

November 16, 1945

TO ALL NC MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES, AND ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS:

Dear Comrade:

I am enclosing to you two documents. One is a letter sent by Comrade Natalia to one of the SWP leaders, which, as is clear from the other document, was meant for the entire SWP leadership. The other document is the statement made at the meeting of the PC of the SWP by J.P. Cannon, dated September 25. To these documents, I wish to add now the following information and comment:

The N.S. letter was sent on August 28, and must have been received in New York a few days later. As is evident from the Cannon statement, he wrote her on September 4 "requesting explicit direction from her as to what disposition she wished to have made of her letter of August 28." N.S. replied, as indicated, in another letter dated September 10, quotation from which is made at the end of Cannon's statement.

Up to this time, the Minority of the PC of the SWP (Goldmanites), and for that matter, the PC (SWP) formally, was not even informed of the existence of the N.S. letter. It was brought to the attention of the PC (SWP), and therefore of the Minority, only at the PC meeting of October 2, on the very eve of the recent SWP Plenum which met to consider the question of unity with the WP.

The letter was read at the PC meeting, with no proposal made by the Cannonites as to its disposition. Thereupon, I learn, Goldman made a motion that it be sent to the branches for their information. No other motion was made. Morrow and Goldman voted for the latter's motion. All the others, i.e., all the Cannonites, abstained. The motion was thus "carried". Presently, the PC session was suspended for a caucus of the Cannonites. Upon readjournment, Cannon declared that he would not take any responsibility for disseminating the letter of N.S., and called for a roll-call vote on the original Goldman motion. The result was the same as before: Goldman and Morrow in favor, all the Cannonites abstaining.

In most of the branches where the N.S. letter has been received, the Cannonites have slurred over the reading of the letter and, in effect, have shelved it.

I have received a copy of the letter and the Cannon statement by accident. The importance of these two documents, and of the circumstances attendant upon them, need not be stressed to you. What does require stressing is that, for the time being, at least, the documents should be read only by those to whom this circular is addressed, and not to the Party membership at large. Nor is it to be distributed to the membership at large, again, at least for the time being. However, it is permissible to communicate the substance of the documents to the membership and the Executive Committees of every branch, and I wish to charge you with doing so. I emphasize once more: the documents themselves are not to be circulated.

With Party greetings,

Max Shachtman,  
National Secretary

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August 28, 1945

Dear Friend:

Permit me to say a few words to you concerning "events" which have taken place in our party in recent days.

In Chicago our comrades have united in a trade union organization with the Stalinists with the aim of pursuing common tactical action, therewith retaining the right to criticize their opponents. It is self-evident that the influence of our co-thinkers is so significant in this city that the Stalinists were unable this time to limit themselves to that tactic toward the Trotskyists which they have assimilated and applied in the course of so many years.

The programs of neither side came up for discussion inasmuch as the program of each side is well known to the other. I am unacquainted with the views of the center concerning this very serious move made by our comrades. But, knowing the general direction of the line of our center, I believe that it holds this step to be correct.

In New York the proposal of the Shachtman group for joint action in the election campaign was rejected (just as earlier a joint action -- the meeting against the fascists! -- had been rejected). In the meantime, the Shachtman group is related to us through its social-political convictions. The Resolution of the Political Committee on this question is in the highest degree unconvincing. And how could it have been otherwise? It is not dictated by political expediency. I find wholly correct the argument of Goldman in defense of the proposal made by the Shachtman group.

The split did occur in our party in 1940, but it also need not have taken place inasmuch as there was not sufficiently deep-going considerations for it. L.D. was very hopeful that your convention would arrive at a general understanding. But the minority put forward demands (faction, independent organ, etc., etc., etc.) which were unacceptable to the majority.

Since then five years have passed; the cardinal question of "the Defense of the USSR" which led to the split has fallen away. But even this question in the words of L.D. could not justify a split. "It would be monstrous," he said (in another connection), to expel comrades from the party for differences on the question "of the defense of USSR", despite the fact that L.D., as you know, attached enormous importance to this question.

A thousand times more important at the present time is unification, rather than the existence of two independent groups who in the fundamentals march under the one and the same banner. The program of the minority is known to the majority from the former's literature; there is no necessity to discuss it. The Resolution of the Political Committee is contradictory: in one place it says that the programs of the two groups almost coincide (an "almost" ought to be outlived in the process of common work within a united party). In another place (a few lines later) the Shachtman group is proclaimed petty-bourgeois in its social-political character. This is not serious. There is no need to prove the advantages of unification - they are comprehensible to all.

At the present moment of great revolutionary tension and responsibility to the working masses, in my opinion, our party, by basing itself upon the fundamental thing we have in common with the Shachtman group, and taking into account

therewith the importance of objective conditions, -- our party ought to take the road of the unity of the two parties. Our common actions on various actual problems, like the struggle against the fascists, like the elections campaign and so on, could cut a road to such unification.

Incomprehensible to me, dear friend, is the persistence with which you put aside the danger of bureaucratism in our ranks. The danger is possible; it is in the air; to be conscious of the possibility of such a danger in and of itself already means to forestall it and it consequently signifies the possibility of avoiding it.

As far back as 1918 Lenin posed the question of the threat of bureaucratism in our Bolshevik ranks; and this not because he observed its manifestations but because he considered it theoretically not excluded. It is far less dangerous to grant the possibility of the development of bureaucratism than to exclude it and to live in the illusions of certainty that its inception is impossible.

In 1918-1919 there were not to be noticed any signs of Thermidor in the conditions existing at the time and there could not have been any such signs, but nevertheless this question was posed primarily as a partial (semi-public) one. It entered no one's mind to push these questions aside. What was branded at that time was chvanstvo (braggadocio and snobbery) which became noticeable among the activists in the various Soviet institutions and which could have led to demoralization and bureaucratism. In connection with this the question of a socialist catechism was discussed in the Political Bureau and a proposal was made to have Bukharin and Preobrajensky compile such a catechism. But it turned out too complicated, far more complicated than anyone had imagined. And this project was never realized. B. and P. only appeared in a humorous magazine depicted as saints (St. Cyril and St. Methodia) with covenants and scrolls in hand.

I press your hand,  
Stay well,

Yours,  
Natalia

PS. Instead of discussion concerning complete guarantees against a deviation into bureaucratism, wouldn't it be more expedient instead to attentively follow all the tiny forms of its possible manifestation (if there are any) and to condemn them?

Two years ago Jim with indignation set down "routine" in our party life. Doesn't this constitute a danger of bureaucratism? Why not openly recognize routinism and why not warn the party against its further development?

Wishing you the best,

N.S.

September 25, 1945

STATEMENT BY CANNON

When Natalia's letter of August 28 was received it was not clear from the letter for whom it was intended or what disposition she wished to have made of it. It was addressed to an individual and contained some personal references, but at the same time was devoted mainly to political questions.

In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding I wrote to her under date of September 4, requesting explicit direction from her as to what disposition she wished to have made of her letter of August 28. On this point she answered me under date of September 10 as follows:

"Assuredly I wanted my letter to Usick of August 28 (like all the preceding letters) to be read first of all by you as well as other members of the party, the majority and minority alike, who are interested in the question, without of course their being published or becoming known through any other channels to the group with which unity negotiations are being conducted but not yet consummated."