

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

A-13

January, 1954

Contents

THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY PLENUM OF THE S.W.P.

By James P. Cannon

Published by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.

20¢

THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY PLENUM OF THE S.W.P.

By James P. Cannon

(Report to the Los Angeles Membership Meeting
December 5, 1953
as transcribed from a tape recording.)

Our 25th Anniversary Plenum, November 7-8, reviewed the developments of the internal situation since the May Plenum and based its decisions upon them.

The May Plenum had followed five months of discussion on a national plane. It was quite an extensive discussion, as you know; more Internal Bulletins were published than even in the great fight with the Petty Bourgeois Opposition in 1939-40. This discussion had already shown quite clearly, we thought, the revisionist positions of the Cochranite minority on the most basic questions of the American movement -- on the perspectives of this country, of the labor movement, and of the party.

The minority had shown a revisionist position on the crucial question of the role of the party; a tendency to transform our organization, which from the very beginning had striven to become a revolutionary action party of the masses, into a propaganda group of critics, renouncing all aspiration to be the future party of the working class.

The discussion had already shown at that time, that although the careful formulations of the minority could not then be justly called pro-Stalinist or Stalinist conciliationist, the leaders of this faction had nevertheless recklessly encouraged a sentiment of Stalinist conciliationism in the ranks, and did nothing to restrain it or oppose it. They permitted people of their caucus to state openly in branch debates, their conviction that the Stalinists "could no longer betray." In one of my letters published in the Internal Bulletin, I stated that this sentiment of Stalinist conciliationism had been most glaringly illustrated in Seattle. That was before the May Plenum, and before the Seattle development of later months, when four members of the branch passed over from the minority faction to the camp of Stalinism.

Finally, before the May Plenum, the minority had shown a revisionist position on the organizational principles upon which we have built our party. The minority faction attempted to set up a "dual power" in the leadership, exercising veto power over the majority, and denying the right of the majority to do anything without their consent and approval.

That's what the discussion had shown politically at the time of the May Plenum. At that time we also had a clear indication of the relation of forces in the party. It was demonstrated, both at the Plenum and in the reports from the branches, that the minority was a quite small minority -- it could make no pretension that it was a leadership enjoying the support of the majority of the party. That's the way things stood -- both as to the development of political positions and as to the relation of forces in the party at the time of the May Plenum.

Now, the relation of forces is a very important question, although there is a certain school of literary politicians who maintain that it doesn't count. For us it counts a great deal, because the relation of forces, determined after a thorough discussion, is nothing less than the expression of the opinions of the rank and file in the party. That's democracy in action. And when the relation of forces shows a very strong majority in favor of one group, and a very small minority in favor of another, the "relation of forces" is just another way of saying that the rank and file is talking, and expressing its will in the discussion.

Why We Saw No Need of Split

We were of the opinion at that time that the positions of the minority were not fully developed. They had started on a certain course but it remained to be seen whether they would draw back, or develop their positions to their logical conclusions. We want to give them time to do the one or the other; and we wanted to give the party an opportunity to see more clearly what the line of development would be. For that reason we saw no need of split at the time of the May Plenum. Despite all the talk of the minority about the majority desiring a split, our position at the May Plenum showed the contrary. We had not advocated a split and had no intention of taking the initiative to bring it about.

We wanted to test things out in the course of further discussion and experience in the party activity. While the minority was half disposed for a split, or half expected that they were going to be thrown out of the party, we took no such position. On the contrary, on the basis of our political position and our organizational strength, as demonstrated at the Plenum and the reports from the branches, we made our truce proposal.

That proposal, which we offered to them and which they finally accepted, was nothing new, as I've explained here before. It was exactly the same proposal we made to the Musteite minority in the 1936 Convention after we had settled the fight in the party ranks over the question of entry into the SP. (This proposal -- accepted by the Musteites at the time -- secured the unity of our organization during the entire period of our work in the Socialist Party.)

Our truce resolution at the May Plenum was almost identical with the proposal we offered to the Burnham-Shachtman minority at the 1940 Convention -- that is, that they remain in the party and retain all normal rights; they could have a limited discussion after the Convention in the magazine; they could have representation on the leading bodies, according to their strength -- on the condition that they accept the decisions of the Convention and remain loyal.

The resolution adopted at the Plenum in May was even broader than that, because it placed no restrictions on further discussion. The Internal Bulletin would be open, and they could write anything they pleased. We have a peculiar bureaucracy in the party -- I don't know whether anyone ever encountered such a bureaucracy in any other movement -- which does not suppress discussion, but on the contrary extends it and insists upon it, so that everything will become clear in the minds of the party members before the final decision is taken.

Was It Correct?

Was the Plenum Resolution, which embodied these proposals, correct? It can be answered in two ways. I would say, the Plenum Resolution was absolutely correct and would have secured peace in the party, as I predicted in my concluding speech, under certain conditions which could not be judged in advance. I might say, in parentheses, that the prediction I made at the Plenum was also intended as a suggestion to the minority. I predicted that they would work loyally; that they would conduct a friendly struggle of rivalry to show that they were better party builders than we were; and that we would have a free, calm and objective discussion. It was not merely a prophecy; it was also a suggestion to the minority as to what the best course would be.

