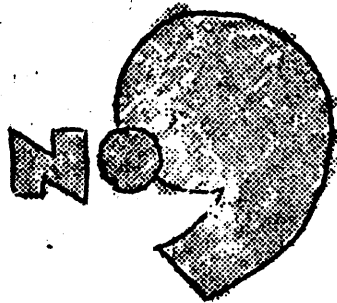


BULLETIN

WORKERS PARTY



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5¢

MAY 1941

AKRON

(Below is published the decision of the March Plenum of the Workers Party in regard to the internal situation in local Akron, together with the reply of the Debs unit refusing to abide by the decision of the Plenum; and the action of the Political Committee in connection therewith.)

It had been the hope and belief of the National Committee that the internal situation in Akron could be resolved without disciplinary measures, but the utterly unreasoning attitude of the Debs unit has finally made this impossible. The National Committee wishes to point out that the Akron situation was a carry-over from the SWP period. When the Workers Party was formed, only one Branch existed in Akron. Upon the insistence and demand of some members of the Branch, the August, 1940 Plenum of the Workers Party permitted the organization of these members into a separate (Debs) Branch, although the Plenum itself was more than dubious as to the wisdom of this course. However, the Plenum wished to give the members of the Debs unit every opportunity to demonstrate that they could function in a positive, progressive and loyal manner in the Party. The decision of the August Plenum was that the experiment of two Branches in Akron should be tried out for two months, after which the Political Committee was to review the results. The experiment was permitted to be carried out actually for nearly seven months - up to the March Plenum, at which time the Akron situation came before the Plenum for review and final disposition. The National Committee feels it incumbent to make the membership as a whole acquainted with the facts, which are set forth below.--Ed.)

P L E N U M D E C I S I O N O N A K R O N S I T U A T I O N

New York, N.Y.
March, 28th, 1941

Debs B r a n c h
Guy Corbitt, Sec'y.
Box 602
Akron, O hio

Dear C o m r a d e s :

The Political Committee received an extended report from C o m r a d e Allen on his recent visit to Akron in respect to the long-standing internal situation. The Plenum likewise had this report before it, and also the communication of the D e b s Branch of March 21st, addressed to the National Committee.

The Political Committee presented to the Plenum for consideration its unanimous proposal for the formation of two new branches out of the present two branches in A k r o n , together with the proposal of the Debs Branch to maintain in the present two branches as they are. The Plenum, after a thorough discussion, unanimously accepted the proposal of the Political Committee, and instructed the National Office to advise the Debs Branch of its decision and reasons for this decision.

As you comrades are aware, the internal situation in Akron has been before our P arty for consideration on several occasions. The Plenum of August, 1940, itself, also considered the A k r o n situation and passed decisions. In order better to attempt to settle positively the inexcusable continuation of a factional situation in Akron, we have again gone through all the letters and documents presented in the past by comrades in the two branches, and by the Debs and Trotsky branches themselves, including, particularly, the several c o m m u n i c a t i o n s and declarations of the branches in the past weeks. This has ~~XX~~ been done in order to ensure all concerned that consideration was given to every possible problem or question in arriving at a decisive judgment on the s i t u a t i o n .

The comrades in Akron recently had an opportunity once again, in the presence of the representative of the National Office, Comrade Allen, to review in detail and in any manner they saw fit, the situation and problems before the A k r o n movement. It is definitely clear that the four days of daily meetings of both branches, as well as lengthy discussions with the individual comrades, with the National Office representative, gave the fullest opportunity to all concerned to express themselves, and for the Political Committee and Plenum, thereafter, to be able to evaluate the situation in a sound objective manner.

We do not feel that it is really required to go into a lengthy review of matters, since it is abundantly clear that, after four days of thorough discussions with Comrade A llen and a further review of all documents and letters to the National Office during the entire period, nothing fundamentally new or significant emerged which was not already known to us. Nevertheless, we set down here our definite views in some detail, with the hope that the

Akron situation will now be resolved in the manner that the Plenum proposes, and that all the Akron comrades will proceed loyally and in a cooperative manner to carry through the decision of the Plenum.

It is the opinion of the Plenum that there exists today no political or organizational basis whatsoever, either of a primary or secondary consideration, which justifies the continuation of the two branches on their present basis and outlook. The Political Committee and Plenum are aware, in detail, of all the issues, real or alleged, which presumably form the basis of the demand of the Debs Branch that it be permitted to continue to function on its present basis, and with a faction approach to the problems before the Akron movement. Both the Debs Branch and the Trotsky Branch acknowledge that there are no political differences between them. Both branches declare their complete acceptance of and loyalty to the Program and organization of the Workers Party. But the Debs Branch has contended that it has differences now on the Negro trade union, educational, public activity, and other questions, with the Trotsky Branch; and that the differences justify the continuation of the Branch as it is today, not only as a Branch, but as a faction to boot. Reviewed, also, were the questions that, allegedly or in fact, were the basis of the friction and division in the past between the comrades of the Debs and Trotsky Branches, and which in the eyes of the comrades of the Debs Branch (though these issues are long over with and disposed of) justify the continuation of an independent Branch existence on their part, and a factional outlook and practice in respect to the Trotsky Branch.

In our opinion there is no basis whatsoever for the continuation of a factional branch existence, and it cannot be countenanced any further. A completely objective review of all the problems of the past years shows that the questions have no relevance to the present situation or relate in any concrete way, political or organizational, to the immediate future of the Akron movement. The questions have been discussed and rediscussed many times. The National Office has presented its views thereon, and has no reason to change its judgment in respect to the long past period. On many of the questions of the disputes of long ago, the Debs Branch has on several occasions stated its position and, moreover, acknowledged where they had been wrong, politically and organizationally. We are of the opinion that its acknowledgments of error should have put a period to those questions, as the Trotsky Branch has done on its part. There has been since, no genuine cause to reopen the long disposed of questions. Nevertheless, opportunity was given once again, when Comrade Allen was in Akron, for the comrades to restate or rehash the past period, as well as problems of the moment and tomorrow.

The members of the Debs Branch expressed themselves in contradictory ways on various matters, particularly the astonishingly contradictory views on specific trade union matters; as, for instance, in respect to the early period and experiences of our movement in the rubber union, the teachers, and retail clerks. For this reason alone, on the most important single problem that comes before the consideration of our members in the living labor movement - that is, in the trade union movement - it is clear that the Debs Branch, or individuals therein, were either not aware of the actual facts, or are confused on the trade union question.

In respect to the so-called "special organization" issue, it is clear to us that it had and has today no significance in respect to the basic attitudes

of either one branch or another on this subject. Votes on this question crossed the present Branch lines; also, the bulk of the present Trotsky Branch voted against the action that was taken. The matter in any event, had only passing episodic significance, and there can be no prejudice on this question, as, for instance, toward those comrades among you who voted for the so-called "special" formation because of lack of understanding of the question or because of ~~the~~ confusion. The matter deserves to be relegated to the limbo of the past, and forgotten.

But it is with the present situation that we are chiefly concerned. On no single immediate problem of the day, be it the Negro problem, trade union, educational, public activity, etc. does there appear to be any differences of even a secondary importance, which can justify the demand of the Debs Branch to continue to function on its present basis.

Certainly there was a basis in the long past for misunderstanding between the members of the present Debs and Trotsky branches, or rather, among the members today who were members of the organization at that time. This refers to the youth vs. adult question. We are aware how easily friction and misunderstanding arise between older comrades who have functioned for a period of time in the movement and newer and younger comrades who come into the movement with a desire to carry on what they regard as necessary revolutionary activities. But this issue likewise is now disposed of, and we do not see anything of a concrete nature which would pose this problem again. Specifically the matter could arise, should any comrades propose now the formation of a youth group or unit. Then everyone could see whether there is any difference among the comrades on such a concrete proposition. But nobody, upon the inquiry of the National Office representative, proposed that there was the basis for the formation of a youth group or unit at this time in Akron, and certainly this is a practical matter through which one might, to some extent, observe whether any differences of a consequence exist between the comrades.

We have taken serious note of every allegation and opinion of the comrades, particularly of your recent communication of March 21st. We note that the signatories to the communication again rehash opinions or allegations of the past years, and some of the signatories subscribe to allegations and to past matters with which they cannot possibly have been acquainted themselves, since they were not members of the organization at that time. That is not the way to educate new members.

We took particular note of the resumption of the charge that the Trotsky Branch must be regarded politically as the "petty-bourgeois opposition". We would again advise the comrades to cease the use of such monstrously false declarations. That approach and the estimate on your part toward your fellow comrades in the Trotsky Branch is just as false, in all respects, as it was when it was made by the Cannonites against the former Minority and the present Workers Party. We suggest that in your own and our common interests, such baseless characterizations cease forthwith.

The Debs Branch acknowledges that there are no political differences between the two Branches. It is also clear from all the evidence - discussions and documents - that there are not even important organizational differences. The comrades, though often requested, have never formulated a program, in order that one might see if there are any distinctions. All the comrades claim is that there have been differences, and that differences are implied or latent in the attitude of the two branches towards the questions of

the day. We find it impossible to accept the demand of the Debs Branch for further separate existence without proof of a more substantial character. Statements that there are "differences"; "two different types of branches"; "two tendencies"; "the tendencies cannot be submerged"; "there is an antagonism between concepts"; there are "irreconcilable differences now", and similar statements made in letters and at the meetings with Comrade Allen - these are just opinions which are not proved at all. Moreover, we are unable to comprehend an attitude which states, "reunification is possible only on the basis of a struggle for . . . domination of a tendency" (Corbitt at Akron branch meeting); "reconciliation is not possible". This attitude is in striking contrast to that expressed by members of the Trotsky Branch that: "They are for reconciliation, for unity"; "for viable fusion"; "the war situation makes fusion all the more necessary"; "Right now differences do not exist". The attitude of the Debs Branch, their approach to political questions, past, present and future, in such a manner is incomprehensible to anyone who endeavors to think and act politically. We realize that vestigial remnants are present after an internal struggle. But we cannot understand the attempt to magnify them into principles. Again, note must be taken of the difference in attitude of the Trotsky and Debs Branches towards the Party as a whole.

