

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

CONTENTS

LETTERS TO COMRADES IN EUROPE - By Max Shachtman	1
ON CHANGING OUR NAME - By H. D. Coleman	10
QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO MAX SHACHTMAN ON HIS ARTICLE "PARTY' OR 'PROPAGANDA GROUP'? THE POSI- TION AND ORIENTATION OF OUR PARTY";	
By Cleveland Branch	14
By Barry O'Connor	15
A STATEMENT ON THE TASKS OF THE PARTY - By Seattle Branch	17
FOR A "PARTY" PERSPECTIVE - By Irving Swanson	22
THE CRISIS IN THE WORKERS PARTY - OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE? - By A. Winters	34

15 CENTS

VOLUME III, NO. 6
CONVENTION BULLETIN NO. 3 NOVEMBER 10, 1948

LETTERS TO COMRADES IN EUROPE

The following are excerpts from letters written recently by Max Shachtman to comrades in Europe, setting forth his own views on problems they confront:

To a Comrade in France

The news of the upsurge of the RDR which is expected in the autumn is exceptionally good. If "La Guache" can appear at least once a week and in 100,000 copies, it seems to me that it must presently make a considerable impression in the political situation.

I have been thinking a good deal in the past few weeks about the situation in Europe - in France in particular - and of the perspectives of the movement. I always try to remain aware of the fact that I speak as an outsider in more than one sense and that I am after all not indigenuous to the countries of Europe and to their political evolution. With this reservation I nevertheless feel that the European revolutionists have not yet emerged from what might be called a politico-psychological pessimism, lack of confidence in themselves and lack of confidence that any serious political prospects lie before them. I cannot escape the feeling that they are heavily affected by the conviction that war and barbarism are inevitable and that only a purely literary protest is possible. I myself do not have that feeling.

I think that we not only have possibilities in Europe but tremendous possibilities. I know how easy it is for the isolated and tiny revolutionary movement to blind itself to the possibilities that exist precisely because of its own long years of non-contact with the masses from whom they are insulated by accumulated layers of defeats. It is so easy in our time to attribute to the people the impotence which the vanguard itself feels. It is not at all difficult in our times for the vanguard to feel completely tired and exhausted to the point of paralyzing skepticism. The masses of the people are also tired, to be sure, but it is much harder for them to remain tired. The failure to understand the tremendous (not inexhaustible but nevertheless tremendous) capacity for recuperation of the masses can only guarantee the continued impotence of the vanguard and piling up of new defeats.

I think that the more or less spontaneous rise of the revolutionary national resistance movements during the war, under the most adverse conditions imaginable - the conditions of totalitarian Nazi rule - was an excellent illustration of what I mean. The "vanguard" convinced that the masses would be paralyzed by the war and by Nazi-ism and would remain paralyzed simply could not conceive of such a huge and significant revolutionary mass movement. So they either ignored it or, worse, boycotted it. It was left to the Stalinists to utilize this authentic movement to the maximum. I am afraid that the same thing is happening again. To be more exact, not quite the same thing but a similar thing. I am now pretty well convinced that the soil is ripening among the masses for a new up-

surge and that we will fail to utilize the exceptional opportunity that is offered us in the post-war period. More concretely, this is how I envisage the situation and the problem:

All the people of Europe are terrified at the prospect of a third world war. So are the people of the United States, but their reaction to the threat of war is not and cannot be one-tenth as deep and extensive as the reaction of the people in Europe. For one thing, the Americans did not suffer from the war at all in comparison to the Europeans. For another thing, the Americans have some kind of perspective, so to speak, in the war; that is, if "their" side wins, they see or they think they see some concrete gains that would be made. The Europeans, on the other hand, at least those outside of Russia, or at the very least most of them, know in their very bones that regardless of which side emerges as the military victor, there is absolutely no perspective for them; there is nothing for them to gain; there is everything for them to lose - their industries destroyed, their land devastated, their independence lost, their manpower exterminated. It is practically impossible to work up a chauvinistic pro-war spirit among the Europeans - difficult to work it up among the Americans but impossible to work it up among the Europeans. It can be pointed out that in spite of this, the European masses are or seem to be passive and apathetic. I am unhesitatingly ready to believe this. I think I know the reason for it.

It is not simply due to the exhaustion from the war. It is due primarily to their failure to see a progressive perspective, a way out of the world dilemma in which they seem to be caught. All they can perceive right now is American imperialism which is "reconstructing" them for participation in the coming war on the side of Washington; and as the only alternative to that, Stalinist imperialism and totalitarianism which has become increasingly unattractive to them. Very few believe that the war will break out tomorrow (and in this they are right) but practically everyone is convinced that the war is inevitable and they resign themselves to it with a tragic and helpless shrug of the shoulders, but not with enthusiasm or with conviction.

The problem then is, as I see it, for an authoritative and significant voice to present the people of Europe, of Western Europe, in the first place - because that is where the people are still comparatively free to make a choice - with an alternative. The problem is to show them as concretely and practically as we can that it is possible to establish and develop a genuinely independent third force. I do not, of course, mean the parliamentary joke which goes by the name of the Third Force in France. By a "force" I mean a real force, a real power, and by "third" I mean a force that is really independent of the two forces that threaten to engulf the entire world, Washington and Moscow. I would attack the so-called Third Force of France not on the ground that it is a third force but on the ground that it is not a third force; on the grounds that it is tagging along at the tail of one of the imperialist powers, that it bears its share of responsibility for traducing the peace hopes of the people, for abandoning the economic and political independence of the country, etc., etc. I would not attack the so-called Western

Union - that is, the combination of France, England and the Benelux countries - on the ground that it is an attempt to establish an independent union of the west European powers but, again, on the ground that it was and is doomed by its policies to be an auxiliary instrument of American imperialism in its war and war preparations against Russian imperialism. I would say to the peoples of Western Europe (to begin with) that the war between the two reactionary monsters is inevitable only if we do not succeed in establishing a buffer between them of sufficient strength and determination to assure world peace. What are the ingredients for such a buffer? The democratic countries of the west: England, France, the Benelux countries, the Scandinavian countries and Germany and Italy. What is required to bring these ingredients together in such a way that they can constitute the kind of buffer for peace and freedom that we want? The closest economic and political unity of these countries, with all the necessary safeguards to assure their national independence, but a unity based upon a categorical declaration of independence from the policies of both Washington and Moscow. In other words, a genuine western union is possible only as an independent western union. An independent western union is the only serious and concrete guarantee against the world being plunged into a war without perspective or issue for humanity. We have a labor government in England; if the occupation authorities permitted a free election in Germany tomorrow, we would have a Social Democratic government in that country. We call upon these countries, these governments, the parties that make up these governments to take the initiative in establishing not a western union which is blessed by American imperialism as its battering ram against Russian imperialism but an independent western union which will use all its strength and influence to resist the drive of the two world powers to plunge us into a war. It could be pointed out that such a union would from the very beginning have tremendous economic resources at its disposal; that it would represent a tremendous political power; that it would from the very beginning enjoy the sympathy of millions in the United States as well as of millions who are at present paralyzed or terrorized by Stalinism in the east; and that it would therefore be able to play not only an independent but a decisive role in world politics; and that therefore it would constitute a real bulwark for peace.

Naturally, there is no question of any illusions about the governments or the parties in question and I certainly entertain none. Nor is it a question of confining oneself to such a propaganda as is outlined above. It would seem to me to go without saying that such a propaganda is to be inseparably coupled with the repeated declaration that an independent western union must be based upon the most consistently democratic policy imaginable, at home and abroad; that precisely in order to be a power it must base itself upon the broadest strata of the people and their interests, and not upon the wealthy and reactionary classes; that it must not only break down all custom barriers within its sphere but all other barriers which stand in the way of a genuine democratization - first and foremost the monopolists, the financial speculators, the exploiters of labor, etc., etc.

Naturally, also, there is no question of illusions about how quickly such a union could be established or even if it can be es-

established at all except under the banner of revolutionary socialism. But before the masses will even think of following such a banner, they must go through their own experiences and in a way which seems practical and realistic to them. The important thing is what can be done immediately. A movement like the RDR has a certain authority. If it were to launch a campaign for such an independent western union on the widest possible scale and with the widest possible circle of sponsors, and implement the campaign through its press and in well organized meetings throughout the country, it seems to me that it would meet an echo not only among the French but very soon among the people of the other countries. I would repeat over and over again: We do not want war. We can prevent the war and all its disastrous consequences. We do not want to work or fight for American imperialism: we do not want to work or fight for Stalinist totalitarianism. If we unite, if we pool our resources and our determinations, we can be strong enough to escape subjugation by either one of these war-mad powers. We want an alliance with Great Britain, we want an alliance with Germany, we want an alliance with other free countries - an alliance of equals but an alliance which from the very outset declares that it will follow a policy of its own, a policy which represents the interests and aspirations of the peoples all over the world, and therefore a policy of the strictest independence from Washington and Moscow. Our present government is impotent. It is a tool of the Americans. The Stalinists want a government which will be a tool of the Russians. We want a government which will ally itself with the other countries to serve as a tool of the people against the war makers and the enslavers.

Do you not think that a concentrated systematic intensive campaign of such a kind would meet with a response in France? Do you not think that a similar response would immediately be encountered in the other western European countries, from Germany to England and from Norway to Italy? I am fully conscious of the fact that I speak from a distance but it is my feeling that the RDR could very well open up its autumn period with such a campaign, that such a campaign would inspire its own ranks and its own militants with a new enthusiasm by giving them a new perspective. I know that you are preoccupied... now but I would be very much interested in reading your reactions to the above notes in which I have tried to outline my ideas. Perhaps you could find a few minutes in which to write me about them. I await a letter from you with the greatest eagerness. ...

(September 30, 1948)

- - -

To Comrades in England

...My visit dispelled any doubts I may have had about the hopelessness of the present position of the RCP, both with regard to its views on the so-called Russian question and its attitude toward the Labour Party. If the leading comrades had sat down to decide on what course would most surely damn their organization to sterility, they would have found it hard to arrive at any other conclusion than the one they have now.