The resolution would have worked out on the following conditions, as we see it now in retrospect:

First, that the issues in dispute between the majority and the minority were only national issues, and that the factions were only national factions. We had discussed, up till then, only on a national plane. We, for our part, had not raised any international questions. We tried, for five months, to confine the discussion to the problems of the American SWP, which are fairly important in themselves and well worth a discussion.

The second condition for the resolution to work out successfully was that the minority was, as we urged them to be, and predicted that they would be, a loyal minority. That is, that they would be content with their democratic rights of discussion and their representation in the leading bodies, and that they would do their share of the party work and conduct themselves in general as a loyal minority. I believe it was correct for us to assume that that would be the case and to give the minority the benefit of the doubt.

We never considered ourselves merely as the leaders of a faction. As leaders of the party, it was certainly correct to give the minority the benefit of every doubt and every opportunity to conduct themselves in a loyal manner, to develop their positions fully and freely in a democratic discussion, and to let the members finally decide. I don't know where or when or how a minority of any party could be offered a better proposition than that which the resolution of the Plenum gave them -- the right to continue the discussion in the Internal Bulletin and in the branches; the right to representation approximately according to their strength; no harsh characterizations of their position, which we had written into our original draft resolutions and later deliberately took out, in order not to exacerbate the situation.

Everything that a minority could legitimately ask was provided for in the Plenum Resolution. If we should be a minority in some other party or organization at any time, or in our own party; if we should sit down to compile a list of demands of what a loyal minority wants -- we couldn't include more than we gave freely to the minority at the May Plenum.

Why the Truce Didn't Work Out

But still the truce didn't work out. Both assumptions, upon which the resolution of the Plenum was based, proved in further development to be false. The minority, as we know now, and as it was clearly revealed in the period from May to November, was not simply a national faction. It was the emanation of an international revisionist tendency, which we know now, as we didn't know then, has been organized in a secret international faction for a long time. The minority had been a part of that secret international revisionist faction from the very beginning.

We began to suspect this toward the end of the discussion before the May Plenum. But we didn't know it; and we did not act, as one should not act, merely on suspicion. We noted the extraordinary assurance of the minority, their repeated insistence that they were Pabloites, and that they represented the real thought of Pablo. In the beginning we thought this was absurd. We saw absolutely no justification in the documents of the Third Congress for the revisionist policy they developed in this country. But the more their claims were repeated, the more we heard about it, the more we began to have premonitions that there might be something to it.

A couple of weeks before the Plenum we received a statement from Comrade Stone in New York, who had belonged to the minority caucus, and had changed his position and joined the majority. He gave us a statement that one of the main themes of discussion in the minority caucus, upon which the caucus had been recruited and held together, was the assertion that Clarke was the real agent and representative of Pablo. He wrote this statement for us and signed it. I sent a letter to Pablo under the date of May 22, a week before the Plenum, in which I quoted this statement of Comrade Stone, a statement that the minority in our party, fighting to overthrow the leadership, was claiming to represent him.

At the Plenum I took the floor after Clarke had spoken and asked him a number of questions: whether he had received any instructions in Paris to begin a factional struggle against the majority of our party; whether he had been told that if he organized a faction against the leadership he would receive the support of the International Secretariat. I asked him a half a dozen questions on this theme from various angles. And what do you think Clarke answered? He stood on his Constitutional Rights and said, "I decline to answer."

I didn't press him. I said, "That's your privilege." But we took his evasiveness into account; that, confronted with this frank interrogation as to whether he was acting independently or whether he was an agent of an international faction, he declined to answer.

At this same Plenum, Clarke in the course of his speech, admitted that a series of amendments which our National Committee had sent to him prior to the Third World Congress, never reached their intended destination. He said he did not bring them to the attention of the Congress, but on the contrary, had burned them. That was admitted by Clarke at the Plenum.

Right after the Plenum, on June 4, I wrote a letter to Comrade Tom in England, which has been widely commented on. In the course of

this letter I told him our conviction, putting all things together, that the SWP had been the guinea pig for some experiments in duplicity and intrigue; that the minority faction in our party was receiving clandestine support, and that we didn't like that. In that letter I referred to the "answer" of Pablo to my letter of May 22, which we received a day after the Plenum. The answer evaded the question raised by the statement of Comrade Stone. That put the finishing touch on the mysterious business; it transformed our suspicions about the role of Pablo in our American faction fight into a conviction.

My letter was a wide open invitation to Pablo to openly repudiate the claims of the minority or anybody else to represent him in a factional way. Instead of that he hummed and hawed and evaded the question. That convinced us that he was in reality acting in collusion with this faction all the time. This was further confirmed by his admission in this letter, that he had been corresponding with the minority faction behind the backs of the official leadership for a long time before.

