

4/33 Rmc

I N T E R N A L B U L L E T I N N O . 1 3

For Members Only

On the question of the Situation in the American League

by G. Gourov

To the International Secretariat (A Letter on the American Sit-

uation) by L. Trotsky

April 29, 1933

\*\*\*\*\*

Communist League of America (Opposition)

--Issued by National Committee--

(in Writings 1932-33)

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY  
ADDED TO TROTSKY ARCHIVE

FEB 20 1958

I

On the question of the Situation in the American League

To the International Secretariat

Dear Comrades:

The situation in the American League demands, as you have already indicated, a prompt and decisive intervention on the part of our organization. From the degree to which I have been able to judge from the minutes of the Secretariat and the correspondence we haven't any difference with you on the evaluation of the situation in the American League. Nevertheless, I consider it my duty to explain to you as clearly as possible how I, after a very detailed conversation with Comrade Swabeck and a study of the documents, regard the situation in the League and what measures appear to me to be necessary on our side.

1. For several years the action of the League bore mainly a literary propagandist character. The number of members vacillated around the same figures, varying according to the improvement or the worsening of the work at the center. The absence of progress in the movement, as has always been the case, aroused all sorts of personal antagonisms. The same absence of progress in the movement did not permit these antagonisms to take on a political character. This has given and still gives to the struggle an excessively poisoned character in the absence of a political content clear to everybody. Members of the organization do not learn anything from such a struggle. They are forced to group themselves according to personal attachments, sympathies and antipathies. The struggle of the group becomes in its turn an obstacle to the further progress of the movement.

2: It is quite possible that in this struggle there are contained plausible principle differences in embryonic form. Nevertheless, the misfortune consists in the fact that the two groups anticipate too much and sharpen the organizational struggle between the groups and the persons altogether out of proportion to the development of political work and the questions raised by the latter. In the impatient organizational maneuvers which are acting in a disintegrating fashion upon the entire League by bringing prejudices to bear upon each group separately, it is impossible not to see the harmful influence of the methods and procedure of the epigone C.I. which has accustomed an entire generation to seeking issue from all sorts of differences with the aid of combinations of the apparatus at the expense of the interests of the entire organization. Therein consists one of the worst traits of bureaucratism!

3. A genuine solution to the internal difficulties can only be found along the path of expanding the mass work. The League has taken this path. It is developing magnificent energy in this work in three directions: a) Campaign on the subject of the victory of Fascism in Germany and the capitulation of the C.I.; b) Participation in the Unemployed movement; c) Participation in the Independent Miners Union (Illinois). In all these fields, the League has already achieved moral successes. But--and that is the most important feature of the present situation--these first successes are accompanied

II

not by a lessening, but by an aggravation of the internal struggle. What does this signify?

4. Of course, it is theoretically possible that with the transition to broader work, the potential difference can assume an open and active political character. But up to the present, this has not been at all expressed in anything. More or less full fashioned, serious and firm differences have not been revealed in any of the three fields of work mentioned above. There remains another explanation: The aggravation of the crisis has been called forth by the mechanics themselves of the transition from one stage of work to another. This does not exclude the birth of serious differences in the future, but those do not necessarily have to correspond with the line up of the present groupings.

5. A solution is impossible except by broadening and deepening the mass work, by drawing to the League fresh proletarian elements, by drawing all the members of the League into the mass organizations. The beginnings have been made for this work. But the struggle of the groups has taken on such sharpness that a split automatically is placed on the order of the day. A split under these con-

ditions would have a purely a priori character, a preventive one, so to speak, one that is incomprehensible for all except those who initiate the split. If it is difficult for us, the leading militants of the International Left Opposition, to grasp the motives of the ferocious struggle, the American workers, including the members of the League itself, would be all the less capable of understanding the causes of a split. This manner of a split at the top would infinitely shatter the authority of both groups and compromise the cause of the Left Opposition in America for a long time. It would suffice today for the Stalinist bureaucracy to publish the numerous declarations of the two groups fighting each other in order to poison all sources of sympathy for the Left Opposition. In case of split the situation would become a hundred times worse.

The two groups should give themselves a clear account of the fact that in case of a split, neither of them could or would be recognized as a section of the I.L.O. The two halves, condemned to a lasting impotence, will find themselves in a situation similar to that of the present groups in Czechoslovakia who are not now members with full rights in the International organization, but only sympathizing groups.

6. The preparation for the national Conference of the League is taking place under the sign of the struggle of the two groups. At the present, one can already to a certain degree picture the perspectives of the Conference: more or less unanimous acceptance of the principle political resolutions side by side with a poisoned struggle on the questions of approving the mandates and of the composition of the future Central Committee. If we assume that the two groups balance each other more or less, the changes at the conference can be reduced to the group possessing 49% obtaining 51% and vice versa; and with the further application of the same methods that would mean a split.

### III

7. The task of our international organization in this question is, it seems to me, quite evident: Not to permit in any case a split at present, on the threshold of the transition of the League to mass work; to explain to all the members of the League that the leaders of the two groups are sharpening the struggle by means of impermissible organizational methods and poisoned polemics; to condemn these methods resolutely, and to call upon the members of the League for the defense of its unity.

8. Independently of the possible opinions of any one of us separately with regard to the question as to which of the groups in the League will acquire a serious and genuine preponderance in mass work, we must as an organization, leave the solution of the question to the future (it is quite possible that the leadership, after some regroupments, will be constituted of elements of both the present groups.). But the next conference cannot in any case assure the domination of one group, due to the absence of political ground in preparation for this as well as of objective criteria. The task of the next conference should consist of saving the League from a preventive split imposed from the top and of so preserving the authority of the League and its combativity for the near future. It is necessary to pose this task in quite an imperative form before all the local groups as well as before the two groups involved in the struggle of the Central Committee.

