

R

1/36

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE GIFT OF
JAMES W. BLODGETT

US 1420.2007

JUN 27 1940

WORKERS PARTY INTERNAL BULLETIN

For Members Only

Issued by National Committee W.P.U.S.

Special, January 10, 1936

Price 5 cents

Note: This Special Bulletin contains material submitted by the undersigned for the Internal Bulletin during July and August. In view of recent developments it is sent out to the membership, because it seems necessary now that the members should have the record. In reading the material members will bear in mind the time when it was written and make proper allowances in connection with details. The number of these Bulletins available is somewhat limited and no further copies can be supplied.

A. J. Muste

JUN 27 1940
HOW THE CANNON-SHACHTMAN GROUP "BUILDS" THE PARTY

US 1470.2007

(Statement by Muste for Internal Bulletin)

I. BEFORE THE NEW YORK PLENUM

It has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the C-S group has committed the following grave errors, and in some cases crimes, against the party.

1. They deliberately started a series of measures beginning with the public attack by Cannon on Zack calculated to bring about the expulsion of the Oehlerites from the party, that is, a split, at the New York plenum in June, carrying these measures so far even before the plenum that the plenum would be able to act merely as a rubber-stamp in consummating the expulsion and split.
2. The C-S group did this before there had been any discussion in the party of the political issues involved. Had the plan succeeded the party within six months of its birth would have been presented with expulsions and a split without having had the opportunity for even one day of organized discussion of the political issues involved. Our statement that this smacks of Stalinist bureaucratic methods is not an exaggeration.
3. The C-S group took the first step in this series of actions, one of which led naturally to the other, namely, the public attack on Zack by Cannon without consulting the Secretariat or the P.C. or any of the comrades of the former A.P. I was in Toledo at the time. So far as any comrades outside the C-S group know, Comrade Cannon may have taken this step without even consulting them. In any case, whether it was the action of an individual or a group, it was individualistic and anarchistic in character, contrary to every principle of Bolshevik procedure.
 - (a. To say in answer to the charge which we have repeatedly made, that the P.C. had provided for a public repudiation of Zack's position, is no answer. The P.C. had done this many weeks before, shortly after Zack was effusively welcomed into the party, especially by the C-S group. No public step was taken against him until he had become an opponent of the C-S group. Then, without consultation with anyone, Comrade Cannon made a public attack on Zack at a time and under circumstances which were bound to lead to convulsions in the party.
 - b. To point out that after Zack had violated discipline by replying to Cannon at the public meeting, the matter was taken to the P.C. does not alter the fact that the fatal first step in the process, the real aim of which was not known to any outside the C-S group, was taken without consideration and authorization which an action of such a character, and calculated to have such consequences, certainly required.
 - c. To point out that Comrades Lore and McKinney, for example, voted for measures against Zack and for preferring charges against Oehler, Stamm, etc. in the P.C. does not alter the role of the C-S group in the situation. It is that role which they must account for, not the actions of other comrades. At the time Lore and McKinney were not in possession of essential facts which later came into their possession. Muste from Ohio O.K.'d the bringing of charges against Zack before his party branch. On receipt of the letter from Cannon which will be given presently in connection with this statement, Muste did not act hastily against the C-S group but waited until his return to New York in order to be sure of his ground before taking serious steps.)
4. Cannon and Shachtman attempted by the organizational measures under discussion not only to combat the Oehler-line, but to put over their own SP line on the Party.
 - (a. That the problem of his SP line and its adoption by the Party was uppermost in Cannon's mind, is clearly shown in his letter to Muste, already referred to.
 - b. At the Pittsburgh Plenum, Cannon and Shachtman were unable to get their SP resolution adopted. In view of his present position, it is pertinent to point out that at this Plenum, Ramuglia was so "crazed and shocked" by the Shachtman resolution, presenting the C-S line and favorably impressed by Oehler's, that he moved that the latter be

campaign of education of the party membership as to what our policy really is and why it is so. There isn't any doubt that the overwhelming majority of the party will support us. That holds good even here in New York, the hot-bed of the faction struggle. Nearly all even of the critical and wavering elements will take a position against the splitters, when the issue is clearly presented and they have to choose. The worst thing we can do in my opinion is to tamperize with the situation. We are confronted with a fanatical - one might say more correctly pathological - opposition that cannot be cured by persuasion. To allow it to remain in the party now means only to paralyze our activity in the coming months, sow demoralization all around and end in a deeper split.

The perspectives of the split-off group are absolutely hopeless; and in my opinion it is a mistake to fear that the cleaning out of the chronic disruptionists will affect the party adversely. There is more reason to believe that party discipline and morale, especially here in New York, will be immensely improved immediately. The mood of the most responsible party members and the resoluteness with which they are facing the issue and rallying around the party is evidence of this. At the same time I am of the firm opinion that a radical solution of this issue will strengthen rather than weaken the recruiting power of the party from the outside. There is an impression abroad, particularly since the entry of Zack into the party, that the W.P. has become the gathering place of all the malcontents and ultra-left extremists of the lunatic fringe. It is even argued against us that the W.P. has taken over the position occupied by the Stalinists in the famous "third period," whereas the Stalinists themselves have become more sensible. This is a really dangerous, one might almost say, fatal impression. If it should not be radically corrected it would signify that the leftward drift of the Socialists would turn toward Stalinism, rather than toward the war, and this in my judgment is a most crucial question. There is no reasonable ground that I can see for the assumption that our road leads through the Socialist party, but I do believe most decidedly that the development of our movement into a mass party leads through a fusion of our party with the eventually developed left-wing in the S.P. We have a tremendous advantage over the revolutionary groups in Europe in the fact that we have a fairly secure independent position, a strong press and seasoned cadres. This ought to put us in a position to make terms with the left Socialists who eventually come to the point of a revolutionary position; but we will never get them to this point if we do not have a correct and realistic tactic toward the S.P. One of the really big and in my opinion irreconcilable issues between us and the Oehler-Zack combination is indeed over this question of the estimation of the S.P. and C.P. We have a dozen instances in the past weeks from the positions they have taken to show that if they make a distinction between the C.P. and S.P. it is in favor of the former. Cohen, who is flirting with the Oehler position this season, characterized the C.P. members as the militant vanguard in a resolution criticizing our May Day policy. This, of course, is false and also fatal. Every new experience testifies to the fact that the C.P. is a decomposing movement whereas the S.P. despite the worthlessness of all of the present leaders, has many signs of life in its ranks. It is possible for us to influence a section of these Socialist workers providing we analyze the problem correctly and point our tactics that way.

I think we are in full agreement on the idea that successful independent activity is the most powerful force for this end. Our magnificent showing in Toledo will undoubtedly have deep repercussions in the S.P. leftwing, but this independent activity has to be supplemented by a correct estimation of the S.P. and a correct tactical approach. The formalistic, religious concept of the Oehler-Zack outfit preclude such a tactic. That is why I think it is absolutely hopeless to think of any reconciliation of our points of view.

II. AT AND SINCE THE NEW YORK PLENUM

The New York Plenum after days of discussion was unable to arrive at a decision on many of the most important political issues before it. At that juncture, the Muste group made proposals to all groups aimed to make possible the carrying on of the political discussion in the Party on a political level, and also the carrying forward of the day to day Party work until the convention. These were - dismissal of pending disciplinary actions (it having been demonstrated that those actions had been taken in advance of political discussions), the acceptance of discipline by all groups, no discrimination in the use of the Press, assignment of party tasks among the groups within the Party during this period. The general basis was consolidation of the Party on the basis of the Declaration of Principles - and the inclusion in it of all groups in the Party - against an

How the Cannon-Shachtman Group Builds the Party -3-

campaign of education of the party membership as to what our policy really is and why it is so. There isn't any doubt that the overwhelming majority of the party will support us. That holds good even here in New York, the hot-bed of the faction struggle. Nearly all even of the critical and wavering elements will take a position against the splitters, when the issue is clearly presented and they have to choose. The worst thing we can do in my opinion is to tamperize with the situation. We are confronted with a fanatical - one might say more correctly pathological - opposition that cannot be cured by persuasion. To allow it to remain in the party now means only to paralyze our activity in the coming months, sow demoralization all around and end in a deeper split.