The Experience in England

Then, after the Plenum, the majority of the National Committee began to feel that it was accumulating overwhelming proof that our revisionist minority in the SWP, which we had tried to debate on national grounds, and prevent it spreading into the International, was in reality the American extension of an international revisionist faction. The Pabloite operations in England gave a striking demonstration of that. The British movement has scored magnificent successes in recent years, after a long, hard faction struggle to separate the Trotskyists from the charlatans and adventurers of the Haston gang. When Burns, the foremost builder and leader, took an outspoken position in sympathy with the majority in our party, Pablo responded by organizing a faction against him in England.

That's not all. He promised Burns, if he would withdraw his support for the majority in our party, that he would let him alone. At the same time he threatened Burns, that if he supported the majority in the SWP, they would make trouble for him in his own party. This crooked and cynical procedure, right out of the Comintern book, finally culminated in an ultimatum which Pablo sent to Burns in England, demanding that he act in the British Party, before his own National Committee, as a disciplined member of the IS in Paris; that his criticism of the draft resolution prepared for the Fourth Congress should not be made known to the members of his own National Committee, to say nothing of the members of his party; that he remain under discipline of the IS and present only the IS position.

Well that, of course, caused us to explode, because that's precisely the device the Stalinists used to corrupt the Communist International. To impose committee discipline on members before their own rank and file; to take a majority vote in a committee and then bind all the members to it -- not, as is quite correct, against the outside world, but in discussion with one's own members -- that absolutely deprives the rank and file of the party of any real information and discussion. The leaders are more informed on the questions in dispute; they discuss them in committee; and if a minority in a committee is bound by committee discipline during a discussion, that means the absolute stifling of any real democracy. We told Burns our

opinion about that; that we, for our part, would throw any such instructions into the wastebasket.

All these things, taken together one after another, convinced every single member of our national leadership in New York, and the Plenum members throughout the country, that the minority in our party had been secretly inspired by Pablo from the beginning. We had been fighting in the dark up to the time of the May Plenum. It was only between May and November that we got the real score.

"Junk the Old Trotskyism"

The picture became clearer to us as a result of the disloyal course of the minority after the May Plenum, a course which could not be otherwise explained. We couldn't understand why the minority so soon, within two weeks after the Plenum, had immediately resumed the most violent factional attitude. In Clarke's speech on the Plenum at the New York membership meeting -- I think you heard it on the tape recording -- he brought forward the slogan: "Junk the Old Trotskyism." That was a much bolder assertion than we had ever heard before. All the "old Trotskyists" began lifting up their ears when they heard that, because they don't want to "junk" any part of Trotskyism.

Then we heard about the Plenum reports at the Detroit and Cleveland meetings. There the minority, instead of reporting in the spirit of the Plenum Resolution, as Myra did here in Los Angeles, made completely factional reports, as if nothing had happened and no resolution had been signed. The same thing took place in San Francisco. The San Francisco minority got the word from New York and erupted in a factional manner very shortly after the Plenum. Then factionalism began rolling like a snowball.

The Plenum Resolution, signed by both sides, provided explicitly that majority rule, whichever side had the majority locally, should prevail in the branches in relation to local administration, and that on the other hand the minority must be guaranteed its democratic rights. In New York we had the majority, and our comrades proposed to have a calm convention where that majority would be formally registered and a new executive committee elected accordingly. The minority objected violently to this simple, normal and necessary execution of the Plenum Resolution.

It was a sin and a shame, they said, for the majority to "dump Bartell" -- as if Bartell was organizer of the New York Local by divine right. That isn't our opinion. Our opinion is that the organizer of a Local holds office by virtue of the wishes of the majority of his local organization. If they want to change organizers or change executive committees that's no offense at all; that's merely the exercise of their democratic rights, which was specifically reiterated in the Plenum resolution -- that the right of majority rule in branches and locals should be respected.

The Sin Against the Holy Cow

Then, at the City Convention in New York, they sprang their big "sensation." The method of "stampeding" a meeting of party comrades by "sensations" -- the method of "exposing" something they have never

heard about and have no means of verifying at the moment; the tendentious quotation from letters and documents they have never read and have had no chance to study in their entirety -- that is the method of demagogues; and Lenin said, "a demagogue is the worst enemy of the working class."

It seems that Pablo, in addition to, or rather as a part of his general Stalinist methods of organization -- when I saw Stalinist, I don't mean that as a factional exaggeration; I mean pure and simple Stalinist organization methods, without any trimmings or reservations; that's what they are -- it seems that in addition to that, as a part of all that, he has a sort of stool pigeon and spy service to intercept private letters and purloin documents circulated privately among the leaders of the majority faction. One of Pablo's spies and letter thieves, in pursuit of his grimy assignment, picked up my caucus speech on "Internationalism and the SWP" and my letter to Tom in England.

This notorious "Tom," by the way, whom the Pabloites have tried to cast out as a pariah, happens to be one of my best friends, a comrade whom I esteem very highly, in whom I have complete confidence. He is one of the oldest Trotskyists, one who has done more than any of us to help the international movement during and after the war. Bartell, the great sensation-monger, "exposed" my letter to Tom at the New York Local Convention last August, as though a great crime had been committed. He offered the letter as definitive proof that this Cannon, who is not satisfied with his long record of criminal activity, has committed now the unmentionable crime -- the sin against the Holy Ghost. And what do you think that was? I criticized Pablo. I took the name of the Holy Cow in vain. I said, openly, in a letter and in a speech, that I didn't consider Pablo my Pope; that a sentence from him does not settle any question for me. That was the crime.

