

A LETTER TO THE MEMBERSHIP

The publication of Comrade Shechtman's circular, "The Wrong Road", (Bulletin of the W.P., Vol. 2, No. 3, April 21, 1947) makes it necessary for the membership to consider seriously the distinction between petty-bourgeois politics and Bolshevik politics.

The hysteria, fear and terror which the Majority leaders have instilled into the members and their dissemination of atrocity stories about the SWP are the very worst preparation for the great tasks ahead. They claim that the SWP is slandering and has slandered them to the SWP membership. At this stage all such matters could have been taken up with the SWP leadership calmly and firmly. The present period should have been used judiciously to review our own past and, above all, to elaborate our contributions to party building. The struggle for unity is only a preparation. The real problems of building the mass revolutionary party begin after unity and demand a period of integration during which mutual confidence is established on all sides. Only Utopians who know nothing of the history of Bolshevism can believe that 2000 will become 20,000 in the class struggle without upheavals, conflicts, factions, groupings, etc. That is the way the proletariat learns, different layers come into action, victories and defeats occur and sharp and sudden changes are necessary. As the class struggle develops, theoretical problems are illuminated, old forces tire, new ones emerge. Instead of preparing the membership for this with the seriousness and foresight of Bolshevik leaders, the Majority leadership has it yelling and screaming about the coming struggle over democratic rights and fearful of the bureaucratized, "semi-Stalinist" party of the SWP and of the deep machinations in which Cannonite politics reportedly consists. It is a shameful, scandalous, and utterly degrading procedure and weakens the movement at a critical stage in its development.

The X Letter

Before the first New York membership meeting on unity was held, Comrade Shechtman knew the contents of the "X" letter and reported them to the PC. Johnson and Forest authorized the PC to make the necessary corrections. Shechtman did so in his speech. Comrade Forest asked for and received special time at the meeting in order to give an account of all negotiations, discussions, etc., concerning unity in which Johnson and Forest were involved.

Subsequently, the PC obtained a copy of the "X" letter and decided to broadcast, in diplomatic language, that Cannon was a liar. It wanted to place Johnson and Forest in a position where they would have to take their share in calling Cannon a liar. Just a step ahead was the possibility that both Cannon and Johnson and the Secretary of the CIO would all be calling each other liars and exposing plots and counter-plots.

For the correction of error, Johnson and Forest were ready. But they were determined to lend no encouragement to the policy of discrediting political opponents as a substitute for positive political positions. Hence when it was first proposed in the PC that the "X" letter be published, Forest, in the absence of Johnson, opposed the publication of the letter. Nevertheless, the PC requested Johnson to write Cannon a letter. Moreover, the next day, this request, along with the "X" letter, was made known to the membership in a way that left no alternative but to enter into the picture. We did so in a manner calculated to do the least possible harm to our movement. We sent our letter to Cannon and attached to it our report to the PC and to the membership of our part in the unity negotiations. We are requesting the PC that these enclosures also be published. We gave the PC a copy of the letter and enclosures sent

to Cannon. Furthermore, we let it be known that we considered our responsibility discharged and that we would not ask for the letter to be published. If the PC wished to publish, that was its business. If it wished to apprise the members of it and the members demanded publication, that too was its responsibility. The letter is the property of the PC. We wanted no part in keeping the question alive. We have analyses that we shall make public. No one will have to urge us to publish these. They will consist of the rigorous analysis of the development of the WP from 1940 to the present day in which we shall show step by step the political and organizational degeneration which we have fought uninterruptedly for six years.

"Bureaucracies" and "Cliques"

The whole procedure of Shachtman from 1940 to today is to obscure his political vacillations and the unclear policies of his own camp by questions of "genuine party democracy". This is the corruption of our membership. In bourgeois society, every trick is used to prevent the workers seeing the political issues clearly and acting accordingly. Bolshevism, for its life, must do the opposite. We shall do everything at our disposal to make the membership see that the course of the Majority as climaxed in this campaign is the enemy of their collective and individual development as serious revolutionaries. Many of them know no better. They came to the movement wishing to learn. It is time they stopped to look where they are going, to think, to come to conclusions, and to act.