The perspectives of the split-off group are absolutely hopeless; and in my opinion it is a mistake to fear that the cleaning out of the chronic disruptionists will affect the party adversely. There is more reason to believe that party discipline and morale, especially here in New York, will be immensely improved immediately. The mood of the most responsible party members and the resoluteness with which they are facing the issue and rallying around the party is evidence of this. At the same time I am of the firm opinion that a radical solution of this issue will strengthen rather than weaken the recruiting power of the party from the outside. There is an impression abroad, particularly since the entry of Zack into the party, that the W.P. has become the gathering place of all the malcontents and ultra-left extremists of the lunatic fringe. It is even argued against us that the W.P. has taken over the position occupied by the Stalinists in the famous "third period," whereas the Stalinists themselves have become more sensible. This is a really dangerous, one might almost say, fatal impression. If it should not be radically corrected it would signify that the leftward drift of the Socialists would turn toward Stalinism, rather than toward the w.p. and this in my judgment is a most crucial question. There is no reasonable ground that I can see for the assumption that our road leads through the Socialist party, but I do believe most decidedly that the development of our movement into a mass party leads through a fusion of our party with the eventually developed left-wing in the S.P. We have a tremendous advantage over the revolutionary groups in Europe in the fact that we have a fairly secure independent position, a strong press and seasoned cadres. This ought to put us in a position to make terms with the left Socialists who eventually come to the point of a revolutionary position; but we will never get them to this point if we do not have a correct and realistic tactic toward the S.P. One of the really big and in my opinion irreconcilable issues between us and the Oehler-Zack combination is indeed over this question of the estimation of the S.P. and C.P. We have a dozen instances in the past weeks from the positions they have taken to show that if they make a distinction between the C.P. and S.P. it is in favor of the former. Cohen, who is flirting with the Oehler position this season, characterized the C.P. members as the militant vanguard in a resolution criticizing our May Day policy. This, of course, is false and also fatal. Every new experience testifies to the fact that the C.P. is a decomposing movement whereas the S.P. despite the worthlessness of all of the present leaders, has many signs of life in its ranks. It is possible for us to influence a section of these Socialist workers providing we analyze the problem correctly and point our tactics that way.

I think we are in full agreement on the idea that successful independent activity is the most powerful force for this end. Our magnificent showing in Toledo will undoubtedly have deep repercussions in the S.P. leftwing, but this independent activity has to be supplemented by a correct estimation of the S.P. and a correct tactical approach. The formalistic, religious concept of the Oehler-Zack outfit preclude such a tactic. That is why I think it is absolutely hopeless to think of any reconciliation of our points of view.

II. AT AND SINCE THE NEW YORK PLENUM

The New York Plenum after days of discussion was unable to arrive at a decision on many of the most important political issues before it. At that juncture, the Muste group made proposals to all groups aimed to make possible the carrying on of the political discussion in the Party on a political level, and also the carrying forward of the day to day Party work until the convention. These were - dismissal of pending disciplinary actions (it having been demonstrated that these actions had been taken in advance of political discussions), the acceptance of discipline by all groups, no discrimination in the use of the Press, assignment of party tasks among the groups within the Party during this period. The general basis was consolidation of the Party on the basis of the Declaration

C-S group rejected this proposal and made instead a proposal of a bloc with Muste on the basis of the C-S expulsion policy. This the Muste group rejected. The Weber, Oehler and Muste groups voted for the Muste proposals. These proposals therefore became the Party position on the internal regime until a Plenum or a Convention reverses them. In regular Party Discussion meetings, those who voted against these proposals have of course the right to criticize them. They are, however, obligated to carry them out in action.

1. The C-S group have at no time defended the Party position in this matter.

2. They broke the letter and the spirit of the proposals immediately after the Plenum by devoting nearly fifty per cent of the June 29 issue of the New Militant to material which implied endorsement by the Party of the French turn and was taken to mean just this by a good many readers, and they were censured by the PC for this violation.

3. Subsequent articles on developments in the SP omitted reference to the WP as an independent party, were in effect out of line with the Declaration of Principles and again elicited protests from a considerable number of PC and NC members. In passing, another illustration of C-S methods in connection with the press should be called to the attention of the Party. At the Plenum it was voted unanimously to enter into fraternal relations with the SAP of Germany. There was also prolonged discussion over the question of asking the SAP to be one of the original signers of the Open Letter for the Fourth International. Right on the heels of the Plenum, the New International appeared with a scathing attack on the SAP ending with the conclusion that the Fourth International must be built not only without but in fight against the SAP. This article was in the hands of the C-S group during the Plenum, no reference was made to it or to its existence, the question of whether to print it and how in view of the decisions of the Plenum was never brought forward by these comrades, who constantly exhibit a strong tendency to regard the Party press as a private monopoly.

THE RECENT NEW YORK DISTRICT CONVENTION AND THE PHILADELPHIA INCIDENT

Numerous illustrations of the C-S organizational methods and the harm they bring to the Party were given in connection with the New York District Convention. It may be worth while mentioning in passing in view of the propaganda about the "landslide" vote for C-S, that in the elections for delegates to the DC, they received 51 per cent of the votes cast.

1. We have taken the position that the District is not a Party by itself, that it is primarily an administrative organ of the Party and that a District Convention should be devoted chiefly to the discussion of the work of the district and to planning for the next period - especially in view of the fact that during the entire month preceding the Convention, a discussion of the political resolutions of the New York Plenum had taken place in the New York District. C-S insisted that it must be a political convention for dealing with political issues.

2. In the P.C. Shachtman was elected to report for the NC to the District Convention. Muste moved that Shachtman report the decisions of the Plenum on political issues, and where the Plenum had made no decisions so to state to the convention, also that the reporter give a brief summary of the activities and progress of the Party outside the New York District. Cannon moved a substitute to the effect that Shachtman as a reporter for the NC should present the C-S line on all political questions to the Convention. Though C-S had the audacity to make this proposal, they did not press it after the NC members violently protested. Thus it was agreed that each of the four groups should present a report and summary to the convention, which would necessarily be largely going over again ground which had been covered in the whole month of discussion.

3. A few days before the DC was to convene, two Cannonites entered the home of an Oehlerite, F. Hirsch, in Philadelphia, to get party or factional documents and severely beat up P. Hirsch, oncholding him while the other belabored him with a hammer or lead pipe. The matter was handled in a most quiet fashion by the Cannonites. Leading Philadelphia Cannonites, for example, were informed about the assault during a meeting of one of the Philadelphia branches. They said nothing about it in the meeting and waited until non-Cannonites had left, to make their own investigation. Apparently this was not a matter to bring out in the open before the Party without a moment's delay. The following night, they hastily called a meeting of the Philadelphia City Committee, the action of the Cannonites was condemned, only a very sketchy report of what had happened being presented. Similarly at a branch meeting immediately thereafter without going

into the facts in any detail, the action was condemned and the attackers subjected to one year and three months suspension, respectively. The PC in New York, sitting as a Control Commission, almost quietly with the comrades of both factions who were involved. Cannonites who had voted for the expulsion of Zaek on the basis of a protest by Zaek against Cannon's attack and of a letter by Zaek to Minneapolis in the course of an action, voted against proposals for the expulsion of both Cannonites who had used personal violence of the most extreme kind in an inner Party dispute.

b. In startling contrast is the way in which C-S handled their attack on the Oehlerites in the District Convention. Shachtman who had insisted that it was necessary to have a political convention and a political discussion oxled his report, the first presented to the convention, by producing documents signed by J. Hirsh, formerly an Oehlerite and now a Cannonite, purporting to convey inside information about the Oehler caucus. This material had been in the hands of the Cannonites for at least five days, but they had considered it entirely proper to withhold information about it from a P.C. which had met for a good many hours that week on the Philadelphia incident and other matters. They withheld this information from the P.C., yet after two days of taking testimony and hearing reports about the Oehler caucus, etc. they tried to force McKinney and Muste to vote for certain motions prior to any deliberations by the P.C. on the testimony and statements presented on the ground that delay of a few hours might mean the wrecking of the Party!

The matter having been introduced in the way indicated, there was nothing for it but to hold open sessions of the PC in the presence of the membership, devoting to these matters two entire days of a Convention which was supposed to give its time mainly to political discussion of the French turn, the Fourth International, the attitude of the Party to the SP, etc. This was done while the Comintern Congress was in session in Moscow, by its actions and pronouncements opening up an unparalleled opportunity for CP propaganda.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND BOLSHEVIK PRINCIPLE

1. Wining under the blows of our attacks on their organizational procedures, C-S allege that the Musteites (and Websterites) incorrectly separate organizational matters and political issues. We have never done so. C-S have to say that we did, because they cannot directly defend their organizational methods. We have pointed out that there is a connection between a political line and the organizational methods used by its proponents. We charge that if such methods as have been attempted to put over the C-S and SP line have to be used, the line itself must be bad. Fundamentally that line is the line of opportunism.

