

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

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AMENDMENTS TO THE RESOLUTION ON THE PARTY

Submitted by Ernest Erber

Amendment No. 1 Third paragraph under heading "Stages of Party Development" (page 2)* to read:

The second period corresponds to the necessity of (a) agitation, that is, the putting forward of single ideas or slogans to the largest possible section of the working class, (b) giving leadership, usually within the labor movement, to those workers brought under party influence by its agitation and (c) the recruitment of industrial workers on the basis of the party's activity in the class struggle. In agitation, the principles and program of the party are not put forward..., etc., etc.

Amendment No. 2 Following the paragraph (also page 2) that ends with "last in the final struggle for socialism" and before the paragraph that begins "The third period corresponds... etc.", insert the following paragraph:

However, since agitation can only be successful when the bulk of the party members are in industry and since successful agitation will result in the growth of party influence among workers and the recruitment of industrial workers to the party, one of the indispensable features of this stage is the change of the party's composition in the direction of a preponderant majority of workers recruited from industry. A party having the majority of its members in industry is required, by the very logic of this situation, to play an active role in the class struggle. In the main, it does this within the mass organizations of labor through the role of its party fractions, which become the ideological and organizational spearhead of the progressive wing of the labor movement. The revolutionary organization must, therefore, assume the responsibility of giving leadership to groups of workers in the mass movement, even though as yet not openly and directly in its own name. This function imposes upon the leadership of the party, in addition to propaganda and agitation, the task of giving guidance and direction to a section of the mass movement in all its tactical turns as required by the course of the class struggle. In this sense the second stage of the organization's development corresponds to its playing a role as a small edition of the mass party which it aims to become. It is in this phase of its development that the party's leadership must divest itself of the habits of the propaganda circle and learn to act as a leadership of a serious movement having serious responsibilities to those it seeks to lead. This means ridding itself of the habit of being a commentator and detached advisor in the class struggle and mastering the art of immediate and spontaneous reaction to the ever-changing situation in the class struggle and at all times thinking in terms of the party's intervention in the situation on the basis of concrete

*All references to pages refer to pages in Convention Bulletin #2

proposals. This requires going beyond giving the "correct line" in the party press and by supplying the party branches and, above all, the party fractions in the unions with specific directives.

Amendment No. 3 Following the sentence, "There are no brick walls between any of these stages", (page 2) insert the following sentences:

Not only does one stage merge into another but each stage combines features of other stages. The original task of propaganda remains a function of the organization in all its stages, though its relative importance declines as the party develops. On the other hand, agitational activity on a limited scale is an inevitable part of the propaganda stage. Likewise, during the second stage the organization gives leadership in action to groups of workers, usually within the mass organization of labor and, thereby, reveals in embryonic form the role it is to play on a mass scale in the next stage.

Amendment No. 4 On page 4, paragraph beginning "The Workers Party is a propaganda group." Delete first two sentences of paragraph so that it begins as follows:

The Workers Party is certainly not a propaganda group in the sense...etc., etc.

Amendment No. 5 On page 4, paragraph beginning "Is our party an agitational group? No; in any case...etc." Delete the first four sentences of the paragraph up to and including the words "between a propagandist and an agitational group." In place of these sentences substitute the following:

In the present period the main public activity of our party is devoted to presenting a program, more accurately, a platform, for adoption by the labor movement. This requires our presence in industry and the maximum activity in the trade unions. The result of our agitation on behalf of our platform and our activities in the struggles of the unions attracts to us the type of labor militant whose very presence within our party in increasing numbers extends our influence in local labor situations and expands the number of workers who come under our influence and look to us for leadership. These activities correspond to the second stage of the party's development when agitation, recruitment from the shop and leadership of groups of workers within the labor movement have been added on to and outweigh our propagandist role, when the organization begins to act as a small edition of the mass party of the future.

Amendment No. 6 On the bottom of page 5, following the paragraph that begins with the words "We did not have to begin... etc." and ends on page 6 with the words "and even non-political

proletarian masses" insert the following two paragraphs:

Our party has, therefore, already passed through all the preliminary stages necessary to entering the "second stage" of its development. With the founding of the Socialist Workers Party in 1938 our movement had exhausted the possibilities of further growth among political elements. Its future lay in finding a point of contact with the labor militants in the shops and unions. Trotsky gave further evidence of his political genius by correctly understanding this need and proposing the transitional program as the bridge between our advanced theories and the level of the class struggle in this country. The adoption of the transitional program marked the end of a stage in our development in which propaganda for our programmatic views was our predominant task. It was now necessary that we begin transforming ourselves from a propaganda group as such and begin assuming some of the functions of party, i.e., participation and leadership in class struggles through agitation and direct activity. However, the predominantly non-proletarian composition of the party (with the outstanding exception of Minneapolis) plus the failure of the Cannon leadership to comprehend the significance of the transitional program, resulted in the latter remaining a basis for literary activity in our press rather than the transformation of the party.

Our struggle against the bureaucratic conservatism of Cannon had as one of its aims the struggle for a campaign party that translated the transitional program into life through a popular, agitational press and bold party actions. The first year or so of the Workers Party saw us realize much of the latter aim (penny pamphlets, popular LABOR ACTION, election campaigns, anti-war activity, etc.). However, our composition was, if anything, even less proletarian than that of the united SWP. Our best efforts to carry the transitional program into life could only be a slight advance over the sterility of the SWP due to our lack of roots in the labor movement. The transitional program and agitation based upon it were, therefore, inadequate to bring about our transition into the "second stage" of our development without the addition of the third, indispensable element - the transfer of our members into industry. It is in this sense that the transition from propaganda group to party must be intimately linked with the transition from a composition of students, white collar workers and intellectuals to a composition of industrial workers.

Amendment No. 7 On page 6, delete the paragraph that begins with the words "Why, then, are we still in a propagandist stage," and ends with the word "reasons". In its place substitute the following:

Why then does propaganda remain, even in the "second stage" of our development, such an exceptionally important feature of our activity?

Amendment No. 8 On page 8, delete the sentence that reads, "There is a second reason why we did not, and cannot yet, shift away fully from our propagandist character." In its place substitute the following:

There is a second reason why propaganda will continue to occupy an exceptionally important place in our activity.

Amendment No. 9 On page 9 delete the first sentence of the paragraph that begins with the words, "Because of the sense..." and ends with "few years" and substitute the following:

Because propaganda will remain one of our indispensable tasks even when we become a mass party of tens of thousands of members (and up to the day of the revolution and after), the party maintains a monthly theoretical journal, The New International, which devotes itself entirely to the elaboration and explanation of our basic ideas. It is specifically in order to supplement our excellent agitation in LABOR ACTION with Marxist propaganda that the party has undertaken to enlarge our paper.

Amendment No. 10 On page 11, in paragraph beginning "In the United States (not fifty years ago...etc.", following the end of the fourth sentence which ends with "we cannot of course guarantee or foretell.", insert the following sentences:

We do know, however, that our ability to achieve such leadership will not automatically flow from the superiority of our program or the excellence of our propaganda and agitation. The decisive test will be our ability to transform our party into one composed overwhelmingly of industrial workers recruited from the shops as a result of our activities. We can become the attractive pole around which the groups, tendencies, split-offs, etc. and countless numbers of unaffiliated ex-Communists and ex-Socialists will group themselves and form a mass party only to the extent that we reveal in our own role and activity the embryo of the party we seek to build.

Amendment No. 11* On page 12, following the paragraph that begins with the words, "Under what we must consider...etc.", add the following:

Right now, and for the immediate period ahead we are still a distance from that quantitative change that will produce a qualitative change. It is utterly ridiculous to be taken aback by such a calm, sober, cool self-judgment, to wail and lament, to sink into despair or fly off in desperation in all directions of the compass. We start with what is. We say what is. We say what we really are, without embellishment, self-praise, or

*This amendment refers to a section of the original Resolution on the Party which was inadvertently omitted from the Convention Bulletin #2 and which is being inserted by reference thereto later in this Bulletin.

self-deception. We must also say what we want to become, and must become ultimately. But more important than that is to say what we can become and strive to become in the next period.

The next period, we repeat, is one of further development of the agitational influence of our party upon the labor movement, the systematic direction of the party forces and supporters in the labor movement, the recruitment of increasing numbers of industrial workers to the party and its definite emergence as a small edition of the mass party of the future. (It goes without saying that this does not exclude actions, but only where they are realistically possible, and only where they do not override our conception of the essential role and perspective of our party at the present time. Examples: isolated election campaigns, strike leadership under special conditions; street demonstrations under special conditions. But decidedly not a general course of actions.) An agitational group is one whose main public activity consists in presenting a program, more accurately, a platform, for the adoption by the labor movement. To put it very crudely: our main (not our only, but our main) public activity consists in urging upon the labor movement a program of action, in telling the labor movement what it must do. Our achievement of the position of a mass party will be revealed when we are in a position to tell the working class what we are doing and to call upon them to follow suit under our banner.

