

# INTERNAL BULLETIN

NO.10

S O C I A L I S T W O R K E R S P A R T Y  
FOR MEMBERS ONLY JUNE, 1939

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PRICE 10¢

Extract from letter of Clart, December 6, 1938

## 1. QUESTIONS OF CONCENTRATION AND REORGANIZATION

For several months I have refused to consider that the loss in numbers, influence and activity of our organization can be attributed solely to a consoling analysis of the situation. The breakup of the People's front pushed thousands of militants to the left; the POI didn't even touch them. The first reason that occurs to me, failing to look for really serious reasons is the policy of our party, is that our organization does not really know how to direct its activity in accordance with the objects sought, that it dissipates itself in the objectives of the moment without concentrating its efforts on few essential points. Thus was posed the so-called question of concentration. At that time, the opposition of Boitel in the regional committee which caused the loss of several weeks and tended to favor passivity, obliged me to make a declaration to the Political Bureau on April 2nd, published in the internal bulletin of the party in July, in which the following was said of the attitude opposed to ours: "Every-one must see that this resistance to a plan, a system against old habits, against inertia, once developed and crystallized into a body of principles and rules would result in a difference on organizational principles of the same type as originally divided the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks...."

Thus on the question of reorganization there were two tendencies, one of status quo, contemplation and even confusion; the other of desire for a resolute effort to bring the party out of the swamp despite petty vanities and old habits. These differences soon were concretized in the political and tactical domains. I have recalled here the questions of concentration and reorganization...because the question of the PSOP is intimately bound up with it. The merit of the resolution on reorganization and of the effort which it implied in the party and in the French commission was to break with a certain self-contentment, to bare the essential mistakes of the French section and to express the desire of the rank and file for a sharp turn, and to consolidate the party, even in its present weakness. However, once the question was posed sharply--however unfortunate the delay--we saw then more clearly the real resources of the party for making this turn. It is a fact that the resources of the party appeared extremely limited. You (the American comrades) were told that we numbered 600. This total must be cut in half even on paper.

At the International Conference we correctly linked up the question of the PSOP with the question of our turn. We had to overcome the centrist obstacle, on the one hand, with a strong fraction (Cannon proposed fifty members) and on the other hand, by an internal redressment. Unfortunately, great strategies often suffer from contact with reality. A policy is carried out with a certain quantity of forces, a tactic supposes a certain number of militants. If these forces are inadequate, the same result must be sought by a different tactic. No one will contest (except on paper which is very tolerant) that it is impossible for us to form a strong fraction in the PSOP and at the same time

preserve enough forces for serious action outside. In these conditions, the double task of destroying the centrist obstacle, winning over its best elements and of finding the elements for a turn to activity, for reorganization, could only be effectively carried through unification with the PSOP.

## 2. THE QUESTION OF THE PSOP

The above arguments are so natural and imperative that on October 12th, I learned that the CC unanimously (I was sick) had decided to make proposals for "organic unity" to the PSOP. Very good. I said to myself that all the comrades of the CC had understood, with surprising spontaneity, the impasse in which the POI found itself and the means of getting out of it. I did not see, moreover, whence objections could come to such an orientation. From Naville? No, because he was the author of the proposition. Certainly not from Boitel, since you will recall that he explained to the French commission, in agreement with us, that if the party did not make a turn, we would be forced to this turn inside the PSOP. You will recall that he supported my proposal of a strong fraction in the PSOP, when I complained of having been forced to make comrades go into the PSOP despite the Political Bureau, despite the conception of Naville, of an influence to be exercised from the outside on certain left currents without distracting the forces of the POI...

For us, who were from the beginning serious partisans of organic unity, the question was very simply posed: since this policy is imposed by the necessity of destroying the centrist obstacle, of reorganizing and fortifying our cadres, it must be done in an audacious and vigorous manner. It was necessary to profit from the situation, to impose organic unity with the PSOP and JSOP by a congress of unification. If such a congress could not be forced (which only a tactic seriously carried out and an offensive could show) then unification would have to take place by the entry en bloc, negotiated between the leaderships with the guarantees stipulated in our proposals.

All this seemed obvious. That is why it appeared absurd to Boitel. We tried by every means to push the party and the youth into this offensive for 'organic unity.' At the I.S. we even adopted a resolution saying to the POI and JSR: Since you have taken this road, this tactic must be boldly applied. Evidently the intervention was regarded as ridiculous. Think of it, the I.S. simply demanded that the leadership of the POI and JSR be logical and serious. No more than that. This was obviously a ridiculous demand concerning which Boitel voiced violent criticisms directed at international interventions in general which come to trouble the quiet calm of the well-endowed national sections.

Our attempts to realize the policy of organic unity can be defined by the following graph: C.C. of October 23; agreement on organic unity; letter of Clart to the PSOP and circular to the regional committees; agreement between Naville, partisan of organic unity and Boitel, adversary of organic unity, on an ambiguous motion from which Naville drew the conclusion of organic unity and Boitel the opposite policy; vain attempt by the I.S.

to create a bloc of the partisans of organic unity so that the JSR and POI could take that road. Naville in the end refused-- after having agreed at the I.S. and in the Political Bureau.

In the youth the course was as follows: a confused but pro-unity current in the JSOP expressed in the proposals of Ladmiral for issuing "Revolution" in common; maneuvers by the leadership of the JSR whose only result was to favor the right wing of the centrists against the left wing...(the JSR leadership) did its best to make the policy of organic unity fail.

This, in sum, is how the policy of organic unity was "realized." It was combatted more in the POI and JSR than in the PSOP and JSOP. Why then astonishment at the absence of results?...The absurdity, you see, was on our part, because we instituted that they carry out a policy unanimously agreed upon instead of substituting for it continual hesitations (Naville) and mea-culpas (Boitel). This was the first difference of opinion.

The second was in the analysis of the PSOP as related to the general situation. Boitel told us that differentiation was impossible in a party that was going steadily to the right and would become a yellow party in the service of Bonnet and Daladier with the CSAGG (trade union committee against war). This perspective of the evolution of the PSOP, the opposite of any serious analysis of centrism and its significance, collapsed in practice in about fifteen days. "Juin 36" abandoned the slogan of disarmament eight days after issuing it. The centrist leaders were obliged to criticize the CSAGG. Differentiation impossible? But there is in the PSOP a Bolshevik-Leninist organ which soundly criticized pacifism and the leadership and it aroused a certain response. There is in the PSOP a discontent expressed not only in these about-faces at the top but also in certain expressions of ultra-leftism...

The PSOP was also supposed to be repellent to the Communists. But unfortunately it is in "Juin 36" that we read of Communist workers and leaders joining, not in the Lutte Ouvriere.

The PSOP was supposed not to exist...but unfortunately at Paris where the PSOP lost many SFIO members we nevertheless saw 5,000 to 6,000 attending the "Juin 36" party, we saw the factory meeting the day after the strike (the general strike) with 500 militants of good worker composition. It was at this meeting that they announced that two factory units of the CP had joined the PSOP...

It is necessary to see the PSOP as a whole and to understand that it is a force of 5,000 - 6,000 members whose social composition in the ranks is better than that of the POI, especially in the Paris suburbs. This was our second difference: We see the PSOP as it is while Boitel sees it as he would like it to be in order to leave our status quo undisturbed...

A final difference: concerning the situation and perspectives, Boitel considered that we were completely wrong in our perspectives for France and suddenly adopted the view of complete defeat and the "cold" crushing of the working class. He went even further:

basing himself in advance on this total defeat, he believed that the party had only to be an ultra-concentrated education group. Boitel even said that it was no longer a question of winning rank and file workers but cadres, erecting this original theory of ready-made cadres in order to justify the departure of several workers who were in the POI.

On top of this came the general strike which showed the necessity of the party having the maximum contact with the rank and file workers and the cadres and showed also that we did not have these contacts. The strike was a failure principally because of the defeatist and provocative tactics of Jouhaux and Co. But this failure engendered in the working class a violent discontent with the Stalino-reformist leaderships which was expressed in part by disaffection in the CGT and CP and in part by the search for a revolutionary leadership. It is necessary to be on hand, or in any case to have the maximum points of support to reach these workers who want a revolutionary leadership. To the extent that the PSOP has many more mass contacts than we, these workers will be attracted by the PSOP rather than by us, because in the present stage they see differences only in numbers, the agitational slogans being often the same. In this situation Boitel reaffirms as correct his prediction of the rightward tendency of the PSOP--although it is true he is alone in this, his friends being careful not to follow him in these discussions...

The majority leadership of the JSR and the leadership of the POI have done everything they could not to realize the tactic of organic unity which we wanted to make them apply before the congress.

The majority leadership of the JSR even hurried its congress on December 3 in order to place us before a fait accompli without serious discussion. This congress of JSR showed us that the total effectives of the JSR amount to 72, counting the mail votes, the total organization numbering 124 on paper. Obviously without serious discussion they took a position against our turn. Such successes are dangerous for those who win them.

To make the turn we propose it is necessary to overcome a certain conservatism, a certain fear of a hand-to-hand struggle with centrism. Only a thorough, sharp, and complete discussion can dispel prejudices and sentimental obstacles. That is why Boitel and his friends tend to postpone or stifle discussion wherever they can.

Today there is no time to be lost. The PSOP and JSOP propose our entry. They refuse a congress on the grounds of the vagueness of our proposals. This is the result of our lack of initiative and audacity. The respite of Munich will not be of long duration. Before the new conflict we must increase and fortify our cadres. That is why I think it is necessary now to negotiate the entry en bloc, failing entry by a unification congress, to assure ourselves an internal tendency organ, which already exists moreover, and besides a review which would be the organ of the 4th International in France. It is necessary to draft a platform declaration containing the slogans of common action, assuring discipline in action, stressing our differences, and conserving our entire fundamental program.

Extract from "THE TACTIC VIS A VIS THE PSOP--WHERE ARE WE?"

by Naville

(Dec. 13, 1938)

In the month since the question of the PSOP has been sharply posed in the party, positions have changed and events have gone ahead. I was certainly wrong a month ago to speak of it as a "little crisis." It is a serious crisis. Through the discussion on the PSOP it is the centrist nonsense of Craipeau which has sought to triumph in the party.

Comrade Clart has taken a lot of trouble in the last four weeks to make us believe that he was a partisan of organic unity with the PSOP on the basis of a fusion congress and political differentiation.

Today he confesses: (Here Naville quotes the final paragraph of Clart's letter above, proposing negotiations for entry en bloc without a fusion congress if necessary.) Clart has thus passed definitively over to the position of Craipeau. What are these arguments worth?

a) It is false that the PSOP is rejecting our proposals "on the pretext of their vagueness." Our proposals were very precise and broadly circulated by the Lutte Ouvriere of Nov. 18 (nearly a month ago.) It is moreover materially false. Pivert rejected our proposals (1) because he does not want the BLs to be a "fraction" within the single party (a party within a party) and (2) because he wants to break our attachment, even individually, to the 4th International.