It is in my view impossible to win the British (or any other) working class militant away from reformist ideology and from the camp of American imperialism in which he is being pulled by his leadership by offering him the alternative, in the name of revolutionary socialism, of defending Stalinist imperialism and of joining a little sect which has taken the position that the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy is not only capable of overturning capitalism but of establishing a workers state. The RCP, like all the other official sections of the so-called Fourth International, has been converted from a revolutionary opposition to Stalinism to a purely "democratic" critic of Stalinism. What else can it be, given its present theoretical and political position? If I say Russia is still a workers state because property is nationalized there; and if I add, as I therefore must, that all the buffer countries under Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe are also workers states because property is nationalized there; and if I admit, as I must, that the economic and political expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the nationalization of property was carried out by the Stalinist bureaucracy; then the simplest political logic compels me to conclude that the Stalinist bureaucracy is not counter-revolutionary in any fundamental sense but that it is a revolutionary force. The only qualification that I am permitted to make under these conditions is that this revolutionary force is bureaucratic, that I do not prefer its "methods" of overturning capitalism and establishing a workers state. Again, in other words, my opposition to Stalinism can no longer rest on the contention that it is counter-revolutionary or that it seeks to maintain capitalism. I must point out that it seeks to overturn capitalism, but that it does this bureaucratically whereas I would do it democratically. An intelligent worker, who is an irreconcilable opponent of capitalism, could then very easily reply and in my opinion he should reply: "I know that you would do the job better, more democratically. I know that the Stalinists do it bureaucratically. But you are a tiny group that cannot do the job in the way it should be done, on a world scale, above all on a European scale, and while I may not like the way in which it is doing and will continue to do the job, nevertheless, it is the only serious force at the present time capable of doing the job at all." All that I can say is that I am a democratic critic of the bureaucratic social revolution carried out by the Stalinists. That is all - nothing more. That rules out any genuinely independent role for the Trotskyists or Marxist movement and reduces it to a pure and simple democratic critic of Stalinism whose basic course is predetermined by the basic course of Stalinism itself. That is the only role that the RCP can play. In my opinion, this means it plays no role at all at best, or at worst that it plays the criminal role of advertising Stalinism as, fundamentally, a revolutionary socialist movement whose only vice is its unpleasant or, if you prefer, its detestable bureaucratic methods.

Unless and until the official Trotskyist movement resolutely and understandingly abandons this whole reactionary theory of Stalinist Russia being some sort of workers state, abandons its preposterous anti-Marxist identification of nationalized property with the workers state, and thereby abandons the reactionary and suicidal course of defense of Stalinist imperialism, it will continue to be a floundering, more or less moribund propaganda group which plays a

negative role in the great work of reconstituting a proletarian movement on a revolutionary, Marxian foundation.

There are, fortunately, an increasing number of Marxian/militants in England who have come to understand this. At the same time they understand that it is necessary to orient away from the Stalinist movement and toward the big reformist movement of the British proletariat within whose ranks they must at all costs place themselves in order to constitute at one and the same time a barrier to the poisonous infiltration of Stalinism and a revolutionary rallying center for the inevitable leftward movement of the working class vanguard elements. Anything less than that I cannot take seriously as a political course, a political perspective for the Marxists in Britain.

...
(October 20, 1948)

- - -

...I did indeed write to M. about the question of Tito. Exactly what she told you is not quite clear to me. But what I wrote does not depend upon any second-hand account of it. I sent a copy of the letter either to H. or A. - I forget which - and I suggest that you ask either one of them to let you see it. As for supporting Tito, that is obviously preposterous. Support him in what? In his fight against Stalin? But his fight against Stalin right now is confined to consolidating the domination of his own despotic bureaucracy over the people of Yugoslavia - confined to that and nothing else. If an actual war were to break out between Yugoslavia and Russia, I would unhesitatingly support Yugoslavia without giving any political support, of course, to the Tito regime. That position, in my opinion, would have to be taken by Marxists because of the character of the war. The totalitarian despots of Yugoslavia would be fighting for the national independence of their country and not for the purpose of imposing anything upon the Russian people. Stalin, on the contrary, would be fighting precisely for the purpose of robbing Yugoslavia of her national independence. In the same sense, Lenin was prepared to support Serbia in the war with Czarist Russia; in the same sense we defended Ethiopia, including the regime of its slave-holding Negus, against Italian imperialism. Mutatis mutandis, Trotsky was ready to support Hindenburg in a war with Hitler, if there had been such a civil war. But when the conflict between Hindenburg and Hitler was more or less chancellery affair, a more or less diplomatic affair, a more or less propagandistic affair, we were not called upon to support Hindenburg and we did not. Similarly we do not support bandit Tito against bandit Stalin in the present stage of their conflict. A war between them (again, if it should break out) would probably be a different matter.

As for the so-called Fourth International, it is up the pipe for fair. As you know, it swore at its so-called Congress that Yugoslavia is an extreme form of a capitalist police state, whereas good old Stalin's Russia is a workers state. Ten minutes after the Congress, without changing step, Germain and Co. are enthusiastically supporting the capitalist police state against the workers police state. And these people have the effrontery to protest against Stalinist "turns!" As for the RCP leadership, it is positively mis-

erable. For them, with their viewpoint about Yugoslavia and the other buffer countries, they are far, far more consistent in supporting Yugoslavia against Stalinist Russia. I grant that out of hand and that is also what I granted in my letter to M. But a helluva lot of "internationalists" they are! With authentic British hypocrisy and with authentic servility to the great god of abstract discipline, they do not breath a word in their press that their International formally characterizes Yugoslavia as a Bonapartist capitalist state, that their International is therefore committing a crime against the working class by supporting an extremely reactionary capitalist state against a "progressive" workers state, and that by designating as a capitalist state what the RCP honestly believes to be a workers state, the Fourth International more brutally defamed the Yugoslav regime than did and does the Cominform itself. Does anything more have to be said about these people?...

(October 20, 1948)

- - -

.... In his letter, Comrade B. described to me in some detail the views that you hold and also the situation that exists in the ILP. I wrote him a rather long letter in reply setting forth my own impressions of the problem and what course should be adopted by the Marxists to resolve it. I myself am exceptionally optimistic about the possibilities in England, provided we do not make more than our normal quota of mistakes. I start from the proposition that the "independence" of the tiny Marxist and quasi-Marxist organizations throughout the world today is either a myth or delusion. They are simply independent of the main stream of the working class movement and the main stream of the class struggle. If they continue to sit smugly along the banks of the stream, then all is lost for an indefinite period of time. If I could put it more emphatically than that, I would.

The Marxists nowhere constitute any longer an independent political party. At best they are propaganda groups. At worst they are very bad propaganda groups. Taking them at their best, it is necessary for them to find fruitful soil in the authentic working class movement - that is, the movement as it actually is, with all of its tremendous defects - so that they can plant and carefully and intelligently and patiently nurse into flower their ideas. I think it is absolutely idle, given the world political situation, given the fact that the Marxist movement has been thrown on to the defensive all along the line, to expect to reconstitute the revolutionary socialist party by the simple process of adding one more member today, one more member tomorrow to the tiny propaganda groups that now exist. In one way or another they must absolutely and immediately find their way into the broad labor movement and seek to transform it into the political instrument that the working class needs in its struggle for socialism.

In practically every important country, these broad working class movements are represented to one extent or another by the Social Democracy and only by the Social Democracy. The only other movement that we can speak of is the Stalinist movement, and, of

course, from my point of view it is absolutely excluded for us to try to work within it as an open political force. Whether the Social Democracy can be transformed into a revolutionary instrument from the formal point of view is, as I see it, a quite unimportant point and worthy only of academic discussion. What is important is that the work be started. The course of the struggle, the very process of the confrontation of conflicting ideas will determine the extent to which the revolutionary Marxian movement can actually be reconstituted as a genuinely effective mass party through the medium of the presently existing Social Democratic movements. It may be that the reformists will throw us out before we succeed in winning the reformist parties to our views; it may be that the struggle will require that we separate ourselves at a given stage from the reformist movements. But there is absolutely no need to decide that question in advance or, more accurately, to try to decide it in advance. The main thing is to start to do the job that devolves upon us now.

To start means: a conscious and profound understanding of the fact that the Marxists have at least in a sense been thrown back practically to the position that they occupied 100 years ago, and to understand also the historical and political reasons for this retrogression. To start means: to clarify all over again, in the light of the new situation and the new problems, the theoretical and political positions of Marxism, which to me means a continued rejection of reformism and all other forms of class collaboration, on the one side, and the completely well-grounded irreconcilability to Stalinism and all of its manifestations. To start means: to understand that although we have been thrown back almost a century in one sense, that does not hold in every sense. Nowadays we are operating amidst a general decay of society which offers us almost every six months new revolutionary possibilities, which we cannot even begin to take advantage of because of our isolation. Therefore: I formulate our tasks in those movements as an interrelated dual one: to constitute at one and the same time a socialist barrier (that is, not simply a barrier in general but precisely a socialist barrier) to the incursion of the influence of Stalinism and a rallying center for the inevitable leftward movement of the workers. Working under such conditions and long such lines offers us at the very least a serious possibility for regrouping the working class around revolutionary Marxian ideas and action. Unfortunately, I cannot take anything else very seriously.

In England this means a brutal break with all remnants of sectarian life, even if it is life in a larger rather than a smaller sect. (If you will forgive me for saying so, the ILP today is a large and heterogeneous sect whereas the RCP, for example, is a tiny and monolithic sect.)...

Advice from afar is always easy and very risky. I hope it will not be considered too impertinent. I think it is necessary to hammer through in the ILP the ideas that we seem to have in common. It is necessary to adopt a clear-cut, independent internationalist position in the ILP and to make clear to the ILP membership and to the rest of the labor movement that the organization no longer considers itself a separate party in any sense but only a militant socialist

propaganda group which asks for nothing more than the opportunity to work loyally inside the Labour Party and as an integral part of it and therefore a part which must enjoy the right to advance its own ideas and to work for its own ideas within the ranks of the Labour Party.

If we do not succeed in winning a substantial section of the working class to a militant movement for the ideas of Marxism, the reformists will inevitably and in not too long a period of time dis-integrate and demoralize the working class movement. That means that it will surely fall victim to Stalinism. The triumph of Stalinism means our necks on the block and the proletariat in heavy chains. At the risk of seeming to oversimplify the problem, that, in brief, is how I see it....