Amendment No. 12 On page 13, for the entire paragraph beginning "Fourth, we emerged from the SWP...etc." substitute the following:

Fourth, we emerged from the SWP without a clearcut and homogeneous understanding of the full implications of the stand we took which led to the split. However, the two questions upon which we split - the "organization question" and the "Russian question" - already gave our party a distinguishing character of its own at the time of its founding. Our further development, no matter how it extended, elaborated and clarified our position, proceeded within this original framework. Our stand on the "Russian question", as we can now see more clearly than at the time, was basically a difference over the evaluation of the nationalized economy in relation to the struggle of the world's workers for liberation, including their struggle against national oppression as in Poland and Finland, an evaluation which was developed to its logical conclusion a year later when we all but unanimously rejected the theory that nationalized economy equals a workers state and established the position that participation and control by the working class through its democratic organizations is an absolutely essential and indispensable condition for the existence of a workers state. The last five years have seen us round out and elaborate our political and theoretical views, above all, in answering the many new and unexpected problems created by the course of the war, including our position on the national question, in Europe, our position on the role of China in the war and our position on the relationship of the fight for democracy to the fight for Socialism, all of which were rooted in embryonic form in

the concepts we established during the faction fight in the SWP. We do not lay claim, to be sure, to being a party from which nothing can be subtracted and to which nothing can or should be added. That conception we leave to the SWP. But we are in a position to claim that we are now a clearly delineated political tendency, with well-established positions on the main questions of the time. However, we are not merely a faction that claims its right to existence because of its specific position on one or several questions in the tradition of the Ohlerites, the Bordighists, the Marlinites, etc. The difference with the SWP majority that made it impossible for us to remain in that party as a minority was not on the Russian question but on the character of the party. It was the latter that made an independent existence necessary for us. The position for which we fought in the SWP on the character of the party and upon which we have successfully operated for six years characterizes our party framework as the framework within which the re-groupment and unification of all revolutionary Marxist tendencies will take place. This concept was the axis of our policies in the recent negotiations with the SWP. The acceptance of our unity proposals by the SWP would have been our victory. The united party would have been organized by the very fact of its existence upon our concept of the party. The fact that the SWP Minority finds it impossible to live in the same party with the Cannon leadership because of a few minor political differences but is moving toward our party despite basic differences such as the "degenerated workers state" concept is further evidence of the fact that our party is the framework for the all-inclusive revolutionary party and the SWP is still an ideological faction. This situation is widely recognized among the radical public, not only among the unfiliated radicals but also among the Socialists and the left sectarians, where we are referred to as the "democratic" Trotskyist party. Within the type of party we have created - basically an all-inclusive revolutionary Marxist party - is to be seen in embryo the internal relations that will and must prevail in the mass revolutionary party of the future. One of our difficulties lies in the fact that this is not fully comprehended or properly evaluated by all the party militants. Too many comrades still view our existence as being the "faction of bureaucratic collectivism" and regard other political tendencies in our party as being there only temporarily by virtue of historical accident. These comrades reduce this tremendously important fact of our all-inclusive revolutionary character to a mere commonplace that refers to it as "our party is more democratic than the SWP." Another difficulty lies in the tendency in our party to regard the co-existence of different tendencies as an abnormal situation due to the absence of a "completed" program. For these comrades, the program will never be "completed" until their point of view prevails. They consequently find it difficult to adapt themselves to our party life as being a normal expression of democratic centralism in practice and preoccupy themselves with year-round polemical and factional activity on behalf of their own political views. While this is and must remain their formal right, it constitutes an irresponsible attitude toward the party and places a severe strain upon its normal functioning.

Amendment No. 13 On page 15, bottom of the page, the paragraph beginning with the words "The key to the solution...etc." is to be deleted and the following substituted:

The key to the solution of these and similar problems - which are problems created by our growth, by our progressive change from an existence to which it would be fatal to return - lies in rooting into industry and the labor movement at least 85% of the party membership so that our members are immersed in the life, problems and struggles of the workers. This must be supplemented by a campaign designed to root out petty-bourgeois traditions that continue to make so many of our members alien to the life and thinking of the workers, even when these members work among them in industry. Such a campaign must aim toward a complete rearming and re-education of the membership as to the meaning of the new stage of party development and a re-gearing of the party internally and externally, from top to bottom, in a planned and co-ordinated manner. This is all the more needed because of our propaganda group tradition which has trained a membership with a one-sided understanding of the nature of the party, i.e., an understanding that makes the revolutionary party synonymous with a cadre party, and makes Lenin's "Iskra" organization of professional revolutionists synonymous with the Bolshevik party after 1912. The new stage of party development means that the lean and hard bones of our cadre party must be filled out with the flesh and muscles of industrial workers brought into the organization. It means that the portals of the party must be opened wide to the industrial workers and that the "old timers", the "professionals", i.e., those who make the movement their first and highest interest in life, must surround themselves in each fraction and branch with labor militants they win to our ideas and teach and train in common party work. It means that our old members be taught on what level to recruit workers as distinguished from the past experience in recruiting students and petty bourgeois elements generally. It means that our branch meetings, our education, our public meetings, our schools and classes, our dues system, our social affairs, our conferences and conventions, our pamphlets and books have to be planned with a consciousness that our party has entered a new stage in which the recruitment and integration of several hundreds of industrial workers is the predominant aim and the first step toward acting like a party.

Amendment No. 14 On page 16, delete all paragraphs beginning with the paragraph that starts with the words, "No party can hold together for long...etc." and including pages 17, 18, 19, 20 and the first part of page 21 to the asterisks. In the place of this material substitute the following:

Leadership and the Cadre

It is one of the prime merits of the Bolshevik form of party organization that it does not leave the matter of leadership to chance or accident. The revolutionary leader must be a skilled professional in his field. His education and training is a long and varied process. A revolutionary party must

seek to maintain a continuity of leadership to place and keep at its disposal the best available material for the tasks at hand. The constant process of the selection, education and training of comrades for party leadership is one of the highest responsibilities of party leaders, both national and local. The party leader who cannot develop the abilities of the less advanced with whom he works is of little value. The traits of leader and teacher must be inseparable ones. It is one of the weaknesses of our party that a consciousness of this need has not been continually kept before the leading comrades, above all by the example of the top committee. This lack must be remedied by the national leadership in the coming period if the expansion of our party through the recruitment is to be equalled by the expansion of its cadre of experienced leaders at the various levels of party life - fraction, branch, regional and national.

Such a cadre is the backbone of a revolutionary party. Its members are those politically educated and organizationally trained comrades who place themselves at the disposal of the party and make its interests their first and highest consideration in life. Its members are ardent party patriots who defend the party and its program against its opponents and make it their first concern to inculcate in the new party recruits a like feeling of loyalty and devotion to the party and an understanding of all its ideas and programmatic concepts.

Our party was founded in 1940 on the firm foundation of a cadre that received its revolutionary training in the previously unified Trotskyist movement and was assembled and given a political orientation in the struggle against Trotsky's views on Russia and Cannon's views on the party. It was the existence of this cadre, though severely weakened by the draft, that guaranteed the party against ideological wavering during the war - that kept it on a firm path of revolutionary internationalism. It was able to do this because it was deeply rooted in the revolutionary Marxist traditions as developed by the Trotskyist movement. This cadre remains and encompasses the educated and trained revolutionists who both nationally and locally play a leading role and discharge responsibilities in accordance with their training and abilities regardless of what programmatic differences have developed within its ranks. It is the aim of the party to see this cadre further strengthened by the addition of trained revolutionists from other political tendencies, above all from the SWP, despite political differences. This is implicit in our concept of the all-inclusive revolutionary Marxist character of our party. This is implicit in our proposed basis for unity with the SWP, a unity that provided for our being part of the broad and inclusive cadre of the united party. The cadre must be as politically inclusive as the party itself.