The Debs branch is entirely wrong when it states that the National Organization has not been critical of the Trotsky Branch. This is not the case. The National Organization has made specific criticisms of the conduct, in several instances of the Trotsky Branch. The Trotsky Branch has, however, taken these criticisms objectively, and declared its readiness to make the necessary changes or corrections in accordance with the criticisms made by the National organizations. It has recognized the validity, on all basic aspects, of the point of view of the Political Committee, and is prepared to orient its relations with you comrades and the work of the future accordingly.

The Debs Branch has, in our view, a peculiar approach to the problems of politics and organization. Presumably it suffices for you that in recent weeks the Debs Branch endeavored to carry on some activities. The National Office has recognized the value of these activities. But it must be pointed out that these activities, only recently entered into, cannot possibly compensate for the political and organizational losses already incurred by Local organization as a whole, and which would, in our opinion, become accentuated in the future, if the status quo is maintained. This has been demonstrated in the main campaign or issue of our Party nationally - its anti-war work.

On the one issue in the past seven or eight months, on which a real and significant difference showed itself between the Trotsky and Debs Branch - the anti-conscription campaign of the Debs Branch - the Debs Branch was politically wrong. Its action compromised our Party, not only in Akron, but had its negative effects generally. The National Office long ago (at the outset) made its criticisms of the campaign as well as the undisciplined conduct of the Debs Branch on this question. Yet only as late as January 28th, in a letter from Guy Corbitt for the Debs Branch, it acknowledged that it was a "very unwise conscription campaign". In our view the National Office and all the local comrades were entitled to a far more complete statement by the Debs Branch on this question.

We note how the present situation has made it impossible to draw into genuine activity and into a proper relationship with our movement, the Negro comrade who was recruited recently into the organization. This comrade has apparently

has not attended meetings even of your branch, and certainly, as you know was not present at any of the meetings at which the National Office representative was present. We have no doubt whatsoever that a new recruit, such as this comrade, if in a position to look at the needs of the movement in Akron today, would unquestionably insist that a new organizational set-up or unification of our forces was necessary for her own activation and the movement as a whole.

We would like it very much if the comrades of the Debs Branch would try to reason without prejudice and subjectivity. In your letter of March 21st, you question the objectivity of the National organization, or its representatives, in attempting to resolve the Akron situation. This impresses us as opinion after the fact or reality. In Akron, when comrade Allen was present, several comrades, including comrade Corbitt, specifically declared themselves convinced that the National Office was entirely objective in its approach to the Akron situation, and was endeavoring to resolve matters so that every member in both branches could be retained and gotten to function. The National Office representative made it abundantly clear, as has the National Organization in the past, that it was entirely opposed to an attitude that any comrade in any branch should be "dumped" or expelled. The National Office criticized, and in a very sharp manner, comrades in both Branches, who, in the heat of dispute, voiced such an opinion or attitude. We confess ourselves unable to understand the contradictory opinions and estimates offered by the members of your branch. In the presence of others, before the National Office representative and members of the Trotsky Branch, individual members of the Debs branch appeared to express their real views or estimates, and these differed in a number of respects. But no sooner do the comrades of the Debs Branch congregate together by themselves, then they revert to their past attitude and declare themselves solidly against any change in the status quo, and exhibit a conservatism and resistance to different habits, ways, thoughts, and actions that is very remarkable, considering that so many of the Debs Branch members would not ordinarily be so rigid. These contradictory thoughts and actions are what have led us to declare that the Debs Branch acts as a clique and not as a political unit. In fact, one of your leading comrades did ~~xx~~ state that the Branch is a clique, but nevertheless thought that the Branch should continue on its present basis, apparently not realizing the significance or consequences of a clique existence.

The Debs Branch, instead of exhibiting a cooperative attitude toward the Party, continues to speak and write in terms of - demands . We think it is high time for the Debs Branch to listen to and accede to the instructions or demands of the National Organization, based as they are on an objective review and estimate of the needs of the Organization locally and nationally. We are compelled, for instance, to take note that for many months after the August 1940 Plenum, the National Office heard nothing from the Debs Branch despite repeated interrogations and communications from the National Office. Only after the National Office finally asked for a plain statement as to whether the members ~~xxx~~ of the Debs Branch regarded themselves as responsible members of the Party, did we at last hear from the Branch, and, diplomatic relations, so to speak, were resumed by the Debs Branch with the National Office. However, the National Office has more than welcomed the resumption of correspondence with, and some of the recent activities of the Debs Branch.

At the August Plenum the Party made an important concession in granting the demand of the present members of the Debs Branch for a separate Branch. Although the Plenum had grave doubts on this proposal, nevertheless, it yielded and made this concession, since the National Committee was and is determined to keep every revolutionary in the organization and to integrate them

actively in the work of the Party on the same basis as any other member. This concession, in our opinion, was a big one. At that time the Plenum stated that there was no political or organizational basis for the division into two Branches, but nevertheless agreed to accept the demand of the Debs Branch for independent Branch existence, in order to test out if the Akron situation could be resolved thereby. In our view today, after an experience of nearly eight months of separate Branch existences, the present relationship in Akron cannot be continued if the best interests of the local and national movement are to be served.

The organization of two new branches out of the present branches is the only way still open to endeavor to resolve the present situation. That is to say through an organic working together. The dissemination of common views, proposals for work freely made by any member, genuine collaboration, is the necessary procedure and step to take today. Fusion in the form of two new branches out of the present two, gives full opportunity, objectively, for any and all comrades to put forward positive proposals for the present and future life and work of the Akron movement, with the opportunity for every comrade mutually to influence each other. We believe that by the creation of two new branches, plus a genuine, loyal collaboration by all comrades, the past, or rather, present situation would quickly disappear and two genuinely functioning branches would emerge.

We are very surprised that the Debs Branch voices fear of "terrorization" (a very extreme term!) from the members of the Trotsky Branch in such a reorganization. Having observed the attitude of the Trotsky Branch members towards the proposed reorganization, we think that the Debs Branch's fears are indeed groundless. After a short period of functioning together, it is our opinion that none of the members in either Branch would continue to act in an organized factional manner, but would endeavor to put forward propositions in an objective way. But from an organizational (factional) standpoint the Debs Branch members would have an unquestioned majority of 8 to 5 in both branches. The members of the former Trotsky Branch would have no choice but to accept the decisions of the majority of the Branch. While this is irritating to any minority, nevertheless, through the newly created branches would be offered the opportunity in life, to test whatever plans or positions or proposals are put forward. The Trotsky Branch members are willing, in the Party interests to subordinate their separate organizational existence, and presumably have confidence in their political beliefs and program of action to risk collaboration and majority control by the former Debs Branch adherents. What is surprising and incomprehensible is the fear of the Debs Branch members to go through experiences and an experiment which would most fruitfully resolve the Akron internal situation. For our part, we are confident that the new set-up is the best basis today for the necessary elimination of old factional lines and practices. We cannot accept the assumption of the Debs Branch that, since there have been differences of importance, in their opinion, there will always be differences that make it necessary to continue on an independent factional basis. The Debs Branch should take cognizance of the healthy attitude of the Trotsky Branch, which places the interests of the Party first in this situation - and not personal or factional considerations.

We repeat, the Plenum is convinced that there is no basis whatsoever for the continuation of the present two branches. If the Plenum were to permit the continuation of the status quo, and approve the demand of the Debs Branch, it could only lead to further in-grown existence, a very narrow political and organizational life, to clique "activity". This would be the tendency in

both branches, no matter whether there was a desire to prevent this development or otherwise. Such a development is ingrained in the nature of the situation, and particularly so with the Debs Branch, which wishes to continue its separate branch existence as a faction without a program. All the activities which might be carried on will come to naught under such conditions.

It is time for all members who profess adherence to the program of our Party, to view matters with sounder perspective, either in the immediate or historical sense. A major reason which makes it mandatory for the Plenum to insist on a new set-up and practice in Akron is the pre-war and war developments in this country. In pre-war and war conditions the greatest possible collaboration as well as political and organizational unity is required. The old situation cannot possibly be permitted to continue under these circumstances. A continued division of the Branches on the present basis is fraught with too many dangers for the organization itself, and for the individual members. To carry on work under developing war conditions demands unquestionably a working together which is not possible under the status quo.

We wish to point out further that on the basis of communications in recent weeks from the Debs Branch, the National Office sent a representative to Akron to attempt to resolve the Akron situation. Comrade Corbitt's letters made it clear that a resolution of the situation was both necessary and possible now. It was from Comrade Corbitt's Communications that we were first advised of the possibility and necessity of a reunification of our forces in Akron. The members of the Debs Branch themselves proposed fusion into one branch on one occasion, as well as later on offering variations, and finally reverting again for a continuation of the status quo. We felt that the Debs Branch was thinking seriously about our organization and movement when it wrote (letter from Guy Corbitt of Jan. 28th) to the National Office:

"The E.C. recommended reunification of the local Party, recognition of Party discipline in case of whatever decision by the P.C.
The main point was subordination of dissident policy on questions of local party problems to loyal adherence to Party nationally."

We welcomed that declaration with open arms. We still think that it is the attitude you and every comrade should take. Indeed, we take it for granted that it is the only attitude a loyal revolutionist can take toward his or her organization. Until now the National Organization has made all the concessions to the comrades of the Debs Branch. Now it is time for the National Organization to put its proposals or demands to the Debs Branch and call upon its members to act as "responsible, disciplined part of the Workers Party by carrying out the decisions of the Party. It is only way to act; any other practice or action will lead comrades away from the revolutionary movement."

The decision of the Plenum is as follows:

"The Plenum accepts the proposal of the representative of the National Office and the Political Committee to form two new Branches out of the existing two branches."

The Plenum further decided that the formation of the two new branches shall take place not later than April 10th and instructs the two branches to proceed to take all the necessary steps to effect this reorganization. The

actual division of the members into two new branches shall be carried out by agreement between the present two Branches.

We hope that the members of both branches will proceed forthwith to effect the reunification of the Party in Akron through the formation of the two new branches. We are confident that this will prove a great forward step toward the political and organizational reunification of our movement in Akron in a progressive manner and direction.

With comradely greetings,

National Committee
Workers Party

Harry Allen
Organization Secretary

April 5, 1941

REPLY OF DEBS BRANCH

Harry Allen,
National Org. Secy.
Workers Party

Dear Comrade,

At its last regular meeting (April 2) the Debs Branch held extended discussion on the general matters raised in your communication of March 28, and in particular on the recent N.C. decision to establish two "new" branches in Akron.