(October 21, 1948)

#

ON CHANGING OUR NAME

By H. D. Coleman (St. Louis)

It is hard to understand how anyone could fail to see the good sense of Comrade Shachtman's proposal that we cease to call ourselves a "party." This is a measure that should have been put into effect long ago. Unfortunately, suggestions of this sort were seldom taken seriously in the past. The contradiction between our name and what we are is now so glaring that further delay in making this change cannot be justified. There is no point in repeating Comrade Shachtman's arguments, except to note that his discussion of the situation in relation to the hoped-for Labor Party is entirely too restrained. It will be difficult enough to function in the new party as we would like to, even under another name. Because of the obstacles that will be put in our way and because of the character of our own membership - which is totally unsuited to participation in such a party - we must smooth our own path as carefully as possible. As a party, our effective participation is totally excluded. We must abandon the fiction that we are a party even in order to gain a foothold in the new political arena which promises us so much. No matter how different our objectives and methods are from those of the Stalinists, we suffer for their sins and are thereby forced to make certain concessions to the "healthy" prejudices of rank-and-file unionists.

When Comrade Shachtman comes to his discussion of the organizational changes that should accompany this change in name, what he says is much more ambiguous, however. His quotations from the Communist Manifesto and his declaration that "Every trace of a sectarian attitude... must be eliminated..." are admirable. But the organizational models he presents to us are - "the old pre-war Bolshevik group" and the old Communist League of America! Even bearing in mind all of Comrade Shachtman's qualifications of "in what sense" he presents these slightly decayed models, (and his qualifications sprout with unusual luxuriance on this occasion), it seems to me they have either an entirely literary character or else they have a political character of the worst sort, considering our present situation. To talk about the pre-war Bolsheviks at this late date, in these United States, in this connection, is to turn completely away from reality. No one except Comrade Shachtman knows much about the pre-war Bolsheviks. If any of the other comrades do possess such knowledge, they have my sympathy for the time they have wasted in acquiring it. Argument about what the pre-war Bolsheviks were and what they did is futile. I can only recall that one of the chief monuments of the period is Lenin's "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism," a most discouraging example of intellectual bigotry and obfuscation, and a wonderful precedent for the recent Stalinist pronouncements on the science of genetics. Too many of our young theoreticians have had their vital juices dried up by this kind of diet, as their morose middle age testifies. At this time, above all, we should try to get away from these legends of the saints.

As for the CLA, probably not many of the comrades know the facts about it. It is not the CLA which we should return to, in any sense. It is the CLA ideology which we should now get rid of, once and for

all. Most of the weaknesses and faults of our movement can be traced back to the CLA, and few of its virtues. I was not a member of the CLA, but I had sufficient contact with it to see that its good qualities were swamped by narrow political dogmatism and incessant bickering over unreal theoretical questions, all in an atmosphere infinitely removed from the American labor movement as it actually existed. (The only exception, of a sort, was Minneapolis, a phenomenon as strange to the CLAers as to everyone else.) If our new, 100% cadre organization is to be even remotely similar to that zoo in which Oehler, Field and Weisbord were among the more peculiar specimens, then indeed we have no future! And if there is no real similarity, then why use the example at all?

On the contrary, we should repudiate on every possible occasion the political narrowness and obscurantism which both majorities and minorities in the Trotskyist movement have always suffered from. These are not indefinable characteristics. We have accurate samples, in full color, in the old CLA and in the SWP today. Most of our comrades apparently have no deep aversion to these characteristics, since not long ago these comrades were happily congratulating each other on our fundamental agreement with the SWP.

We have gone a good way along the right road. Among other things our conception of an "all-inclusive revolutionary party" shows how far. We are now orienting ourselves towards the independent socialist tendencies in Europe (PCUM, RDR, etc.), and away from official Trotskyism. It is impossible to believe that this is merely a temporary tactical adjustment. The only alternative to our present course would be to set ourselves up as the true heirs of Trotsky, and devote most of our time to contesting the will, so to speak. Our membership has never shown any enthusiasm for such a project as this. In squabbles over political inheritance in the past, the outcome has generally proved to be fatal for the contestant. Centrism, that fascinating political category that we talked so much about a few years ago, has practically disappeared from our vocabulary. The "line of blood" between ourselves and "reformism" has very nearly faded away. Our right-wing critics can no longer be answered merely by references to Noske and Scheidemann. The rare occasions when we try to answer in this way, due to irritation or unwillingness to face the issues, are painful and embarrassing occasions for most of us and hard to live down. The fact is, our clear tendency is to play a role not in any way similar to that of the CLA, but much closer to that attempted by the more politically developed elements in the AWP before the fusion with the CLA and immediately following the fusion. It seems to me that we will either continue to move in this direction or we will fail to pieces.

Why then try to make out that our new organizational form will be tighter politically? Our comrades will inevitably carry on the same type of activity, with about the same political content. Indeed, participation in a Labor Party would make necessary a far more genuinely "popular" orientation on our part than we have now, and might, under the most favorable circumstances, draw into our movement new, politically raw elements on a scale that we have had no experience of so far. Will this be more of a "cadre" organization? Will this be less "all-inclusive?" In the happy event that we actually find ourselves in a Labor Party or something similar, I am perfectly convinced that our activities will be concerned to only a minor extent with

"Marxist education" in the sense that most of our comrades understand the term and in the sense it would logically have for a "cadre" organization. Comrade Shachtman himself emphasizes that our union work must continue on exactly the same lines as before. The "propaganda group" he talks about seems to be a rather curious animal.

One thing is plain: That simply being a "clear-cut political tendency," as we are, is not enough these days to prevent our membership and leadership from being disturbed by all sorts of questions and doubts. The fact that we have a firm position on the "national question" does not spare us the penalties of living in the real world - penalties which the SWP temporarily avoids by existing on a Bolshevik-Leninist astral plane. All we can do is try to develop a flexible enough and broad enough organization so that solid theoretical and practical results will come out of this questioning and doubting. A sacrifice or organizational efficiency can hardly be avoided. But the organizational "efficiency" of the past nine years has rested entirely on the self-sacrifice of individual comrades, and is a system that we certainly should not cling to.

Discipline by example is, beyond any doubt, about the only practical form of discipline in such a movement as ours. And the morale upon which discipline is based, especially discipline by example, is, in turn, based on conviction, as Comrade Shachtman says. But the kind of conviction Comrade Shachtman has in mind is necessarily scarce these days; and when we do find it, it is less likely than in the past to correspond with the facts of life. It can't be whipped up to meet a political crisis. Even the most intransigent among our leading comrades tend to shun discussions of certain fundamental questions. For example, they have shown a strange unwillingness to provide our "clear-cut political tendency" with an equally clear-cut basic program, so that prospective members, when they innocently ask for "a copy" of our program, will not have to be referred to a list as long as your arm of theses, resolutions and miscellaneous documents going all the way back to the First Congress of the Comintern, and most of them quite inaccessible. Idiotic as it may seem, a man likes to know definitely to what he commits himself when he joins an organization. Our "program" as it is now starts off as something sufficiently material, in the form of resolutions adopted at our last convention, but becomes less and less tangible the farther back you pursue it, and finally fades into a philosophical mist with various "Leninist traditions" floating around in it and also something about water turning into ice. To all of which, including the dialectical lesson to be learned from water turning into ice, the new member is, for all he knows, irrevocably committed.

It is obvious that our leadership does not really believe that agreement could be reached on many of the complicated questions that a Leninist organization should take a position on. Then why not admit what is undoubtedly and fortunately a fact, and work out a minimum program which will truly and conclusively establish the basis of membership in our organization. Our program of "transitional demands" (an idea that never worked) was not intended to serve this purpose and does not do so. A minimum program is the only kind of program we can actually develop at present. It is also exactly the kind of programmatic basis for our organization that is called for if we are to participate effectively in the Labor Party. The suspicion

we shall encounter can be honestly dealt with only in this way. General expressions of devotion to the principles of Marxism-Leninism should be absent from such a program.

For excellent, practical reasons, we should cease to call ourselves a party. We should, moreover, pay closer attention to Comrade Shachtman's quotations from the Communist Manifesto than he does himself; and we should recognize without equivocation our evolution in the direction of the "all-inclusive group for the propagation of socialism" that Comrade Shachtman rejects. A more accurate description of the type of organization which it appears to me is needed would be something like this: An organization combining the functions of (1) a propaganda and action group, with reasonable internal discipline, for certain limited and carefully defined socialist objectives; and (2) a discussion and educational group, with no discipline and no program except what would be absolutely necessary to confine the discussion within broad limits.

August 30, 1948.

* * *

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO MAX SHACHTMAN ON HIS ARTICLE
"'PARTY' OR 'PROPAGANDA GROUP'? THE POSITION AND
ORIENTATION OF OUR PARTY"

August 27, 1948

Dear Comrade Shachtman:

The Cleveland Branch is preparing for discussion on the article "Party or Propaganda Group." We feel that in order to hold a fruitful discussion we need more information on the subject. We assume that this resolution is being presented at the convention for approval or disapproval by the delegates.

We would like you to answer the following questions if possible.

You mention that there will be organizational changes in line with a political change, but you mention only a change in name.

(1) Do you propose any changes in the organization of either the national or local organization (particularly in relation to trade union department and educational department)?

(2) Do you propose any changes in our party press, either in their contents or method of distribution?

(3) What organizational changes, if any, do you propose in the general practice of democratic centralism? (a) If a member established in a trade union fraction should decide he wanted to quit and go to school or take some non-industrial job, would there be any discipline applied other than pressure? (b) In public speaking must members adhere to the party line or refrain from expressing their own views if they disagree? (c) What would be the relationship between the higher and lower governing bodies of the party? For example, if a member disagrees on the Russian question, can he express his disagreement at public meetings? (d) Would the basis for recruitment be on a more general socialist basis or on more factional lines? Must a member or possible member agree 100% with the line? Can members have as much disagreement with the party line in the new organization as we have permitted in the past?