However, the political positions around which the cadre was gathered in the SWP and upon which our party was launched have undergone a considerable development since then. These positions have been given a more rounded, extensive and integrated form, above all in the party's estimate of bureaucratic collectivism as a new social order, including its international implications in the role of Stalinism, and the relationship of

the struggle for democracy to the struggle for Socialism, including the "national question." Not all comrades of the original cadre have accepted the theoretical and political conclusions to which the party has carried its original views during the last five years. Yet it is precisely these conclusions which, together with the all-inclusive revolutionary character of our party, which most obviously distinguish us from our closest rival, the SWP. Whereas the general Marxist education and revolutionary training of the party and its polemical defense against Stalinism, reformism, anarchism and centrism, as well as against all outright bourgeois currents is a task that can be undertaken by the cadre as a whole, the education of our party, above all of its new members, on the distinctive features of our program and the defense of the program against the SWP is a task that can only be adequately carried out by those comrades who stand in basic political agreement with the party. If the broad and inclusive cadre of trained and experienced revolutionists is the backbone of the party, then that section of it which stands in fullest agreement with the party's program is its brain and nervous system without which the party would lose its common direction and political uniformity. Yet it is precisely the inadequacy and passivity of this political core of the cadre that has been one of the great weaknesses of our party in the past period. Too many trained and experienced comrades, both in the national and local leadership and among the branch activists, who stand upon and fully understand the party's program, have been content to occupy themselves with the routine and "official" functions assigned to them, leaving the education of new members and the defense of the party's program within the party to a handful of leading comrades or considering it the function of some committee or other or the responsibility of someone elected to a specific post. As a result, the thorough education of the membership in the spirit of the party's program so that every last rank and file can defend the party's line against all critics, Stalinists, reformists, sectarians or Cannonites, has been sadly lacking. Even worse, this delinquency on the part of the political core of the cadre has resulted in new members being taken in hand by irresponsible factionalists and imbued with a prejudice against the party's position even before they have had the program explained to them by its supporters. The activizing and stimulating of initiative on behalf of the party's whole program and specifically in behalf of the features that distinguish us from other parties is one of the desperate needs in the coming period, in view of first, the expected recruitment of large numbers of workers brought to the party on the basis of agitation and, second, the increasing conflict with the SWP in our various fields of work. Those trained and educated comrades who are in agreement with the party's program but prove derelict in this task cannot be considered a part of the cadre regardless of their experience and knowledge or their routine activism.

The WP is not, nor does it intend to become, a federation of different tendencies. It is a democratic party but also a centralist party. It insists upon discipline and responsibility, both in the leadership and in the ranks. While those in complete

political agreement with the party will find it easiest to play a role as part of the party's cadre, the party demands of those in disagreement with the party on one or several questions to undertake responsibilities and play a role in accordance with their training and development as revolutionists. Those who reveal by their actions that their differences are so complete as to preclude their playing a role as part of the party cadre, in the sense in which it is used in this document, have declared their inability to contribute to the building of the party.

Amendment No. 15 On page 27, add the following point:

The national convention directs the National Committee to take the necessary preparatory steps to move the national center of the party, including its press, to Detroit within one year. The ability of our center to act as the directing force of the party in the labor movement and on the American political scene generally demands that this step be taken.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE ACTION ON AMENDMENTS TO
THE RESOLUTION ON THE PARTY SUBMITTED BY E.
ERBER

March 27, 1946.

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL
COMMITTEE OF THE WORKERS PARTY

Dear Comrades:

I am enclosing to you the decisions taken by the Political Committee on the amendments presented by Comrade Erber to the Resolution on the Party adopted by the National Committee Plenum. As is indicated by Comrade Erber, he decided, for reasons which he may set forth subsequently, to withdraw the resolution which he presented to the Plenum and decided to submit instead a series of amendments to the resolution adopted by the Plenum. Some of the amendments of Comrade Erber were further amended by Comrade Gould at the meeting of the Political Committee which considered them. At first glance it may appear difficult to follow the course of the amendments and especially the voting that took place on them. However, a careful reading of the amendments, checked with the original resolution, will show that a single line of thought actuated the PC in its decisions to accept certain amendments as well as in its decisions to reject others. Let me run through them briefly.

Amendment #1 was carried by the PC and is now part of the resolution, provided the PC vote is endorsed by the NC. (Having said this once I will not repeat it with reference to the other amendments. Every NC member will understand that he must cast his vote on these amendments in order to determine which are part of the Plenum resolution and which are not.)

Amendment #2 was defeated. This vote is based mainly upon our opposition to Comrade Erber's formula of "a small edition of the mass party", a formula and even a concept which was amply discussed by the Plenum and which we rejected. We reject it here again for the same reasons, as well as for the new additional obvious reason that it is in direct conflict with the line of the resolution itself.

Amendment #3 was carried for reasons that are indicated in the amendment itself.

Amendment #4 was carried because it avoids what seems to be a clumsy formulation in the original resolution.

Amendment #5. Comrade Gould amended Comrade Erber's amendment #5 by proposing not to make the deletions proposed by Comrade Erber but to add the text of Erber's amendment #5. The amendment, as amended by Gould's amendment, was defeated. The reason for this is, again, the formula in the amendment of "a

small edition of the mass party of the future."

Amendment #6 was amended by Comrade Gould to provide for the striking out of the first two sentences, beginning "Our party" and ending with "further growth among political elements." Gould's amendment to strike out these two sentences was carried. Erber's Amendment #6, as amended by Gould, was thereupon carried.

Amendment #7 was carried, again for the reason that it presents a less clumsy and clearer formulation than is contained in the original resolution.

Amendment #8 was carried for the same reason that applies to amendment #7.

Amendment #9 was carried, again for the same reason that applies to amendments #7 and #8.

Amendment #10 was carried because it helps to strengthen the resolution.

Amendment #11 was carried as a matter of course. In the editing of the resolution these two paragraphs were inadvertently omitted from the final text. The omission was, of course, purely technical and Comrade Erber called attention to it. There is no difference of opinion on it. In other words, properly speaking it was not even an amendment inasmuch as it was contained in the original resolution.

Amendment #12 was defeated, first, because it proposes to eliminate the paragraph in the original resolution which deals with the extremely important point about the character of the party at its foundation and, second, because it proposes to replace it with a paragraph which is in part ambiguous and in other part false. Just as the original paragraph is inseparably connected with our concept of the cadre, so the amendment is connected with Comrade Erber's misunderstanding of the problem of the cadre and his opposition to it.

Amendment #13 was amended by Comrade Gould as follows: not to delete the paragraph beginning with the words, "The key to the solution..."; to delete the first 33 words in Comrade Erber's amendment; to preface the remainder with the word "and"; to delete from Comrade Erber's amendment the sentence beginning "This is all the more needed..." and ending with "the Bolshevik Party of 1912." Amendment #13 of Comrade Erber, as amended by Comrade Gould, was thereupon carried. The resolution now reads:

"The key to the solution of these and similar problems - which are problems created by our growth, by our progressive change from an existence to which it would be fatal to return - lies in the formation and consolidation of a basic party cadre, and in rooting into industry and the labor movement at least 85% of the party membership so that our members are immersed in

the life, problems and struggles of the workers."

The rest of Comrade Erber's amendment follows intact, except for the indicated deleted sentence.

This amended amendment was carried because it strengthens the resolution in emphasizing the importance and significance of rooting the party in the working class and in the labor movement.

Amendment #14 and amendment #15 were defeated because they flatly counterpose Comrade Erber's erroneous conception of the cadre to our conception of the cadre.

To summarize the voting: the PC sought to adopt as many of the amendments submitted by Comrade Erber as possible in order (a) to strengthen the resolution wherever it could be strengthened and (b) to reduce the area of disagreement between us to those questions in which the disagreement is clear and which, therefore, permits of a clear and educational discussion.

The amendments which are rejected fall into two categories. One is the category in which Comrade Erber sets forth, in one degree or another, his concept of a small mass party or a small edition of a mass party. We are firmly in disagreement with this formula which is at best confusing and at worst could only disorient the party radically. The other is the category in which Comrade Erber sets forth his concept of the cadre, which can be fairly summed up by his formula that the cadre should be as all-inclusive as the party. This is tantamount to a complete liquidation of our concept of the cadre and given (a) the kind of party we are and hope to remain, and (b) the stage of development of the party today, can only help the disintegrating tendencies that have already manifested themselves in the party. To talk about an all-inclusive cadre as distinguished from an all-inclusive revolutionary party (which is a concept to which we are firmly attached) at a time when you have already a hard and fast faction operating inside of our ranks which opposes from stem to stern all the theoretical and political positions which distinguish our party from other parties, and which itself represents a political capitulation to Cannonism - is to talk very dangerous nonsense. We are having it proved to us every day now that it is necessary to fight Cannonism not only in the SWP but to combat it inside of our own party, to combat it loyally, to be sure, and with the most scrupulous preservation of its party rights. This task, which is not a small but rather an exceptionally important one, as well as the other numerous tasks before the party, cannot be effectively accomplished without the development, training, and supremacy in the party of a cadre in the sense in which it is so clearly outlined in our resolution.

I request that all members of the National Committee immediately cast their votes on the amendments so that they may receive official Committee status either in the form of amendments accepted or in the form of amendments rejected.