And what does Pivert hide behind these arguments? Quite simply, his opportunist policy. It must therefore be said that by his refusal, Pivert is trying to align the opportunists up against the revolutionary wing. But Craipeau and his friends, instead of saying this, make themselves the advocates of Pivert.

b) The situation in the PSOP shows that our policy of unity is bearing its first fruits (the increasing number of sections declaring for unity with the POI, the report of Pivert, the movement in the ranks against the leadership, meetings and discussions in common between the POI and PSOP etc...) This proves we are on the right road, on condition that we finish with the centrism of Craipeau, that we apply the decisions of work and liquidate the menace of split by the pro-entrists.

c) Clart thinks it necessary to "negotiate" an entry into the PSOP because the experiment of "impossible fusion" has lasted long enough. Long enough? Three or four weeks? Clart takes his own impatience for the reality. In fact our policy of unity is beginning to be organized. Now it has a solid basis.

d) Clart repeats that it is necessary to "draw up a platform declaration containing the slogans of common action assuring discipline in action." What slogans of common action can constitute a "platform?" Which ones? Clart doesn't say a word because he is on the path of accommodation and any

criticism of the PSOP already appears to him to be a crime of lese-majesty. He is ready for "discipline in action"--on the strike with 24 hours notice? on the redistribution of colonies by the trade unions? the trade union policy of Chanbellant? etc....

It is more and more obvious that following Craipeau centrism is erupting in our ranks (see also the declarations of comrade Filiatre, that it is impossible to group workers around a Marxist platform, that they are chauvinists, that we are considered agents of the Gestapo, unlike the PSOPists, etc...)

It is necessary to go further and to pose in all its amplitude the question of the position of comrade Craipeau. We spoke of it at length in the international reports. For the moment, we confine ourselves to stressing the attitude of the French minority against the statutes of the Fourth.

Why did it vote against them? The Polish comrades, for example, gave a general political argument that the International Conference rejected but which was serious--i.e. that in general one cannot "proclaim" a defined international organization except when the masses recognize it as leading their struggles.

The French minority gave an opportunist and bureaucratic argument. It did not want the Fourth "because the international situation can still impose upon us numerous (sic!) organizational turns, causing our national organizations to struggle in reformist or centrist parties." It adds that as a result "the movement for the Fourth International can only play a propagandist role."

This statement is the real platform of the minority, in the question of the international as well as the question of the PSOP. Craipeau, certainly in agreement with this declaration of the French minority, does not therefore want the Fourth International because the POI must enter the PSOP.

Let us go further. The French minority voted against the program of the Fourth with the following declaration: "We are convinced that events will soon force the International to re-examine the question and revise its positions." "Soon" came the events of September. In that crisis our parties acted entirely on the basis of the program. The minority did not even try to separate the attitude of the minority in fundamental political questions from its attitude toward the PSOP. They must be fought together.

In its session of December 12 the CC decided again by a strong majority against "entry en bloc" and for a policy of organic unity. At the congress the party as a whole will take a position. We are certain it will do so on the following pre-defined bases:

1. Clear proposals for unity (see the Lutte of November 18).
  2. Active work to develop the influence of our friends in the PSOP (and not to make of these friends a PSOPist fraction in our ranks.)
- \*advance its slogans and saw its predictions utterly routed.
- The Congress of the POI must understand clearly the nature of the positions of the minority. It is a question of centrist attacks. That is why it would be a grave error to try to (continued after asterisk)

3. To develop unity of action in action.
4. To broaden discussions on the program, openly criticizing the leadership of the PSOP.
5. Redressment of the whole party, beginning with its leadership, broader press circulation, etc.

On this road unity with the PSOP will be a victory for the program of the Fourth International.



Paris.  
March 16, 1939

Dear friends:

Here is some information regarding our situation here. It should be considered as confidential and should permit you to send us your advice as to what is necessary for our orientation.

1. Our comrades have been well received in the PSOP. In Paris and in the Paris Region, we already occupy working positions; the secretary of Mantes, where our comrade Craipeau has organized three adult sections and is organizing a youth section; he is secretary of the sub-district. He edits a mimeographed paper. At Maisons-Alfort, Filiatre is the secretary of the section and edits a paper. Filiatre is secretary of the trade union circle "Lutte de Classe," public service branch. Chenel, who is a member of the Central Committee of this circle is assistant secretary of the Maisons-Alfort section. Comrade O. is secretary of the JSOP at Montreuil, Ginette is secretary of the JSOP in the 3rd section, comrade Akoka is in charge of the Clichy\*which appears three times a month, once as a shop paper. Besides, in the 11th section at Levallois, and at Colombes, we have friends who are responsible either for papers or for shop work. In the provinces--comrade Meuris is secretary of the Lille group; he publishes a mimeographed paper; at Lyons we control the federation with the political secretary and the propoganda secretary. At Marseilles, where our comrades got five workers in the Central Telegraphic Office to join the PSOP, we are engaged in trade union and educational work. In the Nantes federation, we have control of the JSOP. So much insofar as local working posts are concerned.

\*paper

2. Insofar as central responsibilities go, we have the following delegates to the Federal Congress, which is the political deliberative organism for the region (Seine, Seine et Oise, Seine et Marne): Bailly, Craipeau, Akoka, Filiatre, Severin, Pradales, Henryk, Rous. The last two were coopted with consultative votes as representatives of the minority of JSRs and POIs who entered.

We have been occupied most with the organization of trade union and shop work. Comrade Rous is a member of the national committee in charge of shop work. He is also a member of the regional committee and of the press committee for the shops. He writes every second editorial for the labor page in Jun 36. He is in charge of the research bulletin for the shop papers issued by the party. He has been attached especially to the Citroen and Gnome et Rhone shop groups. Moreover, comrade Taillantou is in charge of the building trades groups, comrade Labord of the youth sections in the shop groups and comrade Filiatre is a member of the regional shop committee. Our young comrades are engaged in the work of the youth leadership; the JSOP, numbering about 450, is unfortunately, due to the lagging of the JSR, in the hands of the Molinierites.

Insofar as the press is concerned, we collaborate every week on Jun 36. Rous on French questions, Taillantou on trade unions, Brun on international politics, Katel on Russian questions, Labord on the JSOP.

3. The possibilities of the PSOP are pretty much those that we foresaw. We even underestimated them a bit. The party has easily 7,000 members. In Paris we observe among the larger sections: 100 members at the 15th section, 50 of them workers; in the 18th, 80 members approximately, mostly workers; in the 11th, about 60 members with interesting youths among them. But in the suburbs and in the Seine et Oise sections particularly, is there an excellent proletarian composition. The PSOP has 145 sections in the Paris region. Last night there was a general membership discussion meeting on Franc-Masonry. There were about 1,000 in the hall. It must be borne in mind that neither the Seine et Oise nor the Seine et Marne groups attend meetings in Paris which are held at night. In the meetings of the Federal Council (there have been two since we entered) there are about 150 members who come as delegates of the sections; there are about two delegates per section, but they either alternate or only one comes. What is most noteworthy is the fact that practically everything still remains to be done in the field of organizing the trade union and shop work. The PSOP doesn't exploit one-fourth of its possibilities. We must not forget that by organizing the JSOP at the opportune moment, 30 Molinierites in three months placed themselves at the head of about 400-500 youth.

Unfortunately, the comrades most capable for shop and trade union work, (Boitel, Bardin) are among those who have been most hostile to the entry because that would hamper, it seems their trade union and shop work. Seven weeks of work in the PSOP have proven the exact opposite. Our forces and our present capacity are very feeble, on the contrary, because of the very great possibilities. The same reason goes for the JSR. For, although 127 of us entered, being half of the JSR-POI including Algeria and Strasbourg, there were actually only 15 JSRs in our ranks.

4. At present, we have just passed the first stage of the first period, so to speak. That is, the stage of adaptation in the period of work. We have been the victims of an altogether unfavorable conjuncture of circumstances. International centrism, alarmed by our entry as well as by divers symptoms (letter of the old man to Pivert, presence of Martel in Paris) literally swooped down upon the PSOP and throw panic into its leadership. The POUM leaders, arriving from Barcelona, in order to show that they have learned nothing, made us the butt of their maneuvers and intrigues. Consequently we have had to defer the publication of our review for several days. Comrade Rous has edited a pamphlet on Spain which contains a factual analysis rather than a theoretical one, with the purpose in mind of placing the actual mistakes of centrism before the eyes of the PSOP militants, who are very sympathetic to the POUM.

You will also receive a draft program of action which has been submitted for discussion. Among other things, our comrade Bailly was co-reporter at the meeting on Franc-Masonry mentioned above and he is preparing a resolution for the congress on the incompatibility of belonging to the PSOP and the Masons. On this subject, it was very noticeable that there is a strong current against Franc-Masonry in the PSOP. The masons who are covered up by Pivert have the nerve to defend Franc-Masonry officially. It was good that we were the co-reporters against it and that

we were officially designated in this matter. The contacts which we have had with the leadership, the extreme distrust which it has shown towards us, the fact that the left-winger Guerin is the one who has maneuvered us most in order to prevent us from issuing our review, which we wanted to do in collaboration with him, all that indicates our orientation to us. Stubborn and persevering work in the ranks; at the same time, through the review and the pamphlets a patient and positive explanation of our points of view. For the time being, we are even avoiding the provocations of the opponents who would like us to adopt a sharp tone towards the leadership so as to prove that we are out to break the party. During this period, we are not, naturally going to hide a single one of our positions, but we shall present our differences in a cordial manner and place ourselves under the sign of the revolutionary interests of the party. Collaborations on Juin 36 and in certain responsible posts facilitates such an orientation.

5. It was expected that the POI, which has been reduced in forces since our departure, hasn't done anything but publish the paper and the magazine, regarding which it may be said that they were published by the American section with the political collaboration of the Spanish comrades. For our part, we would be glad to see the POI develop and indirectly aid our action by its activities on the outside. In regard to this, despite the inevitable resentment engendered by factional struggle, we do not have the slightest difference with wise tactic outlined by comrade Martel, a tactic which consists of giving the POI and the JSR all the necessary means to facilitate their experience, even more means than we have ever had. Unfortunately, the POI and the JSR have spent their time chewing the rag contemptuously about our experience. The most precious and experienced counsels of our friend Martel--they characterized as "edntrism" behind the scenes. And as for the material support which he gave them in all loyalty and with really extraordinary tactfulness, they dared to characterize that as corruption. Every honest militant who can see these facts divorced from the faction struggle, cannot help being outraged by the altogether politically and morally criminal attitude of the POI and the JSR.

They divide the work among themselves. Naville and Rigal don't want to enter unless they get an order from the International to cover them. At the same time they say to leaders of the PSOP, who repeat it to us, that they are going to enter because they have received the order and that they are not being given any money. Boltel, on his side, who has fallen into dangers which I indicated to him in the polemics (Ucuism mixed with syndicalism) doesn't do anything else but exert himself to persuade what is left of the POI and JSR, not to enter. Bardin, who has a responsible trade union job and who hasn't taken any active part in the POI for more than a year has taken charge of the organizational work of the POI with the aim, he says, of preventing its entry. Whatever talk reaches us from them is talk of hate and vengeance. It seems to be the usual thing with families that fall out. In any case, without a vigorous intervention, we stand to lose for revolutionary work some fifty militants formed in three years of effort.

