, except a coterie of thin-skinned petty-bourgeois intellectuals, half-intellectuals and would-be intellectuals who magnify a few pin-pricks suffered by their individual persons into a murderous bayonet charge against the rank and file of the party units or the trade union fractions — nonsense! And vice versa, practically every proletarian branch of the party supports the majority! Every trade union fraction in the party from Coast to Coast, with the sole exception of a couple of white collar fractions in New York City, supports the majority unanimously, or almost unanimously: This is not by accident. Bureaucratism strikes, first and last, at the proletarian sections of every organization; bureaucracy "bear down upon the proletarian kernel." If the proletariat majority of the National Committee has plenty of political faults and sins to account for; it has to admit a great deal of inefficiency, neglected opportunities, slackness in discipline, etc. But that is the very duty of every privileged stratum controlling the apparatus. By 1935, however, Shachtman found himself on the side of "Stalin-Cannon" in the struggle for entry into the Socialist Party; and the "anti-Stalinist" fol-de-rol was being directed against him, as a leading representa-
tive of the party "regime." That is true, to be sure, but Shachtman always acutely sensitive to anything that touches him personally — thought better of the matter and submitted the charge of "Stalin- nism" to an analysis. This analysis is worth quoting here. Neither the regime's denunciations launched against it have changed in any fundamental respect since its argued on the other side of the question.

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

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

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

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

That quotation deserves study by the comrades in the party who want to place themselves on organizational grounds. The statement of the "Socialist" that "the best organization of the party is not an economically privileged bureaucracy. It is precisely in order to serve their own special privileged interests, and amongst the interests of the proletariat mass, that every labor bureaucracy ties itself up in one way or another with the "enemies" classes. As Shachtman aptly says, it "tears upon" enemy classes and "bears down" upon the proletariat. It is in order to carry through this policy, against the interests and against the will of the proletariat mass, that bureaucratic members of the privileged groups and bureaucratic methods become necessary. That is true only of the Stalinist bureaucracy; it is true also of the trade union bureaucracy, the bureaucracy of the parties of the Second International and of all reformist labor organizations.

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

1. Where and when did the regime in our party "bear down" on the proletarian kernel? Name me one branch, or one trade union fraction, that has complained in the discussion of bureaucratic mistreatment by the party leadership. The whole paragraph deserves study line by line and word by word. I have underlined a couple of especially important sentences. "The bureaucracy tends more and more to bear down upon the proletarian kernel of the country." That is the universal characteristic of this bureaucratic tendency. If the testament is read in connection with the noted articles and letters Lenin wrote shortly before his death, the political and class connection will become apparent. If nothing is learned from the testament except that "Stalin is rude — remove him!" then, indeed, nothing has been learned.

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

The air has been shattered with the shrieks of the individual leaders of the petty-bourgeois faction — God, how they suffered!
or a clique. It is a selection of people who fulfill different functions according to their merits and capacities and experience and their readiness to serve the party at the cost of severe economic penalties. The party has no element of 'patronage' in its selection; the very suggestion of such a thing is an intolerable insult, especially when it comes, as it usually does, from well-situated dilettantes who never missed a dinner appointment for the revolution. Neither can it be justly maintained that there has been any factional discrimination or favoritism in the selection of party functionaries. The opposition has been represented, and well represented, especially in the editorial and office positions in the centre.

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

As for the prominent trade unionists, they have attained positions of prominence in their field, not by "appointments" from New York, but by their own activities and merits which have been recognized by the workers. If the field workers are petty-bourgeois unionists of the party tended from the outset of the fight to "take sides" against the office leaders of the opposition, it is because they are addicts of some preposterous fascistic "leader cult" but, rather, from considerations of an opposite nature. The nature of their work, which is directly and immediately affected from day to day by the actions and decisions of the central party leadership, gives them a more intimate understanding of its real qualities. This determines a more critical attitude on their part than in the case of those leaders who have manifested such tendencies most crudely, and more times than once. Indeed, the tendency of the petty-bourgeois leaders is towards bureaucratic practices. From the nature of the faction it could hardly be otherwise. There are glaring instances which show how they manifested this tendency to the leaders who had a hand in and were able to act without the counteracting influence of the majority. Their conduct in the auto crisis is a classic example of intolerable bureaucratic procedure from beginning to end. And the end is not yet, for they have not yet acknowledged their error, nor corrected their procedure; they still believe that the auto crisis was only in an attempt to explain away their own actions, to justify themselves at the expense of their critics, and to switch the issue and turn the attack against their critics.