With best Party greetings,
Max Shachtman

THE TASK OF BUILDING THE AMERICAN BOLSHEVIK PARTY

At the Workers Conference a year ago it was brought to the attention of the party that there was in it unmistakable signs of disquiet and uncertainty about its course. It was pointed out that unless this was clarified, a serious internal crisis could easily result. (Building the Bolshevik Party) July 1945.

During the past five years the party has proved by its political activity and organizational achievements that its separation from the SWP was not motivated by petty-bourgeois pressure and fear of the sacrifices and demands which resistance to the war would entail. (Cannon). Though handicapped by the enforced withdrawal of a large percentage of its most active and experienced members, the party, by devoted labor and self-sacrifice, was able to establish itself politically and organizationally as a revolutionary propaganda group in the U.S. A large percentage of the membership industrialized itself and achieved valuable experience in the class struggle. Our influence in the union movement, when seen in relation to our size, has been effective. Yet all this hard work has not bred confidence. Uncertainty can be found in all layers of the party.

The New York organization is the heart of the party. At its convention, less than six months after the Workers Conference, the incipient crisis expressed itself with the utmost clarity and almost with violence. In the words of a member of the National Committee who took part in the discussion: "Every one agrees that the morale of the membership is very low, that the members do not have much confidence in the leading committees, that significant numbers are beginning to lose confidence in the future of our party, that recruiting has all but stopped..." (E. Erber, Internal Bulletin, December 31, 1945).

Different reasons were given, but there was substantial agreement among the rank and file that the above represented the actual condition of affairs. As the response to the organizational drive has shown and as its work during five years has amply attested, the party as a whole is ready and anxious to throw itself into the task of building the mass revolutionary party in the United States. The doubts which have overtaken it, as will be shown later, are fundamentally the result of a false political line. Readiness to struggle and sacrifice are not sufficient. If after great efforts the party gains only a small number of members a really serious crisis would inevitably result, with great damage to the Fourth International at home and abroad. The present resolution proposes:

- i. to recall the party to the Bolshevik method of building the party.
- ii. to point out the root of the false course so that it may be more easily corrected.

I.

With the adoption of the transitional program, the Fourth International in the U.S., made the turn from a propaganda circle existence to the organized workers in the U.S. Previously its propaganda was of a theoretical order, (theory of permanent revolution, socialism in a single country, crimes of the Comintern, etc.), directed toward the Third International, the left-wing of the Second International (SP) and other advanced political elements. Its main task now became propaganda for revolutionary action to the advanced elements in the working class. Such a propaganda is based upon the analysis of the situation in the U.S. as pre-revolutionary, for without this, the idea of a transitional program becomes ridiculous. The actual process of building the party is the result of a political analysis of our epoch in general. (See the International and American Resolutions.) Its aim can be summarized briefly.

The party speaks to the advanced workers and, on the basis of the closest struggle with them on the immediate demands, uses every opportunity to propagandize for the organizational forms and actions whereby the workers can oppose and in time overthrow the outlived labor leadership. The party as every party except a propaganda circle begins always with the immediate demands of the masses but at the present stage of its development it keeps a clear distinction between a mass party (able to agitate the masses and lead them in action) and a propaganda group which can only aim at educating advanced workers.

The party concretely aims at:

- i. winning over the developing revolutionary elements among the workers.
- ii. preparing the minds of the masses so that in time they will come to recognize the Workers Party as a necessary revolutionary party and convert it rapidly into a party capable of leading the workers in action.

Proletarianization

This type of propaganda demands the proletarianization of the previous propaganda circle.

The revolutionary propaganda group which has turned to the masses does not merely industrialize itself. Mere industrialization does not advance the purpose of building the revolutionary party, but merely drowns the revolutionaries in the mass. The party proletarianizes itself only to the degree that in the ranks of the working class it poses the proletarian solution of all questions, i.e. the propaganda and advocacy of revolutionary action leading to the social revolution. This must not be confused, as it so often is, with the tasks of the individual party member who in the factory or union responds always to an existing concrete situation. (See American Resolution)

Recruitment Campaigns

Not only its own morale but the rapid radicalization of the American masses makes recruitment the first objective of the party in the present stage.

Both the history of the Fourth International in the U.S. and the historical circumstances of the development of the American proletariat dictate special efforts to adapt the transitional program for the purpose of effective recruitment among the American workers.

The old propaganda circle was compelled to base its general line and its periods of recruiting activity chiefly upon the betrayals and failures of the Third International in Europe. The turn from the old propaganda circle towards the masses demands that that activity be now harmonized with the rhythm of the developing class struggle in the U.S. Thus our recruiting campaigns must be based upon such events as the strike wave and the lessons to be drawn from it.

During periods of quiescence, the party is not impatient at slow growth but mobilizes both its membership and its sympathizers in preparation for the coming events. When these approach and are actually in process, the party with its own revolutionary line carries on an intensive propaganda activity. Thus, as in a period of the strike wave, the party should be mobilized and ready to produce a pamphlet every 24 days or even every week, giving the Marxist analysis of all aspects of the strike. At the conclusion of the mass action, the party then proceeds to initiate a final recruitment drive and cannot fail to win adherents. It is not in the least impossible for the party to double, treble or even further multiply its membership within a comparatively short period of a few weeks or months. But in order to be able to do this, the party must carefully train and prepare not only its membership but its contacts and sympathizers for the inevitability of revolutionary developments and the distinctive role to be played by the party at all stages.

To reach the new type of worker aimed at by the turn from the old propaganda circle the party must reorient itself and base its activity upon the special national characteristics of the American working class.

The American working class lacks at the present time a spirit of generalization and of theory. It becomes therefore the special function of the party to frame its propaganda for revolutionary action and its general propaganda not in terms of articles about socialism but in terms of the development of American society and particularly the development of the American proletariat.

"The truths of communism and the methods of social revolution" must be drawn and expounded on the basis of the historical

development of classes in the U.S. and the concrete events today in the life of the American people. On this basis alone can the propaganda group as distinct from the old propaganda circle find a fertile reception in the minds of the ordinary rank and file American workers. Upon this basis the party can give to the advanced American workers the ideological conviction of the destiny of their class to lead society. It is this which brings workers to the revolutionary party and the full conclusions of Bolshevism. (See Education, Propaganda and Agitation.)

Integration

The party, having turned from the old propaganda circle, faces the task of integrating rank and file workers into the organization. This task is accomplished:

- i. by strict attention to the immediate problems of the individual worker in his factory and union.
- ii. the Americanization of Bolshevism as described above.
- iii. the presentation of the actions of the proletarian and peasant masses abroad, not in general, but in strict relation to the activity of the Fourth International as an active revolutionary organization.
- iiii. instruction in the historic tradition, achievements and methods of Bolshevism in opposition to all bourgeois learning, theories and ideas.

Negro workers present special problems to the party. The situation of Negroes in the United States gives the party many opportunities to participate and give direction to Negro struggles for democratic rights. This meets the justified demand, characteristic of Negroes, for immediate action on their special problems.

The Negro worker, far more than the white worker, requires ideological understanding not only of the development of the American proletariat in American society but of the development of Negro struggles. An important part of his integration in the Workers Party is a Leninist education in the objective role which the Negro masses have played in the past and will play in the coming proletarian revolution. The education not only of Negroes but of the party as a whole in the significance of this objective role:

- i. binds the Negroes to the party
- ii. enables them to answer not only to themselves but to their contacts the justified doubts as to the fate of Negroes after they have participated in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.
- iii. is the basis for harmonious relations between whites and Negroes under the pressure of bourgeois race prejudice which will increasingly be felt in the party as it draws into

its ranks not intellectuals, but rank and file workers, both white and Negro.

Experience has also indicated that Negroes, properly integrated into the party, cannot only bring substantial numbers of Negroes into the party, but are also a means of attracting white workers.

Recruitment, Integration and Education

The propaganda circle based its education upon the special differences between itself and other proletarian political organizations. On the contrary, the education of a propaganda group which has turned towards the masses must be founded on the general principles and traditions of Marxism as a new conception of society and a new way of life.

The foundation of the party's education therefore must be:

i. the study of Capital and the related classics of Marxism so as to enable the party to analyze the different stages of the development of the American economy, American society and the developing role of the proletariat. The study of Capital has always been the basis (a) of all strategic analysis by which the Marxist parties developed their practical activity, (b) the means by which rank and file workers translated their practical experience at the point of production into conscious opposition to all aspects of bourgeois society.

ii. study of the numerous writings, discussions, conversations of Trotsky on the American question, Negro question, etc. These documents form the indispensable manual for the development of the American revolutionary party.

iii. the production and study of material, (pamphlets, outlines) of American history to familiarize the party members with all phases of past social revolutions in the U.S., leading to the inevitability of proletarian revolution.

iiii. the study of the history and development of the Fourth International, particularly in the U.S.