The significant thing about the big exposure that Bartell waved before the New York City Convention was not the merit of my particular criticism -- that could be debated -- but that I had criticized. And everybody began to wonder: What kind of eerie world have we wandered into? It's as though we have a cult and a Messiah here, and the question is not whether the criticism is just or unjust but the fact of the criticism itself.

They expected to stampede the whole party organization around the slogan of defending Pablo's untouchability. Of course, they got a big surprise there. Instead of stampeding the party, they simply aroused the anger of the party members in New York, who don't want to be put in the category of cult followers of anybody. Moreover, when they got a chance to read the whole text they didn't see anything wrong in the criticisms I had made nor in the fact that I had made them.

"Our Faction Comes First"

Coincident with this development of a Pablo cultist attitude in the party, you heard repeated reports that the minority began an almost total abstention from party activity, and that they were defaulting in a body on their financial pledges. I suppose I don't have to explain that to the delegation here from San Francisco who had experience with it. The minority sabotage was no problem here in this Local

because Cochranites don't seem to grow in the Los Angeles sunshine. We had to hear about it here, and we heard plenty from New York and other places.

The Cochranites did something that I personally had never seen in the movement before -- never; that is, a minority faction going on a sit-down strike against the party. In my time I've seen all kinds of factions and faction fights, but I never saw a minority undertake to sabotage party work; and not only that, party finances too. Their participation in the activities of the New York Local dwindled down to "token" participation. Right after the Plenum they had made pledges to our Party-Building Fund, similar to the pledges they had made in the past. This showed that at the moment they had accepted the truce and were going along as a loyal minority. They never paid their pledges. When they were called to account for that, they answered brazenly: "Our faction comes first."

In the New York Bureau of the Executive Committee, the great Bartell was taxed with the conduct of the minority: "Your people are not paying their pledges and that looks like factional sabotage. Can't you do something about it?" He answered: "We don't tell them not to pay their pledges to the party. All we tell them is that their pledges to the faction come first." That's the kind of cynical answers that were given.

In the branch meetings when it came to finances and the role was called, each member would come forward with his payment on his pledge -- according to the established custom. The minority members would come up with "token" payments. If they were due to give ten dollars they would give fifty cents or something like that, to add insult to injury. And if they were asked, "What does this mean?" they would say, "We have to support our faction."

I said, I never saw that before in the history of our movement. The reason is, that every minority I ever knew was always struggling to get a hearing, to win over the others and to become a majority -- to win over the party. Every minority that has any sense knows that if you sabotage party work and party funds you only antagonize the loyal party members and destroy all chance to get a hearing from them. The Pabloite minority didn't seem to care about that. They acted for months as people who were already outside our ranks.

A "Cold Split"

The comrades kept writing to me from New York, as they wrote to the other NC members in the field, and they called it a "cold split." Even Breitman, who is the most restrained and moderate of all our people, referred to it in a personal letter as "a de facto semi-split." And I, out here in the halcyon land of the Sundown Sea, with the smug objectivity of one who is not involved in the immediate faction fight, kept counselling the leaders in New York to be patient: "Don't crowd them too hard; give them a chance to straighten out," and so on.

But they didn't straighten out at all. They went from bad to worse in that respect, until the party members throughout the country began to ask the national leadership: "How long is this to go on? How long must we not only do all the party work and contribute all the funds, but then have to come to the branch meeting and have it thrown

in our faces that they are supporting their faction before they support the party?"

We puzzled over the reasons for such unprecedented conduct. What had caused this sharp turn of the minority, from the stand they took on the last day of the Plenum when they signed the truce resolution? It was not any provocation from the majority, because we had no interest whatever in stimulating a factional atmosphere. Then we heard of the same kind of disloyal conduct by the Pablo faction in England. Finally, everybody had to conclude that there was only one explanation. It was absolutely clear that this was part of the international policy -- the international policy of disrupting and breaking up the old Trotskyist cadres, the old Trotskyist parties, and getting them out of the road.

That's what has been shown not only in this party but in other parts of the world too, especially since the May Plenum. And the reason is, that the old Trotskyist cadres are strictly orthodox, not only here, but all over the world. They are firmly educated in the program just as we are, and they are just as stiff-necked about it as we are. Everywhere the revisionists, who have been aiming to overthrow the Trotskyist program, ran up against the resistance of the old cadres of Trotskyism, and they set out to break them up.

Pabloite "Successes"

My God, they write about the wonderful "successes" they've been having on the international field. These successes consist, since the Third World Congress, of the following: There has been a split in France in which the majority was thrown out of the International. In Ceylon there has been a split of outright Stalinists who took a large section of the party with them. (Imagine this, in the year 1953, in the movement founded by Trotsky! A faction developed in the Ceylon party, beginning with Stalinist conciliationism, as in Seattle, then becoming pro-Stalinist, then making a split and combining the next day with the Stalinists to fight our party!)

Now you have a consummated split in England along the same lines, and a split in the United States.