In "The War and Bureaucratic Centralism," a document of approximately 20,000 words for only one paragraph on the auto crisis. And this single paragraph is devoted, not to a discussion of the crisis and their conduct in it, but to a completely extraneous matter so as to make it appear that "Cannon," who was three thousand miles away at the time of the auto crisis, was nevertheless responsible for their debacle in this situation, as for everything else. In a remarkable article that belongs now to party history, "The Truth About the Auto Crisis," Cannon has written the full account of the auto crisis, an account which is verified and documented at every point. That article will speak for itself, and will be source material for every discussion in the future over the concrete meaning of bureaucratic practices on the party and the present position of an office leader who is not a clique. Here I wish to make only a few general observations on this unhappy affair. The present minority were in full charge of the Political Committee; the seventh member, who had been responsible for all of their troubles, was across the wide ocean, and in no position to hamper or resist their operations here. When the auto crisis was a real test of the regime—their regime. It was a real test of their capacity to lead the party and to lead workers in a difficult and complicated situation. What did they do? They began by bungling the policy. This policy, cooked up in Burnham's study, prescribes a course of action for our fraction which was contrary to the movement of the workers in the industry, and which, if it had been followed out, would have swept our comrades out of the auto union in the space of a few weeks' time. When the whole auto fraction, which included the ablest trade unionists in the party and four members of the N.C., rose up against them they "reaffirmed" their former position by a vote of three to two, with one abstaining, called that the decision of the party, and appealed to discipline and formal authority.

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

Another example of unadulterated bureaucratism of the same type was shown in the proceedings of Burnham's fraction in regional conferences as the election leaped to the election by the majority of the Minneapolis branch last spring.

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

"Motions by Burnham: (1) That the P.C. consider the action of the Minneapolis local in withdrawing its own candidate from the majority primaries and going over to support of Rude as (a) an opportunistic concession to the conservative trade union bureaucrats, and (b) with respect to the support of Rude, a practice in conflict with the party line in favor of genuinely independent working class political action.

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

"(3) A carefully worded explanatory article on this situation
When the light-minded oppositionist leaders attempt to establish a party bureaucracy as a privileged group whose interests are antagonistic to the interests of the rank and file—these leaders, by their policy, designed to serve these interests, must be imposed upon the party by bureaucratic means. Neither have they attempted to find any means for a ruling clique to hold power under the name of "leader cult," yet the Marxists analyze every labor bureaucracy or clique and explain its methods by first uncovering its social basis. It was by this method that Trotsky and the Bolshevist-Leninists disclosed the real nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the first instance, not as an accidental formation, but as a result of the interplay of conflicting privileged groups, and to concentrate all power in the party apparatus.

All the "methods" of Stalinism grew from the necessities of the iron necessity of a still narrower concentration of power. The opposition has made no effort to establish the existence of a party bureaucracy as a privileged group whose interests are antagonistic to the interests of the rank and file; and whose policy, designed to serve these interests, must be imposed upon the party by bureaucratic means. Neither have they attempted to find any means for a ruling clique to hold power under the name of "leader cult," yet the Marxists analyze every labor bureaucracy or clique and explain its methods by first uncovering its social basis. It was by this method that Trotsky and the Bolshevist-Leninists disclosed the real nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the first instance, not as an accidental formation, but as a result of the interplay of conflicting privileged groups, and to concentrate all power in the party apparatus.

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The "Clique" and the "Leader Cult"

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But the conflicts of class interests in the country, and the numerous rivalries and conflicts of interest between the various privileged groups, found a distorted expression in factional struggles within the apparatus itself. This unsettled the regime and created possibilities for the intervention of the party rank and file, and of the working mass in general. The Left Opposition for a time made its way through just such fissures in the apparatus and, as a result of its overthrow, created the arbiters and bureaucrats of the party. The political line of Burnham's motion was absolutely incorrect; it was by this method that Trotsky and the Bolshevist-Leninists disclosed the real nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the first instance, not as an accidental formation, but as a result of the interplay of conflicting privileged groups, and to concentrate all power in the party apparatus.

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

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

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ish an identity, or even an analogy, between our party staff and the Stalinist bureaucracy, they are constructing a house of cards which falls to pieces at the first touch. Turning their backs on the sociological analysis from which Marxism construes its politics, these self-styled "independent thinkers" reveal themselves, on this question, too, as allies of the ultramontane journalists and petty-bourgeois moralists who have judged Stalinism by its methods and techniques, without understanding the social basis and role of Stalinism which dictates the employment of these techniques.