2. The fact that political positions and organizational methods are tied together, interact on each other, does not alter the importance of organizational procedures. Democratic centralism is not a "mere organizational" matter. It is the Bolshevik principle of organization.

3. In attempting to meet our charge of bureaucratic methods, Shachtman in his article in the Internal Bulletin, refers to "our pitiful little bureaucracy, contrasting it with the power, etc. of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is true that our Party bureaucracy is both pitiful and little. We are not, however, dealing with a matter of quantity but a matter of principle. How big must a bureaucracy become, how long must bureaucratic methods be permitted to grow before they are attacked? How much farther do things have to go in the Party than they have gone in connection with the Philadelphia incident before we scotch tendencies which help to produce such incidents? (This is not at all to charge C-S with ordering or instigating the attack on P. Hirsh. It is not to contest the stand which they have taken against such actions. The fact remains that in an atmosphere of heated and bitter factionalism, the more excitable members of the Party are likely to be betrayed into such violent excesses. C-S cannot escape their share of responsibility for the creation of such an atmosphere.)

4. At a recent meeting of the Bronx branch, Shachtman made clear that for him also, organizational matters may be questions of principle. He stated, "Discipline is a principle, otherwise when we pass disciplinary measures against Oehler, he can always escape by saying that he has political differences with us." To Shachtman, in other words, formal discipline is a principle. That is incorrect. Democratic centralism beginning in the regime and making genuine enforcement of discipline possible, is the principle. Oehler is not to be permitted to put forward his political differences as a justification for violating party discipline since "you can't build a party" under such conditions, but Cannon-Shachtman are to be permitted to use their political positions as

justification for so monstrous a proposal as expulsion of a section of the Party before there has been one minute of organized political discussion of the real political issues involved! And this is to be pinned off on the party as "Bolshevism."

5. We are charged with giving "objective support" to, providing "shelter" for Oehler.

a. If support for political positions is meant, our votes on our Political resolutions and Oehler's are in the record. We have not departed from our political positions.

b. If the "charge" means that we are fighting against an expulsion and split policy preceding political discussion of political issues in the party - that is correct. We assume full responsibility in this respect. We believe preventing a split was the first task of the New York plenum, that its consummation would have been a tremendous and possibly fatal blow to the party.

c. If the "charge" means that we encourage Oehler's violations of discipline, excesses in their methods, etc., our answer is that the Oehlerites get their "objective support" in this sense from the Cannonites. The attempt to solve political questions by the methods employed in this case will in every instance produce the same results. It is necessary for the life of the Party that this issue be clearly fought out in the very beginning of its existence. It is a cause for alarm that for a long time so many members of the Party failed to see this and cause for encouragement that increasing numbers recognize that an expulsion and split within six months of the founding of the Party and without one single minute of political discussion of the issue would have been a major crime. In time the entire Party will rejoice that this tragedy was averted.

SOURCE OF THE TROUBLE

It is now clear that it was in the very nature of the situation created by the fusion that the question of the so-called French turn (entry of the French Trotskyists last year into the Socialist Party of France, the SPFO), should cause an important and serious discussion in the party even in the early stages of its existence. No one, in my opinion, could have prevented this. What could have been done was:

- a. To foresee that the discussion must take place,
- b. To see that it was conducted on a political level,
- c. Thus to allay bitterness and friction.

C-S failed to do this and sought instead to meet the situation by indirect and organizational measures.

Shachtman at the recent New York District convention stated in answer to questions, that at the CLA convention preceding the merger a motion was carried providing for "support of the I.C.L." Elaborating he stated that the motion provided for "loyal collaboration on an international scale with the I.C.L. and to accept the position of the international plenum of the I.C.L. on the so-called new orientation." Further elaborating Shachtman stated that a split with the Oehler group was not consummated in the CLA because it was thought that they could take the faction into the new party. The motion above mentioned was to "establish a moral obligation not to bring factions into the W.P. and not to open a factional fight on the basis of the CLA disputes. It was not intended to nor could it have any formal binding effect on any CLA members since the CLA did not enter the W.P. as a faction."

The exact wording of the motions on this subject is: "The convention (C.L.A.) affirms its unchanged solidarity with our international organization and its leader, L. D. Trotsky. Our agreement that a new party is to be formally independent is to be understood as a tactical measure in no way affecting our fundamental attitude toward our international organization and its secretariat." Also "to accept the decisions and resolutions of the International Plenum (I.C.L. decision on the French turn) and consider them binding to our entire organization."

If this declaration by the CLA convention was merely a polite gesture of good will to the ICI, it would, of course, have no bearing on the present discussion. We are held prisoner by that it was merely such a gesture. It can only mean, therefore, that the former CLA entered into the W.P. as a group seriously pledged in some sense to "support the ICI, including the new orientation," and prepared to act as a Bolshevik faction on this basis if it should prove necessary. This would be justified obviously on the ground that the W.P. was a

centrist or not, in the fullest sense of the term, a Bolshevik Party. This position was taken at the CLA convention although the W.P. constitution adopted at that convention specifically forbids any international affiliation except by convention action of the W.P. and though it was well known that a number of W.P. elements were opposed or questioned the French turn and though it was specifically agreed in conversations on the subject that while the W.P. pending a convention could not reject or repudiate the French turn, neither was it on record as endorsing it and the question of the attitude of the W.P. as such would have to be left to a future convention.

The following observations develop from these facts:

1. The conception that under certain circumstances the CLA comrades or part of them might act as a Bolshevik faction in a "centrist" W.P. is evidently not exclusively an Oehlerite concept. It cannot be rejected in principle by C-S. They can only criticize the Oehlerites if they proceed in this fashion on one of two grounds: a) they may say the way in which the Oehlerites bring the issue forward, carry on their agitation, etc. is bad for the party. In this case the answer is that the way in which C-S attempted to put over their standpoint was at least equally bad. b) C-S may say that their political line is right and the Oehler line wrong and that on this ground factional activity on their part would have been justified and on the part of the Oehlerites not. In this case the obvious reply is that within the W.P. the question as to who was politically right or wrong could only be settled by a political discussion within the W.P. and not on the basis of either political or organizational measures of the former CLA.
2. As Bolsheviks CLA comrades undoubtedly had a "right" to commit themselves to what they regarded as a Bolshevik position and to acting as a faction if they deemed it necessary in order to advance that position. But: a) C-S certainly, in view of the facts, have no ground for any "holier than thou" attitude toward any other group in the party; b) from a practical standpoint we may well ask whether a supposedly astute leadership really acted astutely in not informing the W.P. comrades at the time when it was repeatedly stated that "all cards were on the table" about the resolutions in re support of the ICL including the French turn. Shachtman used the expression "moral obligation" in referring to the Oehlerites. May it not be that a "moral obligation" existed also in other directions? If it was thought that the effect of informing the W.P. comrades of the actions taken would repel them and thus endanger the fusion, those who acted on that assumption must obviously accept responsibility for the consequences of their guess.
3. The C-S position on "no discussion for six months" appears in the light of all the facts now available not only tactically unwise but on their part unprincipled. They believed the question of the French turn was a matter of life and death for the revolutionary movement and the W.P. They considered that they had principled differences with the Oehlerites on this vital point. It was a question bound to come up in the nature of the case, with war developments, etc. in France. From their point of view they could have said: "Let the discussion begin among some of the leading comrades first. Let us inform the W.P. of the situation we confront. Let us appeal to them to study the documents. Let the matter be brought before the party in the most careful and responsible fashion so that the fusion may be consolidated and not endangered." On no score could a policy of "no discussion" on this subject be justified or lead to anything but disaster. (The extreme "no discussion" position was never supported by Muste. If for their own reasons and in the absence of information on some of the essential facts in the case Muste and other comrades advocated a certain limitation of discussion, that is their responsibility. Whether they can or cannot justify their position in no way alters the case as to C-S and their responsibility.)
4. It is conceivable that both C-S and Oehler are correct when they argue that their respective positions on the French turn cannot exist together in the same party (often put by both as if the two groups literally cannot continue in the same party - split perspective, etc.) but in that case either C-S should not have brought Oehler into the party or having brought him in it follows that they had to assume responsibility for a reasonable attempt to solve the problem within the W.P. and within the framework of the W.P. constitution, etc. How could that be done? To say that discussion could have been entirely avoided for a year or even six months or three months is absurd, unless it is assumed that neither side would even indirectly or by implication attempt to commit the W.P. or to make it appear that the W.P. was committed to a certain

How the Cannon-Shachtman Group Builds the Party -8-

position. But this possibility was ruled out by the action of the CLA convention. Consequently the situation could have been handled inside the W.P. and within the framework of the W.P. constitution, etc. - since the W.P. itself did not have a position and under its constitution could not act as a section of the ICL - by giving both sides an absolutely clear chance to present their respective views both inside the party and in the press. Naturally such a discussion would have to be regulated and both sides would be obligated to accept W.P. discipline in that connection.