Anybody with half an eye can see that you've got a pattern here -- you've got the pattern of a deliberate program to break up the old cadres, a deliberate program to convert the Trotskyist movement into a left cover for Stalinism. That's the way it looked to us at the 25th Anniversary Plenum.

The design was concealed for a long time by double talk and ambiguous sections of resolutions which could be interpreted two ways. That deceived us for a long while. We noted some ambiguous formulations in the draft resolutions for the Third Congress. We tried to correct them by amendments, which as I've told you, never even reached the Congress. But we did not begin with suspicions. We said: "Well, if the necessary qualifications are not here in this paragraph they are some place else; we don't want to begin with suspicions; we have confidence in the people with whom we have worked so long. We formed our alliance with them in the first place because they stood on orthodox positions as we did, and we give the benefit of every doubt."

The Test of Events

But since the Plenum the proof of the revisionist line was revealed by events and their reaction to them. These events, which crowded one on top of another, obliged people to take positions and show what they meant by the resolutions. The first jolt came from an article by Clarke on the developments in the Soviet Union since the death of Stalin. This was published in "Fourth International" magazine soon after the May Plenum. The article envisaged a possible self-reform of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the gradual reestablishment of Soviet democracy without a revolutionary uprising of the masses led by a revolutionary party. This is directly contrary to the program of the Fourth International.

This article, which raised great alarm here and throughout the world, because it appeared in such an authoritative magazine, was sneaked into print without the knowledge of the other two editors who were supposed to edit everything published in the magazine and control the policy. The real Pabloites combine treacherous policy with a certain treacherous method of working. The other two editors, and all the rest of the party leaders, found out about the article only after it appeared in print in the magazine. You should recall that when you hear accusations that we started the controversy in public. "Fourth International" magazine, which is sold on the newsstands, is as "public" as the Post Office.

Next came the attempt to cover up the counter-revolutionary course of the Stalinists in East Germany. Then the whitewash of the Stalinist betrayal in the French General Strike. All this is documented in our "Letter to All Trotskyists" issued by our 25th Anniversary Plenum. (Militant, Nov. 16, 1953)

It was on the basis of these three concrete events and the line taken by them, that our National Committee made up its mind definitively about the real policy of the Pablo faction. We didn't try to read something into a resolution which might not possibly be there. We didn't interpret doubtful paragraphs out of proportion. We judged the Pabloites by the way they conducted themselves in action; on the events in Russia, in East Germany and in France. And on that basis we say the Pabloites revealed an anti-Trotskyist position in the most important questions of external politics.

Cadre-Wrecking Expedition

Parallel with that, we saw them speeding up their internal program of disrupting the Trotskyist cadre formations in the different countries one by one. That may seem like an utterly fantastic accusation to make; that people in the central leadership of the International would set out deliberately to break up the historically created cadres who are the living carriers of the doctrine, our sole link to the past and the sole forces capable of leading us into the future. But that's exactly the way it looks to us.

It is now clear that the cadre-wrecking expedition of the Pablo faction began, not in our party, but more than two years ago in the French party. It appeared to us then, that the fight in France was merely a fight over tactics, as to what extent and how deeply the Trotskyists should penetrate into the workers movement controlled by

the Stalinists, including the Stalinist party. Now, as you know, we have no sectarianism in our bones at all. We may be convicted of other faults but never of that. We are mass workers by instinct, experience and training, as well as by theory. We're in favor of getting into the mass movement no matter who leads it, or what country it is.

It appeared to us, taking it merely as a tactical question, that the majority of the French party was a little hesitant in this respect, and we stated so in the letter I wrote to Comrade Renard. It is clear to us now, as it was clear to the French already then, that what was involved was far more than tactics. The majority of the French party was stubbornly resisting the liquidationist course, and for that reason there was a deliberate, sustained, factional campaign to break up that cadre. We became convinced of that later; especially after the French general strike, in which the expelled majority showed themselves to be revolutionists in action, and the Pabloite faction acted as apologists for the Stalinists. That's why we changed our position on the French question, and did it openly, unambiguously and straightforwardly. Tactical questions are important only after questions of principle are settled. We will not even discuss tactics with anybody until we first come to agreement on principles.

In England, a real Trotskyist cadre was finally consolidated in a long internal struggle. After long stagnation of the movement there, a cadre organized by Burns finally broke out of the Haston jungle of unprincipled clique politics. They got into the Labor Party in England and began doing mass work on a scale never done by any Trotskyist party in the world, possibly outside of Ceylon. Great progress has been made there -- England has been the pride of the Fourth International now, for years.

We in America have never even approximated what the Trotskyists have been able to do in England in recent years; we never had so favorable an opportunity. They got into the mass movement just when the left swing was taking place, and found opportunities opening up on every side. They soon became an effective part of a big left-wing movement of semi-revolutionists and centrist elements turning to the left.

Right in the midst of this tremendous work Pablo hurled a destructive faction against the leadership, for the crime of sympathizing with the American majority. All of a sudden, without previous notice or warning, Burns was confronted with a hostile faction. This faction, pronouncing themselves 100% Pabloites, demanded that Burns obey the "Discipline of the IS" in internal party discussion, and keep his mouth shut when the draft resolutions for the Fourth Congress were up for consideration.