In the special circumstances of American development, it is precisely the rank and file workers above all others to whom the party must give, both as contacts and far more as members, a comprehensive training in revolutionary thought and the revolutionary way of life as the concrete developing alternative to collapsing bourgeois society. Not only does the worker need this for himself, but it is only by this means that at the present state of the party's development, he can make the deepest and most effective appeal to his fellow workers to join our party. With rank and file workers interest in and defence of the party line is the result of a passionate devotion to the party, both of gratitude for the new world which it has opened to them. The most important part of this education is given

not in formal classes but in Labor Action, the party press and pamphlets, the public meetings of the party and the whole atmosphere which the leadership above all instills into the party.

A Bolshevik party at this stage, can be developed on no other foundation, least of all in the United States. The necessary education in the specific contributions of the party to Marxism in the past five years, concentration on "immediate demands", the conception of "plenty for all" - none of these can be the means of attracting or holding rank and file workers in any numbers in the party.

The Press

Labor Action - The new eight-page Labor Action must make no organized distinction between a section on day-to-day struggle and a "Magazine" section on theory. To maintain this separation would inculcate the old Menshevik conception of minimum demands and maximum program, a conception wholly foreign to the transitional program.

Labor Action must so teach the doctrines of Marxism that it will prepare its readers to become the cadres of the Fourth International and be itself a direct recruiting agent for the Workers Party. The technical means at the disposal of modern society and the radicalization of the masses demand that the paper perform this function. Labor Action must here profit by the experience of the French Party (1938) as to the aim of a mass newspaper:

"This aim is above all inter-related with the aim of the party itself; to forge cadres, provide the explanation of the situation and not to stop at merely agitational slogans, which, lacking explanations and political generalization are powerless to make the workers understand the Fourth International's reason for existence."
(Founding Conference, p. 101)

To put "more socialism" into the paper is not a matter of adding theoretical articles, but making the paper openly recognizable by the workers as an organ of revolutionary socialism.

The New International - The New International as the theoretical organ of the party must perform its traditional function of making a Marxist analysis of current events, of vigorous propaganda for the party line and polemical attacks upon its opponents. But it cannot in this period address itself to opponents to the neglect of the theoretical preparation of its members for their main task: transforming the propaganda circle of the Fourth International to a mass revolutionary party in the U.S.

The New International, in its pages and other publications directed by it, must train the advanced cadres of the party in

(a) dialectical materialism (b) Marxian political economy, and (c) historical materialism. Thus trained party cadres will supply the party and the American proletariat with a constantly growing armory of weapons against American bourgeois society.

On the basis of this education the New International must make itself responsible for serious analysis of all aspects of American life and history, and particularly of the labor movement. The party must have patience and recognize that this serious theoretical work, long overdue, will in time permeate the party and be reflected in its every day life and immediate tasks.

In the present disintegration of American society and world capitalism as a whole the party must set itself as an immediate task:

- i making LA a direct recruiting agent
- ii making the New International, far more than in 1938, the intellectual center of that growing body of radical thought in the U.S. which is critical of American bourgeois society and hostile to Stalinism. The party must recognize that failure in this task cannot be laid to the objective situation which is overwhelmingly favorable.

The Fourth International

The party must educate the members in the spirit and principles and best traditions of the Fourth International. This requires (a) publication of the official documents and important articles of the Fourth International in the party press, public and internal, and (b) while criticizing the International wherever its line conflicts with the party line, not to tolerate under any circumstances or to allow to go unchallenged abusive and contemptuous statements about its internationalism, or its open characterization by responsible party members as "not worth a pinch of salt", and "a bunch of political bankrupts".

II

The future development of the party along the path outlined above can only be achieved if the party recognizes the causes for its previous stagnation and present uncertainty, and resolutely roots out all manifestations of them.

The greatest danger to the party's growth and development at the present time is represented by the "small mass party" conception of Comrade Erber. For over three years Comrade Lund has carried on a persistent and sharp struggle in the National Committee over the method of building the party. In a related series of documents he has accused the party leadership of "pessimism, dimmed vision...lack of sweeping imagination...satisfaction with crumbs when loaves are available, routinism...conservative traditionalism...we are lucky to exist at all spirit." He accuses the leadership of lagging behind the or-

ganization. "Nowhere does the lack of boldness and imagination strike one so sharply as in our topmost circles. Routinism and tradition seem to seek their final refuge there." He has for three years denounced the party for having no perspective. Comrade Erber's views are the fruit of a theory built upon his conception of the past of our movement. For Erber "Trotskyism has been synonymous with 'sectarianism'". For him the "conservatism of Cannon was the typical expression of Trotskyism on the organizational side." "The sterility of Cannon is the logical result of the 'sectarianism', 'doctrinarism', 'rigid, ideological shell' of Trotsky. Trotsky himself was saved from this logical conclusion of his doctrine only by his "idealism and common sense". According to Comrade Erber, the first Four Congresses of the Communist International and the history of Bolshevism have not been submitted to critical study but are viewed as "sacrosanct". "The WP is not and should not be a Trotskyist party in the sense that is usually meant." It is from this conception of the past of our movement, elaborated in lengthy and comprehensive documents, that Erber has consistently supported the present Labor Action. It is on this basis that he wishes the party to transform itself into a "small mass party".

The theories of Erber on party-building are dangerous because the majority of the leadership in actuality has no other perspective to offer to the party as a guide to party building. Defining propaganda as polemic against rival parties, Comrade Shachtman rejects the conception of the party as a revolutionary propaganda organization. This rejection is the essence of Comrade Erber's conception.

The party must realize the close connection between the theoretical heresies of Erber, the equivocal position of Shachtman and the confusion on party building which is now rife in the party. (See Building the Bolshevik Party). The party must unhesitatingly reject these ideas and their manifestations, open or concealed, in all aspects of party life.

The SWP and the "small mass party"

The "small mass party" conception is no personal aberration of Comrade Erber. The party must recognize it as in essence the result of the political inexperience of the American proletariat and long years of struggle against the usurpation of "revolutionary" leadership by Stalinism. The party must especially recognize that in rejecting Erber's ideas and particularly their manifestations in the building of the party, it will be doing far more than putting itself on the right road towards building the Bolshevik Party. It will also help to correct the false course of the SWP, and lay the basis for an effective unified organization.

The SWP practices the "small mass party" conception in a form concealed (and to some extent corrected) by its strenuous attempts to adhere to the strategic conceptions of Trotsky. Parallel to its genuine revolutionary temper in propaganda in

concrete trade union activity it builds illusions among its membership about its influence in the unions and leading the workers in mass struggles. Only a powerful mass party can attempt to exercise the organizational function of leading workers in day-to-day struggles without

- i succumbing to opportunism, and
- ii having the work of its members swept away by obvious inability to withstand the pressure of the trade union bureaucrats whenever these wish to destroy the influence of the propaganda group.

The past history of the party (Los Angeles and Philadelphia) show, and the inevitable puncturing of the illusions of the SWP will show, that only a correct conception of its function can save the Fourth International from diverting its precious energies into fruitless and demoralizing channels.

III

The particular persistence of Erber's ideas in all layers of our party is not at all accidental. The WP was born out of a split of the SWP. In the course of the dispute Comrade Trotsky summed up his view of the historical significance of the dispute as follows: (In Defense of Marxism, p. 104)

"Scientific socialism is the conscious expression of the unconscious historic process; namely, the instinctive and elemental drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist beginnings. These organic tendencies in the psychology of workers spring to life with utmost rapidity in the epoch of crises and wars. The discussion has revealed beyond all question a clash in the party between a petty-bourgeois tendency and a proletarian tendency. The petty-bourgeois tendency reveals its confusion in its attempt to reduce the program of the party to the small coin of 'concrete' questions. The proletarian tendency on the contrary strives to correlate all the partial questions into theoretical unity. At stake at the present time is not the extent to which individual members of the majority consciously apply the dialectic method. What is important is the fact that the majority as a whole pushes toward the proletarian posing of the questions and by very reason of this tends to assimilate the dialectic which is the 'algebra of the revolution.'"

This statement does not exhaust or even express either the complete circumstances of the split in 1940, or the course of the WP or the SWP since that time. Nevertheless, the main difficulties of the party at the present stage can be traced directly to its refusal to base itself upon this instinctive drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist beginnings in the epoch of the death-agony of capitalism.

Because the party does not unequivocally base its policy on the instinctive revolutionary strivings of the proletariat,

1) it fails to make revolutionary propaganda and therefore does not recruit revolutionary workers.

2) it sends its members into industry overweighted with the impossible task of bringing not even socialist but mere political consciousness to sixty million "backward" American workers.