5. Of course, there was not and has not been such unequal chance for both positions. The press has constantly carried material which implied approval of the French turn and has given no hint that there was another position in the party and that it was perfectly legitimate for individuals or groups in the party to hold another position. Shachtman has openly stated in the P.C. that it was his position that no material concerning the French turn could appear in the party press which in the existing circumstances can only mean essentially (regardless of what may be the case formally) that in this matter the W.P. must act as a section of the I.C.L. In this situation it is not necessary to prove that specific articles have been rejected though they have been and no bones have been made about it.

6. The facts which are now for the first time in the possession of all sections of the party make it possible to understand the difficulties associated with the Pittsburgh resolution on Oehler and Stern and the attempt to apply that resolution. In the discussion in the Pittsburgh plenum the criticism was based on the fact that various political issues were raised in the party by the Oehlerites in the early months of the party's existence when it was necessary to concentrate on setting up the party machinery, making the turn to the masses, etc. It was charged that this pressure had been applied by the Oehlerites with such intensity and such methods as constituted a sectarian attitude. The international position of the Oehlerites was not raised in that discussion. At the time the resolutions on international questions had been by specific vote put off to another point on the agenda. As a matter of fact, the political resolutions on international questions were not acted upon at all at the Pittsburgh Plenum but were referred back to the P.C. and by the P.C. in turn to the New York plenum. Under the circumstances the Oehler "international line" and the Oehler political position on other points which had not been taken up by the plenum could not be regarded as having been condemned and prohibited, provided, of course, that they were not out of accord with the Declaration of Principles. In spite of this C-S desired to convey to the party and specifically to the New York membership in discussion that the entire Oehler line had been condemned and it was only at my insistence that the resolution which was finally drafted for submission to the New York membership made it clear that the Pittsburgh plenum resolution did not involve condemnation in advance of political positions which had not been acted upon by the Plenum and a discussion of which in the New York district had actually been provided for by the plenum.

7. The C-S interpretation of the actions of the CLA convention is that Oehler was morally obligated not to open the discussion in the party. It is by now sufficiently clear that the question who opened this discussion is like the question as to who fired the first shot in an international war. The Oehlerites were by no means alone in instigating whatever turmoil existed in the party in the early weeks of its existence. Their open aggressiveness dated from the West resolution and the Shachtman-Swaback support of it - in other words, from the time when the disputed political issue was first definitely posed in the party. Furthermore, the party press from the outset had carried material implying approval and support of the French turn.

In order to avoid all misunderstanding I wish to state again that I am not arguing for the Oehlerite political position. I am arguing for a political resolution of political questions in the party - against the outrage of attempting expulsion of a group and the gutting over on the party of a political position to which they were opposed without a single day of organized discussion of the real political issue involved - for the imperative necessity at the very beginning of the party's existence of constituting a party regime on a basis of democratic centralism which creates confidence in the party and the possibility of the rigid enforcement of party discipline.

###

CANNON ON THE SOCIALIST PARTY
May-June-July versus August Position

by A. J. Muste

In May, June, July, Cannon-Shachtman set forth their views on the S.P. in Plenum resolutions, in the Cannon letter to Muste, in New Militant articles, etc. In the New International for August appears an article by Cannon entitled At the Cross Roads in the S.P. The C-S plenum resolution was so loose that for those who read superficially they may make out a plausible case for reconciling the earlier utterances and the latter. We predicted that they would try to do just this. This must not prevent the members of the party from carefully noting the immense contrast in the emphasis and the entire tendency of the earlier utterances as compared with the New International article.

On The "Reform" of the S.P.

C-S Then?

In June (Plenum) "the theoretically unfounded assertion that it is 'impossible' in any case to reform the S.P. and the insistence that the Left Socialists adopt this point of view in advance is in practice nothing but a command to them to discontinue their activity inside the S.P. It is possible for them to work - only on the basis of an ostensible program to revolutionize the S.P." When we answered that of course those who still believed in this possibility would work on that basis in the S.P., but what is the W.P. position on the point and what do we say to those who want to know whether to join the S.P. for the above purpose or to join the W.P., and when we insisted that in view of the uncertainty both in and outside the party, we had to give a plain, unequivocal answer to that question, no clear answer was forthcoming. The Muste resolution which said "It is fallacious and dangerous to have the perspective that the S.P. can be made into a party of revolution," was rejected. We were treated to learned discourses on how "theoretically it is not excluded."

Cannon Now?

The N.I. article for August speaks right out in meeting about "the decidedly Utopian idea that the program of revolutionary socialism can prevail in the S.P." and lest anyone regard this as just a chance or careless remark, we have a reference by Comrade Cannon to "the fantastic idea that a Left wing can gain the majority in the S.P. and transform the party into a revolutionary organization, for that appears to us to be completely excluded by every consideration of political reality." C-S were deathly afraid in June that our saying this would be interpreted by the Left socialists to mean that we were commanding them inside the S.P. to take this position in advance and so would shut us off from further opportunity to influence them. If it is "safe" and correct to blurt it out now, why was it necessary to conuzzle the party in June by a persistent refusal to make the point clear to everybody then? We think now as we thought then, that we shall have more influence on sound elements in the S.P. when the W.P. does not objectively support Zam, Gitlow and Goldman in encouraging illusions in these elements about the S.P.

The Independence of the W.P.

C-S Then?

From March to July inclusive it was correct and necessary according to C-S to speak even of "becoming the 'official' S.P." (West resolution). A defeatism in re the W.P. was systematically expressed. The W.P. presented the nucleus of the revolutionary Marxian party, of course, but "it is not yet a party in the real sense of the word, i.e. it is not yet the mass party", etc. - a remark which in certain contexts right to a perfectly innocent and essentially insignificant statement of fact, but which in its actual context was meant to and did minimize the role and significance of the W.P. as contrasted with "the potential mass movement of revolutionary Socialists."

Cannon Now?

In the August New International article: Let those who think something can be accomplished in the S.P. hammer out a revolutionary program there, says Comrade Cannon, and "then seriously try to make it prevail in the S.P." They will soon find out how "utopian," how "fantastic," how "completely excluded by every consideration of political reality" that is, according to an earlier passage in the article which we have already quoted. As for the W.P., "we have taken a different road," the road of the independent party. If left socialists act "seriously", we "must eventually come together in a common organization. In our opinion this organization will not be the Socialist Party but a completely independent movement of which the W.P. represents the fundamental nucleus."

The Cannonite articles in two successive issues of the New Militant following the N.Y. plenum of the N.C. of the S.P. contained no reference whatever to the W.P. as an independent party and a polarizing force for the revolutionists in the U.S. They might have been written by a left socialist in a left socialist organ.

path have only been strengthened by the recent developments in the S.P. We have no doubt that further experience of the revolutionary socialists will bring them to the same conclusion." So we don't have to think of "even becoming the 'official' S.P." But again, according to the earlier C-S thesis won't this blunt assertion of the correctness of the road of the independent party, etc. "shut us off from further opportunity" to influence S.P. members? So far as we are concerned, we have always insisted that we shall have much more influence in the direction of revolutionary results upon socialists, if they know that we cherish no illusions about the S.P. and are not shamed and belittled camp-followers of Zax, Gitlow and Goldman.

How Much of a Left Wing in the S.P.?

C-S Then?

When in June we insisted that C-S were presenting an exaggerated picture of the role and possible future of the S.P., an exaggerated picture also of the possibilities of a left crystallization in the S.P. in this period and were therefore throwing the W.P. off the track, sacrificing chances of building the W.P. today for uncertain future prospects, we were "sectarian," we had a bad attack of "organizational fetishism," blind to "all new and living phenomena in the ranks of the S.P. etc." While there were admissions in the C-S plenum resolution that the left wing sentiment and movement in the S.P. was "vague, confused and unorganized," the main emphasis was in almost flat contradiction - on "large sections of radical workers" which had been won by the S.P. It had experienced "an influx of proletarian elements." There was "an unmistakable movement to the left of large sections of its membership" - - - "fundamentally a movement on the road to revolutionary Marxism." The conditions were there "for the rapid development of a broad and authentic left wing movement - rich in possibilities - a potential mass movement of revolutionary Socialists - hundreds, thousands. . . ."