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

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

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

The petty-bourgeois opposition in our party did not invent the theory that we have a "leader cult" and a "one-man regime" in the American party and in the Fourth International; they borrowed that, as they borrowed everything else, from alien sources. In the first days of the present discussion in our party the Lovestoneites, searching for kindred spirits, issued "An Appeal to Members and Fighters of the Socialist Workers Party." The "Appeal" invited any waifs and strays we might have to join the Lovestoneite organization. The inducement? "There you will find an organization which works out its own policies, independently and democratically, to meet the needs and interest of the workers and not to follow a 'party line' laid down by the 'leader' in Moscow or in Mexico City." (Workers' Age, Oct. 21, 1939). I reprint this contemptible piece of petty fakey is designed for those who think an inspection of a political document like a proof-reader and accepts it only if every word and every comma is in place. The line of the document was clear to all, the political conclusions, which were endorsed, were succinctly stated. That is enough for a serious revolutionary to determine his attitude toward any political document. Shachtman knows this as well as we do. He quibbles about a "missing page" only to support the thesis that the leaders of the party are not thinking revolutionists but weak-minded addicts of religious "faith."

I have taken the space to cite the record in this instance to expose Shachtman's falsifications at some length because it is out of such flimsy material that our enemies, the Lovestoneites and their American off-shoot, the Trotskyists, build an identity, or even a religious, between our party staff and the Trotskyists.

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But, it may be objected, the opposition complains of a "leader cult" only in the Socialist Workers' Party, not in the Fourth International. No, no, that is not what they mean. It is the Fourth International, and its "leader cult," to "faith." This contemptible piece of petty fakey is designed for those who think an inspection of a political document like a proof-reader and accepts it only if every word and every comma is in place. The line of the document was clear to all, the political conclusions, which were endorsed, were succinctly stated. That is enough for a serious revolutionary to determine his attitude toward any political document. Shachtman knows this as well as we do. He quibbles about a "missing page" only to support the thesis that the leaders of the party are not thinking revolutionists but weak-minded addicts of religious "faith."
party. After all, Trotsky has failed." (Memorandum of James Burnham issued by the National Office of the American Workers Party.)

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

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

As we came to the end of the concluding session of the July convention and reached the last point on the agenda, the election of the Committee, Shachtman arose to propose a slate. It was very late, the delegates were tired and restless, and many of them wanted to get a few hours sleep in preparation for their departure the following day. Naturally, this could not deter Shachtman from making a speech. Naturally, also, the speech was long and highly significant for the pronouncement of the assumption that the delegates didn't know what they wanted with regard to the composition of the new N.C. and had to be told. Stripped of pretentious and hypocritical verbiage, Shachtman's slate amounted to a proposal to shift the center of gravity in the National Committee by the addition of a number of New York professional "youth" whose experience has been confined pretty largely to the class room and the office of the Y.P.S.L. Without making a speech—the delegates had openly manifested their desire for a change of personnel in the N.C. Shachtman then presented another slate weighted on the other side. Dunne then presented another slate weighted on the other side. Dunne's slate corresponded in its general tendency more to the desires of the majority of the delegates. They knew the leading people, they had listened to endless hours of debate on the organization report, and it is sheer impudence to assume that they had given no thought to the composition of the new National Committee in the light of the debate. An adjournment for consultation was requested, and then—horror of horrors!—"As at a signal, 30 or 35 delegates then proceeded like a man to the back of the hall, where they held a caucus meeting." What is wrong or abnormal about that procedure? The "30 or 35 delegates," that is, a majority of the convention, obviously wanted to make some amendments to the Dunne slate. How else could they do it except by an informal meeting?

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

I personally took no part in the caucus on the slate, as the opposition's document testifies, and for definite reasons. I was anxious to observe the struggle in the open. Shachtman had not been clearly defined in specific resolutions. At the beginning of the convention I proposed that a nominating commission, consisting of representatives from the main delegations, be set up to study the candidates and present to the convention on the basis of the qualifications of the individual candidates and their support in the ranks. I consider it best for the central leaders of the party not to interfere too much in the selection of the personnel of the N.C. Members of the N.C., in order to have real authority, should be pushed up from below, not lifted from the top.