The majority of the National Committee in England told them: "We don't like this business at all. We don't like the fact that you, coming up here all of a sudden with a secret faction, have an accidental majority in the Editorial Board. We are going to reorganize that Board."

That's something, I think, they may have learned from the history of the SWP. The minute the Plenum of our National Committee finds that the Political Committee, or the Editorial Board or any other sub-

committee is not reflecting its will -- it simply reorganizes it. That's the invariable rule recorded in the history of our party. That's what we did at the October Plenum in 1939, at the beginning of the fight with the Petty Bourgeois Opposition. They had a majority in the Political Committee, but at the Plenum they were a minority.

The Plenum said: "That won't work very well, will it? If the majority in the Political Committee is against the majority in the Plenum, the conflict of authority has to be resolved one way or another. And since the Political Committee has no authority to reorganize the Plenum, then the Plenum has to reorganize the Political Committee. So some of you boys are out." Oh, they hollered, "Blue Murder! Bureaucracy!" But we said, "No, that's democratic centralism. You'll have to get used to that. The majority has to rule. That's democracy isn't it? At least, that's the first principle of it."

The British majority seemed to have the same idea. So they reorganized the Editorial Board and made a few shifts to bring sub-committees into line with the NC majority. Then, what do you think happened there? A comrade, who had been dropped from the sub-committee, as we dropped several of the Burnhamite minority from our Political Committee in 1939, challenged the right of the elected majority of the National Committee to remove him. He said: "I am going over to Paris and see what my position is." And he wasn't laughing.

So he goes to Paris, and comes back, and announces that he can't be removed, that the IS says he should stay. This monstrosity was justified on the ground that the Fourth International is a world party with international discipline, and IS discipline is higher than national discipline. This great principle of international organization is prostituted in the present faction fight to mean, in practice, that Pablo's factional agents have special rights in the national sections; that they can run wild and the National Committee can't discipline them. The National Committee, which is elected by a Conference and is responsible to the rank and file, is deprived of all power and might as well resign.

And then came Pablo's ultimatum to Burns that he himself had to obey the higher discipline of the IS and that he defend the line of its majority "until the Fourth Congress." Simultaneously with that, within recent weeks, the Pabloite minority in the British section began to openly violate the discipline of their National Committee in the mass movement.

Now, if there's one unpardonable crime, it's that. I surely don't have to explain that to a Trotskyist trade unionist. Open violation of discipline in the mass movement creates an absolutely impossible situation; it is the most disruptive thing imaginable. It can blow up all your mass work in a short time.

That's precisely what the British Pabloites undertook to do, and this brought the struggle in the British section to a head very quickly. Confronted by open and provocative violations of discipline, the leadership had to decide: Either the National Committee must abdicate, or it can remain in office only as a puppet of a madman in Paris, and say, "We have no rights." Or, as a third alternate, it can throw the disrupters out of the organization for violation of discipline.

That's what was done in England, and we heartily applaud the action of the British majority. The split, made unavoidable by these provocations, was consummated in England in about two weeks from the time of the first violation. A large majority of the party rose up in arms against the disruption in England, as they did in the United States, and supported the majority of the National Committee.

The Pabloite Formula

You knew that for months the Cochranites were violating discipline in the essence of the matter, that is, by neglecting to participate in party activity and by sabotaging party funds. They have not done this simply out of stupidity. It has been a deliberate program, carried out on the theory, assiduously cultivated by the Pablo faction, that international discipline is higher than national discipline. Now, formally, that's right -- if the IS is a really representative body, and there is some control over it, some way of checking it. But as the Pabloites employ it, it is the perfect formula to disrupt any section of the Fourth International before the discussion gets a good start.

Under that formula, as the Pabloites invoke it, no matter how big a majority you have in the National Committee, elected by your membership, under observation of the membership, subject to control and recall by the membership, its authority is cancelled out immediately. The Pabloite cultists are under no obligation to obey the Political Committee, or the Plenum, in New York or London, because they have received a special license from Paris. They can do as they please. At least they thought they could. And they did -- until they finally came to the high point of our 25-year struggle; not only the high point of this year's work, the point to which we were building for six months, but the 25th Anniversary of our struggle in this country, against all obstacles and difficulties.

The celebration of our 25th Anniversary coincided in New York with the wind-up rally in our election campaign -- the best we ever had. The Cochranites organized a boycott of this Anniversary Celebration and campaign meeting. They deliberately organized it. They put their supporters under discipline to boycott the meeting. They even tried to induce sympathizers to remain away. When that happened we said: "This is a public demonstration against the party's 25-year struggle. In effect, if not in actual design, it is a demonstration of solidarity with the Stalinists who expelled us 25 years ago."

That's what we were celebrating, among other things. We were celebrating the action of the original nucleus of American Trotskyism which raised the banner in the Central Committee of the Communist Party and were expelled 25 years ago, almost to the day of the meeting. We took that boycott as a demonstration against the party, and a demonstration against our candidates in the election campaign.