The branch voted unanimously for the following action, continued maintenance of the unit on its present basis.

It takes this step with full awareness of its significance. While recognizing that such a violation of discipline, under present circumstances, places in jeopardy our organizational status within the movement, we stand unanimously convinced of the following:

- a) the war crisis does not allow for "organic fusions", so called, based simply on hypocritical formalities;
- b) the war crisis demands the fullest exposure and eradication of deep-rooted weaknesses in our movement;
- c) the mandate of the National Committee is motivated from false premises to false conclusions;
- d) the next immediate period will completely vindicate the irregular procedure to which we have been forced counter to our will;
- e) and finally, that the interests of the party are only served by our adherence to our principles and non-compliance to your demand.

Fraternally,

Debs Branch,
Workers Party-Akron

April 28, 1941

Debs Branch
Guy Corbitt, Secretary
Box 602
Akron, Ohio

Dear Comrades;

The Political Committee received your letter of April 5th, refusing to comply with the decision of the National Plenum, as contained in the letter of the National Office of March 28th, in regard to the Internal situation in Akron. The Political Committee has withheld, until now, final action on your letter, because we desired to give the members of your branch a last opportunity to reconsider your decision and the consequences which unavoidably flow from your attitude and actions. Also, in view of the fact that Comrade Shactman, National Secretary, was scheduled to be in Akron a week later, on April 12th-14th, we hoped that you comrades would avail yourselves of the opportunity to have a discussion with the representative from the National Office, and thereafter to decide to abide by the decision of the Plenum to reorganize the Akron Branches into two new mixed branches. (Comrade Shactman has now reported on his visit to Akron, and it is necessary to add the following facts in regard to the attitude of the Debs Branch toward the Party.)

When comrade Allen was in Akron in early March, it was agreed by both Branches to cooperate fully in the arrangements of the public meeting in Akron for comrade Shactman on his National Tour. Despite repeated efforts on the part of the Trotsky Branch to get together with your Branch, in order to make joint arrangements for the public meeting, your Branch failed to meet even once with the members of the Trotsky Branch for the organization of this meeting on a city basis. Not once did you comrades show up to assist in making the most elementary arrangements. The Trotsky Branch delayed final arrangements for this meeting, until the last possible moment, in order to give you comrades the fullest opportunity to help arrange the Shactman meeting jointly. The Trotsky Branch finally proceeded itself, in the last days, to organize such a meeting.

However, you and the Trotsky Branch were to cooperate for a joint meeting of the two branches, where comrade Shactman could report on the Plenum proceedings, as well as on the Akron situation specifically. You comrades sabotaged such a joint meeting, refusing and failing to get together with the Trotsky Branch to make such arrangements, although the latter endeavored to do so. Hence there was no joint membership meeting.

In lieu of the failure of the joint membership meeting to materialize, you comrades were to arrange a Branch meeting of your own for comrade Shactman to address, but

you called off that meeting! Moreover, you comrades, as further evidence of your disloyal attitude towards the Party, failed even to get in touch with Comrade Shactman while he was in Akron, except for a telephone call to Comrade Shactman by one of you comrades, advising him that there would be no meeting of the Debs Branch, but that you would see him that evening (Sunday night) in Cleveland.

Finally, Comrade Shactman had an opportunity to meet with members of the Debs Branch in Cleveland, after the Cleveland public meeting on Sunday night was over. But then only with your "top" committee of four or five people.

The foregoing only adds further evidence to our letter of March 28th to your Branch, that you comrades have not, and are not acting in a serious manner whatsoever toward the Party, either locally or nationally. Comrade Shactman discussed with your few comrades who were on hand, for a few hours, but apparently without being able to convince you comrades to act as disciplined, loyal members of a revolutionary Party. One is given the impression of children playing in politics.

Your brief communication of April 5th, in reply to the lengthy National Committee letter of March 28th, which endeavored to reason with you comrades and to explain the validity of the proposal and decision of the Plenum, is hardly worthy of consideration. It is impossible for us any longer to permit the continuation of the present situation, since it can only contribute to disintegration of the movement in Akron. Your attitude is without the slightest basis, as we have more than amply showed, on either political or organizational grounds. Your approach to problems is fantastic, and can almost be described as follows: That if you do not like a comrade or group of comrades, you simply organize a separate branch, even if there are no principled, political or organizational differences.

The Party has tolerated too long already your unserious attitude and practices. Up till now, it has conceded to your demands, even though the Political Committee and the August Plenum were of the opinion that your views and proposition were wrong. But it yielded to your demand in the hope, proven vain, and the belief that every possibility must be exhausted to give you comrades an opportunity to remain and to function in the revolutionary movement. After several months of experimentation in accordance with your proposal, the March Plenum reviewed the Akron situation and decided unanimously for the reorganization of the Branches into two new mixed branches, convinced that this was the only way now open to try to integrate the local Akron movement, and to save you comrades for the Party and movement. Your decision, as contained in your letter of April 5th, together with your intolerable and inexcusable conduct since the Plenum, including the period of comrade Shactman's visit to Akron, shows that it is no longer possible for the Party to do anything else except to enforce the decision of the Plenum by organizational measures. Therefore, by authority of the Plenum, the Political Committee unanimously passed the following do-

cisions:

1. The members of the Debs Branch in Akron who fail to carry out the Plenum decision are immediately suspended from Party membership for one month.

2. Those comrades who formally signify their intention to abide by Party discipline shall be automatically reinstated into Party membership.

3. Those comrades who, at the expiration of one month, shall have failed to signify such intention, shall be automatically expelled from party membership, and, thereafter, shall have any application for readmission considered only as new applicants.

4. Meanwhile, the suspended comrades are formally deprived of any right or authority to speak for the Workers Party, or to represent it in any way, as well as of the right to receive bundle orders of the Party press or of the Youth press for sale or distribution.

Fraternally yours,

National Committee, Workers Party

Harry Allen,
Organization Secretary

(Comrade Macdonald requested publication of his letter to the Plenum before which he also appeared personally. The Plenum was under the impression that the discussion there disposed of matters to that point. However, in view of the request to publish the letter, immediately granted by the Committee, the reply of the Political Committee, in the name of the Plenum and with the latter's authorization, is also printed below--Ed.)

LETTER OF DWIGHT MACDONALD TO
THE PLENUM

Dear Comrades:

For some time, as is well known, there has been increasingly sharp conflict between the undersigned and your representatives, the Political Committee, on questions of both theory and organization. Up to now, I have hoped that these differences could be discussed in a rational and comradely way within the Party. Up to now, I have, therefore, continued to write for the Party press, to take part in Party activities, and to conduct myself generally as a loyal Party member (so far as my extreme ignorance of proper organizational procedure, as defined by the P.C., would permit).

It has now become clear to me, however, from recent actions of the P.C. which I shall later describe, that the P.C. has no intention of treating the disagreements between us as matters for discussion but rather as matters for organizational discipline. "I want to arouse the Party membership against the kind of conduct and attitude that Macdonald represents" writes Shachtman in the last Internal Bulletin. And he now characterizes an article I wrote last summer in PARTISAN REVIEW (under the illusion I was thereby furthering revolutionary resistance to the war) as "an attack on the principles and program of the party all along the line - not just a misunderstanding of them but an attack on them". Holding such views, Shachtman and the other members of the P.C. would be derelict in their duty to the Party if they did not take the sternest measures to immunize the party against the plague of 'Macdonaldism'. This task they can more easily perform in that they happen to be in control of the organizational apparatus of the party.

It is, accordingly, clear to me - what perhaps should have been clearer sooner - that the P.C. is resolved to continue at an accelerated pace its past policy: to use every occasion to envenom the dispute, to wave the bloody shirt of party patriotism, to seize every pretext for disciplinary action against me (without bothering with the formality of granting me a hearing first), to bar me from editorial responsibilities I am clearly competent to assume and to grant my theoretical views no reasonable space in the Party press. In a word, the P.C. is proceeding as though I were, at best, a factional opponent; at worst, a sort of fifth-columnist from the camp of the bourgeoisie.

The present line of the P.C. presents me with three alternatives; (1) to give up my present views; (2) to organize a factional struggle; (3) to get out of the party. The first alternative is out of the question for me, unless the P.C. is able to present more convincing arguments than it has so far; its recent actions, in fact, have greatly confirmed me in my views. The third alternative is not out of the question, but I do not want to adopt it, because I am in agreement with the political program of the party and because I think it would be a loss both to myself and to the party if I am forced to adopt it. The second course I do not favor for two reasons: (A) among my talents that of organizing and leading a factional struggle is not conspicuous; (b) last winter we all went through a long and exhausting factional struggle on the very same issues as would now be raised all over again. The party should at least be clear by now on the nature of these issues, without going through the whole business once more.

This document is an attempt to find a fourth alternative. It is a last appeal to the P.C. and it is an appeal to the coming plenum of the National Committee and to the membership of the party in general. I propose to present my case against the P.C., to indicate the general conclusions I draw from my own experiences, and to ask for certain minimum rectifications of past P.C. actions. I am quite willing to discuss the issues raised in this article as fully as necessary before and with the party membership. But I must state quite explicitly that if the party as a whole supports the kind of organizational procedure the present P.C. has adopted, I will feel obliged to leave the party. I am not and have never been in favor of the kind of party which the P.C. is rapidly making the Workers Party into. The resemblance to the kind of party regime we correctly rejected last year in the SWP (and, in lesser degree, to Stalinist practices) is too close for my comfort.

It is no secret that every since I first came into contact with the Trotskyist movement I have been critical of its organizational tradition, which has always seemd to me less democratic and more authoritarian than it should be. My first contribution to the Party press was a long letter, published in the NI for June, 1937 together with a similar letter from Victor Serge, taking issue with Trotsky's attempt to justify the action of the Bolsheviks in the Kronstadt affair. During last winter's factional fight, I adhered to the Minority because, mostly under the influence of Burnham, it seemd to be making a real fight for more democratic organizational methods. During this struggle I wrote no less than three documents - which the factional leaders did not see fit to publish - on various aspects of this question. I mention these facts to show that the "attitude" now so violently objected to by the P.C. is a matter of long record and not any "yielding to bourgeois pressure" as a result of the blitzkrieg.

Immediately after the split last Spring, I participated actively in editing the party press. I wrote, with Burnham, the editorial in the first issue of the NI and, with Johnson, the editorial in the second issue. I also did all the technical editorial work on those two issues. With Lund , I edited the first two issues of LABOR ACTION.