For our part, we are straining all our forces to get our work done and to persuade them by experience alone. We appreciate very warmly not only the material, but especially the political aid which the American section has rendered us, by sending comrade Martel. We have much to learn on questions of tactics, of organization, of leadership. We have still to put to work the principles forged at the very heart of the direct and living experience of the Popular Front in Spain and in France. Comrade Martel contributed to this, during the two months he collaborated with us, aside from his experience as an old Bolshevik leader, the whole accumulated experience of the American which showed itself capable of capturing a party of the type of the PSOP, one really not so good as the PSOP. But we here are much weaker in cadres and in number, after the split.

The leadership means well but it is weak. In the provinces only do we have some good cadres. Just bear in mind that of the most responsible comrades of the POI, that is, of the Political Bureau, I am the only one who entered the PSOP. This alone should indicate to you your duty of international support, not only materially, but especially politically. When we ask the American comrades to send Martel back to us, possibly with Max, it is not, as you may well imagine, because of our liking for those comrades alone. It is, because, with the brief time before us in France, we must supplement with international support the weakness of our national cadres. The surest way is, of course, to create new cadres. But to begin with, the old ones must serve.

With friendliest greetings,

Clart

THE FRENCH QUESTION

(Speech of James P. Cannon at the New York Membership Meeting,  
April, 1939)

Comrades:-

The action undertaken by our Party on the French question for the past few months is the second serious attempt at international intervention on our part. It is the second time in the ten years we have been battling under the banner of the Fourth International that we have undertaken to give something as well as to receive. The first serious intervention on our part in the international field, that is, in connection with the organization of the world congress, is less than a year old. You all know that we expended great effort, time of leading comrades, and material means in the organization and successful carrying through of the World Congress. It is not too much to say that we contributed very heavily to the success of that great historic event. It is not even too much to say that without us it would scarcely have been possible at the time it was victoriously carried through.

Now, I think everybody recognizes that we have been repaid a hundredfold for all the effort and time and sacrifice that we invested in the World Congress. That is quite obvious. The formal launching of the Fourth International and the publication of its program throughout the world gave a great impetus to our work in the United States as well as to the movement on an international scale. And it is not surprising now that we should be called upon again, within less than a year, to take the leading part in an attempt to aid that section of our international movement which is in the most acute position. Our French section occupies the crucial place on the front-line battle ground of the whole world movement today.

Our Party in many respects has been the most favored one in the whole international movement. We have had comparatively good conditions for the uninterrupted development of our work. It so happened, whether by accident or not, that our Party carried over from the past the richest inheritance in the shape of experienced cadres. By this we were able to maintain the continuity of the movement and to bring over to the Fourth International the priceless experience of the movement that had preceded it. Then again, an item of no small importance for which we deserve no credit whatever - we live and work in the richest country in the world. Material means at our disposal, thanks to the richness of our country from which we get a few crumbs, enable us to make contributions which are impossible for comrades functioning in countries where the crisis of capitalism bears down more heavily upon the workers.

Now, the development of the whole French situation to the point of the most acute crisis when it became obvious to all political observers that we were approaching the final showdown, put upon our Party an extraordinary obligation. It placed before us a real test of our internationalism. And by and large, I think we can say we tried at least to live up to our obligations, and we are still trying to do so.

We made a general estimate of the French situation concerning which there could be little disagreement among us. First, we had to recognize the development of events in France as crucial for the whole of Europe for perhaps years to come - to a certain extent also for us in this country. We recognized that a showdown was near. The social crisis of French capitalism was proven insoluble on the present existing basis. We saw the structure of democratic capitalism crumbling to pieces before the eyes of the whole world. We saw that horrible farce of the Peoples Front, which had demoralized the masses for so long, going down in the most shameful and most disgraceful catastrophe - decisive events in which the forces of the proletariat and the forces of the fascists would confront each other in the decisive battle, complicated by the imminent danger of war, were impending. Either war or fascism, or what is perhaps more likely, both of them together - the inescapable problem of fascism arising in direct connection with the war - was there before us.

I think we all understood that it was necessary for the Fourth International and all of its sections to rally around our French section and give them all possible assistance to put up a struggle, even though we would be defeated in this struggle - and we can never guarantee victory either in a revolution or in an incidental undertaking on the road to the revolution - even though we should be defeated, we would leave behind us a tradition of struggle in France which would prepare the workers for tomorrow. And even if the workers of France should be decisively defeated in the immediate engagement, we do not see the tomorrow as so far away. We know that capitalism has come to such a point in its crisis, in its death agony, that neither war nor fascism nor both together can do other than further aggravate the crisis and prepare for the coming inevitable explosion which will bring with it the victory of the proletariat. The death agony of capitalism, whatever the incidents along the road, however the course of its development may be deferred temporarily, leads only to the revolution and to the ultimate victory of the proletariat. That is the goal we always have to keep in mind and for which we always have to prepare in moments of defeat as well as in success.

Now, back in November and December, our National Committee began to take a much livelier interest than ever before in the French question. We all recognized its crucial importance. We began to recognize more clearly and more decisively than before our international duty, our obligation to the French section of the Fourth International as that sector of our international movement that was in the line of fire.

We got everything from the Fourth International. The Fourth International supplied us with our principles which are the breath of life of our movement. The Fourth International is the inspiration which keeps the wheels turning in the American Party. The Fourth International is the staves which keep the barrel together, and we do not dare to forget it for one moment. And it was not too early for us to begin last November and December, following the World Congress, to think seriously of giving something back for all the rich gifts we have received from the Fourth International; to give not only comments and analysis, but to give also in practical deeds and actions; to try by our intervention, by our efforts, and by our sacrifices to influence the course of events, not merely to talk about them and write about them,

It is not so much to our credit that we let the Spanish Revolution go by in the capacity of observers and commentators - rich and valuable as those comments were. We would have perhaps done better if we had tried to intervene more actively, aggressively, and directly in the Spanish events. Among ourselves, we don't need to conceal the fact that we were perhaps the one group in this country that made the least effort at direct intervention in Spain. The Lovestonites for a while had a representative there; the Ochlerites had a couple. Even Weisbord paid a fleeting visit to Spain. The American section of the Fourth International, the strongest and most adequately equipped one, didn't do so.

It was high time that we should try to make a better showing in the way of direct intervention and direct assistance to the French comrades. And that was not merely an altruistic decision of our National Committee. It was not even exclusively an action of solidarity with the International movement. In the strictest sense of the term, it was the best kind of practical politics on the national field. Because if we have a success in France, if we have a struggle, or if only one step forward is made in France by the help of the American movement, we shall be the gainers a hundred times over.

And in connection with this decision of our National Committee, we saw the most magnificent response of our Party comrades that we have ever seen. We had a revelation for the first time of how deeply the rank and file of our movement is inspired by the sentiment of internationalism; how far it is prepared to go in the form of sacrifices and efforts, far beyond the normal capacity to afford, when there is a difficult action in a crucial situation. That shows the revolutionary spirit of our Party, no matter what any pessimists or babblers say about it. It was best epitomized by the remark of Comrade Dunne in Minneapolis in connection with the extraordinary efforts made by the Minneapolis comrades in the French affair. He said, "That is only a small token payment on the great debt that we owe to the Fourth International."

We will never have any cause to regret those efforts and sacrifices. Impulsive and generous response in a critical situation is always and everywhere the genuine mark of the revolutionist. And even if our efforts in this immediate situation were not as successful in the immediate sense as we hoped - and that unfortunately is the case - nothing has been wasted and nothing has been lost. The rich results will yet come in spite of everything.

I think that we were correct in our impulsive revolutionary response to the French crisis. But it appears to me after some experience at first hand on the ground in France, that our analysis of the situation as of last November and December was not free from error. We tended to see perhaps what we wanted to see in the French general strike - the beginning of a new wave of revolutionary struggle of the masses, which might be compared to the events of June 1936. At a distance it was hard to know that this was not the case, but it didn't take me long on the ground to see a different picture. The general strike was a far deeper and more disastrous debacle even than we saw it from this country. From all indications in the weeks that followed the strike, it could not be properly analyzed as a beginning of a new advance of the workers. Rather it appeared as a rear-guard action that was not only betrayed by the leaders but also never whole-heartedly engaged in by the masses.

The labor movement of France is and has been for some time in a very deep slump. Well-informed trade-unionists, who follow closely the trend of affairs in the labor movement, gave me a number of facts and figures to show that the trade union movement, which had reached a total membership of approximately 5,000,000 following the days of June 1936, had receded back to no more than 2,000,000 at the present time. The masses, discouraged and disillusioned and demoralized by the betrayals and defeats and double-crossings, have been leaving the trade unions in great droves. This began even before the general strike. The great apathy of the workers is the true picture of France today. We don't see any class struggle actions. We see reaction in full swing in the political life in France - the parliamentary regime assuming more and more a role of Bonapartism by decree without even the control of parliament. All these signs and symptoms that were seen in Germany in the period when democratic capitalism was sliding over to fascism are to be seen in France with the single difference that the pace is even more accelerated there. The Peoples Front has served its purpose to demoralize the workers and leave them helpless before this onslaught of reaction. The workers of France have literally been stifled by their organizations - by the Communist and Socialist Parties and the reformist trade unions.

And then during the period that I was there we could feel the weight of this pessimism and discouragement in the very atmosphere in the country. On the top of that came the final catastrophe of the Spanish defeat and the fall of Barcelona. More than a half million refugees were coming into France and into Paris, and the whole atmosphere - I must say because we want to know the real situation as it is - the atmosphere was one of defeat and discouragement.

Now it appeared to me that the majority of the leaders of our French section, the POI tended to misinterpret the situation and its significance. The fact that reaction is on the offensive, which is indubitable, and that the masses at the moment are discouraged, led some comrades to take a defeatist view even of the perspectives. They did not see, as we saw and as we understand, that all this swoop of reaction, which is taking away from the masses all that they gained in the strikes of 1936, is only preparing the ground for new colossal explosions. We analyzed the situation in brief, that the decisive battles in France are yet to come. Others - although I did not find anybody to frankly state that, it could be deduced from their politics - tended to take the position that the battle in France is already lost. And naturally, from this conflicting view of the situation, irreconcilably opposing conclusions can only be drawn.

In spite of the general reaction and the general discouragement and apathy of the trade union movement, we have to recognize in France that in the last year there has been one significant development in the camp of the politically organized workers. That is a split in the Socialist Party in France and the formation of a new organization, the PSOP. This was a split toward the left which was the result of a revolutionary impulse in the ranks against the Peoples Front and all it signifies.

Now the PSOP, of course, began to take shape as a Centrist organization. But from our point of view, that is, from the point of view of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International and from the point of view of our National Committee also, such a



phenomenon - the split of a reformist party and the formation of a Contrist organization - presents a two-sided picture. It has a duplicate aspect all the time. One can see in it an obstacle to the development of a revolutionary organization. A new organization with an essentially radical program but not a true revolutionary direction can even become an insurmountable obstacle.