So large did these possibilities loom to C-S in this period that the Party's course in this period (May-September, 1935) had to be determined by these possibilities, an entire section of the Party was to be expelled without a minute devoted to discussion of the political issue involved, because this "Public Fringe" interfered with the prospect of "making terms" with the left Socialists!!

Cannon Now?

Now let the membership know how much more sober is "our" estimate in August, 1935 according to the N.I. article. "The S.P. as a whole has been declining in membership, not growing, is only a propaganda organization and - - not a very large propaganda organization at that."

The Militant argument that they have "masses" whereas the W.P. is small and "sectarian" is contemptuously dismissed. "Numerical strength" in the case of the Militants has been "largely fictitious." It is "clear that the Militants together with all the left groupings, cannot boast of a very large membership. Neither the Militants nor any other section of the S.P. have a valid right to wave aside questions of program and talk about 'masses'".

And as for a genuine left crystallization: "A serious grouping committed to the principles of revolutionary Marxism applied to the present epoch has yet to make its appearance." The group which publishes the Socialist Call are "centrist wisecracks, misnamed 'Militants.'" They styled themselves "revolutionary socialists" but have not yet revealed the reasons for their claim to this title."

My, my, whither has vanished the iridescent dream of "the Left wing" with which you could already not only "collaborate" as a politically close group but talk of "making terms" and which was to have a "normal evolution toward the position of consistent Marxism? On the basis of the present more sober, honest and realistic analysis of the situation, collaboration of all elements in the W.P. on the work of crystallizing left elements in the S.P. may become possible.

The W.P. and R.P.P.A.

C-S Then?

In May in writing to me Comrade Cannon regarded our contact with the R.P.P.A. as significant and promising. It was subsequently brought out that in this connection he had volunteered to non-party members that we were going to expel the "lunatic fringe" of the W.P. at the N.Y. Plenum. By the time the Plenum met, it had become known that contacts in the R.P.P.A. were not favorably impressed by this prospect. Repeatedly, therefore, in that Plenum Comrades Cannon and Shachtman in the presence of the party membership belittled the R.P.P.A., repeated the name of the contact, did everything possible to drive the R.P.P.A. away from the W.P. My resolution providing for theoretical discussions with the R.P.P.A. and practical collaboration was rejected, although leading R.P.P.A.'ers had proposed this. In proposing to start with what was nearest and most tangible, working on and with R.P.P.A.'ers, we were losing sight of that mighty mass movement of revolutionary socialists. Even in the New Militant articles recently there was a hangover of this needlessly contemptuous attitude toward the R.P.P.A. With the utmost reluctance on Comrade Cannon's part, contact with the R.P.P.A. was resumed after the N. Y. Plenum.

Cannon Now?

In the N.I. article in August, while the same criticisms all of us have made of the R.P.P.A. are indicated, "the theoretical discussions in the R.P.P.A." are mentioned as a hopeful sign in the S.P. We are told that "the R.P.P.A. despite its weakness and its programmatic errors can be a serious factor in the development of a Socialist left wing, precisely because it concerns itself with program questions and has stood by its position under the reactionary assault launched against it at Buffalo. For the building of a revolutionary movement one declaration of principle, firmly maintained, is worth more than a hundred of the diplomatic maneuvers and organization horse-trades which constitute the political method of the leaders of the Militants."

We wait with bated breath yet not without pleasant sensations for further evidences of return to sanity.

A FOOTNOTE OF ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS

By A. J. Muste

Cannon on Oehler

Comrade Cannon way back in May and before any discussion on the real political issue (branch turn, etc.) proposed expulsion of the Oehlerites. "We are holding a meeting tonight and will vote immediately to expel Zack from the party" and propose to "proceed with disciplinary action in every branch." The "whole atmosphere is of a complete break and there is no possibility of temporizing." The "opposition cannot be cured by persuasion. To allow it to remain in the party now means only to paralyze our activity, etc." (underscoring mine, A.J.M.)

Trotsky on Oehler

Comrade Trotsky, though no less decisive in condemning Oehlerite political positions than C-S, is still pleading with Comrade Oehler (trying to persuade him) to accept the I.C.L. position, to abandon what Comrade Trotsky regards as a wrong position. Two months after our New York Plenum he still expresses the hope "that a surgical operation will not be necessary" (i.e. expulsions). Can it be that Comrade Trotsky has not yet learned "true Bolshevik intransigence" from C-S?

In a recent letter to the N.C. of the W.P. Comrade Trotsky stated that he refrains from expressing his opinion on charges of bureaucratic procedure in the W.P., not having had an "opportunity to follow the development of the struggle." He adds: "It would naturally be a mistake to desire to liquidate organizationally an opposition group before the overwhelming majority of the party has had the chance to understand to the full the inconsistency and sterility of that group. (underscoring mine, A.J.M.) - - The party can and must correct the precipitateness of the leaders, since it is not only the leaders who educate the party but the party as well educates the leaders. Herein lies the salutary dialectic of democratic centralism." This much Comrade Trotsky says now, though not yet in possession of information as to what "organizational liquidation" was already attempted three months ago!

In doing this he is acting in line with that article which he wrote in December 1923 and which under the title Bureaucratism and Factional Groups was published in the New Internationalist January 1925. There he stated: "It is far from enough to declare that groups and factions are an evil for their appearance to be presented. - - the struggle against this danger cannot be confined to a formal condemnation and a prohibition. - - To proceed to a split - would not have been difficult and would not have required on the part of the leadership any great intellectual exertion; it would have sufficed to issue an injunction against the Left Communist faction. Nevertheless, the party adopted more complex methods. It preferred to discuss, to explain, to prove by experience, and to resign itself temporarily to that menacing anomaly represented by the existence of a faction in its midst." (This in essence is the Muste proposal to the N.Y. Plenum on the internal regime - the only difference being that in the Bolshevik party at the time of which T. writes there had already been some discussion of the issues, whereas in the W.P. there had been none on the Cehlerite issue when not only an "injunction" against them but expulsion was coolly proposed! Yet C-S try to make out that it is the Muste proposal that the party "resign itself temporarily" to the existence of a faction, which has perfectly good Bolshevik precedent behind it, and not their unprecedented and outrageous organizational methods which are responsible for disturbance in the party.)

Later in the same article Trotsky further illuminates the point: "It would be 'organizational fetishism' to believe that regardless of the development of the party, the mistakes of the leadership, etc. - - a decision is enough to preserve us from groupings and from the disorder inherent in the formation of factions. To look at things in this way would be to give proof of bureaucratism." At the Tenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. discussion had been finished, the constitution of groups and factions was then interdicted. So what? In Petrograd factions nevertheless arose! The simplest thing at first thought would have been to issue an anathema against at least one of these groupings. But the C-S categorically refused to employ this method. (Evidently it had not learned to slug with crus Bolshevik intransigence!) It assumed the role of arbitrator between the two groups and in the long run, succeeded in assuring not only their collaboration but their complete fusion in the organization. "There is an important example," says Trotsky, which deserves to be kept in mind and which might serve to clarify some bureaucratic heads." (underscoring throughout mine, A.J.M.)

Muste, however, is attempting to "reconcile the irreconcilable," is manifesting hangovers of "Christian socialism," etc. when he dares to propose to the "intransigent Bolsheviks" in the W.P.U.S. not as was falsely said "the consolidation of all groups," but a political resolution of political questions and pending discussion of which there had as yet been none, collaboration of all groups in the practical work of the party. But we do not doubt that in the end the party will heed such "exemplars" as Trotsky cited and that "heads" with unfortunate bureaucratic tendencies will be "clarified," since that is truly the Bolshevik way, and that by this means the party will resolve political problems, be put in a position to enforce the most rigid discipline and enter upon that growth for which objective conditions and its own program furnish the basis.

◆◆◆◆◆

The following is the statement presented by Muste to the Discussion meeting of the N. Y. membership on the S.P. question in July.

STATEMENT ON ATTITUDE OF W.P. TO S.P. AND C.P.

A. J. Muste

The subject for discussion today is the attitude of the W.P. to the Socialist Party and the Communist Party in the U.S. No one, of course, thinks that in the final analysis such a question can be isolated from international aspects and relations. The relation of the revolutionary Marxist party toward other parties does, however, have special aspects and phases in each country. This statement will confine itself as closely as possible to the specific question: What is our estimate of the S.P. and C.P. in the U.S. and what should be our attitude toward these parties?