3) it does not recognize that at present the party's only claim to leadership is ideological and therefore places the party in the hopeless situation of competing with the labor bureaucrats as a more sincere and more militant wing of the trade union movement.

4) it fails to teach the methods of social revolution and therefore is compelled to put "more Socialism" in the paper by increasing the number of abstract articles on the socialist idea.

5) it fails in its press to point out and interpret the steady move toward socialism and the leadership of the nation by the American working class. It is therefore compelled to fall back on frenzied denunciation of the evils of capitalism.

6) it has developed a purely arbitrary distinction between propaganda and agitation, based on the conception of propaganda not as revolutionary propaganda for the social revolution but as political polemic with the SWP.

7) it fails to carry on a serious political education of the proletarian vanguard and, as a result, the party inevitably experiences an internal depoliticalization, which is merely an internal reflection of the external concentration on "immediate demands."

8) it fails to teach Bolshevism to the American workers and therefore does not discuss its own development in Bolshevik terms but in terms of regime, conservatism of leadership (Erber), lack of forces, (Shachtman) etc.

IV

Rejecting all types of bourgeois solutions to the problems of society, but at the same time governed by retrogressive concepts of the proletariat, the party leadership undermines the revolutionary confidence of the party membership in itself by a perpetual vacillation between opposing political positions:

The party vacillates on the

1) Russian question (between the position of Carter and the official party position)

2) Character of our epoch (between the theory of retrogression and the theses of the Founding Conference of the Fourth International)

3) Negro question (between the old Social-Democratic conception of Debs and the Leninist-Trotskyist conception)

4) Stalinism (for and against the CP-SP-CGT slogan, support and non-support of the Chinese peasants, for and against the EAM & ELAS to power, etc.)

5) German revolution during the war (implying its impossibility and predicting its imminence)

6) Fourth International (between saying that the only hope of the revolution in Europe is the Fourth International and at the same time ignoring the publications and policy of the Fourth International and denouncing it as politically bankrupt)

7) Bureaucratic collectivism (rejecting it as a new social order except for Russia and at the same time experimenting both in theory and in practice with the idea of a new bureaucratic collectivist social order)

8) Historical foundations of the Fourth International (between attacking all who preach that Stalinism is the inevitable fruit of Bolshevism and at the same time asserting that Lenin's and Trotsky's treatment of the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, (ratified by many Congresses and by Lenin himself) contributed to the degeneration of the revolution and the victory of Stalinism. (The "Mistakes" of the Bolsheviks, NI, November, 1943)

The party at this stage, lacking effective forces, can sustain itself only by a clear consistent political line and the firmest conviction of its past and its future. If even the line is proved incorrect, a healthy party can change it and thereby even gain in confidence. The present vacillating course of the party leadership on fundamental questions is one of the chief causes of the uncertainty of the party.

The party must establish and resolutely maintain until it is changed a firm political line on all fundamental questions.

Democratic Centralism and the Cadre

Unable to mobilize the full force of the party for action behind a firm, clear, political line, the party leadership is driven to intensify education in the special discoveries of the party during the past five years. But inasmuch as this line cannot be related to the recent past of the Fourth International (e.g., CP-SP-CGT to Whither France; the Negro position to the writings of Trotsky, etc.) the party education cannot bring the desired results.

In full control of the party press and party education and with leading representatives of its line in nearly all the centers of the party, the leadership is forced to try to achieve by organization what it cannot do by political means. It is driven to attempt to establish cohesion in the organization by the imposition from above of a cadre, to be composed essentially of those who subscribe to the special theoretical contributions of the party.

Any attempt to carry out the cadre principle will result in the virtual creation of a thinly-disguised faction, the setting up of two types of membership, the relegation of experienced, politically developed, devoted party members to the status of second-class citizens, as well as give a false education to new members as to the relationship in the party between members of opposing political views. Thus, the word, cadre, which, in its Bolshevik sense, signifies the development of the whole membership in the basis principles and traditions of Marxism, rejection of all bourgeois concepts and ideas, devotion to the party and readiness to submit to its discipline, has now become degraded by the application of it to a factional maneuver.

The party must resolutely reject this concept and any attempt to put it into practice.

V

Bolshevism and Unity

The WP must base its demand for unity on the theories and practices of Bolshevism and the objective situation in the United States.

The WP condemns the leadership of the Fourth International for not pronouncing itself clearly and unequivocally and demanding that the SWP accept the proposals of the WP for unity. It condemns the SWP majority for its unprincipled and dishonest factional maneuvers in regard to the proposals of unity made by the WP and the SWP minority.

The WP, while recognizing the objective results of a concrete situation, disapproves of the actions of the SWP minority:

- 1) in allowing its factional struggle to reach the perspective of a split on the question of Cannon's regime.
- 2) in conducting its factional struggle in a manner harmful to the education of the Fourth International and particularly the youth in the traditions of principled Bolsheviks.

By these actions it has done harm to the very cause of unity it initiated. It has lost the opportunity of effective resistance to the unprincipled Cannonite opposition to unity and has done harm to the Bolshevik morale of the whole movement in the United States.

The WP pronounces itself against splits in the Fourth International of any kind except on the political ground that the party from which the split is proposed is no longer an instrument of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

The WP denounces splits in organizations which have left the propaganda circle stage and address themselves seriously to workers. It does great harm to the conceptions of Bolshevism

when workers are asked to devote their lives to one party and then told that although the parties still stand on the revolutionary principles of the Fourth International, it should be abandoned in favor of another.

The WP does not unduly concern itself with problems such as Hansen's article on Cannon and controversy in the SWP about the rights of intellectuals to criticize the party and the publication or non-publication of letters, etc. It does not give the slightest credence to the conception that a party cannot be built with Cannon. It is confident that if Cannon or Cannonism or any other individual or tendency stands in the way of building the Fourth International in the U.S., then the revolutionary cadres in both the WP and the SWP will either defeat such individuals or tendencies or thereby prove their inability to defeat the bourgeoisie. The WP makes its main attack on Cannon's regime its refusal to enter honestly into fusion negotiations. This refusal betrays its stultifying monolithic conceptions. The WP recognizes that the mere acceptance of fusion between the two parties would strike a death blow at the monolithic conception. All other preoccupations are subordinate, disorient the membership of both parties and strengthen the Cannonite mis-education in the rank and file of the SWP on unity.

The WP stands for the unity of the Fourth International at home and abroad and recommends to the party to use all legitimate means to carry out its policy of unity, not being deterred by the dishonesty of the SWP leadership or the ignorance and fanaticism of its members. It is confident that its own devotion to the principles of the Fourth International, its proved capacity to struggle against the bourgeoisie and the developing objective situation will compel the formation of a united party in the United States.

Finally, the WP denounces the invitations in any form, in public or in private, to any minority to leave the party.

VI

The party must constantly bear in mind the peculiar circumstances under which the Fourth International functions today, owing to the tension of the whole international situation and the smallness of the organized revolutionary forces. Its individual members will be called upon to carry out tasks of revolutionary leadership and responsibility which will tax their energies and resources to the utmost. It is therefore of extreme importance that workers who join the party find in the party itself a means of developing themselves as revolutionists of mastering to the fullest extent of their capabilities the theory and practice of Bolshevism. It should be impossible for any party member even after only a few months in the party to feel that he has not learned anything. In its present condition of dissatisfaction with bourgeois society but yet lacking revolutionary theory, layers of the American proletariat will be

found receptive to the ideas of Bolshevism, but only if the propagandist of Bolshevism is himself a trained, serious, educated Bolshevik, preferably a worker, able to give by his personal example and personal exposition some indication not only of the socialism which the party aims at but the socialism which it represents today. This can be learnt first of all in the party.

Such a condition does not exist in our party today. That it should be realized, demands from the membership first of all a clear conception of the dialectical connection between the international perspectives of the party, its national perspectives and the task of party-building. It demands from the membership a resolute determination to discuss its problems with serious recognition of the great issues involved and to be merciless against all who show by their arguments, demeanor and general procedure that they seek least of all a clarification of issues and the education of the membership.

Above all, the united membership must drive out of our ranks defeatism, pessimism and scepticism in any shape or form. It must base itself unequivocally upon confidence in the historic destiny of the proletariat and in the party as its expression. Without this basis, even the correct revolutionary line can only bring a few more members and continue the party on a more or less stagnant course. With this basis the party can by the proper education, training and patience so prepare itself that as the proletariat moves to its destiny, it will in increasing numbers recognize the propaganda group of the Fourth International and steadily transform it into the mass revolutionary party which will lead the social revolution.