(4) We'd like to remind you that most of us, at least here in Cleveland are not at all familiar with the type of organization found in the old Communist League of America. Please elaborate.

(5) Will there be a change in our present emphasis that all our activities are done to facilitate recruitment?

(6) You state on page 13 that we will devote our main attention to the labor movement, but not all. You do not mention what other areas of activity we should work in. Please clarify this point.

(7) On trade unions, would our policy be to gain trade union office on strict programmatic basis or would our policy be relaxed?

We urge an immediate reply to the Cleveland Branch. It will save us many hours of discussions on just what you mean or propose on various questions which could be better spent on what our positions are in relation to the resolutions. We hope that the questions and answers will also be printed in the PARTY BULLETIN.

Comradely yours,

Members of the Cleveland Branch

#

September 20, 1948

Dear Comrade Shachtman:

Last week my branch discussed your article "'Party' or 'Propaganda Group'? The Position and Orientation of Our Party" which appeared in Vol. III, No. 4 of the BULLETIN. In the course of the discussion, several comrades complained of what they feel to be a lack of precision or clarity in your article. This letter is not intended to reflect the discussion in full, but merely to bring to your attention the kind of questions on which some of the comrades seem to feel greater precision or elaboration is necessary.

1) For some years we have been trying to build a party. Yet during this whole time the objective conditions have not been much different than the ones which you describe in your article. Why didn't the leadership of our party recognize that it would be impossible for us to build a party and that it was necessary for us to consciously constitute ourselves a propaganda group? If our attempts to become a party under the conditions you describe have been a hindrance to us, doesn't the leadership bear a heavy responsibility for our misdirection, and isn't it incumbent on those who now propose a change to clearly come to grips with the policies and perspectives which were held out to us in the past?

2) You say that we must become aware of the fact that we have operated best when we have behaved like a propaganda group and have had the greatest response under these circumstances. Do you consider that LABOR ACTION has been a socialist propaganda paper in the past? In other words, does your proposal envisage any considerable change in the kind of a paper we put out, and if so, along what lines?

3) You say that we must train our people so that they can become the socialist leaders of the working class movement, that we must instill in them the ambition to become the outstanding participants in the unions today and the labor party tomorrow as spokesmen for the socialist program. As the above would appear to have always been one of our aims, what concretely do you believe the party should do with regard to its press, education, etc. to implement or further this goal?

4) You say that we should intensify Marxist education and

propagate the program and leadership of Marxism in the ranks of the working class. This also requires concretization. Presumably we have always been doing this, though in different ways at different times. For example: before our movement adopted the transitional program in 1938 we laid stress on one kind of Marxist propaganda. Since then we have tended to lay stress on the transitional program as another kind of Marxist propaganda. Each was adopted as a result of the conception of the party at the given moment, of its role and of the objective circumstances in which it operated. Does your proposal envisage a change in our approach in the paper, in pamphlets, in meetings, on the floor of unions or other organizations where we are active? If so, concretely in what direction?

5) You speak of our press and organizations going "the whole of the way" to establish us as the "loyal left wing of the working class..." (p. 12) while at the same time retaining "the fullest and strictest independence of our Marxian program and conceptions.. . the fullest cohesion and independence of our organization." Yet you maintain that the American working class is very backward politically, and will most likely begin its road to independence by forming a reformist labor party. Doesn't it appear inevitable that in the presence of such backwardness in the class the Marxist party or propaganda group is bound to appear as being separated by some distance from the working class, and even its left wing? Concretely, how do you think we can bridge this gap? Isn't it possible that what you propose is that we have our cake and eat it too, in this respect, and that the gap either cannot be bridged at present by a Marxist group except at the expense of its principles?

I think the above should give you some idea of the kind of questions the comrades are asking, at least in our branch. I believe that an answer would serve to clarify the matter for all of us.

Comradely yours,

Larry O'Connor

#

A STATEMENT ON THE TASKS OF THE PARTY

By Seattle Branch

Our movement was organized on the assumption that we were living in an epoch of wars and revolutions; that the first and second world wars were a result of economic conditions which could not be resolved by those wars; that a revolutionary socialist movement would quickly grow out of the social conditions created by a degenerating capitalism.

We saw no difference between the socio-economic conditions of 1914 and 1940 which created the two wars. Since the Russian Revolution grew out of the first, we expected the second to produce a second revolution. Everywhere we saw the objective situation rotten-ripe for a socialist revolution. In our preoccupation, however, with our analyzing of the imperialist forces and deciphering the Russian riddle, we failed to understand the importance of the subjective factors in the situation, or their relation to the objective situation.

Our difficulty in bridging the gap between the subjective backwardness of the working class and the objective need of Socialism can be laid at the door of the ever falling degree of confidence of the working class in Communism because of the ever lower degeneration of Russia, which they link with Communism. Some workers are drawn into the Stalinist orbit. Most, however, are repelled by Stalinism. The revulsion or negative attitude which results from this rejection establishes also a negativism toward what they consider the Stalinist's radical cousins - namely, US. The working class has been unable to draw the distinction between Stalinism and Trotskyism, between bureaucratic collectivism and Communism, between totalitarianism and proletarian dictatorship. We have not been in a position to correct their thinking because we are isolated from the working class, partly physically, but mostly politically. We have no joint political arena in which these concepts can be clarified. We have begun to make a slight gain in this respect in the UAW and Maritime. But even here it can be dealt with only on a narrow plane - mostly non-political.

Furthermore, in spite of our exemplary role in most union struggles, workers are suspicious of us because we live in two worlds. They live in a trade union world and we live in a political world and, worse, a "Socialist world." We are isolated from the working class because the working class is isolated from politics. Our organization, ideas and objectives are political. The working class organizations, ideas and objectives are not. To overcome our isolation from the working class, we have to put the working class on a political road.

We Keep the Scissors Open

While it is generally true that the working class is backward, it is equally true that we have done comparatively little to overcome that backwardness. Every stage of the development of our move-

ment, the CLA, SWP and WP, has had the same orientation, both political and organizational. Politically, either positively, critically or negatively, our orbit has been the Soviet Union. Only in the last couple of years have we begun to realize that since the Russian Proletarian Revolution is lost and that there is no revolutionary movement on the horizon (except the ghost of the third camp), we have to build a new revolutionary movement - beginning in the USA with the backward American working class; that we have to, therefore, learn how to overcome the workers' prejudice against politics and Socialism. Organizationally we have continued to think along the sterile lines of regroupment. The possibilities for enlarging the revolutionary movement by raiding other organizations do not exist. The Socialist movement has dried up because the working class consciousness has declined. To continue the policy of regroupment of the revolutionary vanguard may increase our numbers by fifty, but in the process we are further from the real source of our strength - the working class. A generation of internecine warfare has purified and cleansed our politics. But it has brought us no nearer to Socialism. For in the course of the struggle, the working class has slipped from our grasp.

It is a good sign that in the last couple of years we have sought a new organizational orientation. We have begun to think of how to tap the forces through which a revolutionary party could be rebuilt. We have projected and hoped for the third force. Without respect for our hopes, the working class continues politically to be split between the two old camps in spite of the fact that they have little or no confidence in either. Our task, however, is not to predict the third force. Our task is to organize it. We have reached the point where the only road toward Socialism is through a Labor Party. Our task is no longer to advocate a Labor Party. Our task has become -- build a Labor Party.

We Wait on the Spontaneous Masses

The long history of socialist struggle has verified over and over again that the working class cannot go beyond a pure and simple trade union struggle without the intervention of scientific Marxism. Yet we continue a non-intervention policy as far as changing the struggle of the working class from an economic to a political one. That is, unless we consider intervention the advocating of a Labor Party through the pages of LABOR ACTION or the occasional resolution. All of our political resolutions and actions indicate that we believe it is not we who will build a Labor Party, but the labor lieutenants of capital or even possible (if remote) the Stalinists. The British Labor Party, the German Social Democratic Party and the Russian Social Democratic Party came into being because the Socialists built them. An example closer to home: the CCF was not built by the union business agents. We can advocate forever, we can rant at the union bureaucrats indefinitely, but we won't have a labor party. Because they cannot see beyond the union's contract or the dues receipt.

With our present political line and organizational forces, we are helpless to intervene. We are thinking and acting in terms of 1917-1928 when the radical parties had some standing and respect

among the working class, when a party could put forward a policy, or a program and it would be listened or or read at least. Now it is not listened to either out of fear or out of disgust because of a mistaken belief that Stalinism and Communism are the same.

To continue any longer the policy of waiting on the labor bureaucrats taking the initiative in building a Labor Party or of the working class spontaneously organizing political struggles will be fatal. It is our task to build the Labor Party and if we don't do it, it will not be built.

When we ask the question, why doesn't the WP grow? - we are saying, why do not large or even small numbers of workers jump across the abyss that separates us from the trade union movement? For a generation, as a movement, we have been losing contact with the working class.

Why is it, that in localities where we get a large number of workers who agree with us, who are regular subscribers to our paper, who come to our forums, who speak for our ideas, never join the WP? It all simmers down to the fact that the jump to our party is too great; the fear of isolation, the fear of losing their jobs becomes too large an obstacle. As a consequence, our membership is composed of heroes, our sympathizers of those rare souls who perhaps have neither families to be responsible for or "there is not much else to live for."

We have to do the jumping, not the working class. We must do it organizationally and not through a transitional program. Propaganda is no longer sufficient to bridge the gap between us and the working class. It is imperative that we seek to build a political organization of the working class and not an organization separate from it. Instead of building a bridge from the working class to us, we must build a bridge from us to the working class and then build a bridge from the working class to Socialism.

From O'Connor's report we gathered that Shachtman, in his report (to the N.C. Plenum) felt that we should give up the transitional demands, in the sense that they are a platform, that we should put our stress more on a socialist program - that is, shift from agitation to propaganda. He advocated this because Trotsky, at the time he formulated the transitional program, thought that it was necessary only to bridge the subjective backwardness of the working class with the objective necessity for socialism so that we might establish the necessary conditions for a revolutionary struggle for workers power.

