

The communication discussed in the following letter is attached

August 21, 1945

Robert Sherman;  
Denver, Colorado

Dear Comrade Sherman,

I have been instructed to reply to your letter of August 13, 1945 which was read and discussed at the last meeting of the Political Committee.

We understand fully your being disturbed at the kind of "stories" that appear to be circulating in some quarters within the Party. They are the product of the school of petty-bourgeois gossiping and rumor-mongering that has long afflicted the revolutionary working-class movement, but which every serious revolutionist has taken good care to stamp out of the movement as a corroding menace. The "stories" you have heard are typical examples, and we are glad to nail these wretched lies and slanders for what they are.

1. The Active Workers' Conference was called in response to an urgent and no-longer-postponeable need of the Party. It had been contemplated for some time, on a decision made by the November, 1944 plenum session of the National Committee, and was held off for one technical reason or another. It was finally called on the date scheduled by the unanimous decision of the Political Committee. Every single member of the Political Committee, without exception, voted for the Active Workers' Conference, and voted, likewise, for the date on which it was convened. Not one single member of the Political Committee proposed that a regular National Convention be called in place of the Active Workers' Conference. These are not "opinions" about the facts. These are the facts themselves as recorded in the minutes of the P.C.

2. The second lie, and slander to boot, is that the Political Committee or the National Committee intends so gross a violation of its trust as would be involved if it did not call the next convention within the time prescribed by the Party constitution. No member of either Committee has voiced or even indicated such an intention. The facts, as recorded in our official minutes are that at its last plenary session, the National Committee of the Party decided to settle the question of the next regular National Convention at the coming meeting of the National Committee, which is to take place later this year. No contrary proposal or motion was made by any member of the National Committee. No member of the National Committee - and it is these members who are in a position to know - made any charge that the Committee, or any member of it, contemplated a violation of the Party Constitution on this (or any other) point. The comrade, or the ones who "informed" him, is a malicious and irresponsible falsifier.

3. What is meant by Comrade "Johnson...being isolated" is not clear to us. Comrade Johnson occupies, unfortunately, a special position which compels him and us to regulate his activity accordingly. Wherever possible, Comrade Johnson has spoken before the membership and spoken without let or hindrance. Comrade Johnson was assigned to teach two sessions of a class organized by a trade-union fraction in Philadelphia. Comrade Shachtman did not go there "immediately afterwards to counteract his effect." What "effect"

was Shachtman or anyone else supposed to counteract? Comrado Coolidge, however, was assigned to attend the class for the following sessions. The class for several technical reasons, could not continue. But Coolidge was able to, and did, meet with the fraction for its specific trade-union work, with which he is exceptionally well acquainted, and for which reason he was given this special assignment. Your rumor-mongers are not only slanderers, but clumsy ones.

4. The story about the alleged "isolation" of Comrade Allen falls into the same category as the story about the alleged "isolation" of Comrade Johnson. Not a single document written by Comrade Allen has been refused publication in any periodical for which it was intended or requested. There was a delay in the publication of one of comrade Allen's documents, as has been the case with other documents in the past, but the delay was occasioned only by technical difficulties. Comrade Allen is not at present employed by the party for reasons it deems entirely adequate and reasonable, and is not due to Comrade Allen having volunteered to leave full time party work. As to the nature of Comrade Allen's private work, the Political Committee has not had and does not have any responsibility for it, nor has the Committee raised any objection to the work of Comrade Allen.

5. Whether or not there has been any "development of theory", is for every party member to judge for himself. The views of the leading comrades on this score has been expressed frequently and publicly, and requires no reiteration here. That "Shachtman does not write" is, as you know, a little exaggerated. That he "does not let Johnson write," is contemptible falsehood, first, because comrade Johnson has had full freedom, like any other comrade, to develop his views in writing, both in the internal and public press; second, because not a single one of Comrade Johnson's writings has been refused publication; third, because Shachtman has neither the desire nor the power "not to let" Johnson or anyone else write; and fourth, because if Shachtman or anyone else sought to arrogate such a power to himself he would be dealt with by the membership, beginning with the Political Committee in a manner he deserves.

6. The slanderous identification of the "organizational point of view" of Shachtman (by which the slanderers mean, in this case, the Workers Party) and of Cannon (by which is meant the SWP) can also be answered by any party comrade who knows anything about the two organizations. The most recent refutation of such a calumny is the tribute paid by the SWP opposition to our Party, a party whose regime and methods the Opposition is sufficiently well acquainted with to appreciate in comparison with the half-Stalinist regime that obtains in the SWP.

The most poisonous aspect of this gossip and slander is the manner in which it is disseminated. Responsible critics, whether right or wrong, have their say in the party publicly. They confront those whom they criticize and confront them openly and honestly. They make their criticisms in such places and in such a way as makes it possible to hold them responsible for the criticisms. This is the serious Bolshevik method. First, it gives those who are criticized an opportunity to defend themselves, to acknowledge an error where one has been made or to refute a falsification where one has been uttered. Second, by confronting the critic with those criticized, the party membership has the only possible opportunity to find out who is

right and who is wrong, who is lying and who is telling the truth. Third, the critic can be held to his criticism, and held to it strictly; otherwise, he can go on freely and forever without ever having to be called to account.

The petty-bourgeois rumor-and-gossip-monger keeps to the dark corridors, to the slanders whispered behind the hand, where nobody but his victim can hear him, and above all where the object of his criticism can make no reply - no reply of any kind. In this way, the internal life of the movement is poisoned; politics becomes impossible; discussion is beside the point; cliquism takes the place of political education and struggle of ideas. Opinions are not decided by a free and full exchange and even conflict of ideas, but only by unanswered, and unanswerable (because unknown) gossip.

The National Committee accepts, as part of its duty and tasks in educating the workers and youth who have been attracted to our party, a struggle against all these forms and manifestations of un-political and un-principled cliquism which make up fifty to ninety percent of the "life" of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois politics.

With best party greetings,

Max Shachtman

Postscript: I may now add that this letter was approved by unanimous vote of the Political Comm. present at which were Allen, Coolidge, Craine, Gates, Johnson, Lund, Nevins, Shachtman, and Stevens.

August 13, 1945

National Committee  
Workers Party

Dear Comrades,

"It is regrettable that a letter of this sort must be written.

"Comrade Dave Miller has returned from Philadelphia bringing the following stories:

1. That the calling of the Active Workers Conference was deliberately engineered so as to avoid holding a regular convention thus precluding any struggle with Comrade Johnson on his views.

2. That the convention will not be held within the prescribed time violating constitutional provision.

3. That Johnson is being isolated. At first he was refused permission to visit Philadelphia but finally was allowed to go, with Comrade Shachtman being sent there immediately afterwards to counter-act his effect.

4. That Comrade Allen is being isolated. His documents were refused publication. The fact that he is now "only a salesman" is evidence of how he has fared.

5. That there has been no development of theory, That Shachtman does not write and does not let Johnson write.

6. That from an organizational point of view there is no basic difference between Shachtman and Cannon.

Is it necessary to mention with what ensuing disturbance, if not outright alarm, these stories reached here? It is felt that the material contained herein is sufficiently serious to merit your attention.

"Fraternally,

"Robert Sherman", Denver

~~225~~  
544