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

Cliquists and cliquists and permanent factions are abhorrent to proletarian revolutionists who seek the realization of their socialist aims through a workers' mass movement led by a mass party. The only permanent formation that can claim our allegiance is the party. Factionalism is for us only temporary groupings, to be dissolved in the party when the immediate issues in dispute are settled. To speak of cliques, that is, groupings of chums and friends without a principled basis—we did not wage an educational struggle against such abominations since the inception of our movement to win the hearts and minds of the masses. Our persuasion is ineer slander without a trace of justification in fact.

XIII.

The Proletarian Orientation

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

The leaders of the opposition confine their remarks to only one aspect of the meeting, and, in my opinion, to the least important aspect—the procedure. The meeting is cited as one of their big "proofs" of the existence of a secret clique which decides things and substitutes itself for the official leading body of the party. If it was a clique operation, why then, were Burnham and Shachtman dissolved in the party when the immediate issues in dispute are settled. To speak of cliques, that is, groupings of chums and friends without a principled basis—we did not wage an educational struggle against such abominations since the inception of our movement to win the hearts and minds of the masses. Our persuasion is sneer slander without a trace of justification in fact. The opposition tries to isolate the elections to the N.C. from everything that had preceded and led up to it in the convention. These proceedings, especially the debate on the organization report, clearly intimate a brewing struggle between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies, the struggle which broke out with such violence a few months later. These intimations did not pass unnoticed by the delegates from the proletarian centers. They didn't know everything, but they sensed the direction in which the conflict was moving and began to align themselves accordingly. So also did the minority of the delegates who automatically rallied around the Shachtman slate without the formality of a caucus consultation. Dunne and Shachtman each signify certain things in the party. Any speeches they may make at the eleventh hour of a convention change nothing. Shachtman will never know it, but speeches are judged not only by what is said but also by who says it.

I personally took no part in the caucus on the slate, as the opposition's document testifies, and for definite reasons. I was anxious to observe the struggle in the open. Shachtman had not been clearly defined in specific resolutions. At the beginning of the convention I proposed that a nominating commission, consisting of representatives from the main delegations, be set up to study the candidates and present to the convention on the basis of the qualifications of the individual candidates and their support in the ranks. I consider it best for the central leaders of the party not to interfere too much in the selection of the
method of operation among the members of any serious leading body will not do for our mystery writers. There was something sinister afoot; nobody is going to delude our perspicacious Hawk-shares with the hook and lie that is that they have travelled 1300 miles simply to give our trade union work an impetus in the auto field. They remind their readers that Cannon, forgetful about the interests of his "clique," was "about to leave for Europe." And here they pluck out the heart of the mystery: "This was a real top secret among the bosses. It was not meant to be public knowledge. But it was the beginning of an army of fanatics who were determined to make war. Preparation for war means, for us, not some esoteric intellectualilia wing of our leadership. But we did not foresee that the conflict between the proletarian and petty-bourgeois tendencies in the party. I, along with other comrades, expected future trouble from the same clique." The meeting discussed, and the F.C. later ratified, not questions of policy but plans of organizing our trade union work in the auto field and the personnel of the field staff. And since four members of the N.C. were to be in the field, it placed the direction of the organizing campaign in their hands. Is that an abnormal procedure infringing upon the rights of the P.C.? Not at all. "The only thing we are to do, if we are to bring the editors of our press and realized in life, must be directed by those who specialize in trade union work and concentrate their attention and energy upon it.

If our critics are not satisfied with this explanation, and still consider that some crock or chevalier way or other they were horn-sagged, and the F.C. "deliberately" displaced one of its members to France and others to the auto field—if they still feel this way about it, I offer them a simple proposal to even the score. Let them establish some contacts with workers or trade unionists in New York City, and let them get a plan to utilize these contacts to extend and develop our trade union work in this field; let them come to the P.C. with or without prior consultation with us, and propose that the plan be approved and that they be in charge of the campaign. I will pursue this question only with those who have only an esoteric programmatic side.

The conflict between the proletarian and petty-bourgeois tendencies in the party was expressed for a long time primarily in this difference of orientation. In the present distribution, there is an agreement in that the workers' mass movement, by an irreconcilable struggle for a proletarian program. It was this revelation of programmatic differences which caused the muffled struggle, already evident at the last convention, to break out in the open one a wider front. At the last convention both sides undoubtedly sensed the coming storm, but we saw it as a "maneuver" against them. They don't even understand that our maneuver was aimed exclusively at the auto bosses and their labor agents.

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