But it is not only an obstacle to one who sees things from the point of view of Bolshovism, and that is the only point of view worth anything in politics. It is not only an obstacle but an opportunity, for it represents to breaking loose of some thousands of workers from their reformist moorings under conditions where they become more susceptible to revolutionary influences. And if it is possible for the revolutionary party to understand the situation, and not to permit it to escape from its grasp, it can become the opportunity for a step forward, as was the case twice in the history of our American movement.

On the one hand, the PSOP can become a new POUM on the order of the Spanish party and thereby can destroy the revolutionary prospects as surely as did the POUM in Spain. But if the PSOP or substantial parts of it, can be fused with the French section of the Fourth International, and if out of it can arise an expanded section of our international movement in France, it can be the means of successfully leading the revolution, or in any case of conducting a struggle that will prepare the victory for tomorrow.

Now, as we saw it, the PSOP was nearest to us of all tendencies in the labor movement, in the sense that they represented a grouping of workers who, for the most part, were trying to find themselves in a revolutionary movement. And that indicated to us what was necessarily the next step of our movement - to make a fusion of our section with the revolutionary elements of the PSOP and with those elements who wanted to be revolutionary.

Here began the first of the difficulties in France. The difficulty, I must say in my firm opinion, was not in the general situation. The difficulty was in ourselves - that the leadership of our French section, unfortunately, very unfortunately, was not ready to carry out an active, aggressive policy in the face of this phenomenon. Our French section is not only weak in numbers, but still worse, its leadership is weak in its understanding of the aggressive nature of Bolshovik politics. That is the root of all the evil in France.

The French Party, after its emergence from the Socialist Party of France, was immediately hit by a paralyzing split in its own ranks. It has remained pretty much in isolation and has fallen into a policy of sectarianism of the second degree. That is my own terminology; I use that term to distinguish from sectarianism in principle. The French comrades settled accounts with sectarianism in principle in 1934 and rejected it in principle. Since that time, I don't doubt, they have written some excellent theses and articles about it. But in spite of that, by and large the French organization - at least its leadership - remained sectarian in their mentality, in their tendency to run away from complicated situations, to find a more peaceful uninterrupted routine activity, whereas the nature of Bolshovism is aggressive, always looking for some new perspective or possibility to enlarge its influence and engrave its ideas on a wider circle.

Now, we have to make allowances for that in France as in other sections. The leadership in France is without a broad political experience which is more or less a reflection of the general weakness of the European movement. The downfall of the Comintern brought with it the most devastating consequences. The whole generation of leaders were corrupted by Stalinism or fell by the wayside. None of them came over or remained with the French section of the Comintern. None of the experiences of the old movement were embodied in the personnel of its leading cadres. The POI has always been isolated from the mass movement--even from sections of it; and did not, under those conditions, develop an experienced staff of sufficient self-confidence and flexibility to respond immediately to new opportunities and to plunge into new conflicts.

Now, these weaknesses, and above all the failure to understand the aggressive, political methods of Bolshevism, paralyzed the POI at the moment of its opportunity. There was no chance to lead a revolution in France in the last period, nor even--as far as I could judge--to lead any significant actions of the workers. But there was and is a real opportunity for the French section of the Fourth International to connect itself with a much larger body of workers in ferment and motion, to draw them into the Fourth International and expand the base of our movement in preparation for a new rise of the class struggle that is to come.

And not even the intervention of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International, plus the intervention of our party through a direct representative, was able to solve that problem at one stroke.

The circumstances dictates a fusion of the POI and the PSOP--that is politically absolutely clear. Everybody agreed upon that. Here was a Centrist organization breaking from Social-Democracy and proclaiming its desire to make a revolution, an organization with about 7,000 members even after it had sloughed off more than half of its membership in the September crisis and the general strike--on the other side--a section of the Fourth International--400 - 500 members, isolated from the masses.

As I say, everybody agreed on that. The Executive Committee of the Fourth International, Comrade Trotsky, our National Committee and both factions of the POI--the majority and the minority--all agreed on the necessity of the fusion of the POI and PSOP. But they agreed upon it in a different way. At least, so they all said. But many times when I heard the majority of the POI proclaiming its desire for fusion, I thought of the story of the professional loafer who used to look for work and pray to God he wouldn't find it. They were for fusion with the calm assurance that it would never come about.

The political problem existed in how under the given circumstances was it possible to realize the slogan of fusion. And here there wasn't agreement. Fusion by a joint congress of the two organizations--that was the slogan and demand of the majority of the POI. The only trouble with that slogan was that it was not realistic. First of all, the relationship of forces between the

two organizations deprived it of realism--about 7,000 members in one organization and not more than 500 in the other. It wasn't realistic for the smaller organization to demand a joint congress.

Secondly, the PSOP had just a few months previously held its founding congress. The leaders of the PSOP had an easy answer to the members of their own rank and file who wanted to come together with our people. They said: "We just had a congress a few months ago. We are going to have another one in May. We haven't yet adopted our program. Let these Trotskyites come in--join our party and have the democratic rights of everybody else!" The slogan of the POI created no response in the ranks of the PSOP. It reacted, as a matter of fact, against us and not in our favor. And that seemed a perfectly reasonable and rational answer.

Now fusion of the POI and the PSOP in the given circumstances in France could be and can be realized only by entry of our organization into the larger one. There is no other way. The more formalities and conditions that we put even for entry, the more we build fences around ourselves. That coincides entirely with the wishes of the elements of the leadership who don't want us in. The thing to do, very obviously in my opinion, which was also the opinion of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International, was to enter the Centrist organization without ceremony or conditions, and then create in that organization means to conduct our work.

Shortly before I arrived in France, the Executive Committee of the Fourth International held a meeting and adopted such a recommendation--recommending to the POI that it should join the PSOP.

It seemed to me, normally the recommendation of the Fourth International should have sufficed. It is not pleasant to contemplate that the recommendation of our International Executive Committee does not carry a great weight in the affairs of any single section. I am sure our party would hesitate ten times over in rejecting a recommendation that came with such authority. But it seemed to have no bearing in the POI. A faction fight was raging and the ranks were divided into majority and minority factions.

I arrived a day and a half before the Congress was called. It was held in an atmosphere of sharp factionalism and antagonism--with a split impending. I must say that I wasn't received with too much enthusiasm by the majority. Before I had a moment to say anything, they expected me to be on the side of the liquidators and opportunists as they called the entrust faction. At any rate, I didn't try to influence very much the decisions of the congress. That would have been impossible in such a short time anyway. Together with comrade LeSoil of Belgium who had been sent by the Executive Committee as representative to the congress--he and I together tried to use our influence to moderate the faction atmosphere, to eliminate organizational and technical disputes which might sharpen the atmosphere. In general we worked for a policy of moderation.

We had a pretty clear impression of the results of the congress the day before. The factions were pretty well defined and it appeared on the face of things that the opponents of entry

would have about 60% and the minority 40%. The minority claimed that many delegations were not quite correct and they intended to contest a number and to dispute the majority of the congress. We prevailed upon them not to do that, not to press their contest to the point of split in the congress before the political question would be discussed, and in general, as I said, worked to moderate the atmosphere. The result of the congress in spite of that--in spite of the fact that the minority forewent its contest on delegates--showed a relationship of forces of 60% against entry and 40% in favor of it.

I don't know, and I don't know whether anybody knows, the exact proportions, But in any case I know that was the minimum strength of the minority--40%. And without our knowledge, and without our intervention after the votes had been taken, the minority walked out of the congress anyhow and announced its intention to join the PSOP.

We decided to wait developments, and since it was manifestly impossible to solve the problem at one stroke, to work towards the solution of the problem in sections--first with the minority favoring entry into the PSOP, and secondly, perhaps, with the youth. In any case, it was clearly going to be a drawn-out process and could not be brought to a conclusion at one stroke.

The intervening period gave me a good opportunity to make a closer study of the PSOP and this is substantially what I found out about it. It was estimated during that period that it was 5,000 or 6,000 strong. It had originally about 20,000 members. In the September war crisis, the general strike, and other events it had lost over half or 3/4 of its membership who had fallen out or gone back to the Socialist party. We found out later, through the investigations of our comrades who joined the PSOP, that it actually has no less than 7,000 members. In the city of Paris it has 145 branches and has organizations in all the provinces of France.

The general composition of the party is not so bad. About half, perhaps, are workers. The other half, I don't know what they call them in France--white collar people and professors. And, unfortunately, most of them are not of the revolutionary variety, as with us, but more of the petty bourgeois type. There is a joke they tell around there--that the PSOP really means the Socialist Party of Workers and Professors. For the most part, these petty-bourgeois pedants exert a conservative influence in the organization and play a role out of all proportion to their rights. This is partly due to the peculiar tradition of the French movement which does not develop the professional functionary. And that is regarded by the Frenchmen as a wonderful democratic situation. They don't have a lot of bureaucrats taking up the payments of the membership, sitting around and doing nothing except giving orders. The leaders of the party are people who have free time to give--leaders in their spare time. This system is the opposite to that of the Bolshevik party which trains a professional staff and gives it the leadership of the movement. That is the tradition of Bolshevism. ^\*and so on - an awful lot of professors.

I had argued with some of the PSOP leaders on that question. In that great party of 7,000 members they have, if I remember correctly, one functionary--a technical man and not a political leader. The leaders of the Socialist party in this country before the war were of the same type. They were primarily

generous professors, lawyers, preachers who had time to spare. The functionary of the party who gave his whole time was simply the drudge who carried out the orders. The real bosses who really ran the party were not giving their whole time to it. We put a stop to this monkey-business when we formed the C. P. in 1919; it has no part in our tradition. I discussed this question with some of the leaders of the PSOP. Our party, which is smaller than theirs, has approximately 30 full-time functionaries in the party and youth. It seemed incomprehensible to them. And yet one has to wonder how it is possible to conceive of making a revolution without a professional staff.

The party has an enormous amount of agitational energy, has innumerable meetings, publishes a weekly paper of 20,000 circulation, has a movie department--in general it creates the impression of a very active agitational party which is extremely superficial in its theory. Such a party, if it has a cadre of bolsheviks and is equipped with a theoretical direction can develop. But if left to develop by itself, it can be smashed at one blow.

The leadership has at least three definite currents, although I don't think they are organized into factions. They have a right wing, close in its ideology to the Socialist Party of France. The great block of the center, which is represented more by Pivert, has very much the ideology of the London Bureau. The left wing, which is not too strong, inclines very much towards cooperation with the Trotskyites, is very anxious to have the Trotskyites in the party, but is by no means bolshevik. On the whole, I would say it is a much better party than the Socialist Party of the United States when we entered--much better in its composition, its activity, its freshness, and its leadership. It is a far more promising field of revolutionary development. The PSOP is, of course, a centrist party in the real sense of the term. But every centrist organization is different. This is a centrist organization which has only recently broken from the Social-Democracy and is impelled by the violence of the split on a left-wing course. United with a genuine left wing grouping it can finish its development. Left to itself, it can swing back to its point of departure.