Then came two events (of somewhat unequal historical importance): the Nazi blitzkrieg of May-June, and the defection of Burnham from the party. Burnham's desertion - morally indefensible under the circum-

stances - threw a great scare into the other party leaders. Perhaps Trotsky had been right when he pointed to the 'inevitable' end of the road Burnham (and myself) followed. The blitzkrieg was also alarming partly because our political analysis of the war had left us as unprepared for the Nazi's overwhelming success as were the bourgeois politicians, partly because of the tremendous tide of pro-war sentiment that immediately swept over the country. The shock of those two events caused the party leadership to forget the lessons of the winter's faction fight and to scramble back to the firm ground of Bolshevik orthodoxy as rapidly as dignity would permit (and a bit more rapidly in some cases!) My own position became very difficult. Burnham's ideas on organization still seemed to me valid, and in addition the blitzkrieg had stimulated me to do some thinking and reading about the nature of fascism. I developed some conceptions which seem to have stood the test of time quite well, but which are admittedly "unorthodox". The intellectual atmosphere which began to develop last summer in the party (which I described in my "Fraternity" document on Johnson's extraordinary editorial in the N.I.) and which has been getting thicker ever since, was one designed to stifle any attempts at what Cannon used to call "independent thinking".

1. The Points at Issue

(1) My article, "National Defense: The Case for Socialism" in PARTISAN REVIEW, July-August, 1940.

There seems to be a general impression within the party that my main purpose in writing this was to deliver what Shachtman calls "an attack on the principles and program of the party all along the line". Ironically enough, I wrote it precisely in order to put forward publicly, among the leftwing intellectuals who read P.B., what I conceive to be the revolutionary program of the party: no support to either side in the war; the only way to defeat fascism, within and without, is a workingclass socialist revolution. It is true that the theoretical road by which I reached this program is different from that of the present P.C. (and, no doubt, of the party in general). But that the program advanced in P.R. differs from that advanced in the party press - this is simply not true.

It would have been much easier for me not to write the article. My colleagues on P.R. were not enthusiastic about the proposal. I wrote it, however, because I considered it to be my duty as a revolutionary not to remain silent in a magazine I help edit in the face of the pro-war hysteria which swept through the American intelligentsia after the Nazi blitzkrieg. In writing such an article, I was compelled, by any standards of integrity, to define my difference of theoretical interpretation with the orthodox Marxists. It is a fact, perhaps hard to believe, that when I wrote the article, I had no idea I was violating any party discipline. Since I put forward the party program -and, judging from the response to the article, at least as effectively as that program has been put forward anywhere else since last May - it seemed to me I was performing a meritorious act. Apparently the mistake I made was in believing that we we are trying to do in the Workers Party is to put forward a program of action. The Party's real function, so far as the P.C. is concerned, seems to be rather to defend a doctrine (I shall return to this point later.)

(2) Johnson's editorial in the August New International: my protest about the same; the reply, by Shachtman, of the P.C. to my protest.

In Internal Bulletin #5 I have already dealt with the underhanded attack Johnson made in the N.I. on my P.R. article and so will not recapitulate the matter here. I want here simply to point out the extraordinary way that Shachtman "answered" my complaint against Johnson's methods. I asked that some of this famous hard-Bolshevik discipline be applied to Johnson. Shachtman evaded either condemning or supporting Johnson - and then devoted the bulk of his "reply" to a violent denunciation of my own sins. As though a judge were to say to a man who complained that his watch had been stolen: "Maybe so. But the real point in this case is that you beat your wife." It is an elementary rule of orderly procedure in such matters that the tribunal of justice - which is what the P.C. was in this case - must proceed according to some objective rules, judging each case on its own merits, without considering the general 'attitude' of the parties involved. Let the P.C. take whatever action it thinks necessary against my P.R. article. But this should have been kept scrupulously separate from the question of the propriety or impropriety of Johnson's actions.

Shachtman, in handling the matter in the disorderly way he did, produced the absurd situation that if I had not protested to the P.C. about the NI editorial, I would not have been officially censured for my P.R. article. From another point of view, of course, his procedure was not absurd at all, but quite skillfully calculated to sidetrack any serious consideration or pronouncement on the issue I raised; whether the P.C. considers it good party practice for comrades to term each other "counter-revolutionary" in the party press on the basis of the kind of disagreements Johnson had with my remarks on the fall of Paris.

(3) The reorganization of the editorial board of the New International

When Shachtman went away on his tour last year, he delegated his editorial authority on the N.I. to four comrades: Gates, Johnson, Lebrun and myself.*

When Shachtman returned from his tour, he told me - and doubtless the others - that he was "taking over" the NI again. A few months later, I was surprised to note that a new editorial board appeared on the NI masthead: Shachtman, Gates and Johnson. Nothing had been said to me about this; I was given no opportunity either to protest my exclusion or to defend myself against whatever charges were responsible for it. Nor have I to date been able to find out why I was dropped. Shachtman evaded answering several direct questions, promising to write me a formal letter about it. The letter has not materialized.

* This was done in the sloppy, anarchistic way in which the leaders of the W.P. so often act. On the very day of his departure, Shachtman casually mentioned to the four above named comrades that he was turning the NI over to them. It was the first time any of them had know of this intention. There was no discussion of editorial policy. The magazine was simply dumped into our laps, and Shachtman added he hoped the next issue could be out in a week.

Since I think I may say without any lack of modesty that I am at least as well qualified, from the viewpoint of editorial and journalistic experience, to edit the NI as any of the present editors, I assume my exclusion is due to political considerations. It is extremely important, however, from the party's standpoint, that these considerations be made known, for what is here involved is a basic organizational principle: for what political reasons does the party think it wise to prevent members from contributing to the party press their technical talents? A basic question of party rights is also involved: does a member in good standing have the general right to the powers and responsibilities in the party which his abilities can handle? Or does he have to be not only a member in good standing but also one whose "attitude" is considered good by the P.C.? In a word, are there in the W.P., as there were in the SWP, "second-class citizens" ?

(4) My article on "the Economics of German Fascism"

On December 24th last, I gave to Shachtman, for publication in the New International, this manuscript. It was 90 pages long - about 30,000 words. I hoped all of it could be printed in the NI, but in any case, I wanted a reasonable amount of it printed there. On January 29th, I was informed that the P.C. had passed a new rule that in future discussion articles could not be more than four pages long in the N.I. My article could be granted that much space in the NI (about 4,000 words), and, as a special concession, 20,000 words in the Internal Bulletin.

I thought - and still think - this an unjust and unreasonable decision for the following reasons:

(a) In style and treatment, the article was designed for a wider audience than is reach by the Internal Bulletin, it is a broad historical analysis and factual survey which there can be no possible organizational reason for keeping within the confines of the Party. The subject treated is one of an importance warranting more than four pages in the NI.

(b) To print 20,000 words of it in the Internal Bulletin, - even if this issue were made available to the general public, as was proposed by the P.C. - would mean that very few readers would ever get through it all. It is hard enough to read even short articles in the Bulletin because of the mimeographed form, and 20,000 words would be sheer optical torture.

(c) The NI has already printed 19 pages devoted to the 'orthodox' viewpoint on German fascism - Johnson's 16 page article last July and the 3 page article by Robbins in the following issue (not to mention many pages on the theme by Johnson in other articles). An article by Sherman which was at least as competent as that by Robbins was submitted last fall and rejected. This seems to me an unjust division of space.

(d) My own views on the subject had been publicly criticized by Shachtman in an article in Labor Action. I had not requested any space to reply at the time because I assumed I would be granted reasonable space in the NI later on.

(e) It was known to the PC that I was working on this article. In fact, after the appearance of the P.R. article last summer, it was these comrades who were most insistent that I "put down on paper" my views so there could be a thorough discussion of them in the party

press. I think it is unjust to apply a blanket rule about four-page discussion articles to an article which was submitted before the rule was passed. And from the viewpoint of making use of the abilities of the party comrades, it was stupid to let me spend three months studying the subject and writing the article for the NI - and then propose to print one-sixth of it.

(f) The first excuse made was space: in only 16 pages, how can we give your article more than 4? (Though there were 16 pages for Johnson's superficial and hasty article on the subject; 11 pages for Shachtman's academic treatment of the Russian question (also a "discussion" article, by the way!) and almost 8 pages for his rehashing of the arguments against Cannon's war line he had already made in Labor Action.) The next NI, however, is to be 32 pages, and Shachtman has refused to use any of it for any more of my German piece.

(g) I understand that Gates is preparing an article taking issue with the fragment of my article which has appeared in the NI. What sort of conception of wither fair play or intelligence in discussion have people who organize a "discussion in which one side is prevented from even making known five-sixths of his argument?"

(5) The question of the "symposium" on fascism in the next PARTISAN REVIEW.

The remarks hercon by Shachtman for the PC and a brief statement of my own position appear in the current Internal Bulletin. I will not go over the issues again here. But since when I wrote my brief statement, I had not seen the material in the Bulletin (but had only been informed in a brief note about the action of the P.C.) I want to go into two important points raised in the P.C.'s documents:

(a) On the basis of this alleged misdemeanor of mine, the P.C. formally "reopens" the whole matter of my relations to the party and prints a superheated letter by Shachtman, written several months ago and doubtless held in reserve for such an occasion. I protest against the P.C. taking this drastic action without first getting my side of the story. This is the procedure one adopts with a factional opponent and not with a comrade. Its object is not to clear up any misunderstandings but to create more, not to arrive at a basis for agreement (or at least, understanding) but to score a point. And even a factional opponent could claim, as his right as a member of the party that before he is thus formally condemned by the P.C. he be first granted a hearing.* This is undemocratic and bureaucratic procedure.

(b) The P.C. complains that the party point of view on fascism is not presented in the so-called "symposium". But what is the "party point of view"? Is it simply that this is an imperialist war like the last one and that Germany is a capitalist state and economy? Then both Reinmann and Mattick represent the Party point of view.** Or is it more detailed than that? In that case, is it Shachtman's conceptions we are to take as representing the "party point of view", or Johnson's? For there has clearly developed a deep rift between these two members of the PC if the question of fascism be carried beyond the most general level. And even there, although both agree Germany is capitalist, they disagree sharply on their definition of capitalism. (and, what, pray,

* This is normal branch procedure, Why should P.C. procedure be less democratic?