The WP leadership has committed many crimes against our movement. This latest maneuver with the scandal, the waste of time, the diversion of the attention and energies of the members, the possible embitterment of relations throughout the International, the political degradation involved, could only have been undertaken at this time by desperate politicians as the climax of seven years of political disintegration.

Today, the WP lives according to the following evaluation of contemporary politics: The Stalinist regime is bureaucratic collectivist, totalitarian. It is ruled by a clique which practices the leader-cult, holds down the backward masses, miseducates them by force and deception and bureaucratically manipulates them. The Stalinist parties are totalitarian parties. They too are cliques which practice the leader-cult, deceive the backward masses and bureaucratically manipulate them. The Fourth International is led by a clique which is in the pocket of Cannon, the leader, who deceives his followers and bureaucratically manipulates them. The SWP is led by a clique which practices the leader-cult, and miseducates and bureaucratically manipulates the membership. The Johnson-Forest Minority is led by a clique which practices the leader-cult, miseducates its backward followers and bureaucratically manipulates them. Implicit, and not always only implicit, in this world-wide analysis is the idea that it is only because they lack power that the Fourth International, the SWP and the Johnson-Forest Minority have not completed the degeneration which imposes its bureaucratic manipulations on the backward workers by force.

To counteract these "bureaucracies" and "cliques" Shachtman has his "cadre". All types of revolutionaries are welcome. Their rallying cry is not revolutionary activity which is not suitable for the backward masses. It is not the mobilization of the parties for the task of transforming themselves into mass parties. For this the small, insignificant parties are not ready, whatever may be the objective situation. Their rallying cry is "democracy". Their main business is anti-Stalinism, anti-Cannonism, anti-Johnsonism. Their specific political method is exposure of the dishonesty, duplicity and bureaucratic

methods of political opponents; by this means to effect the enlightenment of the duned, deluded and backward followers as to the unreliability of their leaders. The organizational force of this political activity is the "cadre", the sole, the original contribution of Shachtman to the political ideas of the Fourth International. This, stripped of all decoration, is the special political atmosphere of the WP.

The present campaign against Johnson is merely the climax of a political degeneration which began with the birth of the WP. In 1940, the then SWP Minority accused the SWP of "bureaucratic conservatism". The inference was clear. The WP, by democratic dynamism, would show how to build a party. The WP leaders had the confidence and allegiance of a membership whose efforts, devotion and readiness to oppose the bourgeoisie stand second to none in our movement, when all the circumstances of social origin and specific conditions in the United States are taken into consideration. But the proponents of democratic dynamism have shown themselves to be a colossal failure. They have no perspectives of any kind. In 1940 when they hoped to demonstrate their party-building capacities, they rallied behind a Russian position consisting of all sorts of diverse elements which later divided into the three leading positions in the WP, including that of the WP Minority. The real burden of the attack, however, was the leader-cult, the clique, bureaucratism, duplicity, etc. Now in 1947, when their perspectives of party-building are nil, they place the whole responsibility upon the proletariat and Stalinism. It is impossible to blame "bureaucratic conservatism". Therefore, "bureaucratic conservatism" becomes the "bureaucratic jungle", and for the impressionistic analysis of the Russian state of 1940 is substituted the impressionistic analysis of the Stalinist parties.

Far more than in 1940, the exposure of the cliques, leader-cults, and all the shameful crimes of political opponents has become the means whereby the "cadre" is held together. This is the Bolshevism of the leaders of the Workers Party. It is the last resort of bankruptcy. The WP leadership knows that all its unique contributions to Marxism are doomed. It seeks to save its Russian position, which is being overwhelmed by state capitalism, by narrowing the Russian question down to one of defensism or defeatism. It knows that once there is a unified party within the United States, the bulk of the membership will discard the concepts of retrogressionism, no revolutionary situation without a revolutionary party, removal of the Socialist United States of Europe from the top of the order of the day, etc. Hence, the frantic character of its attempts to smear all its opponents as the primary political campaign in the last few months of its existence.