The London Bureau is interested also in its course. And the London Bureau represents a variety of centrism which on the surface may appear to be identical with that of the PSOP but which is far worse--it is, in large part, the centrism of ex-Communists slipping back into the direction of reformism and of old hardened bureaucrats incapable of responding to revolutionary activity. I consider that the PSOP has the prospect of becoming another POUM without difficulty, and of sharing its fate. On the other hand, fertilized by the doctrines of the Fourth International and influenced by its cadres within, a large part of the PSOP can be brought on the path of the Fourth International and can stand at the head of the French masses in the coming revolutionary struggles.

And that, as far as I could judge, and as far as any qualified political representative of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International could judge--that problem is the main and crucial problem of the French section of the Fourth International.

From a political point of view we are not only responsible for the POI. We bear a certain responsibility also for the PSOP. It depends on the Fourth International in no small degree what will be its further development--which direction it will take.

I found it possible without difficulty, in fact, without any solicitation on my part, to have numerous discussions with various leading figures of the PSOP. Of course, at the time I went we had great hopes that our French section would respond to the political necessities of the moment. We hoped they would be ready to act in a way determined by political necessity, and that I would, perhaps, be useful as a result of our experience in such matters, in negotiating relations with the leaders of the centrist movement. I found it quite possible to have the discussions and the negotiations, but, alas, I didn't have the troops to represent. Consequently, it became necessary on my part to cut it out because we had nothing to propose. It is very hard to be a good diplomat when you haven't got an army.

Now, things didn't stand still. Our enemies, as well as our friends, reacted to the intervention of the American party and of comrade Trotsky and of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International. Our friends reacted not too enthusiastically. But our enemies, the London Bureau, flew into a panic. It appeared to them as a concentration of the Fourth International, which in a way it was. There was the letter of Trotsky to Pivert which was known to all of them. There was a representative of the American party in France. There was the fact that 40% of the POI--although they didn't know the per cent--had already joined the organization. The London Bureau, which exists only for the purpose of sabotaging the Fourth International, staged a big concentration in France at the same time. I was invited to a discussion at lunch with a group of leading figures of the London Bureau. I, of course, accepted because it is more or less a practice of mine to talk to political opponents. But it is partly, I think, an illustration of the sectarianism of our comrades in France that they don't like to get mixed up in any kind of complications. They had visions of a big betrayal. The truth of the matter was they considered my politics 100% centrist to start with. Of course, nothing came of it. It was purely a diplomatic dinner.

I also had some conversations with leaders of the POUM, all of whom converged in Paris after their escape from Barcelona, and all of whom, as was expressed by comrade Rous, came to Paris to demonstrate that they had not learned anything from their experiences in Spain. I must say it was one of the most depressing afternoons I ever had, the afternoon I talked with Andrade. He is a former member of the International Communist League, was considered the Left Wing of the POUM. He went through that whole tragic experience. And after we got through talking about the Stalinists and Anarchists and other matters, I asked him, "How do you evaluate now the actions of the POUM in signing the program of the Peoples Front and entering the government of the Peoples Front?" He said, "I think we did right." There was nothing more to talk about. I felt that it was absolutely useless to talk to these people. They have not learned anything from their experience. The whole bunch of the London Bureau is the same. There is not among them one revolutionary party. The one

section of that group that has some vitality--the PSOP--they are trying with might and main to drag into that terrible swamp. And that presents to us and to the workers of France an enormous danger.

These people of the London Bureau specialize in the struggle against us. They devote themselves to weasel attacks in the corner. They shy away from every kind of political discussion. They use every other kind of argument to prove you can't get along with Trotskyites. "Look at the United States--they went into the Socialist Party, they broke it up, and so on." They create an atmosphere where everybody is placed on their guard against our comrades before they begin their work. They are planning for the month of April--right at the present time--another big meeting of their so-called International Front against War. It seemed to me tragic that at the moment when these people were trying to poison the atmosphere of the PSOP and to set up obstacles and barriers to our penetration that the leaders of our movement complement their work. The London Bureautes work to prevent a further entry of our people and to hamper the work of those inside. Our leading comrades did everything they could to accommodate themselves to that policy. The interests of the Fourth International suffered by it.

In addition to that, a new headache developed. You know something about the history of the Molinier faction and the decision of the world congress ratifying the expulsion of M. as an undesirable character. This clique, having completely exhausted the possibility of further maneuvers with our French Section, had finally joined the PSOP. They entrenched themselves--about 30--in the youth organization of the PSOP, and in a short time gained control of it. They claimed they agreed with the Fourth International on everything but, of course, their "methods." They conducted intrigues against us in the ranks. Now, in that situation as it developed, it became more and more clear, not only to me, but to the other members of the Fourth International, that we had to accelerate the actions of our French comrades. They were stewing in their own juices and making no progress whatsoever--standing on one spot. I took part in innumerable meetings. I never had so many discussions, with so many people, over and over again. And always I came out, like Omar Khayam, the same door wherein I went.

All this time the walls were being built up against our penetration in the PSOP. The "entrust" group headed by Rous was gaining ground, establishing new contacts, having really almost an open door before them, especially until the London Bureautes developed an active policy against us. It was almost that in a short time they had a debate on Free Masonry, which is a form of chloroforming the class antagonism of the proletariat and is a big issue in France. They had a discussion in Paris with about 1,000 members of the organization in attendance, and the reporter against Free Masonry was one of our comrades. According to the reports I received, a majority of those in attendance, particularly of the workers present, supported the position of our comrades.

Comrades Rous, Crapeau and others were taken into the staff of the official paper and allowed to write articles right away.

We were in the Socialist Party a year, and I think, we got only two or three articles in the monthly discussion bulletin. In the Federated Council of Paris, which has delegates from every branch, a number of our comrades were drawn in as delegates right away. Rous was drawn in as a consultative member and given the right to take the floor. Discussions began about the forthcoming convention. Rous announced there that he was going to propose the transitional program of the 4th International, and Pivert made a motion that he be drawn on to the program Commission. Before I left there, Rous had drawn up his statement and had submitted it for discussion in mimeographed form throughout the organization. Comrade Crapeau, organized in the space of a month two or three new branches in the neighborhood he worked.

In general, I cite all these facts to show that the general atmosphere of the PSOP was favorable to the intervention of our comrades and the possibility of their working. Rous wrote a pamphlet on the Spanish catastrophe which is sold through Party channels, as well as by our group.

A week or so before I left they came out with a monthly magazine almost as large as the New International, published by Rous, full of Bolshevik articles. While they were doing this, the POI was not able to record any progress whatsoever. We began to press the leading comrades at least for the entry of the youth of the 4th International into the PSOP to chase away those Molinier usurpers and give the youth a revolutionary direction. And then, finally, we had to conclude that there was absolutely no political way out in the next period except a complete entry into the PSOP. We began to press for an entry both of the adult organization and of the youth. The result of the pressure was that a majority of the Executive Committee of the youth pronounced itself in favor of the entry but did not have a majority of the rank and file. A strong minority of the POI took a position in favor of entry. But were not able, at least in the immediate situation, to swing the whole thing around.

I don't know how that will impress you - whether that is due to incompetence on my part or whether it was a task that could not be solved at one stroke - I don't know. It is possible that the task might have been accomplished more successfully and more cleverly by someone else. My opinion is that the problem was so deeply rooted in political differences that it was utopian to think that it could be done with one stroke. When you recall our own experience - how long it took us to transform the Workers Party from a majority of opposition to any kind of maneuvers with the Socialist Party to a position where the party would be ready to enter the Socialist Party when the situation became ripe, that it involved at least a solid year of a very sharp and protracted faction fight and even a split, that the fight was conducted by a strong group of the party, when you recall this, you realize that such transformations, such victories over sectarianism, are not to be solved overnight.

Then I, of course, had additional handicaps. The fact that I was a foreigner and had language difficulties, and that it was necessary for me to work with the greatest caution, that I could not afford to go to membership meetings, and that the fact that I never had any cooperation from the leaders - and I was compelled to work entirely through the leaders - you can see it wasn't exactly an easy task.



In my opinion, now after thinking of the thing from a distance since my departure, the solution of the problem in France cannot come by top negotiations with the leadership. All the diplomacy and cleverness in the world will not solve the problem, which is that of smashing sectarianism. And that can only be done by an appeal to the rank and file of the organization. And this became more and more the opinion of the executive committee of the 4th International.

A short time before I left, we held another meeting of the executive committee of the 4th International. We had representatives from Poland, from Greece, from France, from the U.S., from England and Belgium. At this meeting, after prolonged discussion, the entire executive committee, the Belgium the English, Polish, American, and one other, I can't recall at the moment, excluding the French, voted to recommend again to the POI to enter the PSOP and emphasized its recommendation that the youth join immediately and without conditions.

When that brought no results, when the comrades were not disposed to yield to that third intervention of the executive committee, it seemed to me that we had come to a stalemate and that it would be unprofitable for me to work there under those conditions until our National Committee had given the matter further consideration. It seemed necessary for me to return home for consultation with the N.C. - not about an abandonment of the struggle, but about a new form and method of conducting it.

We have had this matter up for discussion in the N.C.. We have taken decisions to continue our intervention to maintain a representative in France and to continue to assist in every way we can. That is the way the matter now stands. I think we can be reasonably optimistic that in the next few months we will succeed in solving the problem. I am sure that the position of the committee will be supported by Comrade Trotsky also. Our Committee voted unanimously to endorse the decision of the Executive Committee of the 4th International in recommending entry into the PSOP.

The general conclusion as I see it is that the problem of the French section remains for us a problem of tremendous importance that is not diminished by the difficulties that we have encountered. We have to recognize that our attempt to solve the problem at one stroke has not met with success. That is not our fault, and we need not be discouraged about it. It only means we must try a new means of attack. We have to tackle the problem from a new angle and try to solve it by stages.

In any case, a continuous intervention in France is an absolute necessity for us. It is necessary for us to maintain a representative in France, to issue an appeal to their ranks in a form which will be best calculated to get a response from them.

Whatever the result may be, we are the gainers for the effort we have made. We have not only helped already - and that is testified to in more ways than one by the ~~group of~~ internationalists in the PSOP - but we have also learned something from it. We have the satisfaction that we have once again transformed our internationalism from words into deed. That in itself is a great step forward for our party.

LETTER OF CLARTE

June 2, 1939

Dear Comrado:

We have just gone through a stage with the congress of the PSOP which could have been fatal for us if we had learned nothing from the experience of the past which above all taught us how to work. You will find in 'Juin 36' the basis for an appreciation (motions, votes, speeches) on the whole sufficient to have a general idea of our position in the party. You will see the extent of anti-Trotskyism and the dimensions of the attack on it by the minority called "Guerin-Weitz-Rous". On our position, properly speaking, I presented the draft of a program (adapting the Fourth International program to the French situation) as well as a counter-report on orientation. Our ideas were adopted by weaker federations like Bouches du Rhone, the Gironde, the Nord, Morocco. However, none of this could appear clearly at the congress because the masonic-centrist bureaucracy multiplied statutory obstacles.