And we said: "This is enough! These people are no longer comrades of ours. They are a gang of strikebreakers. By walking out and boycotting our 25th Anniversary celebration they have consummated a definitive split in our party!" That was the opinion all the National Committee members expressed as they assembled for the 25th Anniversary Plenum. We said that the task of the Plenum was simply to recognize the fact, and to act accordingly; to recognize that the

internal debate was ended and that no more compromises are possible. You can compromise with people in a union in a discussion and debate as to whether to go out on strike or not. But you can't compromise with anybody who walks through the picket line after the strike has started.

That's the way we felt about these people. Our whole attitude changed when they boycotted that meeting. We said: "No more internal debates with these people. The rights of a minority in our party are very many and they are carefully guarded, and always have been. But nobody has the right to be disloyal, no matter who sponsors him." That was the sentiment of the Plenum; and on that basis, as you know, it adopted a motion to suspend the NC members who organized the boycott.

A constitutional provision gives the National Committee the right to suspend members of the National Committee, for cause, by a two-thirds vote. And that's what we did -- we didn't expel them, we suspended them. They have the right of appeal under the party constitution. They, and others who solidarized with their strikebreaking action, have the right to ask for reinstatement. The Plenum attached only one condition: The boycott of our 25th Anniversary celebration must be disavowed. Anyone, anywhere, who objects to this condition brands himself thereby as an enemy of our party and has no right to remain in our party.

One may ask: "Why such a drastic sweeping action? Why, in one blow, bring the whole thing to an end, stop the debate and suspend them from the party? Why not merely warn them?" The answer is: They were warned. We warned them at the May Plenum. And we gave them another chance, a wide-open chance, after the May Plenum. They were warned at every meeting in New York -- "You are not doing your party duty; you are sabotaging party funds; you know the party cannot tolerate that." They paid no attention; the warnings were all disregarded.

Our Tradition

As a matter of fact, they were warned by the whole 25-year history of the party. All anyone would have needed, to know what the Plenum was going to do about this boycott of our 25th Anniversary, would have been to read the party history. It is all written down in the precedents of the past. This is the most democratic and easy-going party in the world. It lets its members do any damned thing they please. It never invokes any rigorous formalistic discipline; never drives people too hard -- at least I've never seen anybody driven too hard. But this same party, from the very beginning, never permitted anybody to challenge the party in a public action. No matter how big they were nor how big they thought they were. Never once.

That issue of real, not formalistic, discipline, came to a head first in the Hotel Strike in New York in 1934. B.J. Field and a group of party members in charge of that strike, with a big mass movement in their hands, thought they could lay down the law to this little Trotskyist group that didn't even have a telephone in the National Office, as they reminded us tauntingly. They refused to carry out party policy, and we expelled the whole bunch, just like that. The same thing with the Oehlerites. And similarly with the Shachtmanites,

when they refused to accept the Convention decision. We didn't hesitate to expel them, although they had nearly half the party with them. The Cochranites had plenty of warning -- at the May Plenum, and in the New York meetings, and in the history of the party.

The boycott, and this is the way you have to look at it -- was not an individual dereliction; it was an organized public action. I believe the party should be patient and careful and go slow when an individual comrade gets out of line. We shouldn't be in a hurry to expel an individual the first time he stubs his toe or does some things he shouldn't do. We've never been in a hurry in that respect. But this boycott was not a case of individual indiscipline which could be handled in leisurely fashion by the Control Commission. This was an open insurrection against the party, an act of war. Debate ends when the shooting begins. The party had to shoot back; that is, if it wanted to survive. We considered this boycott a deliberate split, part of an international conspiracy, and it had to be met as such.

If we had not acted at the Plenum, if we had let the boycott of our 25th Anniversary go by as a mere peccadillo, we would have condemned the party to months of chaos while the Cochranites prepared a formal split at their leisure, without paying any attention to any discipline whatever. If they could get away with a public boycott of such a meeting, the Cochranites would have concluded that they had a license for anything. They would have run wild, internally and externally, and there would have been no way to restrain them.

The Political Committee would have been powerless. Between Plenums the Political Committee -- under the Constitution -- has no right to suspend NC members. The Constitution gives that right only to the National Committee as a whole. A mere censure and a warning, after all that had been done, would have been a betrayal of the responsibility of the Plenum, which would have been greatly resented by the party members.

The Party Showed Its Trotskyist Caliber

This fight, as I see it, has been a big test for the party; hemmed in as it is by all the spears of reaction, under all the pressures of the most powerful imperialism in the world. The SWP is the only revolutionary party in this country, and it has to meet the full weight of opposition from every corner. It is simply an objective statement of fact to say the party stood up under this test and showed its Trotskyist caliber. That's the basic fact, and we have to proceed from that.