While we agree that the transitional program no longer fills the bill; we think that a retreat into a sectarian propaganda existence is even worse. That may not be what Shachtman intends and it seems from his statement in the BULLETIN on a new orientation that he speaks for a less sectarian existence, but his organizational proposals leave us nearer sectarianism than before. While he makes organizational provisions for the "propaganda" and educational existence of the movement, he establishes no organizational

formula breaking our political isolation from the working class. Into the trade unions is not enough. We are still isolated from the unions politically.

For us, the retreat solely to a propaganda existence will solve nothing. In our opinion this direction of development flows from an artificial division of steps in the development of a revolutionary party, which steps are schematic and do not flow from the dynamics of the class struggle. The stages of development: propaganda, agitational, and action, put the problem of building the party on a formal basis that has no reality in life. A working class revolutionary party will emerge out of two stages. Stage one is a process of breaking the isolation of the working class from politics. Until that time we will not be able to penetrate the working class with our ideas, because they are essentially political and the working class is non-political. The fact is that we are in the unions, our comrades are becoming known as good unionists. But aside from a small circle, as we become known socialists, we become isolated.

Once a labor party is established, the second stage in the development of our movement is to break the working class from reformist politics. In that process, we will become a revolutionary party because the working class will become a revolutionary working class.

Our error in the past has been that we have projected a revolutionary socialist party outside of and without the working class. This has proved all but fatal. Tomorrow's promise depends upon our ability to fuse our political life with the union movement....

We have said that we can begin to end our isolation from the working class by ending the working class isolation from politics. It is evident that there is a considerable sentiment throughout the United States for a labor party. We lament the fact that the Stalinists subvert the sentiment for a labor party, and that the union leadership fails to give leadership to this sentiment. We say, that when the sentiment reaches an irresistible level, the trade union leaders will be forced to launch out on a labor party or give way to a new leadership.

There is no indication, despite Reuther's pronouncements, that a labor party will be formed. The most likely variant is a Democratic Party with a new face, or a new bourgeois party, unless we organize the necessary working class force to push the trend away from the Democratic and Republican and Progressive Party into a Labor Party. Reuther, Dubinsky and Henderson, without an alternative foreign policy to the Democratic and Republican coalition, ~~polity,~~ will end up with an essentially anti-labor domestic policy as war between Russia and the United States draws closer. We do not mean to say that the labor coalition will not form a party. That is very likely, but it will not be a labor party. It will, however, bring us closer to a labor party because it will bring into focus the real issue which traps labor, that is, the need of the capitalist class to shackle labor so that it can carry out its war aims.

To prepare for the time when the new party is formed and even to prod the political realignments along, it is essential for us to merge ourselves with every worker who is now in favor of a labor party. To

merge with them, we must first organize them. We do not begin by propagandizing those who are for a labor party. In the course of dealing with the issues that arise, in explaining the need of the labor party, of trying to win over the progressive currents in the existing political formations, and of building a party, these workers will come to learn class politics. The important task now is to ally ourselves with them so that in our public life we become the committee for a political party.

Such a formation is the organizational answer to the situation in which we find ourselves. Such a committee would establish a political bridge between us and the working class, and offer a means by which a genuine labor party could be built. It would put us elbow to elbow with the most advanced workers. It would give us an approach for opening a political discussion with every worker. It would enable us to interpret every event in American life in class terms - in terms of the need for a labor party. Without the boogie-boo of Socialism. It would enable us to adapt ourselves to the status in which socialist organizations are placed. It would become a positive alternative to Stalinism. Now we are in a position of condemning the Stalinists for subverting the labor party sentiment, without any alternative perspective.

Such a formation will enable us to mobilize the necessary forces to push the unions into politics; to accelerate the political realignments toward either a labor party or a third party. If a third party blossoms forth, we have around us already the most politically conscious workers in the union movement. These workers can form the left wing in that party, and workers who are prepared to push forward to establish a labor party. By organizing these forces, beginning now, we begin in the new labor party with the possibility of having a real influence upon it.

The best way to explain what we have in mind to the greatest number in the party is to conceive of this as an entry - like the entry into the SP - with two notable exceptions. One, we first organize the group with which we merge into a committee for a labor party. Two, we go with them into the labor party and remain there until that party becomes a revolutionary socialist party or the working class loses confidence in a labor party in favor of a revolutionary socialist party.

During this process we maintain a scientific Marxian center as a necessary prerequisite for a correct course. LABOR ACTION shall be the organ of the Committee for a Labor Party - with its name changed to something like "The Labor Party Advocate." THE NEW INTERNATIONAL shall become the organ of the revolutionary organization which will be known by such a name as the Association of Socialist Workers, the task of which organization will be to continue and perpetuate scientific Marxism, to train and educate Marxists and develop socialist working class leaders.

#

FOR A "PARTY" PERSPECTIVE

By: Irving Swanson (New York)

1. The coming convention of the Workers Party will find us still a small and uninfluential group. This after eight years of existence. During all these years the aim of our party was to break out of its isolation and become a conscious factor in the lives of tens and thousands of people. In order to do that we adopted a certain orientation, we formulated our role and tasks and the organizational methods to carry out these tasks. If now at the end of eight years we have arrived at what is essentially an impasse on the old basis, it is necessary to draw up a balance sheet of our experience in order to determine whether the reasons for our failure to grow have been primarily objective, that is, where regardless of what we might have done things would have essentially turned out as they have, or whether the fault primarily lies in the subjective, namely in incorrect perspectives, tasks, organizational methods, and the like. This is the only fruitful way of posing the problem of the continued isolation of our party.

2. To begin this analysis it is necessary to go back to the emergence of our movement from the C.P. From 1928 to 1938, the main orientation and efforts of our movement were directed toward recruiting from the ranks of the politicals, recruiting people capable of absorbing the highly developed and differentiated ideas of the movement and who organizationally speaking were capable of being professionals, that is, making the party a "way of life". Our orientation was toward people, to use a phrase, capable of being "sectarians", as different from a "mass" approach. This orientation was forced upon us both for an "internal" and an "external" reason. Internally, the pioneers emerging from the C.P. had to work out their thinking into programmatic formulations, the ideological (and first) basis of a movement. This "working out" meant living a "sectarian" ideological life and demanded and could only attract people capable of living such an ideological life. Externally, the situation that we operated in those years was the existing of other viable poles of attraction. In the early thirties the left turn of the Comintern, the success of the 5 year plan in Russia, the collapse of capitalist economy in the U.S. allowed the C.P. to draw to itself the main bulk of leftward moving workers and intellectuals. At the same time, with the bureaucratization of the C.P., the victory of Hitler, leftward moving workers and youth brought to political life by the collapse of U.S. Capitalism began to enter the S.P. Under these conditions, where viable groups existed we could not be an attractive force to masses, who went to what already existed and appeared to be, or have the chance to be, effective. Thus we were forced to seek out people capable of being "sectarians". We did trade union work and the like, where the opportunity presented itself, but the character of the party, its press, education, branches, was of a sect, as defined above, and not a Party.

3. However, in 1938, the founding of the S.W.P., and the adoption of the Transitional Program signified the attempt to shift our main emphasis from the "politicals" toward unaffiliated and even non-political masses. This shift in the direction of masses of people meant that we had to change from the character of a "sect" to a group that would be able to recruit and keep workers, that is, to an organization that act-

ed in the manner of and would have the spirit of a Party.

4. Let us define what being a party, even a small party, means. The act of setting up a party means to declare that the group considers itself as the proper pole of attraction for all those elements seeking a way out. And it attempts to prove its claim and be that, by intervening in the life of the people in every way it can up to the limit of its forces. Whether it is a pole of attraction is the test of a party. A sect looks for people, a party attracts them. A sect seeks out those capable of absorbing its highly developed ideas and way of life, a party attracts people primarily by intervening in the issues that are agitating people's minds in an effective and concrete way. It can thus be seen, that a party, except for the forces at its disposal, does not restrict its scope, but that it attempts to expand, to reach wider and wider circles of people, in the direction of speaking for all the exploited and oppressed.

5. Now the above meaning of a party is generally accepted in the abstract. However, as we will try to show, the Party did not act in this manner and direction, and not as a matter of incompetence. Rather because of the perspectives we developed, and following therefrom, the conception of role and tasks and organizational methods we held, we consciously restricted the scope of our party. This is what we will attempt to prove in the following pages.

A DUAL PERSPECTIVE

6. As stated before, 1938, with the adoption of the Transitional Program, signified a turning toward the broad masses. However, the adoption of the Labor Party plank at the same time created a duality in our basic perspective. For on the one hand, the setting up of our party (SWP in 1938) was a declaration that we considered ourselves as the legitimate center of attraction for leftward moving masses, in opposition to whatever already existed, the C.P., the S.P. and the non-existent Labor Party. But in the other hand the call for a Labor Party was a call for another party, for another pole for workers to group themselves around. It is necessary at this time to understand that an integral factor in our advocacy of the Labor Party was the recognition by us of the inability up till then of our movement to build itself into any real force, and moreover without the likelihood of its doing so in the near future. Thus the duality. On the one hand setting up to be the pole of attraction, and on the other saying we could not be that pole.

7. Now the point is that this duality of perspective could only have been averted, or "merged" if our perspective had come to life, namely, the actual formation or definite tendency toward the formation of a Labor Party. For then the perspectives we laid out would have gone "according to plan": the building of our Party and the crystallization of a revolutionary force in the Labor Party merging into one overall task!

8. As it was, however, this duality in our perspective turned into a contradiction in perspective. A contradiction that effected the conception of our role, tasks, and organizational generally. And which moreover became a prime factor in restricting the scope of our party.