This was, moreover, but a lesser evil, because it was not in our interest this time to show our strength too much. From the picture you will be able to get from the figures given in Juin 36, it follows that our influence in the broad sense covers one-third of the PSOP and that the PSOP represents 4,500 to 5,000 members. Of course, take in due account the fact that the summaries of speeches and in general, the congress report was written by anti-Trotskyist pens.

During the congress and in the preparatory period, Comrade Guerin, without at all abandoning his oscillations, maintained toward us a quite honest attitude of solidarity. Of course, he is not a Trotskyist. He little understands Bolshevik methods. He is against the Fourth International, deeming it artificially constituted by your own will, but it must be said between us, that his attitude toward us was on all counts honest, particularly when he denounced on the basis of personal conversations with Collinet the famous Marxist Center as a center directed against the Fourth International.

Guerin expressed shock at the violence of certain expressions in Trotsky's last letter in reply to Pivert. Of course, Pivert's reply did not in itself merit any other response, and Guerin himself had to agree that this letter, half-insolent, half suspicious, in the style of a Free-mason Philistine, was a kind of provocation. However, it is a fact that Pivert's popularity is great in the party. The uneducated member of the PSOP believes Pivert on his word. In this sense, the criticisms of Guerin have some justifications, altho' purely formal. Since the PSOP declares itself unable to publish this correspondence, which would have been preferable for circulation purposes, we will publish it in the next issue of Voie de Lenine.

In the summits of the Party, Pivert is the prisoner of the masonic-bureaucratic clique. But at the base, there is true contrism; spontaneous, honest, hesitant. Pivert represents both currents at the same time and unfortunately, the working class base sees itself in him. You see his method! He is very proud of Trotsky's first letter. He shows it, with satisfaction, to all his friends and increases thereby his personal popularity. Then his free mason friends gradually bend him to suspicion. They depict Trotsky as a sort of

demiurge or devil' capable of the worst maneuvers. They pose conditions. These methods of colonizations, they say in an indignant tone, must stop. Hence the reply which expresses in part everything that is reactionary in the anti-Trotskyism of Gorkin, Brockway, and the free masons. In part, also, there is fright, a sort of panic in the face of the so-called "great Trotskyist maneuver" which exists honestly in the ranks of the PSOP.

The whole art of anti-Trotskyism consists in utilizing these doubts and confusions, these panics and fears in behalf of reactionary elements. Let us not forget that elements like Zeller were at first in the SFIO anti-Trotskyist and fought us fiercely in collusion with the real bureaucrats. The same phenomenon exists in the PSOP. On this subject, our friend Cannon, who is truly an excellent tactician, contributed in giving us an orientation which we consider good and which we are continuing, even after this congress, with some variations. We want to be the builders on the political and organizational terrain of this party which has neither program nor organizational methods.

The orientation of the POI toward the centrists consists three-quarters in saying there is nothing more to be done in the PSOP, which is rotten, and that as a result, one must be content with winning a few elements and working among the youth. We reject such an orientation as ridiculous and dangerous sectarianism. For example, the POI entered in the 17th (district) declaring that it was not a question of entry but of fusion and proposing the issuance of 'Juin 36' and the 'Lutte' in common and in any case the united front with the three or four comrades who remained outside. These caricatures discredit us deeply and provide the basis for all the centrist bosh about our methods. In JSOP in the 14th, Max, an entrust ex-SSR, declared that the party was completely rotten and that there was nothing to do but to make violent criticisms with a view to speeding up the necessary clarification and separation. As you see, the squeezed lemons are not all on one side.

We are going to undertake, especially in the coming months, the task of clarification and information on the Fourth International in order to win a maximum number of militants to our total program and adhesion (in the form of unification) to the Fourth International. To speak schematically, it is possible to say that we can win 1,000 serious militants. But this is absolutely impossible with the methods and orientation of the POI. It is possible only on condition that we be really serious and disciplined militants of the PSOP, building sections and recruiting for the party. I am also convinced that certain methods are not opportune, at least at the present stage. It is a fact that we permit ourselves too often to be drawn by our impatience and that, in France in particular, we have shown ourselves incapable of building an organization, not knowing how to work patiently and even slowly, if necessary, not knowing how to be tolerant towards workers and militants who do not share the whole of our point of view. Experience shows that the party, even if it rests on a Bolshevik program, must know how to assimilate, attract, or permit the coexistence of certain elementary worker currents who do not learn except by experience. I was really frightened by the number of workers whom we permitted to fall into the hands of the masonic-centrist clique, in large part through our incapacity and our mistakes.

At the PSOP congress, I could cite not one, but ten, fifteen delegates at random who were former leading comrades of the CP in the Pyrenees Orientales, in Dordogne, Moselle, Finistere, or honest building or metallurgical workers at Clermont-Ferrand, Marseille, Lyons. We had been maneuvered in the Seine by being told to be careful - that it was a less advanced province, that it was for the free-masons. On the contrary, the province showed itself to be composed of small federations but on the whole worker and peasant. It is an excellent way of learning bolshevism to win these militants to our ideas by positive action. The anti-Trotskyists know that our fraction, with its prudence, its way of making concessions in methods, is fundamentally the most dangerous for their influence. That is why they try to make amalgams, either with the POI or with the Molinierists. It must be anticipated that in order to continue the experiment, we may be obliged, despite political solidarity to appear distinct from certain elements who also place themselves under the banner of Trotskyism, in case the POI does not accept our orientation or if the Molinierists, seizing upon the exclusion of Molinier, stage some provocations.

In concluding, I would like to ask you to give us your opinion not only on the question of orientation but also on a question intimately linked to it: the tactic of the Fourth International in favoring the successful outcome of this orientation. At present, the centrists, the POUM, the ILP, etc. have gotten around the PSOP to make it adhere to a Marxist center. An international conference will take place in September for the definitive creation of this new London Bureau. There exists in the PSOP a confused and irresolute current in favor of the invitation of the Fourth International to examine the possibility of unification in an international conference. At the left, this current is represented by Guerin-Weitz and is even making of the invitation of the Fourth International to the international conference a sort of ultimatum. Of course, deeming it inopportune to have a practical decision made too soon on the question of the Fourth International, we have supported the Weitz-Guerin proposals for discussion and invitation to the Fourth International. But to that it is necessary to reply by a policy both entirely supple and offensive, in the domain of information, facts, criticisms, program on the part of the Fourth International.

This policy must be based not on criticism of the old debris, but on the desire of the PSOP militants to create a new international. The Fourth International, in its leadership, has unfortunately not existed for several months. The PSOP should have been literally surrounded by solicitations, been the object of a campaign of solidarity and political explanations whose tone should have been appropriate to its composition and its level. There is none of this. The Fourth International does not move, while the centrists hasten to conquer the PSOP. On the pretext that the PSOP did not accept the proposal of unity with the POI, they have been let drop. This is not a policy. The Brockways, Gorkins, Lovestones and others are more substantial. While they move, intrigue, attack, the Executive Committee of the Fourth International disappears. Naville does not even want to come to meetings and will not attend, he says, a meeting which we had finally agreed upon to put an end to this intolerable state of affairs.

Our friend Fauchon has arrived, and truly it would be absurd to ask him to settle in a few days a situation so compromised, the more since he finds the POI in a state of extraordinary demoralization.

It is absolutely necessary, if we don't want the Fourth International to miss a favorable situation once more, to make an absolutely radical turn. It is necessary to declare for the support of the PSOP, for an international conference with the POUM, the PSOP, and the Fourth International. It is necessary to take the initiative of counter-proposals. It is necessary to accept a future invitation. At the same time, of course, there must be emphasized the dangers which the anti-Trotskyist currents are creating for the PSOP. But these dangers must be for us a further reason to put an end to a policy which we alone, truly, are the ones to understand. If the POI does not give in, it is necessary to desolidarize publicly from it.

In the POUM after the collapse there has been a left wing orienting toward us. Unfortunately failing to have assimilated the sectarian errors of the past, our group (Muni) is in process of leaving this left wing drain away in a Molinierist direction. It will not be possible to win in the POUM any more than in the PSOP anything good in them without breaking radically and in a much more energetic manner than we have with the sectarian, formalistic, literary, artificial methods of the past.

Such are the few considerations I submit to you. I know that they reflect in the present actuality the advice you have often given us. But it is a question now of knowing if the cadres of the Fourth International are going to be content to condemn sectarianism in words without disembarassing themselves of the survivals of leagues, circles, and sects.

With fraternal greetings,

CLART

THE PSOP TURN

by Joe Groen and Carl Hanley

When we first found ourselves in disagreement with the International Secretariat on the French question; we naturally prepared to bring other comrades to our way of thinking. We were surprised and troubled to find that this would not be our problem. Instead, our job till now undone, turned out to be that of finding channels for discussion. Means of communication which, from our theoretical understanding of party democracy, we had supposed open, proved to be shut tight. And for us, the question of inner party democracy loomed beside the French question as a paramount issue. We will therefore take up some space relating to our efforts to bring the French question to light, hoping that this may cause comrades to scrutinize more closely the party's democratic machinery.

Shachtman's account of the Munich disillusionment and the November 30th general strike, his description of France as the most vital sector in the world revolutionary front, fired our enthusiasm. Moreover, we had recently worked in the POI and knew Shachtman's words to be true. His mention of a possible fusion between the POI and the centrist PSOP disturbed us.

As time passed, certain developments caused our uneasiness to grow. News reached us from French comrades of a split in the POI, but within our party which had just turned eyes toward France, dead silence reigned. It was as if France had never existed.

We decided that the time had come for open discussion on France, and proposed to our branch that it recommend publication of an internal bulletin - which was our idea of what a party discussion should be.

Since our branch E.C. consists of relatively old and responsible comrades, we will here describe their reactions to this proposal. (1) "The SWP is just becoming a mass party, and this is no time for inner-party controversies." (2) "Publish no bulletin, but confine the discussion to a New York membership meeting." (3) - and this after endless argument - "Recommend to the Political Committee that it take what steps it sees fit to inform the rank and file on France."

This last proposal was submitted to our branch membership, and when we opposed it in favor of a frank declaration for an internal bulletin, an E.C. member called one of us a "suspicious character." The E.C.'s motion was passed by a margin of one. Meanwhile, other branches in different parts of the country, as well as some YPSL units, began sending in requests for an internal discussion on France.

The discussion which the P.C. "saw fit" to permit was a membership meeting in April at which Comrade Cannon gave an extended report - other speakers being limited to five minutes. For the party outside New York City, France remained a burning question-mark, untouched by the few brief and uninformative items which the Appeal began publishing two months after the split.

At this membership meeting, Comrade Cannon criticized as sectarian the majority of the POI which refused to enter the PSOP, and ap-

proved the action of the minority which disregarded the democratically formed decision of the POI and split away.