March 18, 1946

J. R. Johnson

ON COMRADE JOHNSON'S AMERICAN RESOLUTION - OR SOVIETS IN THE SKY

By Irving Howe

The purpose of this article is to begin an examination of the errors in Comrade Johnson's resolution; it will merely note a few in brief, with the hope that other comrades will develop the points in detail. The issues involved are important enough to warrant such further discussion.

I - The Objective Situation in America Today

The preliminary weakness in Johnson's resolution is his failure adequately to describe the objective situation in America today. Unlike the resolution of the National Committee, he makes no effort to describe the position of American imperialism in relation to the rest of the world, nor of its probable internal developments during the next period of years. The NC resolution, after analyzing the basic situation (the impossibility of imperialist stabilization, the continued antagonisms between the two major powers in the world today, the tremendous expansion of American productive forces with its resultantly sharpened crisis) proceeds in Paragraph 23 to a specific prediction about the period ahead. It predicts a "temporary economic boom" as the most likely variant. And this for a variety of reasons: the accumulation of capital reserves, the hunger for consumer goods, etc., etc. — all of which are made possible by the favored position of American imperialism in the world today. That is the basic fact. American imperialism, unlike any other in the world, can forestall for a time (and for a time only!) the deep crisis which has already attacked and will attack in the coming few years even more murderously every other country. American imperialism in a privileged position can thereby temporarily "ease" its internal problems; it may even temporarily throw a few crumbs to the workers, somewhat analogously to the way British imperialism threw a few crumbs to its workers when it was at the height of its exploitive period. Do not misunderstand! This doesn't mean that American imperialism is exempt from the basic crisis; we pose no theory of "exceptionalism." But it is, in a sense, the very severity of the crisis in the rest of the world, the very desperation of Europe and Asia, which gives American imperialism its momentary and partial breathing spell.

Now we make this analysis because it is of first importance for our behaviour and attitudes in the coming few years. (And that is the main purpose of a resolution: to guide us for the coming few years.) There will be "sharp class battles" in the next period; these will be part of a "period...of great preparation for the future." But unless there occurs a series of cataclysmic events on a world scale such as none of us (not even Johnson!) is in a position to foresee, it is very unlikely that the social crisis in America will, within the next two or three years, so sharpen and the political level of the American wor-

kers so heighten that a direct struggle for power will take place.

Here is one estimate. Johnson poses no real alternative. He engages in ecstatic flights of rhetoric — but he couches them loosely enough to avoid being pinned down. At the membership meeting in New York, he pooh-poohed any discussion about "booms" or economic predictions; he would not allow himself to be drawn into discussion of such matters when he was busy creating soviets in the sky. But we insist that he must discuss these questions. He must tell the party what he expects to happen in America -- not in general descriptions of the crisis of capitalism to which no one can take much objection but which are not analyses of the immediate period. He must tell us: what developments does he expect in the American economy during the next two years or so? What effect will the relationship of America to Europe and Asia have upon those internal developments? What effect, in short, does America's dominant position in the world economy have upon domestic economic developments and then upon the position of the working class? These questions must be answered concretely; not in rhetorical flights about the coming revolution. Without such an analysis Johnson's position is merely a subjectivist wish-thought.

II - The Position of the American Workers Today

It is on this question that Johnson makes his most grievous errors. There are a variety of formulations, all of them loose and sloppy, in his resolution. Let's compare them:

On Page 14 of the bulletin in which his resolution appears, he writes: "No revolutionary can deny the possibility that two years from today the American proletariat could cover the nation with soviets (or their equivalent)..." Now this is either grievously wrong; or grievously irresponsible journalism. One doesn't write (or at least one shouldn't) resolutions based on mathematical possibilities. Of course it is possible that there will be soviets in America two years hence; it is even possible that there will be soviets two weeks hence. If that is all Johnson means, then he is merely indulging in misleading speculation. But the purpose of a resolution is to analyze the past and present and as much as possible to predict the future, or at least possible variants of the future. Now the real question is: How much likelihood is there that the American workers will have reached the stage of creating soviets within two years? Not very much, is there? If you are talking about likelihoods, real living probabilities upon which to base our behaviour, then Johnson's estimation is wrong. If you're just fooling around, then his estimation is irresponsible. And if you're trying to suggest likelihoods without committing yourself too irrevocably, then you use loose formulations such as "No revolutionist can deny the possibility..."

On the same page we read: "awareness of the contradictions of American capitalism have been to a large degree the property.

of Marxists alone. Today, they are increasingly the property of great masses of the people." If Johnson is using language in a responsible way, then he doesn't know what he's talking about. The usual trend of Johnsonism is to say that the "instinctive movements of the workers" (of which more later) are forcing them into revolutionary action. But here Johnson speaks of "awareness" which means -- in English at least -- consciousness. Does anyone with the faintest acquaintance with the thoughts and attitudes of the American workers believe that they are in any way aware of the contradictions of capitalism? Would that it were so in real life -- and not merely in Johnson's mind!

The same kind of vague and irresponsible "revolutionism" is found on Page 18 in which Johnson speaks of the "revolutionary pressure of the American proletariat." What does "revolutionary pressure" mean? Does it mean pressure to overthrow society, to change the system? That's all it can mean, again, unless English be abused even more than is our wont. And so on Page 26 we learn that "The American proletariat... will welcome the most drastic revolutionary changes in American society, carried out at the expense of private property." If Johnson is serious, he means that the American workers are not merely receptive to Socialist ideas, not merely that they vaguely desire some kind of change (or more accurately, amelioration) but that they will welcome the Socialist Revolution. Is there one serious and mature comrade working in a factory who will testify that the workers today will welcome a Socialist revolution? They are militant; of course! They fight hard; of course! They sometimes violate aspects of private property "rights"; of course! But do they, in any considerable number, yet think of themselves as a revolutionary class whose mission it is to achieve the Socialist revolution? Alas, no! The fact may be unpleasant; but the price of not facing it will be even more unpleasant.

If we accept Johnson's estimate, and we are serious about it, then a whole new perspective is on the order of the day: the seizure of power; or at the very least preparations for its seizure, not eventually but within a short time. Workers, who, in Johnson's words, "will welcome the most drastic changes in American society, carried out at the expense of private property" AND who are not, as a whole, prey to the illusions of either Social-Democracy or Stalinism, are surely on the threshold of power. No other conclusion is possible. Is that the fact in America today?

(In passing: just how seriously Johnson is -- I use the word "serious" not as a subjective personal description but as an objective political category -- is indicated when we read in the very resolution containing the above statements that "this is not a matter of an actual revolutionary situation but a matter of years of preparation." But if the workers will "welcome the most drastic changes in American society" and if Soviets are a real possibility within two years; and if these workers, to repeat, are fresh and undefeated and untainted by either Social-Democracy or Stalinism then why is it a matter of "years of

preparation?" How many years incidentally? I ask this last question not because I want Johnson to answer or believe him or anyone else capable of answering the question, but because it will clarify the area of disagreement. If it is really a matter of years of preparation, then where is his disagreement with the NC which would undoubtedly subscribe to that formulation? In a word, are we entering a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary period? Johnson must answer these questions specifically and without equivocation. Is Johnson talking about the next two or three years -- for which we are preparing resolutions -- or is he indulging in grand historical sweeps which by their very breadth do not offer guidance for the coming period and if confused with the specific perspectives for that period are positively dangerous?)

What is the real situation with regard to the American workers? The truth is that the basic contradiction between their behaviour and consciousness remains: the contradiction between their fresh and increasingly bold economic struggle and their comparative political backwardness. As the NC resolution states, "The masses continue to follow bourgeois reformism." This is a matter of neither wish nor analysis; it is a simple fact. ● America is the only country of any consequence in the world today where the masses still retain their essential faith in the workability of the capitalist system, though they desire reforms and amelioration. America is the only country in the world of any consequence where the workers do not function in the political arena as a separate class, not matter how mised; but where instead the overwhelming bulk of the workers still retain their essential faith in the capitalist parties. In no other country do the workers think in terms of "god men"; in no other country is the doctrine of "reward your friends and punish your enemies" (of which even the CIO-PAC is a variety!) so universal. The American workers have recently made significant advances, (e.g. the General Motors strike) but they still function within the limits described above. We may not like this; we try to change it; but we shall meet with grief if we deny it. Johnson doesn't analyze this; he doesn't even deny it; he does worse, he ignores it. He substitutes what he considers -- and rightly -- the "logical consequences" of the present strike action of the workers for their present state of consciousness. But the two are not the same and it is not, in fact, until the very peak of a revolution that they even touch each other.