For the failure of the Labor Party movement to develop in real life, constantly posed before us the two elements in our party perspective, each with its own implications as to role, tasks, organizational methods, etc.: the "Labor Party" perspective and the "Party" perspective so to speak. On the basis of the "Party" perspective we developed the ideas around a "campaign"-party, a party that would intervene in issues in a thoroughgoing and sustained manner, and attract people on the basis of our work on these issues. But the "Labor Party" perspective, since we couldn't do anything about it by ourselves or join any movement in that direction since all these tendencies had died still-born, made our function be that of propagandizing for a Labor Party. And the more we became a "Labor Party" party, the more our general character became that of being a propaganda group, and not a party. Moreover, our Labor Party propaganda, with a labor party development not taking place, and our agitation not joining a real current of thought and action, reduced our role as "propagator" to sterility and impotence. Indeed, a vicious circle has been set up, existing to this day. The party, from the very beginning saddled with an idea that its most likely development lay through the formation of another party, never really developed the type of all rounded political activity that may be summed up as "intervention in the issues of the day", and which alone could test the capacity of the party to grow and be that pole of attraction that a party is. With the party thus saddled, and thus unable to break out of its isolation, the "Labor Party" perspective, and particularly that element of it based upon our own insufficiency, came more and more to the front, with the idea of all rounded political activity becoming slowly displaced. But this precluded any success of the party since it pushed the necessary type of activity to make the transition from "propaganda group" to "party" into the background. The continued non-success of the party to break out of its isolation only made the Labor Party development seem all the more urgent with further stress on the "Labor Party" perspective. And so on until today.

9. Alongside of the practical effect of the duality in perspective, namely the pushing into the background of all rounded political activity in favor of a propaganda group went a "theoretical" development. In the document The Character and Perspectives of Our Party To-day by Max Shachtman, issued for the Active Workers Conference held in 1945, the main role of our party as propagator for the Labor Party, and which precludes a broad series of independent actions, was consciously conceived. (More accurately, rationalized.) As we have mentioned before, the Labor Party perspective even in 1938 was conditioned by our recognition that up to that time the party had failed to build itself into any real force, and furthermore could not expect to become a mass party in the immediate future. This was the negative aspect that made all the positive angles (organized arena, step forward from point of view of workers' consciousness, and the like) seem all the more positive. But still the "Labor Party" perspective was never given the character of a necessary historical phase, "necessary" being here defined, that if the workers were to progress they would have to form a labor party. But today precisely this view of the labor party as "necessary" pervades our whole concept of the labor party and which moreover, raises that element of the labor party perspective that is based upon our own insufficiency to a qualitatively different level. For it then implies that the workers, if they are to go forward, will have to form a labor party because we are not capable of becoming their class instrument,

that is, not capable of becoming a mass party through direct recruitment. And it further implies that all is lost if the workers don't form a labor party because "necessary" means that if the workers haven't enough class consciousness to even form a labor party then how can we expect them to come direct to socialism. Thus we have moved from a simple recognition that a revolutionary force sufficient to play a real role was absent to an implication that such a revolutionary force is incapable of arising through its own inner resources.

10. That this is the way our "Labor Party" perspective is translated I would like to show by the following quotations. In the document cited above, The Character and Perspectives of the Party To-Day, we read, "We are handicapped primarily by the fact that we do not operate with a politically organized working class. That is point A,B,C, and all the other letters down to Z. The history of the labor movement shows that no revolutionary organization in any country ever became a genuine mass party over night--that is within a period of two-three-five-ten years.... In our time, (not fifty years ago and not fifty years hence) the true revolutionary vanguard movement has an elementary need of a proletariat organized politically as a class. In the U.S. (again today, in the present concrete situation) this means that our main political slogan, the struggle to break the proletariat from bourgeois politics and to set it on the road of class politics--revolves around the fight for an independent labor party." (All emphasis in the original.) The particularly significant remarks in the context of all these sentences are those that theorize about the development generally speaking of mass parties out of mass parties, with the obvious reference that this is the way the Workers Party will develop. With the phrases "point A,B,C,...", "elementary need" and such urgent formulations is it too much to see in these lines the kind of theoretical reasoning behind our being in practice a "Labor Party" party at the expense of an all rounded political approach to the American scene?

11. Further. In the resolution, Tasks of the Party In the Present Situation, presented by the N.C. to the A.W.C., of 1947 we read, "The most important forward step that the American working class can take in the next period is its declaration of political independence from the bourgeois parties. The Workers Party does not deceive itself with glowing dreams about becoming the mass party of the American proletariat overnight...." The last sentence following the first show how closely both ideas are tied together and how in the eyes of the party's leadership the Labor Party has become a "necessary historical development" if the Workers Party itself is to grow.

12. However, up to now this concept of "necessary" was only implicit, with doors left open. But today, with the publication of Max Shachtman's article "Party" or "Propaganda group" we have this concept made explicit!

13. To sum up. We have tried to show how at the very inception of our party (SWP in '38) the adoption of the "Labor Party" perspective created a duality in perspective which could only have been averted by the actual development of a Labor Party formation. That the "resolving" of this duality led to the party becoming a propaganda group at the expense of all rounded political activity proper to a group moving in the direction of become a party. That the restriction of scope this

has meant has taken place not only on a practical basis but also on a theoretical plane; where the "Labor Party" has become a "necessary historical stage" in the ideology of the party.

UNIONITIS

14. Up to now we have been dealing with that aspect of the situation that arose out of the creation of a dual perspective. We have tried to show that the "Labor Party" perspective overcame the "Party" perspective, and that this led to restricting the scope of the party. To acquire a fuller understanding of this process we must go further into the reasons why the "Labor Party" overcame the "Party" perspective, and the type of all rounded activity flowing from that perspective. Moreover, we must visualize this question in the context of a constant and insistent posing of the problem of the "Party" perspective, constant and insistent precisely because the Labor Party failed to develop and because the party failed to achieve real growth in numbers and influence through its role as propogator for the Labor Party.

15. It is here that we come to the party's approach toward what it considered to be "mass activity", its approach toward the working class in general and the trade union movement in particular. And we see that its answer to the problem of the "Party" perspective, its conception of mass activity was not the concept of all rounded political activity, of intervention in the issues of the day, but was a substitute for mass political activity, namely the trade union movement. To paraphrase Leonard and Marco: we have substituted the class concept for politics, we have substituted being with the class for conducting political activity among the class. To the question of the "Party" perspective we gave the answer of getting into the masses, which meant to us to get into the trade unions and to consider as really meaningful only those issues arising out of the trade unions.

16. This identification of party work with trade union work (unionitis) led unavoidably to a restriction of the scope of party work, that is, undermined an approach of all sided political activity. For we tended to shut ourselves out of intervening in a whole host of political issues that had not arisen out of the trade union movement or amounting to the same thing, that the trade union bureaucracy would not allow the union movement to become involved in.

17. To make this mistake is easy (especially for a small group which finds it difficult to handle political issues itself and thus looks for already developed arenas) because it is "logical". That is, the working class is the revolutionary class, and the trade union movement is its organized sections. Therefore a revolutionary party must above all extend its influence in the working class and the trade unions. But it is also true that the working class is only potentially the social lever for the overthrow of capitalism and the institution of socialism. That it will fulfill its role only when we are its leaders. At the present time the trade union movement is a bourgeois labor movement. And that is why we cannot limit ourselves to the confines of the trade union movement!

18. It is true our politics is class politics and class politics is not suspended in mid-air. Even though a group of non-working class

people can advocate working class socialist politics in the sense that these politics truly represent the immediate and historic interests of the working class and socialism, nevertheless, that line in order to acquire social force must have the class members supporting it. But again this only poses the necessity of extending our influence among the working class and the trade unions but does not tell us how! But what we have done is to make "being in" identical with "how". We forget that we join organizations, including trade unions, not in and of themselves but because they are organized for certain struggle and educational purposes which allows us a vantage point from which to conduct political activity. If we couldn't conduct political activity with them we wouldn't join them. There are many workers in the Democratic and Republican parties, there are more workers in the American Legion than in the American Veterans Committee, but still we don't necessarily join these organizations. This means that our concept of "arena" does not essentially stem from its class composition but means those people who group themselves around issues. That is how we will extend our influence, precisely by intervening in the issues of the day. We will find our "arena" in those people who are sufficiently aroused, sufficiently intelligent, to want to do something about it. Within this context our getting into organizations (including the trade unions) can be correctly understood. They are vantage points, they present opportunities to conduct political activity. We simply never make them identical with political activity, nor do we confine ourselves to the political activity arising from these organizations.

19. "Making politics", this is our method, this will give us our "arenas". Won't there be workers responding? Isn't our politics, the answers we give, the proposals we make, based upon the needs and struggle of the workers and all the exploited? They why shouldn't we naturally attract workers, and consider as highly unusual a banker responding favorably to our political activity? Is it necessary to point out this interrelationship?

20. Thus, we can see, looking back on the period of years since 1938, how our party, in its own conception of its perspectives, role, tasks, etc. prevented the development of an approach of intervening in all the political issues of the day and instead restricted the scope of the party. Thus it has never really tested the capacity of a group like ours, with our program and our size, to become a pole of attraction, it has never really tested the capacity of our group to get "into" a political issue, a ferment and agitation, with a concrete understandable answer. Our party has never really tested its capacity to build "bridges" between itself and the masses. What it has done essentially, despite all the proletarianization, the trade unionism, the character of LA, and the like efforts to turn its face toward the masses, has been to remain a group that only people capable of being sectarians will come to. This in essence is our bankruptcy.

21. While up to now we have attempted to disprove the idea that the present impasse is due primarily to objective reasons only in, so to speak, an indirect manner, namely by showing how our failure lies in us, we, nevertheless, avoid making for the moment a direct analysis of the objective situation we are operating in, in order to fully and concretely explain what we mean by "making politics" and to show how our party, with its present forces, can make politics. And in order to be

concrete we will take two issues which our Party has attempted to do something on and show what could have been done with a proper orientation, and a proper understanding of how to make politics.

THE MARSHALL PLAN ISSUE

22. How have we attempted to intervene on the Marshall Plan issue, the master plan of American imperialism. We don't have the Congressman so frequently mentioned in the LA discussion articles to present an alternative program in the halls of Congress. That is, we can't intervene on the plane of legislation or government. We as a Party do not propose to organize a movement to send aid to Europe. Moreover, although the Plenum resolution on the Marshall Plan (Draper-Hall resolution) raises the demand of trade union control of aid we are not carrying on a campaign around this demand either in the pages of LA or in our trade union fractions. All in all, we can say we do not see the possibility of intervening in the Marshall Plan issue on the level of "action".