** (see bottom of next page for footnote.)

is the "party point of view" on capitalism itself - Johnson's? Shachtman's? Mine? - and if there is such an official statement, where is it to be found?) The fact is that these matters cannot possibly be handled in the organizational way the P.C. is trying to handle them, that the problems raised by contemporary history are so complex and the evaluation of these problems already so different even in the P.C., that to apply disciplinary measures in a matter like the P.R. "symposium" without first a thorough discussion of the matters in the party, is both unjust and unintelligent.

2. Some General Conclusions - and Recommendations

From the above personal experiences, as well as from observation of the way the problems raised by the Sherman group were handled, I have reached certain conclusions. Let me indicate them briefly.

(1) Theory and Program.

It was a chief contention of the Minority during last winter's factional struggle that it was possible for a group to agree on a common political program of action even though its members held different theoretical conceptions. Concretely, Trotsky and the Majority insisted that the question of support or non-support of the Soviet Union in the Finnish war was directly dependent on the theoretical question of whether the Soviet Union is a workers' state or not. Thus, if one believed the Soviet Union to be a workers' state, one had to support it in the war; and vice versa. We replied, I think correctly, that the theoretical and the programmatic questions here were quite distinct; that one must condemn the Soviet rule in Finland regardless of one's opinion on the general class nature of the Soviet state. We insisted that people holding widely different views on the theoretical question could come to the same conclusions on the programmatic issue of support or non-support of the Red Army.

Yet when I follow precisely the same mode of reasoning in the case of the nature of German fascism, I am denounced as counter-revolutionary and I am told by Shachtman that I am leading an attack on the "program and principles of the party". Why? Why am I not told that I cannot logically follow the party's program on the war, that I must support one side or the other if I insist that in Germany you have not a capitalist but a new kind of economy and social structure? Why was it possible for people who thought Russia was not a workers' state and people who thought that it was, to agree on a common political program in relation to the Soviet-Finnish war, while it is allegedly impossible for those who think Germany is capitalist and those who think it is not capitalist to agree on a common political program in relation to the second world war? The line the P.C. has taken recently is one which can only be justified by the general approach to these matters which Cannon-Trotsky had last winter; that there is a direct, one-to-one correlation between theory and program - so that it is not enough to agree on a political program of action, but this agreement means nothing (is either disingenuous or muddleheaded) unless there is also agreement on matters of general theory like the dialectic or the class nature of the Soviet Union.

There is, of course, a connection between theory and program, but it is not the immediate, one-to-one sort envisaged by Cannon-Trotsky (or our own P.C.) It is true that in the long run some one who believes the USSR is a workers' state will be more anxious to defend it than some one who does not, that in the long run certain tactical and programmatic differences will probably develop between revolutionaries who believe German fascism is non-capitalist and those who continue to insist that it is capitalist. But, just as the theoretical differences about Russia did not prevent a common program on the specific war in question, so the theoretical differences on Germany do not now prevent a common program on the war abroad. Later on, it is possible and even probable that such programmatic differences may develop, but for the moment the differences exist only in the field of theory, not of action.

This distinction between theory and program is all-important, especially today. Shachtman seems to have become as incapable of making it as Cannon is. At least, I cannot otherwise understand his charging that my P.R. article was an attack on the program of the party.

(2) Should party discipline be extended to matters of theory?

In all matters involving political action - Do we support either side in the war? What is our attitude to conscription? Are we in favor of the formation of a labor party today? - I agree it is necessary and desirable to have party discipline, that is, to require that members stick to the party line in public unless specifically otherwise provided for. But in matters of general theory, I think such discipline is not practical, not necessary, and, above all, not desirable.

Not practical because, once such questions are taken beyond the most elementary level, it becomes impossible to decide which individual theorist expresses the "official" line and which is a "deviationist" I have already indicated this difficulty in the matter of the party "line" on fascism. The Stalinists and the Cannonites, of course, solve the problem by reducing theoretical discussion to the level of monotonous repetition of orthodox platitudes. Even they have trouble in dealing with the more abstruse matters, such as the dialectic. (By the way, has the Workers Party a "line" on the dialectic?)

Not necessary, because, while the expression of conflicting views in matters of action would be confusing to those who listen to the party, such disagreement in theoretical matters need not at all interfere with unity of action. I quite agree with the excellent points made by "Vox" in his article in the last Internal Bulletin, on this and related matters.

Not desirable, above all, because (1) people outside the party will be much more interested in a party press which freely discusses such matters; (2) far from such thinking being regarded as a necessary evil to be tolerated (and kept down to the minimum possible space under the apologetic heading "discussion Article") it should be greatly encouraged, as the only way we can keep our theoretical weapons up to date and ready for use; (3) the tradition of a party "line" on matters of general theory is one which is always used unfairly by those who

happen to be in control of the party apparatus, the criteria for "orthodoxy" being so necessarily vague as to make it easy for the in-group to brand dissenters as heretics and even - as in the case of the P.R. "Symposium" noted above - to take quite unjustified organizational measures against them.

(3) The Second-Class Citizen

During last winter's factional struggle, Cannon's line of attack against the Minority, especially Burnham, was that we were "bad" comrades, that our political outlook was determined by our petty-bourgeois origin and that we were looking around for a way to yield to the war pressure and desert the revolutionary movement. Hence he logically enough proposed to treat us as "second-class citizens". Now as it turned out, Burnham did desert the movement. Do the present leaders of the party think that means that Cannon was right? If so, then I can understand the way they have been imitating Cannon's methods of late. But if not, if they still believe what they said last winter, then they are behaving very queerly. For they seem to have revived the category of second-class comrades and to have placed there in all who criticise their organizational methods.*

I can see how, in matters involving carrying out of assignments and practical activity, some comrades can be considered better than others and hence given more responsibility. But I cannot see how, in matters of theory and of general 'attitude', there can be 'good' and 'bad' comrades. For specific failures to carry out tasks, or specific breaches of party discipline, there must be specific punishments - censure, suspension, expulsion, etc. But these punishments must be the end of it. As long as a comrade accepts the political line of the party - as I do - and is willing to work for it - as I am - he must be given whatever responsibilities he can carry out. If such vague criteria as 'attitude' ("So-and-so won't be in the party much longer...") and 'reliability' are used, then the group in control of the party apparatus can obviously interpret these vague terms to suit themselves and can render it impossible - as with the case with Sherman and his friends and as is rapidly becoming the case with me - for the second-class citizen to function within the party.

(4) The choice now before the party

The basic issue involved here is how to deal organizationally with the existence of theoretical disagreements within the party. There

*It is an interesting point that it is primarily the organizational rather than theoretical heterodoxy which makes a second-class citizen. Thus Johnson, most intemperate in his onslaughts on dissenters, is now in the comic position of having himself developed some theories which, from the viewpoint of orthodox Marxism, are not at all kosher. Yet, although this should logically cause him to be dropped from the editorial board of the NI just as I was dropped, this doesn't seem to have happened. In fact, unless my eye for style deceives me, he wrote the editorial in the last issue. Of course, the difference is that Johnson accompanies his theoretical peccadilloes with the most ardent expressions of fidelity to Bolshevism.

is now a choice before the party. It can follow the present policies of the P.C., which are the traditional organizational methods we rejected in the SWP last year; or it can reject these methods and call the PC to order.

The policy of the PC is to make crude and demagogic correlations of the theory and program, and on the basis of this false identification to take organizational measures against dissident theorists. (Comrade X holds to this theory; whether he realizes it or not, his theory leads to social patriotism; X must therefore be regarded with suspicion, the comrades must be warned against him, his theories must not be discussed but exposed, X himself must be assited in every way either to see the logic of his theory - i.e., to get out of the party - or to see its falsity.) This approach, besides being unjust to comrade X (and this injustice, if we had state power, might be somewhat serious for X), also damages the functioning of the party. Shachtman and Johnson talk big about a party of action and express unbounded contempt for a 'debating society' like the SP. This, in fact, is their chief motivation for the 'ideological firmness' with which they try to repress any unorthodox thinking. Yet the actual effect of this attitude is that the PC spends vast amounts of time and energies conducting these doctrinal witch hunts, that comrades like myself who can make a contribution to the movement are driven into inactivity and the energies of the membership in general are dissipated in theological discussions not as to the proper course of action, but as to how 'orthodox' this or that comrade's ideas are.

The recently concluded Sherman episode should be a warning to the party. I was not a member of the Sherman 'faction' and I had no part in writing its statement. Nor can I at all approve of the method they used in their struggle: issuing an ostensible factional document, thus implying they were launching a fight within the party either to educate it or to take over control, when they had already definitely decided to enter the SP. (As I told Sherman, it seemed to me he used the kind of methods he objected to in the Trotskyist movement, and with even less justification, since his group based its whole political rationale precisely on a rejection of such methods.) But all this does not alter the fact that the fifteen or twenty youth comrades who left the movement with Sherman to enter the SP did so because they honestly saw no other way to continue a struggle for socialist revolutionary aims. The loss of so relatively large a group of comrades cannot be lightly passed off. The regime in the youth, from all I can gather, is even worse than it is in the party - that is, more repressive of any theoretical disagreement. The questions raised by Sherman in the summer, - and I hardly need to state that I was in agreement with him on most of them - were sharpened and envenomed to such a point by the youth leadership that Sherman and his group actually came to the conclusion that they could fight better for our common aims inside the SP. We should ask ourselves most seriously how this could have come about.

Nor should it be assumed that the Sherman incident is the end of such episodes. The present approach of the PC to theoretical disagreements is the traditional one, that is to say, an organizational approach which produces endless factional struggles and splits. Disagreement is treated not as normal and desirable in a living party, but as the source of weakness and confusion, as a cancerous growth that must be

cut out. Points raised by those who question what the in-group (the PC) thinks is orthodox Marxism are not discussed in a rational, friendly way, but are rather denounced. This approach means that every theoretical disagreement quickly takes on an organizational character so that, to each side, it seems to be a matter of the very political life and death of the party that his view should conquer. Such is the future perspective of this party unless a radical change is made. Yesterday it was Sherman, today it is Macdonald, tomorrow it may very well be Johnson.