III - The Role of the Transitional Demands

Though the transitional demands were originally formulated on a world scale, the scope and manner of their application in America has always been and remains vastly different from that in Europe. The reason is obvious: the main task in America is to break the workers away from bourgeois politics, to prod them into functioning as an independent and separate class. That, I repeat, is the main task; and were it achieved even partially, would represent a tremendous victory for the socialist movement. Now the transitional program as applied to America has always

had as its main purpose precisely this need. We asked ourselves the question: What slogans and perspectives can we raise before the American workers which will enable us to move this class so militant and aggressive in the economic struggle and so backward and tied to the bourgeoisie in the political arena -- what slogans can we raise that will move this class into action so that this chasm will be bridged? And that's where the transitional demands came in. That is why in America -- and in America alone -- the central point of the transitional program is the demand for a labor party. If not to bridge that gap between economic militancy and political primitiveness, then what purpose is there in raising the labor party slogan?

Now then, if we accept Johnson's analysis, then the gap no longer exists, or it is at the very least much narrower than we believe. In that case, we can ask, why raise the present transitional program at all? If the masses are on the threshold of a direct struggle for power, if they will welcome a drastic change in society and in property relations, then why raise slogans whose major purpose is to make them aware of the need for such a change and to begin to move them into action for it? In that case the need is to raise a whole new set of slogans, slogans of a pre-revolutionary nature, directed towards a rapid struggle for power. In that case, why raise the slogan of a labor party? If the workers are ready for socialism, if they welcome it, why the devil bother about a mere labor party? It is in order to overcome this contradiction that Johnson is forced to utter his mumbo-jumbo about giving the labor party slogan a "revolutionary content." What that means he does not explain, because he cannot explain it in terms of his analysis.

Let me anticipate a Johnsonite rebuttal: "It isn't a matter of an immediate revolutionary struggle but of propagandistic preparation for that." But how does one prepare propagandistically? By raising slogans -- in addition to general education and propaganda about the desirability of socialism -- which correspond to the needs and consciousness of the day; slogans which make possible a real connection between what exists today and what we want to exist tomorrow, rather than slogans based merely on our wishes. Therein is the whole purpose of the transitional program, which Johnson does not understand at all.

IV - The Slogan of Factory Committees

The new cure-all proposed by Johnson is the slogan of factory committees. He does not attempt to give this slogan any concrete significance or orientation. Are these factory committees to be embryo or miniature soviets? Are they to replace the trade unions, or to displace some of their functions? Again, I ask these questions not in search of blueprints, but in search of direction. And here is why:

As Johnson quotes Trotsky, the latter proposed the slogan of factory committees. But Trotsky proposed it under conditions in which the trade unions had exhausted their function, conditions in which the workers were turning from the unions because

they could not satisfy their needs. Thus, for instance, during the war, the slogan of factory committees had a certain limited but important application. In many cases, where the union leadership was particularly strongly tied to the war machine and unwilling to fight for shop demands, factory committees (concretely the assumption of de facto leadership by the shop stewards) sprang up spontaneously; that is, the workers turned from the unions to their own improvised and provisional organs of action. Under such conditions it was legitimate and useful to urge the slogan of factory committees; it met with a real need of the workers. But today that situation no longer exists. The unions are fighting -- inadequately, poorly, hesitantly no doubt -- but they are fighting. And the slogan of factory committees is therefore largely, in general, an abstraction. It is not the king-pin of our demands, as Johnson would have it, because it does not correspond to any real situation.

V - "Instinctualism" And The Role of The Party

The basic error underlying Johnson's approach to every political question is his constant underestimation of the role of the party in our epoch. He constantly speaks of the "self-activity" of the working class as if that were some magical panacea. But let us try once again and however briefly to restate what should by now be commonplace in our movement:

The working class is capable of great and heroic actions even on the basis of the limited consciousness which capitalism develops in it. It is capable on that basis of struggles of great ferocity and vigor. But such struggles must remain limited, sporadic and essentially unfulfilled. The working class cannot conquer power by "self-activity" or "self-mobilization"; it can conquer power only under the leadership of a consciously revolutionary and democratic socialist party. And a great deal of that revolutionary and democratic socialist consciousness must be implanted into and seep into the minds and hearts of the masses. We must not succumb to any aristocratic theory, as Johnson does in part, in which the consciousness of the vanguard is mated with the "instincts" of the mass -- unless we desire the abortion of bureaucratism! The socialist revolution is different from all its predecessors, it gains its very uniqueness and world-liberating character in that it demands and requires a high degree of social and political consciousness from the masses. Of course, one doesn't expect each worker to become a theoretician...and -- just a minute! -- one does, too. What is it that the socialist movement does to the worker? In a sense, it makes an intellectual out of him; that is to say, it teaches him to think in theoretical terms, to generalize his experience. And this is a mighty, an unheard of advance in consciousness. Did the Bolshevik Revolution do that? To a tremendous extent! And to the degree that objective conditions made that increase in consciousness impossible, to that degree was the basis of the future degeneration laid.

But all this means next to nothing to Johnson. He is con-

stantly seeing self-mobilizations and self-activity; to him it is of little consequence apparently that in America the revolutionary movement and the masses do not yet have any substantial contact whatever. He instead speaks of instincts, of the objective consequences of instinctual action. But that is the task of the revolutionary party: to get the workers to understand the objective consequences of their behaviour and needs. And it is our failure thus far to achieve this in America which is our main problem.

The tendencies to revolt are, in a sense, "organic" (as Johnson puts it) in the position of the masses under capitalism, but that is not the same as a conscious drive to seize power. And without the revolutionary party, the latter will never be consummated and the former will always be frustrated. The ideas of socialism, of socialist revolution, of Marxism do not spring from "organic tendencies in the psychology of workers" living under capitalist production relations. They are implanted -- yes, "from the outside" -- by the socialists, by our party. That is why it is insufficient to base our perspective merely on the objective situation of the workers today (which Johnson completely misunderstands, as I have tried to show); we must take into account the relationship between the working class as a whole and the revolutionary vanguard. And that, in America today, should give us cause to pause...and think...before speaking as does Johnson.

"Instincts" are not enough. The working class can make many moves based on an incomplete or false consciousness; but it cannot seize power on that basis. And if one is serious about that perspective and doesn't merely talk of it, then we must recognize the virtual lack of contact between the mass and the party and not indulge in revolutionary phrase-mongering.

VI - The WP and the SWP

The rest of his document should be rejected as wrong; this section must be characterized as rotten. I refer especially to the sentence which, after referring to the "inestimable advantage" of the SWP over us, proceeds to say: "Not only in relation to Europe but in relation to the United States the SWP propaganda is in the full Trotskyist tradition..." Since this comes immediately after a section in which the WP line is characterized as Menshevik (but "within the limits of the Fourth International" -- whatever Menshevism within the limits of the Fourth International may mean!) we are justified in assuming that it refers to the superiority of the SWP line over ours. I therefore wish to ask comrade Johnson:

When the SWP hailed the advancing Stalinist army as "the liberating Red army", when the SWP national secretary called upon the workers of Warsaw to subordinate their struggles to the oncoming Stalinist army -- was that the SWP's "inestimable advantage" over us, their means of espousing the "full Trotskyist tradition"?

When the SWP press discovered that the workers in Russia "owned" the factories and the land and that that was the cause of their determined resistance -- was that the SWP's "inestimable advantage?"

When the SWP the week after the war responded by printing a learned dissertation on criminal syndical laws while we of the "Menshevik" WP responded by printing a bold declaration against the imperialist war -- was that the SWP's "inestimable advantage?"

When the SWP played ostrich in the trade unions and finagled with bureaucrats while our comrades boldly and with some success pursued a class struggle line in the unions -- was that their "inestimable advantage" over us?

When the SWP national secretary spoke of "telescoping" the struggle for socialism with defense of country -- was that their "inestimable advantage?"

Your formulations on this question are not merely wrong, comrade Johnson; they are simply an insult to the party for which we have worked these past six years, for the distinctive tradition within the Trotskyist movement we have so laboriously constructed.

One word of warning to some of the newer comrades: The issue in dispute is not who is "more revolutionary" or who is "more optimistic" about the possibility of revolution. The main task of our party is to recognize the facts and to proceed from them to try to make its program accepted by the working class. When we say that the workers are at the moment politically backward, that they are still tied to the bourgeois parties, that doesn't mean that we have "no faith" in the workers, or that we do not expect them to move in revolutionary directions. Quite the contrary. Our whole approach, the approach of the NC resolution, is predicated on that perspective. But we are too well acquainted with the history of our movement to allow ourselves to substitute wish for fact, to delude ourselves with fantasies of our own manufacture. The recent militancy of the American workers gives us enough cause for confidence in their future, provided we of the revolutionary movement learn to make contact with them and persuade them of our views. But we must not fool ourselves into believing that we have already done so. Johnson's resolution is a product of fantasy churned with half-digested quotations; ours a sober and concrete estimation of the situation we face and the tasks it imposes on us. The party must choose decisively.