9. To the degree to which it is possible to judge from correspondence, a considerable number of the members of the League, perhaps a majority, does not belong to either of the two groups and speaks with indignation of the danger of a split. Given the absence or at least the non-obviousness of the principle bases in the struggle of the groups, conciliationism is quite justified and progressive in the internal life. It is necessary now at the present stage to support this tendency with all the authority of the International organization.

10. The preparation of the Conference should, it seems to me, be conducted in the spirit of the considerations made above. that means:

a) All local organizations should demand of the leaders of the two groups to reduce their clashes within such limits that the speeches, declarations, etc. on both sides cannot become a weapon in the hands of the enemy.

b) All the theses, counter theses, amendments should be sent out in time, not only to all the members of the League, but also to the I.S. so that a discussion of all phases can take place before the eyes of all the sections and under the control of the latter.

c) The final time of the Conference should be designated in agreement with the I.S. so that the latter, in case of need, will have the opportunity to delegate its representative to it.

d) Up to the time of the Conference the present Central Committee, which remains, of course should enjoy the entire support of all the members of the organization. On its part the Central Committee will abstain from artificial organizational manipulation

within its own body which bear a factional character.

e) The local organizations should be guided in the election of delegates by consideration of the sufficient firmness and independence in their representatives on the question of safeguarding the unity of the League: The instructions to delegates should be voted upon in the same sense.

f) Inside the forthcoming Central Committee there should of course enter leaders of both groups at present engaged in the struggle; but side by side with them should be placed some solid comrades possessing authority, not having engaged in the struggle of the two groups and capable of bringing about a healthier atmosphere in the C.C. To this end the dimensions of the C.C. should be considerably broadened.

g) In case of need, the Secretariat should call a special Plenum devoted to American affairs with the participation of representatives of both groups.

\* \* \*

Historical developments place before the American League exceptional tasks. They open tremendous possibilities for it. Our American friends must be aware that we are following their work with the greatest attention, that we are ready to bring them our support with all the forces at our command and with all our means, and that we firmly hope that they will put an end to the internal malady and that they will issue upon a broader path.

G. Gourov

March 7th ,1933

Buyukada, April 17, 1933.

To the International Secretariat

Dear Comrades:

It has appeared to you that my letter could be interpreted as being more favorable to the minority than to the majority of the CC of our American section. If this is your impression, that shows that I have expressed myself badly. In intervening in this question, I strove to discount completely the experiences made on an international scale (case of comrade Shachtman) and to follow, step by step, without the least interference on our part one way or the other, the development of the internal conflicts and differences on the American field.

It seemed to me--and it still seems to me--that the minority is exaggerating enormously the importance of the National Conference--not as a regular political meeting of a revolutionary organization, but as the means of solving the internal struggle by organizational means, that is to say, by an eventual small majority of several votes. For me, political wisdom consists in understanding that at the present stage, there is no organizational means of bringing about a decision ~~xxx~~ favorable for the development of the organization itself. Quite the contrary, it is necessary to advance policies by guarding sharply against rushing things too much.

V

It also seemed to me that the majority, as the leading faction in the CC, showed a certain impatience and applied or attempted to apply organization measures which, without giving permanent results, could not help but sharpen the conflict.

I notice with satisfaction that the majority has withdrawn, on its own initiative, one of the measures which consisted in depriving comrade Abern of a deciding vote in the CC in the absence of comrade Swabock. And if I understand the sense of the latest CC minutes, the reaction of the minority seems to me quite disquieting.

There is the matter of our possibilities in the Miners' Federation in Illinois. Cannon is well known down there, he enjoys a certain authority there based especially on his past trade union activity. Everything appeared to me to indicate that it was he who should have gone there again with a situation that is promising enough. The continuity of the work already begun also demands it. Now, the minority opposed it with the candidacy of comrade Shachtman and it is to be feared that the CC will remain undecided.

Such a measure on the part of the minority cannot be justified except by deep differences on our work among the miners. Now, I do not get the impression that the minority is correct in its criticisms, far from it. Comrade Allard is reproached for not emphasizing sufficiently the point of view of the Left Opposition in the trade union paper of which he is the editor. Comrade Cannon is reproached for having presented himself as a representative of progressive workers and not as a representative of the League. I cannot see any good grounds for the first reproach. I have only two issues of the paper in question. In one of them, the editors played up the speech of comrade Cannon quite big, which is of course, of great importance for us. It is quite possible that comrade Allard does not utilize all the possibilities; but he quite alone-- or, at least, he was up to very recently. And then, it is a question of a trade union paper, the editing of which requires a great deal of prudence. The reproach against comrade Cannon appears to me to be dictated by a purely formalistic intransigence. I do not think that it was the task of comrade Cannon to present himself as a delegate of the League, the latter being a political organization. With political demonstrations, not much is accomplished inside of the trade unions; it is important to get into them, to gain authority within them, to work inside, to create a fraction there, which in its turn, must not use the name of the League on each and every occasion, especially not as long as it remains an infinite minority. The mass union is not a meeting called by some political organization. Naturally, for such things there are no cut and dried rules; it is a matter of concrete circumstances. But it appears to me--I can very well be mistaken from afar--that there is in the objections of the minority a certain spirit of sectarian formalism. In any case, those objections do not at all appear to me to be sufficient to prevent from fulfilling so important a task as that among the miners.

Since I have decided to follow the development of the internal struggle from step to step, I beg you not to consider this letter as "final". Its purpose is to supplement the preceding letter in the light of a new experience. L. Krotzky.