For the good of the movement, therefore, I propose the following changes in method and action:

- (1) The Workers Party should be conceived of as a group which exists to work for a common program of political action, rather than as a group organized to defend some theoretical doctrine. The only requirement for membership, therefore, should be acceptance of the party's program of action, regardless of acceptance of either "Marxism" or "Bolshevism". (I put the words in quotes because there is at present, even among those who consider themselves orthodox in such matters, little agreement as to just what is meant by these terms.)
- (2) Likewise, the criterion by which the membership (in the case of elective posts) and the PC (in the case of appointive posts) determine how much power and responsibility a comrade shall be entrusted with should be, not his or her alleged "orthodoxy" or "non-orthodoxy" in relation to some body of doctrine, but rather his or her energy, ability and devotion in carrying out the party's political program.
- (3) A clear line should be drawn between disagreements within the party on program and disagreements on theory. In respect to the former, members should be subject to the present disciplinary controls by the party. There should be no party control over theoretical matters.
- (4) Concretely, this distinction would mean that the party press would be open to articles expressing all theoretical tendencies, the decision as to whether any particular article should be printed or not resting on the judgment of the editors of its merits. It would also mean that when Shachtman analyses German fascism in a lecture and the floor is thrown open for discussion, comrades (like Sherman and Macdonald on one recent occasion) who took the floor to disagree would be considered to have further illuminated the subject instead of to have struck a blow at the party. And that the comrades who took part in the Marxist School in future would be able to discuss freely the theoretical problems raised in the courses, instead of being bound by "party discipline" to keep silent on any controversial matters. (I was really dumfounded to learn, from Vox's article, that in the last sessions of the School - which exists presumably to clarify such questions of theory - no theoretical discussion was permitted.) Most of all the change I propose would affect the New International. At present, there is a four-page limitation on "discussion" articles, and also a limitation of eight pages in any single 32 page issue to be devoted to such articles. The effect of the proposed change would be to make the NI largely into what would now be termed a "discussion organ". This I would consider all to the good, since, if, as is the case, most of the party's theoreticians are developing conceptions

which do not fit into the "line", it will merely cramp the theoretical education of the party to limit such articles to one-quarter of the magazine. The notoriously low level of the NI since the split - little if any better than the Fourth International - is due largely to the absence of such discussion in its pages.

5. Some Modest Proposals

There is no agreement between myself and the PC on these questions. Probably most of the party at present would agree with the PC's general approach rather than with mine. I don't expect this document by itself to work any sudden and miraculous conversion. These matters must be fully discussed in the party. I am quite willing to take part in such a discussion. But the methods used by the PC in carrying out its general orientation - as against the orientation itself - are such as to make it impossible for the discussion to be fruitful. More important, they seem to me to be the methods not of a revolutionary socialist party, but of a bureaucratic apparatus tending towards Stalinism.

I do not want to leave the party. I agree with its present political program, and I think I have talents and energies which can be used to further such a program. But I am not in favor of the kind of party Shechtman and the present PC are rapidly creating. I would like to ask, therefore, for some expression of opinion from the National Committee, and from the membership as a whole (in the form of branch resolutions or individual protests) on their reaction to the specific issues between myself and the P.C. Regardless of agreement with my views in general, for example, do they approve of the actions of the PC detailed above? Do they think it is the right, for example, of any member of the party to be given an opportunity to present any defense he may have, before the PC takes action against him for alleged breaches of discipline? Is it, for example, a right of a comrade who has worked, with the full knowledge of the party leadership and even with their encouragement, for several months on a long theoretical study - is it his right to have a reasonable amount of this study printed in the NI, assuming no serious objections are raised to its quality? Is it, for example, the right of a member of this organization to participate in the editing of the party organs to the extent of his abilities, regardless of his disagreements on theoretical matters with the PC? Is it, for example, generally considered good party practice for one member to use the kind of methods (polemical attack, without mentioning the victim's name, in an editorial in the party press) and language ("counter-revolutionary", "petty bourgeois", etc.) comrade Johnson used against me last summer in the NI?

If the National Committee and the party membership agree with me at least on these specific issues, they will support me in insisting that the PC make the following rectifications of its past actions:

- (1) State its unambiguous language its condemnation of the method and language of Johnson's attack in the August NI on my PR articles.
- (2) Restore me to the editorial board of the New International.

(3) Provide for the publication in the earliest practicable issue of the NI of at least 8 printed pages more of my article, "The Economics of German Fascism".

If these rectifications are made by the PC? as the result of pressure from the National Committee and from the party membership, I will conclude that it will be possible to have a fruitful discussion in the party of the more general issues raised in Section 2 of this document. And above all, it will be possible to hope that there is some possibility of arresting the present rapid degeneration of the Workers Party into the kind of undesirable bureaucratic-conservative regime we rejected last year in the Socialist Workers Party.

Smachtman, in his Debate with Sherman, stated that he worried much more about how to take power than about what might happen afterward. For myself, with the spectacle of the Stalinist degeneration in Russia before my eyes (and, closer to home, of the Trotsky-Cannon methods in last year's factional struggle), I am extremely concerned about "what may happen afterwards". I hope the party membership shares this concern.

Dwight Macdonald

New York City
March 22, 1941

STATEMENT OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE, ON BEHALF
OF THE PLENUM, IN REPLY TO DWIGHT MACDONALD

THE PLENUM REJECTS COMRADE MACDONALD'S ULTIMATUM

Comrade Macdonald has presented the Party with an ultimatum. Either put me on the editorial board of The New International, condemn Johnson, publish eight more pages of my article...or else. The very fact that Macdonald is capable of present the Party with an ultimatum, demanding rectification of several personal grievances, else he will be compelled to take unstated action, indicates the differences between Macdonald and the Party. These differences are not episodic or trivial. They relate to the fundamental question of the kind of Party we want to build.

Macdonald writes his document, so he says, merely to rectify those injuries which he fancies he has suffered. But the document itself is answer to his complaint, for in that document he states his views as to the nature of the Party, its relation to Marxian theory, etc.. Given other circumstances, the question as to whether Macdonald should or should not be on the editorial board could be disposed of easily and simply. In these circumstances, they cannot be divorced, as even Macdonald realized by writing the document as he did, from his general opinions of the Party as they conflict with ours.

The Workers Party aims at being a democratically-centralized Party of action, with rigid individual and collective responsibility, a Bolshevik organization aggressively defending, extending and applying the ideas of Marxism. Macdonald, on the other hand, states, "I am not and have never been in favor of the kind of Party which the P.C. is rapidly making the Workers Party into. "Bolshevism" and "Marxism" he places in quotes "Because there is at present, even among those who consider themselves orthodox on such matters, little agreement as to what is meant by these terms". Whatever may be the opinion of others as to what these are, Macdonald's is clear and decided: the Marxian conception of the Party is wrong; judgement on virtually all other phases of Marxism and Bolshevism is to be suspended, pending critical analysis and rejection -- during which time they are no longer to constitute the political frame-work of the Party. Macdonald adds: "Of the questions raised by Sherman in the summer -- I need hardly state that I was in agreement with most of them..." Sherman not only rejects Bolshevism and Marxism pending critical revision, but considers Marxism and Bolshevism as enemies of the movement. Whether Macdonald, agreeing with Sherman on "most of them", is of the same opinion is not momentarily clear.

Because Macdonald fails to understand the relation of theory to revolutionary practice, he demands complete freedom of action. So long as there is agreement on what he calls the "program" -- there must be no control on theoretical matters. At home and abroad he wants the right to denounce Marxism (since 1917) and Bolshevism. He hopes for a loosely constructed party which is actually a series of united fronts based on a "program of action" at any given moment, and whose constituent elements are not united by acceptance of and adherence to the fundamental principles of Marxism and Bolshevism: in fact, they cannot be, he explains, because nobody knows what these are -- or, in his own words -- there is "little agreement as to what is meant by these terms".

Macdonald presumably writes his document with the intention, in part, of upholding the dignity of theory. In actuality, however, by pruning the theoretical structure of the Party from its practical application, and by assigning to the theory of the movement a mere "debative" importance, Macdonald betrays a careless, dilletantish and even cynical attitude towards the very theoretical questions which he wants so much to discuss. Our movement is based precisely on Marxian theory -- the nature of capitalist society, the role of the working class, the proletarian revolution, and so forth - without which we would have no reason to exist as a Party, and without which we could not draw up what Macdonald refers to as the "program of action". Macdonald, deeply concerned with theoretical questions, wants a "theoryless" movement in which everything goes and nothing matters ... except the "program of action" which is drawn out of the air.

This, and his specific views, so far as they are known, on the principles of the movement are the major sources of conflict with Macdonald. These fundamental differences explain it, and not malice or personal grievance on one side, nor bureaucratism on the other. What further accentuates the manifestation of these differences is that Macdonald simply does not understand our conception, whereas we understand his only too well. As an "independent thinker" he is only too heavily dependent on those who have gone before him -- and by "gone" we mean just that.

THE PARTY AND ITS PROGRAM

We have always wanted, and do so now, to make of Macdonald a completely integrated comrade in the Party. We want not a "united front", but his complete integration in the responsibilities and privileges of the Party. So far, Macdonald has exercised more of the latter than the former. Conceiving his relation to the Party as that of one "organization" to another in a united front based on a "program of action", Macdonald properly reserves for himself the right not to sign a "non-aggression pact" with the Party. In a "proper" united front, each organization maintains and reserves the right to criticize publicly the other member or members on matters of theoretical or political disagreement; and, as is known, it is not always necessary to consult the other party as to time, manner, or place of public criticism or separation. Hence Macdonald's behavior; hence our conflicts.

Macdonald has misunderstood our fight with the Cannonites. Does he imagine it meant a more "liberal" attitude towards Marxian principles? For Burnham, perhaps; for us, no. What he now writes about the fight, shows that he is still confused. He thinks he is acting now as we did then. By no means! Cannon and Trotsky told the Party in effect: You cannot discuss the concrete questions of war policy without discussing the class nature of the Soviet Union. We replied: You can. But we added: We are not raising the fundamental question of the nature of the Soviet Union. We are not proposing to change the Party line on that question. We want to leave that for a scientific discussion -- one which we hope the Party will soon have. That discussion is important and necessary because the Party as a Party, must have a position on the class nature of the Soviet Union. But it is not a part of the particular discussion we are now holding.