23. Now the Marshall Plan issue is a perfect example of the kind of problem we are faced with in the case of many first class issues, where we cannot intervene on the level of action, (which includes "calls" for action), but still we feel the Party must react in some way. For one, we want to give the advanced militants who are influenced by us a line on these politically significant issues, and secondly we want to take advantage of the interest aroused by the issue in order to extend our influence, we want to "use" the issue. Therefore, if we can't "do" anything on the issue we can write and talk about it.

24. Here it is necessary to understand that writing or talking about an issue, can constitute real "intervention". That is, intervention does not merely consist of taking a concrete step, or advocating the taking of a concrete step, Educating can be intervention. It is necessary here to visualize the issue and the interest aroused by it in terms of a "field" in the sense that one speaks of "magnetic field" or the like. Specifically, in the case of the Marshall Plan, we must see the people whose interest has been aroused by the Marshall Plan, who are asking questions about its significance, should it be supported or not, will it work, etc., as constituting a "Marshall Plan field of interest". This "field of interest" can be broken into by anybody that seriously educates them and clarifies them, in regard to their questions. These people will react positively and appreciatively to a paper or magazine (or class) that helps them toward a real understanding of what is involved, that gives them the possibility of applying their intelligence to these all important world problems. That means making them well informed factually and theoretically about these problems, that in today's political atmosphere are conversational topics of the day. This "using" of the issue to extend our influence both in the sense of spreading our own ideas and also in the sense of gaining people's respect is intervention, intervention to give it a name, on the "level of education".

25. With the above ideas in mind how did and is the party utilizing this "level of education" in relation to the Marshall Plan. A quick survey tells that the party dealt with the Marshall Plan issue in the usual way, that is, summing up the meaning of the Plan in a series

of generalizations, giving the line on "for" or "against" and at the same time paying very little attention to the factual background or to explaining the whole complex of economic and political factors that is necessary for a person to understand the plan, and upon which basis he can use his own intelligence to arrive at political judgments. (The articles of Paxon and Judd are examples of what we should do but only prove the point we are making by their being the only serious stuff we have put out on the issue in all these months).

26. This means we failed to use the "level of education" to intervene in the Marshall Plan issue. It means we had to fall back on empty sounding agitation which impresses nobody because it teaches nothing. The point is that while generalizations may be adequate for people who already have political ideas and political premises, it is entirely inadequate for and unimpressive to the average (politically speaking) reader who wants to have the political conclusions or generalizations proven to him by facts and figures, and a kind of education that will allow him to use his own intelligence and not be "high pressured" into a line. It is a safe bet that the average reader did not come away from his reading of LA on the Marshall Plan with the feeling of having learned something, of feeling a little bit taller, more prepared to discuss the issue with his friends, which only means we failed to utilize the Marshall Plan issue in a way we could have insofar as forces are concerned.

27. And as we said before the Marshall Plan issue is the kind of issue that we meet time and time again and that is what makes our failures to utilize the "level of education", which in these kind of issues is practically the only way we can intervene, so unfortunate.

28. So much on the Marshall Plan and the method of intervening on the level of education.

THE PALESTINE ISSUE

29. We will further concretize the approach suggested in this article by examining the Palestine question in relation to the Jewish population, primarily of N.Y., and see how we could have intervened, what openings offered themselves, what different levels of intervention could have been acted upon, given the correct orientation toward making politics.

30. The situation was as follows: (a) There are over two million Jews in N.Y. almost to a man having experienced a national feeling finding its clearest expression in strong pro-Zionism. (b) Secondly, the agitation around the Palestine issue was of a continuous nature and not one dramatic episode. Summing up, we had a large mass of people aroused by a political issue and a ferment that was of duration allowing for an extended campaign. (That is, it didn't depend upon taking advantage of one dramatic event which poses all the difficulties to making politics faced by a small party in sharpest form, but gave us the opportunity of continuous activity over a period of time in which the events themselves would prove the correctness of our main ideas and the superiority of our party to others.)

31. What could have been done firstly on the immigration issue,

which began the whole Palestine affair, and secondly when that issue became subordinated to the question of the political structure of Palestine, when the British threw the question of Palestine into the U.N.

32. A) The Immigration Issue: A picket line in front of the British Embassy, an open meeting in Brownsville that was part of McKinney's election campaign, and a few articles analyzing the Stratton DP bill was our total accomplishment in regards to this issue. But if we were serious about intervening in the immigration issue we would have investigated all the legal angles to immigration into this country, investigated the various committees set up to lobby for increased immigration, (one of which had a definite trade union complexion) followed carefully the whole discussion continuing to this day on the DP's in the UN Intergovernmental Refugee Organization (IRO). We could have then spoken with authority on the issue. Our "Open the Gates" would have been more than the usual traditional "progressive slogan." We could have dealt with the fear that many workers feel concerning an influx of immigrants in a concrete fashion. We could have exposed this most shameful crime the nations are perpetrating against a section of humanity, making them men without a planet, pariahs, clothed and fed by governmental aid because the Western world hasn't yet arrived at the scientific methods of disposal that the Nazis did. And moreover as part of the DP issue, and as a prod to action on the immigration issue, we could have presented the facts about the Jewish catastrophe and gone into an extended discussion of the meaning for human civilization that is involved in the Jewish catastrophe. All of this could have been attempted on the "level of education".

33. Whether being conversant with the issue could have helped us intervene on the level of action, or through organizations, we do not know insofar as "action" is concerned though it might have been possible to organize a strike of the Labor movement, or of the predominantly Jewish unions, to demand that the Exodus be allowed to disembark in Palestine. The possibilities of intervening certainly cannot be grasped if we are not looking for opportunities and keeping posted.

34. B) The Political Structure of Palestine: When the state structure of Palestine became the chief topic of discussion what could we have done? It is necessary to realize that the context of our activities was (1) the events were taking place in Palestine and not in N.Y.; (2) but the discussion in the UN was going on in N.Y. arousing a tremendous political mood which meant that propaganda could be effective, and (3) we had a line of Arab-Jewish unity that with the starting intransigence of both Arab and Jewish spokesmen, plus the events of the communal rioting in India fresh in everyone's mind was both distinctive and sensible and bound to be verified with every passing day.

35. What did the party do? About two open meetings on Palestine. Essentially isolated and routinist activities and therefore not really meaningful. What could we have done to get our message across? A series of leaflets should have been planned to come out with the various dramatic breaks in the situation. In the heightened political atmosphere they would have been meaningful, especially if other activities followed. We could have "picketed" the main headquarters of the Zionists and the offices of the Arab states with carefully worded signs, which would have been very dramatic.

36. What did LA carry? It has covered the Palestine question in the usual way by interpreting the daily news. But at times it hinted at giving a more concretized intimate treatment by mentioning the various Zionist factions with a few paragraphs of explanation. This hint indicated the right path. (The articles of Rudzienski on Poland are so impressive by their concrete intimate knowledge of the Polish situation and not a reliance on mere, even if correct, generalization. The same is true of Brad's articles on Wallace). We could have, and had the people capable of discussing such things as the terrorist movements from all angles, the politics and significance of the various Zionist parties, in a documented manner, the nature of the Arab national movement, economic and social conditions in the Middle East including Palestine. In the tremendous interest aroused by the Palestine issue can we imagine the reputation LA would acquire by such articles?

37. We raised a demand in our article in LA that the American labor movement send a delegation to the Middle East and also contact the British labor movement. Did we try to do anything about it? An appointment can be made with Dubinsky. We are not saying anything could have been accomplished along this line but we are saying that we didn't even try! And we didn't try because we're not orientated in the direction of looking and seeking for openings, be they tiny cracks in the door.

Enough has been said to indicate the possibilities for "making politics" that lay in the Palestine issue...

THE QUESTION OF FORCES

38. We have gone into some detail in concretizing exactly what we mean by "making politics". We feel this is necessary since the ways and means of intervening in political issue is largely an abstraction to much of our membership. On the one hand, the old-timers who have been living in a propaganda sect for so many years have never had a chance to learn how to make politics and moreover have become "conditioned" by their sectarian existence. On the other hand our new comrades are handicapped by lack of political and organizational experience in grasping the ways and means of intervening in issues.

39. However, a more thorough discussion of the question: is the WP capable of making politics, involves also a discussion of the question of "forces". Both because it deserves to be treated for itself, since we are a small organization, but mostly because it is constantly used as the justification for our failure to intervene in this or that issue. No one is against intervening in any kind of issue per se. Indeed we find in all the official documents of the party relating to its role, tasks, and organization generally, the statement that the party does not exclude actions or a series of actions, etc., on various political issues. But they must be "realistically" possible, namely where we have the forces. Now this has seemed reasonable to most comrades since there is such a thing as material forces putting limits, to one degree or another, on the amount and variety of activities that can be undertaken. Moreover we are a small organization and we do not have much money.

40. We do not propose to discuss this question abstractly. Rather

we want to examine whether or not the present failure to conduct all rounded political activity is justified on the basis of our small amount of forces. And we will start by making a positive presentation of how we would carry on such work with the present forces at our disposal.

WORK-STUDY FRACTIONS: The Basic Unit of the Party

41. For simplicity's sake let us take up the political issues we used as examples before and see how we would utilize our forces in order to carry on work on these issues in the way we have outlined.

42. Our intervention on the Marshall Plan as we outlined it would be almost exclusively through the press. We outlined a plan for a thorough exposition of the meaning and the mechanics of the Marshall Plan in order to break into the "Marshall Plan field of interest". This was the level of intervention we felt was possible in the circumstances.

43. Nevertheless the question of forces immediately arises since it is apparent that the editors of both the NI and the LA could hardly find the time, among their other functions, to write these kind of articles. Research must be done. Discussion is necessary over interpretation. All this besides the actual writing. It is evident that in order to accomplish our goal, to intervene in a serious way on the level of education, it would be necessary to go out into the party generally and organize a group of comrades whose party task would be the studying up and writing of these articles. That is, we would organize a "work-study fraction" on the Marshall Plan. (Likewise the Palestine issue, the 5¢ fare in New York, etc., etc.)

44. How is this different from the present way of getting these things done. At the present, for example the Marshall Plan and the Palestine issue, it is necessary to look for qualified individuals who are interested enough personally to write on the subject. That is the way these matters are handled. And if these interested and qualified individuals do not exist, and the issue is felt as important that we must comment about it, then the results are those dreary series of commonplaces and generalizations that pass for "analytical" articles in our press.