At this moment this is the most critical question before our Party. This does not necessarily imply that fundamental principles are directly involved. Certainly the dividing line in the Party on this question is not between those who do and those who do not accept the dictatorship of the proletariat, revolutionary internationalism, etc. At a particular moment in the life of a party, and especially of a young party, a matter of strategy and tactics may, however, come near to being a question of life and death. Furthermore, in dealing with a given problem of strategy or tactics, attitudes may be revealed which are bound to lead to wrong positions on other matters also.

The Party senses the importance of the issue. Many members are profoundly disturbed over it. It will be a great mistake and will vitiate our discussion from the outset, if this concern felt by the Party is ascribed to "hysteria" over a "non-existent" danger based upon easily disproved tales about leading comrades conducting secret negotiations with right wing Socialist leaders, etc. If this is indeed all the foundation there is for concern, then the mental caliber of the party is surprisingly low. But party members generally, as well as leading comrades, ought to recall that it is the practice of capitalists to dismiss the entire revolutionary movement as a pathological phenomenon and of bureaucrats similarly to explain opposition to their policies within working class organizations, and that revolutionists should not lightly imitate such habits. Besides, we shall demonstrate, I believe, that there is plenty of ground for concern in this case on the part of intelligent and responsible comrades.

The problem is one which it should be possible for us as revolutionary Marxists to solve by a realistic and objective consideration of its elements, and it is such a consideration that I shall seek to give it.

Let us begin with a consideration of the Cannon-Shachtman resolution on the subject under discussion, and note first of all certain alleged facts as to the S.P. which it sets forth. The S.P., we are told, has won "large sections of radical workers." There has been "an influx of proletarian elements" into it. Several comments on this assertion are required.

1. Unless we are to get an exaggerated notion of the strength of the S.P. and its hold upon "proletarian elements" in the U.S., which may lead us to draw, or unconsciously slip into, the conclusion that if we are to find our way to the masses it will have to be entirely, or largely, through these advanced workers who have been drawn into the S.P. in such large numbers, we have to get an accurate picture in our minds as to the position of the S.P. relative to the American working class as a whole. The case was admirably put by Comrade Shachtman in certain theses written for the C.P.A. Convention last year, which incidentally were in my opinion much better adapted to the needs of the W.P. than the present Cannon-Shachtman resolution. Said Comrade Shachtman in 1934: "The forces of the new party (in the U.S.) do not have to contend with a Social Democracy in any way comparable to the German, Austrian, Belgian, etc. The American S.P. has all the vices and none of the virtues of the European Social Democracy. After decades of activity, it has not a single congressional representative nor a single daily organ it can call its own. Its influence in the trade unions is confined to a comparatively small and indecisive field. It is not rooted deeply in the American working class. It is ridiculously weak even in its strongest field, election campaigns. It is at this very moment being torn by internal dissensions."

2. If one takes a survey of industries and industrial centers throughout the country, it is clear that the influx of proletarians and radical workers into the S.P. has been far from impressive. One can go to countless localities - Intercen, Allentown, the anthracite, Pittsburgh, the entire western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio coal and steel region, Toledo, West Virginia, Indiana, the north-western states, the Pacific coast, most of the southern industrial areas, and find at best only a handful of proletarians in the S.P. It takes no mathematical genius to count up the important industries where they have been able to make an impression. In New York and Philadelphia, to a lesser extent in Detroit.

Cleveland and Chicago, in the central and southern Illinois mine fields, and recently among the Missouri share-croppers, some gains of course have been made. In many of these even, the gains were by no means entirely among proletarian elements.

3. A similar difficulty in demonstrating the existence of a great reservoir of "radical workers" in the S.P.U.S.A. is encountered when one analyzes the vote on the Detroit Declaration of Principles last year. Deduct from the five or six thousand who voted for this by no means revolutionary Marxist declaration, the Wisconsin Socialists, the pacifist professional-clerical following of Devere Allen, Sherwood Eddy, and Herman Thomas, the non-proletarian elements in the R.P.C. and the Militants - and where are these radical proletarians in the S.P. - "the potential mass movement of revolutionary Socialists," to quote another phrase in the Cannon-Shachtman resolution?

4. The large sections of radical workers who have been won to the S.P. are characterized in the Cannon-Shachtman resolution as having been "repelled by Stalinism." There are here and there, notably in Illinois, elements which are accurately characterized by that phrase. Except for these cases, however, this expression coupled with certain other references in the Cannon-Shachtman resolution, also gives an erroneous picture. Many of those who joined the S.P. when it was growing and who considered themselves revolutionists were repelled by the Stalinist "third period" trade union, united front, social-fascist, anti-labor party positions. They are, however, in many cases attracted by Stalinism since these positions have been, ostensibly at least, abandoned by the C.P. Not a few thinking of themselves as "revolutionists" were actually repelled mainly by the discipline imposed by the C.P., the exposure to danger in class-struggle activities, etc. and joined the "softer" S.P.

At the present time the movement of members, such as it is, is not out of the C.P. into the S.P. but the other way round. Furthermore, to talk about the members of the C.P. as "far from being the most advanced workers" and in the next paragraph about "large sections of radical workers" in the S.P. is a case of trying to make facts fit a theory and the wish being father to the thought. Leaving aside the matter of the estimate of the two parties as parties, in most places the S.P. members are the shopkeepers, professionals, pacifist clergy, and YMCA workers, and the better paid workers or union officials; the C.P. has the rank and file proletarians who are politicalized. Also in most cases where there is fighting to be done, more reliance is still to be placed on the C.P. than S.P. members.

The points we have made are, though not the most basic, of considerable importance because they reveal a fault in the C-S resolution of looking at the S.P. scene through spectacles which make things appear in a rosy glow and because they make it clear, whatever one's view about the entry of the French Bolshevik-Leninists into the Socialist Party, that the reasons which might have justified such a move in France do not exist here. The relationship of forces is entirely different.

We turn now to the more basic question of the analysis of the political trends in the S.P. presented in the Cannon-Shachtman document. The influx of radical proletarian elements into the S.P., we are told, together with other causes, has produced in the S.P. "an unmistakable movement to the left of large sections of its membership," "Fundamentally, this" (one naturally asks for some precision in defining "this" in such an important reference, but I think we shall demonstrate that one looks in vain for such a definition in this resolution) at any rate, "fundamentally this represents a movement on the road to revolutionary Marxism." The movement, we are told in the next sentence, is neither "accidental nor unreal." The conditions exist for "the rapid development of a broad and authentic left wing movement in the S.P., rich in possibilities for the future." The "normal evolution" of this movement is toward "the position of consistent Marxism." A little farther on the expression we have already quoted in another connection is used: "the potential mass movement of revolutionary socialists."

Now as I said a moment ago, one looks for clear indications, for concise statements, as to just what is meant by this broad, authentic mass movement normally evolving in the direction of revolutionary Marxism, which goal it may be expected rapidly to attain. What organizational form has this movement taken? What are its organs and what evidence do we find in them of the characteristics mentioned? Who are its leaders - Thomas, Krueger, Hoops, Haggood, Goldman, Gitlow, Zorn? These are natural and obvious questions to raise under the circumstances and the fact that they are raised is no evidence of hysteria on the part of the questioners.

If we are told that these concrete matters are not touched upon because this is a resolution dealing with general perspectives on the basis of which details are later to be elaborated, we reply that the Plenum is attempting to legislate for a specific period in the life of the Party and of the revolutionary movement, that the Resolution is obviously intended on the face of it to give a line for Party procedure in the present period, that it does in fact deal with a number of very specific matters (the I.W.S. Fraction, united front, labor defense proposals) and is by no means vague or lacking in vigor in its expressions on those points. It is vague and indefinite and incomplete precisely at the point where the Party and the Political Committee in the next period are in need of directives and of a clear understanding as to just what we are heading for. There is no reference whatever to the R.P.P.A. although conversations with some leading comrades of that group had actually taken place. No supplementary resolutions covering these points were offered by the Cannon-Shachtman group. My resolution on work in the S.P. which did contain specific references was rejected and no substitute meeting this objection offered. More than this, some paragraphs beyond the one from which we have been quoting, the Cannon-Shachtman resolution itself makes an astounding statement - astounding, that is, in view of what has gone before, that "the left wing sentiment and movement in the S.P. today is vague, confused and unorganized; in other words, it is merely a movement in the earliest stages of its evolution, which is far from having developed with logical consistency to the position of revolutionary Marxism." On one page we have in the S.P. large sections of radical workers, an unmistakable movement to the left, fundamentally on the road to revolutionary Marxism, the condition for the rapid development of a broad and authentic left wing movement, the normal evolution of which is toward the position of revolutionary Marxism, a potential mass movement of revolutionary Socialists. On another page, we have a picture of something vague, confused, unorganized, merely a movement in the earliest stages of its evolution, which so far from being fundamentally on the road to revolutionary Marxism and bound to have a normal evolution in this direction is far from having developed with logical consistency toward this position, which in other words also exhibits tendencies to develop in other directions. (underscoring throughout is mine. A.J.M.)