Macdonald turns this procedure upside down in the course he has adopted. He takes our fundamental principles (and the nature of the Party is one of the most important)--makes fun of them, distorts them, rejects them cavalierly and calls upon his audience (in public as well as private) to do likewise. Nobody knows what "Marxism" or "Bolshevism" is; whatever is meant by them, his readers and listeners should be skeptical. But these "unknown" principles constitute the basis of the Party. No matter, "I put forward the Party program". That takes care of his united front obligations. But, we have an altogether different conception of what constitutes the program of a revolutionary Marxian Party. And in this program of ours are included precisely those instruments (principles) which are indispensable for analyzing such questions as the nature of fascism, and the class nature of the Soviet Union. That is why we are now engaged in discussion the latter question: so that our program may be clear on this theoretical point, so that our politics and practice may follow suit.

That program is reflected in the political resolutions of the Party and in the great literature of Marxism. It is sometimes necessary to reconsider and change political and theoretical opinions. We do this not in "liberal" skepticism, but in serious minded discussion - well organized, well thought out. Sometimes we reject a previously held belief; sometimes we amplify it, or give it a new interpretation. This we do within the framework of Marxian theory, and with a view to achieving the maximum clarity in our theory and our program. Once changed, the new theoretical or political line further clarifies our program. On the basis of this fundamental program we devise a practical program for participation in the daily class struggle.

Macdonald seems to think that he is making a devastating criticism of our Party by asserting that nobody knows what the theories and principles not only of Marxism, but of Bolshevism are. There is here a very elementary misconception of both thought and organization. When and where was the revolutionary organization, or any organization for that matter, which did not periodically discuss the validity or the proper interpretation of its principles in not only a specific, but also in their general application. The history of the Bolshevik Party is, from one point of view, nothing more than a record of precisely such discussions. Within the Second International, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin had serious divisions on the character of capitalist accumulation, on the role of the party, on self-determination, etc.. But despite these differences, they both would have repudiated any member of the Second International who attempted to teach scepticism about the principles of Marxism "because nobody knew what they were". What would be the correct Bolshevik procedure in any particular period, in Russia, the Trade Union Question, N.E.P., etc., gave rise to sharp and often acrimonious disputes in the Bolshevik Party. In such discussions, principled questions would naturally be raised. But to think that because of the discussion of principles, no principles existed which anybody knew, is a perverse absurdity. The discussion could take place precisely because there was a body of principles, of doctrine, of theory, which formed the basis of the Party.

Bolshevik discussion also take place in a certain manner. We discuss our doctrines or certain of them which need clarification or, if necessary, alteration. The Party is carrying on such a discussion now on one field, and as is necessary with a subject of such importance, in an orderly, systematic, organized manner; in other words, according to the principles of Bolshevism. The coming convention will arrive at a position which will then be the position of the Party. Historical circumstances may later compel a reconsideration, the impulse for which can come either from the membership or the F.C. Party members are expected to conform in public to the position of the Party. This applies to all members without exception. We have stated that for general theoretical discussions our discussion organs are always open. Recently the F.C. passed a motion recommending the institution of a purely theoretical discussion journal, in which the members could raise any theoretical question with the utmost freedom. What more does Macdonald want? There are principles which he misses no opportunity of sneering at, and flouts in practice. These presumably are, in his opinion, the principles which lead to the degeneration of a revolutionary Party, or, more concretely, which led Bolshevism to Stalinism. The Party will struggle with Macdonald, to teach him to see the error of his conceptions; but, as he was informed at the Plenum, the Party as a whole is convinced that it is only along Marxist lines that the victorious Party of the proletariat will be built. Macdonald must understand this and conform to procedure so long as such procedure is endorsed by a majority of the membership.

Macdonald cannot claim, any more than Sherman could, that he was "tricked" in any way. On the eve of the split, we had it out with Burnham in Macdonald's presence, when we were writing the Resolution on the Aims, Tasks and Structure of the Workers Party. Macdonald says he agreed with Burnham. That for him is unfortunate. But we are not saying anything different now than we said to Burnham then. The latter's views were rejected unanimously by our steering committee. We wrote our Marxian and Bolshevik "orthodoxy" into that Political Resolution; there was no need for us to "retreat" as Macdonald now says to an "orthodoxy" which we never abandoned or intended to abandon.

HOW WE COME INTO CONFLICT

Now Macdonald disagrees with the principles of Marxism, that is, the Party program, in our conception of this program. We are not referring to certain "abstract" questions of theory and philosophy (e.g. dialectics, the controversy over the accumulation of capital) which do not have a direct bearing on our program except in the most general and distant way. Macdonald disagrees with us on fascism, on the nature of the Party, etc.. He is free, in fact he is obliged, to present his differences to the Party -- to formulate a platform, to state his opinions, present resolutions for consideration and vote in the manner provided for by Party statutes. Does Macdonald do this? No. Without even notifying the Party that he intends to write an article in a non-party publication, he suddenly springs into the public, in "his own" periodical, with his

own views. His "intellectual integrity" compels him, you see, to state where he disagrees with the "orthodox Marxists". He doesn't mince words, for his is in a united front and hasn't signed a non-aggression pact. Besides, that united Front does not and cannot have an opinion on fascism. It hasn't been discussed, and everybody save he is confused, he argues, hence it cannot be part of the program. Macdonald errs, and errs seriously. Our movement does not begin with the split in 1940. Months and years were spent discussing the nature of fascism, and the fruits of this discussion are in the writings of Trotsky, the documents of our international conferences -- and in two political resolutions adopted at plenums of the "new" Party.

If Macdonald rose in the Party to say that he considered its program inadequate and proposed the following specific changes, no one would have any complaint. Provision would be made to discuss his views. In fact that is exactly what the Party has done -- both in membership discussions and in The New International. But Macdonald goes further. Sailing at high journalistic speed, he publicly dumps overboard the Party's position on fascism, informs the world that it is the duty of the "radical intellectuals" (who simply stink with skepticism already) to be skeptical of the ideas of Marxism.

We learn that it is not our task to "defend a doctrine" or to "defend instruments". In Marxian language, this means that while he defends his anti-Marxian prejudices we must not, as a Party, defend our tested principles and ideas--that is to say, our main instruments and weapons--for Macdonald proposes that we write these off the books of the Party. Our ideas are our swords. Macdonald tells us to put them in the scabbard "for the duration" while we debate the quality of the blade. In the meantime we will fight with our theoryless "Program of action".

We also learn that he disagrees with "both Trotskyist groups" -- yes, including the one in the united front. And all this he sums up in his statement to the Plenum in these words: "It seemed to me I was performing a meritorious act". In treating these ideas the way he does, in performing such "meritorious acts", as a member of the Party, Macdonald discredits himself as a Party member, and thereby the whole Party.

How far Macdonald is from our conception is proved by his attack on the Party position on fascism at a public educational lecture by Shachtman. How could he permit himself this luxury? Because he is a second class citizen, as he laments? No. Because he is, or wants to be recognized, as a privileged aristocrat in the Party who can do as he pleases, and when and where he pleases. He takes every occasion he considers valid to state his independence from the Party and its program. Then he makes a few bad jokes about it -- asking just what is the position of the Party. Is it this comrade's or is it another comrade's? Macdonald knows or ought to know. But "bureaucratic" as the Party is it gave, and has repeatedly given, Macdonald the benefit of the doubt: perhaps he doesn't know what Party procedure is; we will merely call it to his attention. Yet, when the Party informs him of its procedure and his obligations under that procedure which has been democratically decided, for better or worse, by the Party membership in convention assembled -- when the

Party does this, Macdonald replies indignantly that he does not agree with the nature of the Party. Does he go to the Party, present a resolution for adoption at the next national convention? No. Macdonald disagrees. Macdonald, therefore, acts.

He asks for, and is granted, adequate space in our theoretical organ. But that is not enough for Macdonald. He writes his article in Partisan Review; he speaks out of turn at the public lecture; he organizes a symposium in his own organ and excludes from it the Party with which he disagrees; and ends with the demand that his right to continue along this line be recognized formally by the Party as proper procedure! In order to complete the confusion, he asks that he be allowed to act as he does on theoretical questions--because these theoretical questions are withdrawn from the Party program. And this, the high road to theoretical (and therefore organizational) degeneration, Macdonald proposes as the road to save Bolshevism, or whatever he thinks the Party is, from degeneration.

It is now time for Macdonald to realize what our conception of the Party is. Also, that the P.C. intends, with the cooperation of the membership, and doing all it can to keep and make use of each comrade's talents, to lead the Party in accordance with its declared principles.

THE DISCUSSION ARTICLES

Macdonald is not protesting against "second class citizenship". He is protesting against our refusal to grant him extraordinary privileges. Nobody ever told him we would print a 50,000 word article in The New International. That is entirely untrue, and fantastic. We said we would print his views as discussion material. But he is impatient. He has discovered a new world, and nothing else is of importance. Other comrades may have to suffer alone within the limits provided by the Party, but not he.

What is the situation with regard to The New International? The New International was at the time a 16 page magazine; today it is a 32 pager. The New International is the Party's theoretical organ. That is, its function is to present the theory and the program of the Party as it relates to various questions. Because the Party considers discussion of its theories and of its program a vital necessity so that they will always be up to date, and able to withstand the test of events, it sets aside a certain percentage of its theoretical magazine for that purpose. Whether that is four pages, or six pages or eight is a technical problem. What is important is that the character of the magazine be predominantly an exposition of the Party's program; that it be a 100% Party organ. Overly long discussion articles make this impossible. More than that, however, long articles on any subject make impossible a balanced and interesting issue which takes up a host and variety of interesting questions. The P.C. therefore decided to limit discussion to eight pages, and to limit all articles, of any kind, to four pages - except by request to, and permission of, the P.C.

Macdonald wants all of his article published; then graciously reduces his demand to 12 pages. But, in the first place, there are other subjects under discussion; and in the second place there are other comrades who want their modest discussion articles printed - and they take their own contributions as seriously as does Macdonald.

In the course of time, as space and other discussions permit, Macdonald can have all the space he wants. What are we to do with these other comrades? That isn't Macdonald's concern. Change the character of the magazine, or keep other contributions out - so long as his world-shaking document is published. Indeed, he spent no less than three months studying! But what about all those others who have spent years in studying various questions (yes, comrade Macdonald, there are comrades who have spent years, not months, studying revolutionary theory and social development.) Are they to be excluded because Macdonald considers their work to be a "rehash" or "academic" or "superficial and hasty"? Democracy, however, is based on the rights of all members, even the "rehashers" - and not on the privileges of an individual. Macdonald has had space in The New International; he has been allotted 20,000 words in the Internal Bulletin (not to speak of his own private space in Partisan Review). These, he complains, are insufficient; he must have special privileges. But the Party cannot let itself be intimidated or swayed by this anarchistic and ultimatic nonsense!