That meeting three months ago completed the internal discussion so widely demanded by the SWP rank and file. If any conclusion is to be drawn from all of this, it is that a very important feature of SWP party life has been permitted, if not forced, to decay. When we were in France, the POI was publishing a very vital internal bulletin each month. But within the SWP, discussion, as can be seen from the first Internal Bulletin this year, has reached a low point.

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Before turning to the French controversy, it would be well to examine a few less-known facts about the parties involved. The Federation of the Seine, an advanced group within the SFIO (French SP) split from the Blum party last year under the leadership of Marceau Pivert, calling itself the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan. The Federation had been outstanding not only for its progressive character, but also for its age, traditions, and separate bureaucracy. These apparently contradictory features - progressive character and strong bureaucracy - were illustrated by the adherence of the Federation to the London Bureau while still within the SFIO.

During the 1936 sit-downs, which Trotsky greeted with an article entitled "The French Revolution Has Begun", the Federation showed few signs of the revolutionary character now being read into it. If leftward motion in contrist groups is characteristic of pre-revolutionary situations, why didn't we hear about the Seine in 1936? The answer becomes apparent when you consider why we did hear about it in 1938. In that year the Seine split from Blum over the Popular Front and collective security. The objective situation wasn't half as hot as in 1936, but the detail causing the split - Popular Frontism - was important and spectacular. That's the most that can be said for the birth of the PSOP. Unfortunately, much more is being said for it.

The immediate reason for the break was interesting. The Senate refused to grant Premier Blum the power to rule by decree - the same power Daladier later used to break the strike. Blum, paralyzed and enraged at the Senate's insults, nevertheless frowned on any attempts by the working class to help him out. But then, Pivert staged an anti-Senate demonstration. This huge dog, licking and mauling Blum at the time he most wanted to look respectable, needed a kick despite its good intentions. Blum and Pivert split over the anti-Senate demonstration.

If the break had come on the crest of a wave of militancy, with the rank and file forcing the hand of the leadership - if the issue at stake had borne some resemblance to a revolutionary or even a transitional demand - then the PSOP might be correctly viewed as an eruption of the revolutionary elements in search of Marxist leadership; but the inconsequential nature of the Blum-Pivert argument, together with the fact that the split occurred during a lull in the cycle of working class militancy, indicates the true nature of the break: a technical dispute among SFIO bureaucrats. This fact is fully borne out by Pivert's subsequent attempts to return to the kennel - an attempt which failed only because Blum wouldn't hear of it. We bolsheviks allowed ourselves some wishful

thinking because Popular Frontism seemed to be an issue. That was a miscalculation. When one bureaucrat bites another bureaucrat, that isn't revolutionary news, even though profound issues may be flung around in the meloo.

A brief but decisive delineation of the PSOP is furnished by three stages in its history as an independent party. When the stink of the SFIO became too strong for the noses of the left social democrats, they split away from Blum under the leadership of that inveterate centrist, Marcoau Pivert (who later tried to get his wayward flock back into the fold). During the Czechoslovakian crisis, the PSOP turned down the POI's proposal for a united front against imperialist war, stampeding instead toward a confused herd of pacifist organizations (CSAGG) which supported Daladier and the Munich Pact. During the general strike two months ago, the PSOP refused united front action with the POI on a minimum program.

By a happy accident - the SPUSA's position on collective security - the PSOP becomes available for close inspection by those who are familiar with the American scene. If you're too far away to see and understand the French animal, you have but to look at the Socialist Party of the U.S. With its reactionary head, its Clarity wing making revolutionary noises, and its rear end turned against collective security, it furnishes a perfect domestic breed of the PSOP. The likeness is almost complete.

"But the SPUSA is dwindling and degenerating, while the PSOP is evolving to the left." We can hear that chorals of protests in advance. But to state that the PSOP is moving in a leftward direction is merely to describe the approach of the revolutionary crisis in France. The same left ferment can be found in Blum's party, and probably within the French CP itself. Why single out the PSOP as the white hope of the revolution? Would its hopelessly centrist leaders cooperate any more with the bolsheviks than would Blum in a revolutionary crisis? Obviously not; the crisis would only destroy what illusory differences still remain between Blum and Pivert.

But we need not look into the future to see Pivert's inevitable jump back into bed with Blum and Faure. In his January lecture, Comrade Shachtman illustrated the approach of critical days by stating that "even" the SFIO has its anti-war faction, the Faure group, and devoted considerable irony to the pro-Daladier form this anti-war sentiment assumes. But Comrade Shachtman thereby illustrated the imaginary nature of the line dividing the PSOP from the SFIO. We would describe the approach of the crisis similarly - by pointing out that "even" the PSOP took an anti-war, pro-Daladier position.

To hail the left evolution of a centrist party is merely to rejoice at one of the definitive characteristics of an approaching revolutionary situation. When Comrade Shachtman says, "the centrist party is moving rapidly to the left; therefore let's fuse with it," that has a smooth sound. Translated into Marxist language, it means: "a revolutionary crisis is approaching; therefore, let's fuse with the centrist party." And that sounds terrible.



In his talk last January, Comrade Shachtman made reference to the dissatisfaction of the Stalinist workers in France. This subject alone deserves an entire thesis. Here is what Fred Zeller, JSR leader, said of the Stalinist workers in 1935: "Workers, especially petty bourgeois without any Marxist education who became radicalized under the pressure of the crisis, will still believe it (the CP) to be the revolutionary party it was until 1926 and will take longer to realize that Stalin has learned nothing and forgotten everything of the great teachings of Lenin.

"We see the truth of this when, in the joint meetings which we have had with CP militants or in private conversations, we show them the meaning of Stalinist degeneration. Not rarely, these comrades reply: 'That is not true. We have not changed. We are still the same. We have remained faithful to Lenin. We are still revolutionary defeatists. We are also for a workers' and peasants' government.'"

These words are almost the exact duplicate of conversations the writer had held with Stalinist workers (seamen) up to the time of the Czech crisis. In later conversations, if these workers have been sullen and taciturn, it was only to conceal the anxious beatings of their own hearts. To Zeller's account, the writer wishes to add only this: that the Stalinist workers he has met and talked to, both in France and on French vessels in New York, have filled him not only with sadness but with hope, for they are the most class conscious, the most courageous, the most admirable people he has ever encountered.

The workers now leaving the French CP by the thousands must not be confused with the petty bourgeois and backward proletarian accretions that grace the CP as a result of its chauvinism in the past three years. (The last-mentioned elements were delighted with Humanite during the Czech crisis). The workers now abandoning the CP are the most revolutionary workers in France. Their present desertion is not the sudden thing it appears to be. Disgust with the CP line has been growing among them for a long period; they hung on to it because they lacked the theoretical training to discern the flaws in popular frontism, and because the CP with its October traditions, seemed to them the party that would make the French revolution. These workers are literally ready to mount the barricades tomorrow. The illusions which caused them to pay reluctant homage to the CP started exploding during the Munich crisis. Not through the reading of theoretical documents, but through their own experience, it became clear to them that the popular front and collective security were nothing but a mask for rank jingoism - not, as they had supposed, a clever sleight of hand to scare Hitler. And now these people are abandoning their last reformist illusion. They are bitter and ready to fight.

These are the people who in 1936 raised the red flag, embroidered with hammer and sickle, to the high steel rafters of the French factories and told each other, half-jokingly, half-seriously, that the revolution had come. These are the people who, during the height of the 1937 "pause" (a period when their leadership broke all records for class collaboration) wrote on the walls and streets of Paris "Les soviets partout!" Talk

of Pivert and the PSOP!

The mistake of calling their desertion "demoralization" (Shachtman in his recent talk) has a certain irony. The Stalinist worker who has seen L'Humanite join Doriot's Liberte in summoning the French masses to their death, who has been revolted by this spectacle of foul war-mongering, and who has torn up his CP card, did not thereby commit an act of demoralization. This was a gesture of high revolutionary consciousness. But tomorrow, that red-hot revolutionary fervor may turn to cold white ash. Therein lies the irony of calling a Stalinist worker demoralized. If nothing is done - quickly - he will fulfill that prediction.

During this earthquake in the French CP - far more important than the left ferment in the old Seine Federation - where was the POI? It was putting out a weekly, sometimes bi-weekly paper and negotiating with the PSOP and Anarchist leaders for "permanent" united fronts. Even the Algerian workers - dynamite in the hands of a revolutionary party during a war crisis - were forgotten while we followed, as through a microscope, the moods of the PSOP bureaucracy. Let it be related to their eternal credit that a few iron-hearted JSR's distributed anti-war leaflets at the Gare de l'Est while troops were entraining for the Maginot line. (They were immediately arrested of course). Yet this act of inspiring courage was also an act of adventurism. Where were our united fronts? The Stalinist workers would have flocked to them. Answer - we were too busy with the PSOP.

Yet the erosion within the CP continues and will continue. Those workers who were not sufficiently disgusted with Humanite's defense of Czechoslovakia will soon become disgusted with the "defense" of Algeria and Tunis, or with a future "orderly" one-day strike - factory occupations strictly forbidden. They will look for a party that shows itself to be revolutionary in action - in united fronts. Will the POI be there for them? Or will it be in the PSOP, debating with the reactionary leadership in internal bulletins and in its independent press - with the Jounesses prevented from distributing handbills, this time, by party discipline?

#### -The Neo Destour-

The Neo Destour, Algerian Nationalist Party, is a rallying point for tens of thousands of Algerian workers in France, and carries considerable influence in Algeria. It staged the hostile demonstrations which badgered Daladier during his warlike tour of African colonies a few months ago. This party has maintained fraternal relations with the POI. Ta Thu Tau, imprisoned Fourth Internationalist leader of Indo-China, is often mentioned by Algerian workers in the same breath with Mossali, their own imprisoned leader. At a Paris meeting which the writer attended, a thousand Algerians cheered Rousset, POI, as much as they did speakers in their own tongue. Less warm receptions were accorded to the spokesmen of the Gauche Revolutionnaire - naturally, since they had less to offer. But unfortunately, actions of unity failed to follow Rousset's words of unity. Again, the POI was too busy with the PSOP.

-the POI-

Estimates of the POI membership (before the split) ranged from 400 to 700. In addition, Fred Zeller in his pamphlet, The Road for Revolutionary Workers speaks of 2,000 JSR's (French YPSLs). Whether they still exist or what has become of them remains unclear. At the time this writer worked in Paris, the JSR's were very much in evidence. These 2,000 cannot conceivably have been lost to the revolutionary movement, since Zeller wrote the pamphlet. It is reasonable to suppose that they are still Bolsheviks, waiting on the sidelines because of the inactivity of the POI, and that they would go into action again the moment the party revived.

At the time the POI split, it had been conducting months of negotiations with the PSOP party tops for "organic unity on a minimum program" and for a "permanent(sic) united front." The difference between "organic unity" and simple entry is in reality negligible, and those who remained outside the PSOP after the split had been advocates of the former policy. Actually, the entrust group violated not the basic policy of the POI, but its discipline. Standing apart from both the "organic unity" faction and the entrists were a group of largely proletarian elements who advocated independent action and united fronts. These have lately been contemptuously designated as "the trade unionists".