45. The matter does not simply stop at insufficient material, both in quantity and quality, but most often simply means that nothing is done because it is the rare comrade who is so intensely interested that he will by himself start studying and writing on a subject that requires hard work and discipline. And this "nothing" being done extends far beyond the matter of studying and writing since it is only proper to include in what is lost to the party all those steps, small though they might be, all those sudden opportunities, all those ways and means of intervening in an issue that undoubtedly would have occurred to us on the basis of our awareness and knowledge of the issue.

46. The fact is that it is possible to get this studying and writing done. There is a great deal of brain power, learning capacity, and already achieved education existing in our party, and we speak here of the average comrade. But in order to utilize this brain power and

learning capacity it is necessary to organize it, to put it under organized direction and discipline. This is the first function of the work-study fraction.

47. However, writing and studying is only one aspect of the "work-study fractions" just as studying and writing articles is only one aspect of intervening in issues. For this work-study fraction form of organization is capable of assuming a varied number of functions, educational, literary, political and organizational. For instance, the work-study fraction based on the Palestine issue would not only be a literary group, studying and writing on the issue, but it would be responsible for the writing of leaflets, it would be the ones to contact the Zionist organizations and the like where people who not only had generally political savvy but who also knew something about the issue were required. It would inevitably play a political-organizational role simply because the awareness of the issue that would be its through its study and writing would make it a real source of ideas on a different ways and means of intervening in the issue, and a constant source of advice to test the ideas of others, say the Organizer, or the Executive Committee, who are not so directly involved. In short, the functions of the work-study fraction would flow from the nature of our intervention in the issue.

48. This is as much as we will say at this time on how to utilize our present force in order to "make politics". We do not want to lay down a blueprint, or take up the various organizational problems that this system of work-study fractions would involve. We have merely tried to grapple with this question of "forces", and show how on the basis of what we already have, and properly utilized, it is possible for the party to inject itself into the issues of the day.

49. Within this context of understanding how we have the forces, properly utilized, to conduct all sided political activity, we can understand what our present lack of forces really consists of. It is not so much a real lack of forces, but a non-utilization. But not a non-utilization in terms of bad planning, bad morale meaning assignments not done, and the like. Since in terms of certain tasks, namely those of a propaganda group, we have a fair degree of utilization. Our branches are quite capable of and actually do, distribute LA's, hold meetings and educational classes, etc. But in terms of being able to get hold of issues, learn about them, concretize a program of propaganda and action, in terms that is of being a party, here we have a real non utilization of our forces. And again this is not an administrative problem, but is essentially a question of orientation, perspective and conception of tasks which is the basis upon which you determine the "how" and "where" you utilize your forces.

(A second portion to the above article is to follow. I.S.)

#

THE CRISIS IN THE WORKERS PARTY -
OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE?

By A. Winters (Newark)

- - -

Ten years after the official founding of the Trotskyist movement we find it wasting away both abroad and at home. This disintegration is taking place at a time when world capitalism is at its weakest and millions of workers are looking to socialism for a solution to their misery. Nowhere has Trotskyism taken hold. Everywhere it is essentially isolated. The best that some sections of the movement can claim is that they have held their own. At worst, there is stagnation, isolation, demoralization. Any serious analysis must take this dismal picture at the starting point if any kind of solution is to be found.

The SWP has a very happy and simple answer to this problem. They say in effect, "We are winning. We have remained firm. Our rounded, finished program has in the main foreseen all difficulties. He who says we are dying is at best a pessimist and at worst a treacherous variety of a Menshevik. Stop whining. We have no time to waste in discussion with you. We are busy building a party."

This fortunately is not the case in the WP. Almost every comrade is occupied with the question, "What next?" Most of the PARTY BULLETINS to date try to grapple with the problem.

Comrade Shachtman in his article in the PARTY BULLETIN approaches the problem essentially from the point of view of allaying the frustration of comrades. On his return from the Congress, he ran smack into the morale question and something had to be done about Frustration Incorporated. The question of the "viability of Socialism" and "how long can this go on?", kept popping all over the party, especially in the non-industrial branches. So Comrade Shachtman in the main says: Comrades, don't break your heads. We can't accomplish what you want. We are not a party. In reality this has long been true. Let us stop calling ourselves the WP. When we are not a party we can concentrate on becoming the left wing of the labor movement. The basic reason for our present dilemma is, says Comrade Shachtman, objective and, secondly, subjective. In a joint resolution with Comrade Gould, Comrade Shachtman tells us the objective reasons. They are the rise and power of Stalinism and the strength of American capitalism. These two factors kept us from becoming a force.

Is this the main picture? The answer must be "No." On a world scale capitalism has never been weaker. Millions of workers in Europe are followers of the SP and CP, parties which they think will institute socialism. They are not with us because we didn't reach them and conduct a fight for their allegiance, against the CP and the SP. The objective factor was there: decay of capitalism and the workers in leftward motion, against capitalism and for socialism. The subjective factor was missing, namely, our contact with them. Had this contact existed, at the least we would have been a party of

thousands and with luck a mass party on a world scale, a serious contending force. Can we say that the workers as a whole or a part knew of us and rejected us? Can we say that the workers weighed our ideas as against those of the fakers and chose the betrayers? This is obviously not the case.

This discussion about the objective and subjective is not, as some may believe, hair splitting, nor the question of winning the workers something dragged into the discussion a la Johnson.

From the concept which is unfortunately held by Shachtman and Gould and others and which says that the existence of Stalinism and American capitalism and the two rivals in world relationship, fundamentally predetermined our present influence, flows the demoralization that presently exists in the WP. How else can one explain the confusion in the PC and in the ranks around support for the Marshall Plan? If one consciously or unconsciously believes that the present and immediate next period had to belong to the Stalinists and that they will control the workers and we have no perspective of a serious struggle for the workers' allegiance, then it becomes relatively easy to give the job of removing Stalinism to U.S. imperialism. I do not say that Shachtman or Gould draw these conclusions today from their fundamental thesis, but others have. This is the only way to explain the pro-Marshall Plan sentiments in all of their varieties.

If one understands that objectively we had a chance to win the workers and that subjectively there is still time, then there will not exist the hopelessness and political confusion so prevalent today in the non-proletarian centers. There will be energy and determination. Without a proper understanding there cannot be proper activity.

In America, millions of workers only recently passed through the experience of the CIO. All types of militants have sprung up from this development. With only some rare exceptions, we got none of them. The party as a whole was subjectively incapable and is still incapable of winning any of these people.

Comrades Shachtman and Gould recognize this subjective factor which exists today as it did yesterday when, in their resolution, they ask comrades to become political leaders of workers in order to utilize the hoped for labor party developments. While they have given a correct general orientation towards work in the trade union movement, what is missing is a specific sharp analysis of this concrete problem, that is, how to seriously carry this work out successfully. I am sure many comrades will say that they have heard "To the factories" before and the orientation will remain on paper as other orientations have in the past.

What is the Concrete Problem?

Comrades must bluntly be told the truth. The truth is that internationally the Trotskyist movement has essentially been petty-bourgeois in composition. This applies to the SWP as well as other sections. If you look carefully you will see that many of Cannon's workers are really campus boys dressed up tough but having no fol-

lowing amongst the workers. The SWP has many good workers but essentially they too are in the process of learning how to dig in. With them their stupid trade union antics have ruined some good chances, particularly in the UAW. Their mistakes are essentially political and not so much those of every day trade unionism. The movement has never accomplished the "exclusive concentration on the working class" that Lenin spoke about in "What Is To Be Done" (p.83) (attention IKDers). This is especially true of the WP. It has never been nourished from contact with the working class. Here and there; there are exceptions, but I am talking of the party as a whole. One of the most ignominious facts of our past defeat is the fact that the working class did not even know of our existence, let alone our program. We were never in the fight. Comrades must understand that today this is the main work even if in some cases practically no other work is accomplished. The conception that a branch can do good work with its main work outside the mass movement must be rooted out of the party.

Above all this exclusive concentration must start from the Political Committee itself! The center must be permeated with the idea and practice of "exclusive concentration." The PC must be weighed down with worker comrades who have shown ability to lead. They must set the tone in the PC as well as in the branches. A good beginning would be the moving of the national headquarters to a center like Detroit where the coming labor party developments will most likely center. Our best political talent should be concentrated on developing our working comrades and their contacts. They could thus have that indispensable personal contact and give immediate and careful consideration to all developments. Last spring the Reutherites held three important caucus meetings in Detroit, Buffalo and Philadelphia, where key questions were discussed. To my knowledge there was no centralized PC direction to these meetings. To my knowledge there was just no direction. It is inconceivable that a PC with its nose to the grind stone could have neglected these meetings. Other such opportunities have also undoubtedly been missed.

The finances of the party or, excuse me, the group, should be used far more for such projects like the concentration of the few willing and able trained trade unionists it has into the industrial centers. Twenty-five such comrades could sink the indispensable roots where for the first time in an industrial center workers know of Trotskyist leaders. If the party could catch on in a center like Detroit, it could be the beginning of the emergence from isolation. We must be against small "muzhik" branches. Despite the good efforts of these comrades, they are squandering our sorely needed forces.

The press must likewise be centered on this problem. It is far from being a paper which deals with workers' problems. Ranger's labor party articles have been good but much more has to be done especially from the field. Far more discussion in our BULLETINS must take place around the "know how" of work in the trade unions. We have conducted essentially guerilla warfare in the trade unions. There has been little of the specialization and technique development for those already in industry. In the main, local comrades do

their work on their own, too often using the trial and error method. I hope in the near future to contribute an article to the convention discussion dealing with trade union work as such.

A serious mass work can at the least solve the problem of morale. It is a fact that those weakest in morale in the main are not from industrial centers where the best morale is generally to be found. At best it can mean the beginning of a real growth. The labor party developments will pass right over our heads, as have other developments in the labor movement, if we don't dig in.

If a sufficient group in the party can do this job, then their example will serve as a real push for all comrades to get into the ~~thick~~ of it. Simply appealing to comrades to enter industry will only irritate many of them.

The time to act is now. This task can no longer be postponed.

October 29, 1948.

#

1949