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

Macdonald was put on a provisional editorial board of The New International during Shachtman's absence on the first national tour. (He writes that Shachtman "delegated his editorial authority on The New International to four comrades"; does he think that we act like the board of Partisan Review, or didn't he ever hear of a P.O.?). When Shachtman returned, the provisional board was dropped and later reconstituted. Macdonald was not included on the new board, nor should he have been. He asks now: "for what political reasons does that Party think it wise to prevent members from contributing to the Party press their technical talents"? Non-membership on the board in no way prevents Macdonald from contributing his "technical" talents, from writing articles and having them published. But more than "technical" or even literary talents are required for membership on the editorial board of The New International. The New International proudly calls itself an organ of revolutionary Marxism. It is not primarily a discussion bulletin; it is not the organ of a united front of Marxists and non-Marxists. Its primary purpose is the advocacy and defense of the principles of Marxism, those same principles which Macdonald treats with such contempt and about some of which, at least, he has the same opinions as Sherman.

Macdonald disqualifies himself from membership on the editorial board by his conception of the relation of theory to the Party, and also by his specific views as to the character of The New International. Consider the impossibility of it: Macdonald wants to exclude the theory of the Party from its program; yet he wants to be an editor of the theoretical organ of the Party. Macdonald disagrees with the principles and program of the Party; yet he wants to be an editor of an organ which must present these principles. Macdonald believes that The New International should be a discussion organ published by the Party, rather than a 100% Party organ; yet he wants to be an editor of this Party organ.

Further, the main qualifications of membership on the board of such a magazine are rigid loyalty to the Party and above all, the ability and willingness to advocate and defend its principles.

Macdonald's document (not to speak of his article in Partisan Review) makes it clear that Macdonald is not ready to do any such thing. He has the ability to write on a number of subjects; therefore he has been and is invited to contribute on these subjects. He is ready to attack the principles of Marxism; within certain limits he may even do that, but under the heading of discussion - precisely because the board and the Party do not take responsibility for his articles so published, but print them nevertheless because he has certain rights as a Party member.

That is why he is not on the board of The New International, and cannot be. He thinks he ought to be, and he can think so only because his view of what the Party should be, and what Marxism is, is not ours. As for our being "sloppy" and anarchistic--really, in view of Macdonald's own sloppy and thoroughly anarchistic manner, especially with relation to his article in Partisan Review and his editorial conduct of that magazine, his charge can only be labeled impudent.

ON JOHNSON

Macdonald demands a repudiation of Johnson's article. The P.C. has several times acted on this. Its answer is contained in full in a letter sent by Shachtman to a comrade and which appeared in Internal Bulletin #7. Briefly, the P.C. took the position, and the Plenum reiterated it, that Johnson, adequately or inadequately, took upon himself the responsibility of defending the Party from attack. Macdonald, who attacked the Party in a non-party publication? Dares ask condemnation of a comrade who rose to defend it. What a sense of values! As the Shachtman letter states: "Johnson wrote to defend the Party and its principles, whereas Macdonald wrote and writes, and in general conducts himself, as if there were no Party, or if there is one, that he owes no particular allegiance to it.

Macdonald goes further. He tries to identify himself with the "case" of Johnson. Is he joking or does he really believe we are dopes? We do not say to Macdonald (or Johnson): you must henceforth have a different opinion on fascism (or on Russia). We say to both of them (and to every other Party member): Conduct your discussions, present your views or criticisms in a certain way, in conformity with Party procedure. That is what Johnson does; Macdonald doesn't. Macdonald is, again, standing everything on its head. He writes: "The basic issue involved here is how to deal organizationally with the existence of theoretical disagreements within the party". Very well! We have theoretical disagreements with Macdonald. We invite him to present his views in a normal organizational manner. The P.C. provides him with an elaborate forum: articles in The New International, long articles in the Bulletin, special Branch discussions, debate before the New York membership. How does HE act when he has a theoretical disagreement? HE PROMPTLY TAKES ORGANIZATIONAL MEASURES! The minute he disagrees with the Party, he goes OUTSIDE its organizational ranks! He plunges into a public attack on us in a non-Party organ; he disassociates himself from the Party, etc., etc.. And he is so convinced that this is the way any normal person would act that he seems to take it for granted that Johnson will act exactly as he does, if not today, then tomorrow -- a dead misconception.

THE SYMPOSIUM AND PARTISAN REVIEW

The P.C. acknowledges that it erred in adopting and printing its statement on the Partisan Review symposium before a discussion with Macdonald. Having done so, it must add that it rejects Macdonald's explanation in toto. His political editorial participation in Partisan Review is, or should be, considered as his Party work, at least in part. He has never consulted the Party about this work! He conducts it independently - it is his own private sphere, and the united front has no control over it, nothing to say about it. He never informed the proper Party bodies about the plan for a symposium, so that the Party might make some suggestions about it (yes, it is possible that we might have been intelligent enough to make some!) He says it is not a symposium! He can only mean that it is a poor and unrepresentative symposium. To say that no one in the Party is equal to the scholarly task, or to say that Mattick or Reimann represent "orthodox Marxism" (hence the equivalent of the Party) is a miserable joke which would undoubtedly be appreciated by the editorial board of Partisan Review - but not by us. Macdonald does not even consider it important enough to comment on why he failed to consult the Party about the whole business. That is more revealing than everything else he says about the episode.

So far as his work on Partisan Review is concerned, the Party is not even a second class citizen; it has no citizenship rights at all. Up to now, the Party has leaned over backward in its reluctance to intervene in the work of a comrade engaged in editing a semi-cultural, semi-political periodical, primarily because it has no desire to exercise any "discipline" or advance any "line" in the cultural or esthetic field. We realize what harm has been done by such attempts in the past, especially by the Stalinists. But in view of Macdonald's course in Partisan Review and in view above all of the political degeneration of the periodical, whose CHIEF job in the present period should be, at least so far as politics is concerned, to tear the hid off the renegade and backsliding "radical intellectuals", the P.C. has decided to begin applying, in Macdonald's case, the rule already understood by every other Party member, that the political activity of all Party members, in any field, must be under the supervision and control of the Party. We are a little late, but we hope we shall not make the same mistake again.

WE SHALL NOT ACCEPT ANY ULTIMATUMS

Macdonald tells us that there is now a choice before the Party. In reality there is a choice before Macdonald, because the Party has made its choice, clearly and definitely, in the course of the year of its existence. Macdonald has not yet made his. We hope he will make it in line with taking his place in the Party. Macdonald speaks of "my extreme ignorance of proper organizational procedure, as defined by the P.C.". He is, we fear, no less ignorant of the temper of the Party and of the important development it has undergone in the past year - in the form of greater seriousness, more cohesiveness, less tolerance for diletantism, etc.. Comrade Macdonald presents the Party with an ultimatum - no less! It is interesting to note that upon reading the P.C. decision on the Partisan Review symposium, prior

to the Plenum, Macdonald simply broke off diplomatic relations with the Party and declared that until his demands were met he would no longer write or speak for the Party and would not "lend his name" to it. In witness whereof, he promptly held up completion of an article for the Current New International which he had been invited to write. (After the plenum, he resumed diplomatic relations with the Party, acknowledged his error, and did complete the article.) And what is the nature of Macdonald's ultimatum? He speaks a great deal about our terrible bureaucratic regime and the wonderful organizational line of the late Burnham and the equally late Sherman. And how does he propose to wipe out that regime and introduce a democratic one in its place? One expects some fundamental propositions, something startling. But we are doomed to disappointment. All three proposals he makes are concerned exclusively with his personal complaints. It would be utterly unbelievable if it were not there, black on white. Condemn Johnson, put Macdonald on The New International board, and give him another eight pages in the magazine - and the Party is once again on the road to salvation! Straighten out these three world-historical crimes, and there will be a substantial assurance that after we take power, we will not degenerate into Stalinism. And if not? If the Party does not tremble and bow to the ultimatum? Then Macdonald will leave the united front!

The Party has not the slightest intention of being treated to such ultimatums, much less of accepting them. Rather, it puts a choice squarely before Macdonald. He must abandon his absurd concept of the Party as a united front and assimilate the idea that it is a democratically centralized revolutionary Party. The Party knows the value of intellectuals, with their special talents and abilities, provided they agree to function in the movement in a normal way. Every member knows the extremes the Party went to in order to make possible the continued functioning of Burnham in the movement. He was determined, however, to escape the discipline of the revolutionary Party and its program, for that is what his desertion meant. That is also what the desertion of the Shermanites meant. The P.C., individually and collectively, has made every effort to facilitate the assimilation and fruitful functioning of comrade Macdonald in the Party. Virtually every member of the P.C. - as well as others - have spent hours and hours of comradely discussion with Macdonald in an effort to improve relations, in an effort to have him understand those elementary concepts of the functioning of a revolutionary Party which almost any comrade learns after a month or two in the movement.

Yes, comrade Macdonald has many talents which the P.C. is anxious for him to put at the disposal of the movement. There is a place for revolutionary intellectuals in the movement, and we will do all we can, be as patient as possible, to win these revolutionary intellectuals over, and to keep them in the Party. We have every interest and desire not only to keep Macdonald and comrades like him in the Party, but to make their work and development, as well as the work and development of the Party as a whole, the most fruitful possible. To this end we will on every occasion try to plan with comrade Macdonald his work, assign him tasks which he is ably suited to handle. All experience teaches, indeed, that it is only in the Party and in the collective contribution to its advancement that the work and development of any comrade can be fruitful. But for that the cooperation of every comrade is also required, and in the specific case, the cooper-

ation of every comrade is also required, and in the specific case, the cooperation of comrade Macdonald. We will do our utmost to cooperate with Macdonald. As for the rest of us, so for him: it is necessary to settle down firmly to the tremendous tasks at hand. Our movement is young, but not so young that it can be frightened by ultimatums or shaken by resignations. It is our sincerely expressed wish that comrade Macdonald will take his place in our Party as a loyal and disciplined and active member, working together in a revolutionary Party.

Political Committee

Workers Party

May 9th, 1941