In our opinion, they are the Marxists of the POI.

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Now what is this French controversy which, through the silence of the P.C., has acquired such a mysterious and almost sinister character? Is it the old principled question, the feud between the liquidationists and the "sectarians" which separates us from the splinter groups? Efforts have been made by various comrades to place the controversy on this plane. "The French Oehlerites" is an expression recently come into fashion in certain circles. In our opinion, this method of argument is regrettable. Cannot these comrades conceive of a situation in which the policy of entry might be open to question? Cannot they imagine that an opponent of entry might not be an Oehlerite or Fieldate, but an honest SWPer?

No, the real crux of the matter lies precisely in the question whether France 1939, is either the time or the place for our old SPUSA maneuver.

The setting for our entry into the SP of the USA was favorable. In passing, we register our disagreement with some of the internal methods used to convince the WP, and later with the policy of splitting away over a comparatively trivial issue, when a major one (Spain) remained untouched.

But in spite of these defects, the maneuver went well. In a vast setting of backward workers, on whom the capitalist crisis had yet to imprint its lesson, and with whom our work as a party was a tedious and long drawn out prospect, here was a relatively small centrist group with a loft ferment. A chance to make easy money politically; and we should and did take it.

Entry was the best method for many reasons. In crucial periods, the wall separating the rank and file of political parties dissolves in excitement and militancy; but at the time of our entry that wall still existed, and it was necessary to surmount it. We could do that, since the SP was sufficiently small for our members to make themselves felt, and since we were concerned at the time only with the SP - justifiably so. Moreover, since both the SP and the WP were parties weak in factory elements (fraternization within factories is both important and easy when parties have proletarian composition) we solved the problem of fraternization by entry.

When Shachtman, last January, spoke of sending to France a comrade (Cannon) experienced in the entry maneuver, he made it appear that this tactic was something to be transplanted from the U.S. onto French soil. Actually, none of the conditions favorable to the American tactic existed in France,

Both the PSOP and the POI are largely proletarian parties (we have comrades in such important enterprises as the Reynault Auto, the Gnome Aircraft, the Paris subway, the Marseilles docks, the Lille metallurgical works) and the POI has been an important factor in the molecular process of revolutionizing not only PSOP workers, but militant Stalinists and Socialists as well. The running war crisis has broken down party walls - the PSOP included - to the point where Stalinist workers, for example, physically defended POI militants against Stalinist leaders in factories. This solidarity, if it were only exploited, could be worth ten entries.

But by far the most important difference between the French and American settings is the condition of the French proletariat. Instead of being the only hopeful political group in a barren land of backward workers, as was the SPUSA, the PSOP was but one political expression of a wave of mass militancy, of despair and searching for leadership such as France has seldom seen. The Munich crisis had unmasked the imperialist war; Stalinists, Socialists, colonials - all were on the move. Algerian longshoremen at Marseilles struck in the teeth of war mobilization; demonstrations and riots increased in North Africa and Syria (they haven't ceased yet); CP workers left their party in droves; new CGT elections opened trap-doors beneath Stalinist bureaucrats.

A feature of this resurgence of militancy was the November 30th general strike. In calling it a protest against the Daladier fascism, the CP attempted unsuccessfully to hide from the workers the true nature of their own strike. The Stalinists, within the immediate memory of the French workers, had handed over to Daladier this very dictatorship; and moreover, it was a dictatorship which, as Daladier made perfectly clear, would prepare France for the very war which the Stalinists had been shrieking for. French workers knew this, and their strike was an anti-Stalinist strike, as even so confused a journalist as Raymond Graham Swing could point out.

It failed, not because the government made it a military crime, but because the CGT criminally sabotaged it. The most advanced workers, foreseeing bloody rout if they carried on the struggle that their leaders had wrecked in advance, decided to beat a

retreat, and this was an act not of demoralization but of revolutionary intelligence. The less advanced workers carried through their strike - also a revolutionary act, but one showing inexperience. Even so, the real struggle against the state flashed here and there like lightning. Around Lille, miners fought the garde mobile and sang the Internationale. In the red suburbs of Paris, the government found it necessary to erect barricades and machine-gun emplacements. In Havre, sailors openly defied court-martial to strike on their ships.

Comrade Shachtman, describing this situation last January, viewed the French revolution as a real possibility for 1939. We agreed with him. Mass disillusionment with the Stalinists and the popular front, strikes that sabotaged the war machine and challenged the bourgeois state, open defiance of the military - such a conflagration could not but mean that the workers were ready for revolt.

Was this any time for the revolutionary party to bury itself in a "contrist party with a left ferment"? Nonsense! All France was in left ferment!

"Well," replied one comrade discussing this point, "we couldn't enter every party in France, could we?" That remark indicates the degree to which entry has become an obsession with many of our members. Is entry the only tactic of which the Fourth International is capable? What has become of the United Front? Not once have we heard that tactic seriously mentioned in connection with France.

"But the POI hasn't got the numbers for such a thing," some have protested. That objection is mechanical. The strength of a revolutionary party resides not in its numbers, but in the masses it can set in motion. (And don't forget about the 2,000 JSR's, you number fiends!) With its present membership, an adequate organizational machine and a regular press, the POI could tap support more widespread, relatively speaking, than the German CP in 1932.

Let us enumerate some of the essential features of the tactic that would accomplish this - the United Front.

It is, by its very nature, a thing of the rank and file. Leaders play an important role in it, but their most important function is to remove themselves as obstructions. Sometimes spontaneous united fronts occur despite opposition from tops - as in isolated instances between the German Socialists and Communists in 1932. This is important to remember.

The united front is the counter-attack of politically diversified masses against capitalist reaction. Except in soviets, it is a temporary thing, on a minimum program.

In periods of increasing crisis, the program of the United Front rubs contrist leaders the wrong way. They go into it against their will, as a result of mass pressure. It is therefore the duty of the revolutionary party, initiating united fronts, to make its efforts known to the rank and file of other parties, and to present them with a program which answers needs which they feel. This at the same time that negotiations proceed with

party tops.

The united front is a testing ground where centrist parties ultimately fail, and where the revolutionary party comes to the fore. This is equally true where the centrist leaders refuse to join and unmask themselves in that way

In action, the united front is an enormous magnet, attracting to it workers who had not joined at the outset. A relatively small group, emerging as leaders in such actions, may find themselves the head of an offensive immeasurably greater than anything they could set in motion by other means.

The united front does not tie the hands of the revolutionary party. If centrist leaders successfully prevent their organizations from joining, the bolshevik party proceeds to independent action, setting the example for those workers whose leaders backed out.

"All this may be true," some comrades have replied to us. "But the POI has attempted united fronts, and failed." Yes, the POI did make some attempts. But they were confined to negotiations with PSOP bureaucrats - virtually "united fronts from above." The most disastrous of these attempts occurred immediately before the November general strike, when the PSOP leadership, having finally consented to joint action, backed out at the last minute. The action was completely bureaucratic. But had the POI propagandized the PSOP rank and file, this could not have happened. As it was, the matter lay entirely in the hands of functionaries who could not be expected to act differently.

The attitude of the POI toward genuine united fronts was illustrated by the following quotations from the Lutte. "We are happy to accomplish such united fronts, as for example the one which occurred this very week in the 15th section of the PSOP. But... such actions, being local, occasional, and isolated, are entirely insufficient."... "we think that the problem of the united front between the PSOP and the POI has been exceeded by the objective situation; we claim that the success of real workers' united front has become subordinate to the unification, on a Marxist base, of vanguard organizations. Nevertheless, we are naturally ready to make such common action as is possible with the comrades of the PSOP."

For them the united front is "insufficient"! Not only was the POI dissatisfied with these "local, isolated" beginnings, but it abandoned the job of cultivating them because they failed to win nods of approval from the centrist tops. The POI wanted permanent "committees of the united front", but "regress" that the central committee of the PSOP "fails to understand, as we do, this necessity." If the POI "regretted" that, it is due for a real shock in a short while, when the central committee of the PSOP will "fail to understand" the necessity for soviets.

Of course, the POI's failure to propagandize the PSOP rank and file had another reason as well. Propaganda means organization, functionaries, leaflets, a press - and all that means money. The POI had none. We made a good start by collecting a fund, but something went wrong.

No, the united front has not yet been tried in France, even though it is patently the answer to the current problem. A well-planned united front tactic, joining the PSOP to the POI last November, would have taught the PSOP workers - in action - what our French "entrists" comrades are slowly - perhaps vainly - trying to teach them by writing columns in Julia '36 and debating with Pivert.

But when compared to still another possibility, united action with the PSOP pales in significance. The Algerian workers are searching for leadership! They have not even the remnants of patriotism that still confuse the French workers outside the POI. Theirs has been an oppression by foreign imperialism. Their function as cannon fodder in the coming war has long been clear to them. They have shown themselves capable of militant organized action against the French bourgeoisie. In distinction to the PSOP, they are ready not only for united strike action, but for united anti-war action on a Marxist basis. They have actually asked the POI for it.

We can conjecture the possibilities of such a united front, involving an important section of Islamic nations, would open in Africa. In France, the spectacle of Algerian workers, with the POI at the head, waging a struggle against imperialist war, would send the disillusioned Stalinists, Socialist, and PSOP workers thundering to our ranks. Here is the united front in all its size and power!

How puny beside this prospect is the tactic of the International Secretariat - entry into the PSOP!

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Comrade Cannon's report to the New York membership was no heartening thing. Perhaps most depressing was his evaluation of French workingclass militancy. Comrade Cannon went to France, where his contacts were admittedly few and painful, and where language formed a serious obstacle; and there decided that we had all been wrong about the French proletariat: the November strikes marked, not a surge of militancy, but a falling off. Is it possible that Comrade Cannon's confidence in the French proletariat was soured by the failure of his particular mission? His estimate seemed to be definitely ex post facto.

But that estimate may soon turn out to be accurate, ironically enough. Perhaps it is accurate already. The time for action was last fall and winter. The iron doesn't stay red hot while the blacksmith is discovering that a hammer, not a screwdriver, is the proper tool. There may yet be time in France. But we have already made a serious error.

The (March 7th) issue of the Lutte carries an account of a "united front" meeting at which spoke representatives of the POI, the PSOP and the Noe Destours. The POI speaker spent his time begging the PSOP for "organic unity on a minimum program" - a glorified form of entry; the PSOPer devoted his speech to refusing. The Noe Destour speaker asked for revolutionary leadership. Nobody listened to him.

There, in a nutshell, you have the French mistake.

TAKE THE POI OUT OF THE PSOP! FOR AN INDEPENDENT BOLSHEVIK PARTY  
IN FRANCE: A PARTY THAT WILL STRENGTHEN ITSELF AND THE FRENCH  
PROLETARIAT BY MEANS OF THAT FIRE TEMPERED WEAPON OF THE REVO\*  
LUTIONARY VANGUARD, THE UNITED FRONT!

Joe Green, Carl Hanley