Now if the latter is a picture of the actual situation in the S.P. - and it is, even according to Cannon-Shachtman on this page of their resolution - then the earlier quotations cannot also be the picture of the actual situation today, though they purport to be. And if the earlier references can be in fact only the description of a possibility, a dream perhaps, then we may justly require: 1. That the party be oriented on the basis of facts and not of a rosy dream, which may perhaps also be the product of a certain hysteria. 2. That more attention be given to possible developments other than the rosy variant. 3. That a much closer and more convincing analysis be given us of how this vague, confused, incomplete sentiment and movement which at present is admittedly developing in various directions can be made into the broad, authentic, etc. movement, so that we may know exactly what we are being committed to and what are the prospects of having our hopes realized.

Leaving all questions of subjective motivation entirely out of consideration, what practical objective purpose is served by vagueness and by the setting forth of contradictory positions on such a crucial question? Not, we may be sure, any purpose of Bolshevik politics. What is accomplished is leaving the way open for opportunist moves, for bargaining, for shifts in the line which can only be opportunistic in character since they are not based on a clear and a generally understood analysis, for easy alibis. We are opposed to placing the Party in any such position. We reject a resolution so full of holes that it cannot hold any water and just because of that will let any kind of material pass through.

Now although definition is avoided in the Cannon-Shachtman resolution, only one conclusion can be drawn as to what we would have been told was meant by this broad, authentic movement of radical proletarians in the S.P. moving rapidly to the position of revolutionary Marxism, if this resolution had been carried, viz - "The Militants."

A description of the role of the Militants is given in the Shachtman thesis of 1934. There the militant group is characterized as "shot through with treachery, deception, reformism, whose objective (and often enough subjective) aim is to preserve social democracy from the too compromising right wing and a too embarrassing left wing." It is furthermore asserted that the "greatest and most dangerous enemy to the revolutionary development of the left-wing workers in the American socialist movement is the militant group. Its victory at the Detroit convention of the party and the formal adoption of its 'declaration of principles' placed the American S.P. definitely in the camp of centrism. At the same time, the course of the Militants at and since the convention clearly reveals this group as a tendency whose role is that of a lightning rod for

grounding truly revolutionary sentiment in the party into the safe scill of reformism. The Militant group in the U.S. aims to fulfill enofunctions: to save social democracy from reformism."

The Declaration of Principles of the Party states: "Though now as at other periods in history the Party contains many militant and leftward moving workers.. the radical phrases of the contrist wing represented by the 'Militant' leaders serve as a cover for an essentially reformist attitude and a policy of capitulation to the right wing."

With due humility we inquire: What has happened since the fall of 1974 to invalidate this description of the Militants, to make them instead an unmistakable, broad, authentic, etc. movement to revolutionary Marxism? And if as a matter of fact the conduct of the Militants has been such as to confirm the correctness of the earlier characterization, then why is there no hint of it in the present resolution? For what reason is it now no longer necessary to take care that the W.P. is guided by this characterization? There can be no reason other than the ones we have already suggested and the possibility that the "French turn" has, correctly or incorrectly, influenced the thinking of comrades in regard to the S.P. in the U.S.

We proceed to the next point in the argument. If the left movement in the S.P. is the imposing affair which the dominant strain in the present Cannon-Shachtman resolution suggests, the question inevitably arises - and in no sense as a product of hysteria - what are the chances that this movement may capture the Socialist Party? To put the question another way: Can the left wing "reform" the S.P. - in the sense which the Cannon-Shachtman resolution sets forth as the correct definition of the term - viz., gain a majority in the S.P. and secure the adoption of a revolutionary program?

Obviously, this is for the W.P., for left-wing workers in the S.P. for advanced workers generally, another crucial question to which a clear, unequivocal and correct answer is required. What answer does the Cannon-Shachtman thesis offer? The question - the comrades will be pleased, ^{even} a little surprised or shocked, - to learn - is an "academic" one. It "requires consideration" from the theoretical guides of the party only because it has been raised in our internal discussion as an argument against those who calculate upon the need and possibility of developing a strong left wing movement in the S.P."

The question having been thus needlessly and irritatingly raised by those who want to make things uncomfortable for the Cannon-Shachtman group, the framers of the resolution nevertheless proceed to devote a thousand words to the matter.

First of all, they lay it down emphatically and repeatedly that the possibility of "reforming" the S.P. cannot be ruled out of consideration - though the whole business is presumably "academic." The language employed is interesting. "To state categorically" that the "reform" of the S.P., its transformation into a revolutionary party, "is 'impossible' is theoretically false." Now either this is a purely abstract, academic assertion in which case it means exactly nothing here and its use can only be misleading, or the assertion is made of an actual movement with some relation to the realities with which we are dealing here and now. That the authors do mean that the reform of the S.P. is more than a purely abstract and academic possibility, they proceed to make clear.

They point out that during the post-war period this is exactly what did happen in certain countries. What is that but to say that in more than an academic sense it is conceivable that it may occur again. That they themselves feel this is evidenced by their next remark: "The prospects of repeating this experience in the S.P. of America of today is remote." Remote is not the same as academic or purely theoretical. "The W.P.", they go on, "does not base its strategy on the assumption that the S.P. is going to be transformed into a revolutionary party. Nor has the W.P. any need of orienting itself in this direction." Certainly, we may observe, no one would dare to come forward in the W.P. with such a proposal at this time! But those who move a given distance in a given direction may move farther in that direction.

The Cannon-Shachtman resolution then immediately proceeds to another point which flatly contradicts their earlier assertion that the matter is academic and needs to be considered only because it has been raised in our internal discussion by opponents (hysterical perhaps) of the Cannon-Shachtman line. "The leftward moving workers in the S.P. ^{is} playing a leading role in the development of the Socialist left wing... must proceed from facts!" It is not suggested - in this paragraph - that the S.P. ^{is} is possibly to reform the S.P.

got this idea from Cannon or Muste or Johnson - or even Cannon or Shachtman. It is after all such as we are dealing with, facts in the S.P., not merely Oehler's fantastic which lead a shadowy existence in the W.P. internal discussion and nowhere else!

I do not of course dispute the fact that many S.P. members believe they can reform it, though it is indisputably true that there are also a good many left S.P. members who for the present remain in the S.P. not because they think they can reform it, but in spite of the fact that they have definitely given up hope long since, comrades who can only undergo demoralization if they remain there for very long as they are. I do not suffer under the delusion, either, that we can win those who have the above faith simply by a solemn command to them to discontinue their activity in the S.P.

For the present I am interested to inquire what interpretation these left elements in the S.P., quite without any assistance from within the W.P. and in particular without any assistance from opponents of the Cannon-Shachtman line, are bound to put upon the position of the latter. It seems to me inevitable that they should reason thus: "Cannon and Shachtman see this imposing and promising left wing movement in the S.P., the potential mass base of the revolutionary Marxist party. They admit the possibility of our capturing the S.P. can by no means be ruled out. Of course, in their capacity as W.P. functionaries, they have to say that the possibility is remote. But they admit it has happened many times before. Why not again? Even if they sincerely believe that the chances are slim, we on the inside know better. See what gains we have made in the N.E.C. in a couple of years, and so on and on." Without entering now into the question of whether the result is good or bad, though the Cannon-Shachtman group has not dared to assert that it would be good and seeks to give the contrary impression, the fact is that the objective result of the Cannon-Shachtman position is to encourage the hope that the S.P. U.S.A. can be made into a revolutionary party.

Then another question is bound to arise - and again not from the camp of those who are hysterical about a "NON-existent danger". The left wing comrades in the S.P. say--have said for years to some of us--"Why not join the S.P. in order to make the victory of the left wing certain and swift," I do not assert that the Cannon-Shachtman position permits of only one answer to that question--the answer of "going into the S.P." I do not see, however, how they can escape the conclusion that on their premises "going into the S.P." is far from being a purely academic question, that it becomes a question for serious practical consideration.