From that standpoint -- at the moment of concluding the internal struggle and facing the revisionist splitters as a rival and enemy organization externally, and simultaneously opening a struggle for Trotskyism on the international field -- at this time, in the face of these circumstances, I think it would be out of order to divert attention with a carping criticism of the leadership, or any section of it. The party ranks are in no mood to welcome such an attitude at the present moment. There will be plenty of time and opportunity to review everything later on. Right now we want complete solidarity in the fight to protect the Trotskyist heritage in this country and throughout the world. This fight is being led by our National Committee as a whole. It would be a disservice to the party to divert attention from that main fact, and seize the opportunity to pick a flaw here and

there in the way things were done by one individual or another. The important thing to remember now is that the overwhelming majority of the leading cadre of the party saw the situation before it was too late. It doesn't matter if some were a little too fast or others were a little too slow.

The important thing is that the overwhelming majority saw the situation in time, that they led the fight against the revisionists to a successful conclusion in our own party, and are now joining the fight on the international field. What is also important now, to notice and remember, is the remarkable demonstration of the party ranks in this fight. They showed the results of their long training in the school of Trotskyism. They not only supported the leaders; they even pushed them forward in the fight. The whole party has been reeducated and rearmed in the political and ideological fight. New leaders have come forward from the ranks, and they will find their rightful places on the National Committee at the next Convention.

Now as to how the split left the party: This split, like others we have gone through in the past, was thoroughly prepared and motivated. For that reason, like the other splits in the past, it caused no demoralization whatever, as far as I know. On the contrary the party is bounding forward with intensified activity and stronger confidence than ever in its great historic mission. I witnessed that personally in New York, at the first membership meeting after the Plenum. There was no moaning or whimpering, no disloyal complaints or carping criticisms; nothing but a confident, matter-of-fact discussion of plans and proposals to develop the party work.

It was the same all over the country, according to reports. I didn't visit any other sections, but such were the reports received by the National Office in New York. The party members, who had gone through the long struggle with the Cochranites, all thought the time had come to bring things to a head. When they heard about the boycott they were sure it was time to call a halt, and they were fully ready for the Plenum decision.

There was no opposition, no trace of complaint, from one end of the country to another, when the Plenum decision came out. On the contrary, there was immediate approval from the rank and file of the party. They had had enough of the "cold split" and the "sit-down strike." The formal split in all the branches was carried through with precision, without the slightest hesitation, within one week after the Plenum. That wouldn't have been possible without thorough preparation, because our party members, like any other rank and file, are not anxious to have splits.

Our hands are now free to help the orthodox Trotskyists in the other parties, in the struggle against revisionism on the international field. The National Committee is now turning its attention to this responsibility. The Open Letter of our 25th Anniversary Plenum -- addressed to all Trotskyists throughout the world -- presents our indictment of Pabloism for its pro-Stalinist policy, as revealed in action in great events since the May Plenum. The Plenum's Letter also indicts the Stalinist organizational methods of Pabloism. This letter signifies a definitive break with Pabloism and there will be no turning back.

The Rebirth of Trotskyism

It may be charged against us that we were late in discerning the revisionist character of Pabloism. That is only partly true. We characterized and fought the American manifestations of revisionism from the very beginning. We were late, it must be admitted, in tracing the revisionist faction in our party to its fountainhead in Paris. We were late also, a quarter of a century ago, in getting a clear picture of Stalinist revisionism in the Comintern.

We didn't catch up with the real meaning of Stalinism until 1928 -- five years after the fight first broke out in the Russian Party. But even at that, we were earlier than some others. The fight of 1928, out of which our party was created, evolved in about the same way as the present one, from the national field to the international. And in my opinion, the Plenum's Letter has no less historic significance than our declaration against Stalinism on October 27, 1928.

The reason for our delay in joining the international fight this time, as I have said before, was the deceptive, two-faced methods, the treacherous double talk, by which the Pablo cult, like all other revisionists in the past, concealed its real program. The Third Congress Resolutions -- as written -- gave no sanction for the policy actually carried out in recent months on events in the Soviet Union, East Germany and France. They gave no sanction to disrupt and split all the old cadres. In my opinion, the most that can be said against the Third Congress Resolutions is that they contain some ambiguous formulations which can be "interpreted" in different ways.

That was the trick. The ambiguous formulations were put in the resolutions on purpose. The Pabloites showed us what they meant by them in their policy on the Soviet Union, East Germany and France in the past six months, and by their attempts to split and break up the old Trotskyist cadres.

It certainly must be admitted that we did not see what was really going on too soon. We were a bit late, as in 1928. But not too late. We are caught up now and we are going to stay caught up, as we did after 1928. It is our duty to help the international struggle because we have the strongest organization, the strongest cadres, which have had the most benefit of direct collaboration with Trotsky, and probably the most collective experience.

The revisionists have turned out to be a small minority in every party where the fight has come to a showdown. We have reason to believe that it will be the same in the other sections, now that the fight is brought out into the open by the Open Letter of our 25th Anniversary Plenum.

The aims of our Letter are quite simple and clear for all to see. It calls, not for a split but for the unity of all Trotskyists on the basis of their common programmatic principles. It proposes an honest, democratic discussion among Trotskyists -- to prepare an honest, representative, democratic Congress of Trotskyists. That will be accomplished.

Morris Stein aptly characterized the open struggle against revisionism as the "rebirth of Trotskyism." The international fight will not be the "funeral" of Trotskyism -- as our wish-thinking enemies say -- but its triumphant resurrection.

#