Add to what we have already said the undisputed facts that the French section did not enter the S.F.I.O. that other sections of the I.C.L. have entered the S.P., that the proposal did receive some consideration in the C.L.A. before the merger, that Comrade Shachtman specifically proposed that the Spartacus go into the Y.F.S.L., and the fact that the West resolution proposed the possibility "of the official S.P.", under certain circumstances regarded as attainable, becoming the revolutionary party--and I submit, comrades, that the hysteria theory about this whole subject has been conclusively disproved by detailed citation of chapter and verse from the statements of comrades Cannon and Shachtman themselves--disproved as it was reasonable in advance to expect that so obviously superficial and non-political a theory would be disproved. If the facts cited do not warrant raising the question as to whether we are presently to be confronted with a proposal to "go into the S.P." and a demand for adequate proof to the contrary, if this is not the proposal or not meant to be the effect of the line laid down, then nobody in the revolutionary movement ever had any cause for alarm about anything. Is it seriously proposed that we must wait until the proposal is written down in black and white that we must allow a line that we question and distrust to be worked out to its final conclusion, before we ask a question about it? Is it seriously proposed that we content ourselves with a verbal disclaimer? We cannot be expected to be and we will not be thus silenced.

The Cannon-Shachtman line on this S.P. question deprives the S.P. of recruiting power. It has no convincing argument to offer workers for joining the W.P. rather than the S.P. Indeed the weight of the argument tends to be towards the latter course. It is based on an incorrect estimate of the facts as to the S.P. rather than expose and smash them. For the W.P. it is a policy of organizational defeatism and liquidationism. Thus, it is the most serious conceivable blow that can be delivered against the building of the revolutionary party and the cause of the Fourth International in the U.S.

The line we counterpose to this incorrect and defeatist one can now be summarized in comparatively brief space.

1. To the Cannon-Shachtman statement that "the C.P. is a reactionary force in the labor movement against which we must conduct a most important struggle on every front" we add in counterpoise with the Declaration of Principles and the

Shachtman thesis of 1934,--what comrades Cannon and Shachtman forgot, or for some other reason, failed to add to their present resolution: The S.P. is a reactionary force in the labor movement against which we must conduct an irreconcilable struggle on every front.

2. The Militants we characterize and deal with in accordance with the Declaration of Principles and the Shachtman thesis of 1934.

3. We reject utterly as a tenable perspective in view of the actual facts as to the S.P. in the U.S. the possibility of its reform, i.e. its transformation into the revolutionary Marxist party and we propose to propagandize actively against this illusion which serves as a shield behind which centrists of all kinds in the S.P. evade fundamental programmatic issues.

4. We reject the conception that if a separation is effected between the Old Guard in the S.P. and the other elements, a clear basis for fusion between the latter and the W.P. will then ipso facto exist. The situation will not be analogous to that which existed between the A.W.P. and the C.L.A. early in 1934 since the new Old Guard elements in the S.P. present an entirely different picture from the A.W.P. with its C.P.L.A. background of conflict with the trade union bureaucracy, etc. and its clear declaration for a new party and a new international. It would not be possible to fuse with Thomas, Allen, Knueger, etc. on the basis of the Declaration of Principles. Furthermore, the experience of the A.W.P.-C.L.A. merger has demonstrated that even where two groups merge on the basis of a sincere acceptance of the Declaration of Principles, considerable difficulty is involved in assimilating all members into a Marxist party and in fact not all can be assimilated. This furnishes no serious danger and is a risk richly worth taking where the two groups are of approximately equal size and the hopelessly unclear and non-assimilable elements are certain to be a minority. The case would be entirely different where an overwhelming majority of as yet unclear elements, including leading elements, were taken into a merger, as would be the case with a merger between the W.P. and the S.P. minus its Old Guard.

5. If a split such as referred to in the preceding paragraph occurs in the S.P. it will be the business of revolutionary marxists to work for a further split or splits in which the incorrigible reformists and centrists are differentiated from the elements genuinely moving toward a revolutionary marxian position and capable of being assimilated in the W.P. either as individuals or in small groups or as larger groups with which merger occurs.

6. We do not propose a passive waiting attitude toward developments either in the S.P. or the C.P. but positive, aggressive work through the press, fractions, etc. It is precisely the Cannon-Shachtman line which in practice results in a non-Bolshevik, waiting policy since it weakens the W.P., is based on lack of faith in its possibilities, makes it a bargaining agency or subject which has to wait until the leaders of the "broad authentic potential mass movement of revolutionary socialists" are ready to make offers of marriage. Our line by building up the W.P. carrying on a relentless campaign against reformism and centrism, carrying the offensive to the S.P. will hasten the break-up of the party, compel all honest elements to face up to fundamental programmatic issues, expose confused vacillating and dishonest elements, and give the many in the S.P. who have already given up any notion of reforming it an alternative other than the C.P. to which to turn.

7. With elements in the S.P. which approach a revolutionary Marxist position and are prepared for the discussion of such issues as the Fourth International, Stalinism, etc. we propose discussion and in practical work collaboration. This is our proposal with regard to the R.P.P.A. and we may observe that the monopoly of positive work in developing contacts with this group, etc. by no means rests with the Cannon-Shachtman group.

8. Because of the loose organization of the S.P. and the extremely varied character of the groups in it, no hard and fast rule with regard to taking individuals or groups out of the S.P. or merging with them can be laid down--except the rule that it will not be possible to plot out one undeviating line. In some cases, therefore, individuals will be drawn out, in other cases smaller or larger groups. In other cases the effort to secure a crystallization of a considerable force on a left-wing basis will have to be made. When the maximum crystallization achievable with the given elements has been reached, then they should be joined with the W.P. on whatever organizational basis fits the coordination of forces, etc. To forestall any tilting at straw men, I emphasize 1) that the W.P. by fraction work, etc. must play an active and not a passive role in these crystallizations and is best able to do so precisely when its members and leaders are clear that the W.P. is the integrating center for revolutionary forces in the U.S.; 2) that we are not proposing premature withdrawal of individuals in order to make a cheap showing; 3) that so far from drawing into or merg-

ing with the W.P. left wing elements out of the S.P. under the condition indicated serving to strengthen the Right wingers or centrists in the S.P. discouraging any leftward movement, the withdrawal of revolutionary elements under such conditions will demoralize right wingers and centrists and cause honest militant elements the more earnestly to ask themselves where they belong as the capitalist crisis deepens.

9. Those in the S.P. who still sincerely believe that it can be reformed we shall influence most constantly by our actual work in the class struggle and by our press. Where we are able to deal more or less directly with them we shall 1) give no encouragement to the notion that we think it pays to labor to reform the S.P. 2) we shall mercilessly expose the leadership in which these workers trust, 3) we shall tell these workers that they must a) study our program, b) work out a revolutionary Marxist program for their own group (and of course assist them) c) fight all right wingers and centrists in the S.P. on the principled basis of such a program.

10. In our work in the mass organizations we shall consistently and with determination push our united front policy, both because of the practical results this will bring in daily struggle and because of the contacts it affords us with workers of their political parties and groups whom we must aggressively seek to influence in the direction of our program. But we shall not suffer under the delusion that our road to the masses lies only or chiefly through the S.P. or that we need to pursue a tactic of tail-endism to the S.P. in mass activities and mass organizations. Thus we shall avoid not only a sterile sectarianism, but the equally serious evil of a shallow opportunism, a degrading sacrificing of dignity for the sake of an illusory introduction to the masses for which the Party of Toledo and Minneapolis does not at this date have to look to the S.P.

11. We propose to take account of the likelihood of vacillations, compromises, postponements of issues in the S.P., failure to do which easily leads to a banking on developments which, if the W.P. pursues a correct policy, may bring advantage to it and to the revolutionary movement when they occur--but which whether or not the W.P. has a correct policy, will not take place for some time and should not therefore enter into our calculations of assets in the present period.

On the basis laid down in our resolution and in this statement we believed last fall that the W.P. could be organized--the revolutionary Marxist party actually launched. We did launch the W.P. and raise aloft the standard of the Fourth International. On the same basis we can and shall continue to build the W.P. as the integrating center for the revolutionary forces in the U.S. If this be organizational fetishism, let us have this rather than organizational defeatism and liquidationism.

P.S. We point to the developments at the recent N.C. Plenum of the S.P. as having furnished abundant confirmation of the analysis of the situation set forth in this article which was written before this Plenum.