#### "The Wrong Road"

Shachtman's unique contribution to political thinking, called "The Wrong Road" gains its sole political coloration from the quotations he cites from Johnson. In his anxiety to establish that we, the state-capitalists have entered into an unprincipled bloc with Cannon, the workers-statist. Shachtman throws all caution to the wind and recklessly introduces at this time, when the two parties are about to be united, such phrases as "opposite sides of the barricades", "I shoot in one direction and you shoot in another." All this is done by a principled man out to arouse the suspicions of the Johnson-Forest Minority that its leaders are introducing a "little change" to court the SWP. Contrast this to the sober and serious manner in which Johnson and Forest state their differences on the Russian question in their letter to Cannon:

"The Minority would like to clarify also its position on the Russian question. In our opinion the differences on the Russian

question go very deep and it has been clear to us for a long time that they encroach upon the general politics of the International. However, so long as our particular struggle was devoted mainly to resistance against and exposure of the political positions of the WP, we did not emphasize more than was necessary our differences with the International. Now, however, that unity, in our opinion, is assured, not only in the U.S. but in the International as a whole, we propose to make very clear to the International what are the consequences of what we consider to be their entirely false position on the Russian question. In the SWP circular it is stated that the line of the Fourth International has been 'brilliantly analyzed in the new theses of Germain on the Russian question'. In our opinion, the theses of Germain represent a serious blow to our movement, particularly because they use a method and arrive at conclusions which we cannot for one moment conceive as being acceptable to Comrade Trotsky. This the Minority proposes to express in no equivocal terms. But at the same time we wish to affirm our considered political judgment, which is that in the U.S. these questions cannot and should not be allowed to disrupt the work of building the American Party."

The Johnson tendency, which arose from its Marxist criticism of Trotsky's position on the Russian question, needs no lessons on blocs from Comrade Shachtmen. In 1941, we refused a bloc with the defeatist, Carter, against the conditional-defensist, Shachtman, on the ground that the Carterite brand of Bureaucratic Collectivism which posed the question of a third alternative represented the greater deviation from Marxism. Today, in the United States, we categorically refuse to make a bloc with Shachtman whose Bureaucratic Collectivism has become indistinguishable from that of Carter-Garrett. As to the bloc internationally, we ask: Defeatism for what? For critical support to Mickolajczk? For the proposal, at this stage of European developments, of entry by the European sections of the Fourth International into the respective Social-Democratic parties? Or for the mobilization of the masses in workers committees, peasant committees, with the perspective of workers power and the Socialist United States of Europe? If the Russian question were a question involving the practical activities of large numbers of the proletariat and therefore the practical activities of the party, unity would be impossible. Until that time, the question is a theoretical question. We remind the party of what we wrote in our analysis of the different tendencies on the Russian question:

"The Minority here affirms that any Marxist party which governs its practical politics by the theoretical perspective of bureaucratic collectivism as a 'third alternative' to capitalism or socialism a) repudiates Marxism which is based from top to bottom on the duality of bourgeoisie and proletariat as contenders for mastery in modern society, b) leads inevitably to tampering with the fundamentals of Bolshevik strategy. The result at the very best can be only the strengthening of bourgeois-democratic illusions in the party and in the masses." (Statement of the Johnson Minority on the Origin, Character and Perspectives of the Johnson Faction, Bulletin, Vol.1, No. 16, p. 29)

For years no one has been able to get a word out of Shachtman on the theory of retrogression which dirtied the pages of the NI month after month. To this day, Johnson and the party wait in vain for the resolution of the WP on the American question, a new draft of which was submitted to the 1946 Convention on the morning of the day of its adoption. The party waits for a resolution

on the Negro question into which is to be incorporated the resolution of Berg. The International waits in vain for some guidance on the jungle that is the theory of bureaucratic collectivism. On all these questions, the leadership has been silent, has been silent for years. A hopeless confusion besets the party as to whether unity is desirable because the objective situation and the radicalization of the masses demand that we mobilize our forces to build the party; or whether unity is necessary in view of the political stagnation in the United States. Silent on all these fundamental questions, the party leadership jumps into its element and sets the stage for its real politics - what Johnson said to Cannon after the plenum had taken its decision. Isn't this the dragging of the party into the mud? Is no voice of protest going to be raised?

Precisely because Shachtman's politics consists of nothing else but exposures of bureaucracy and dishonesty, he must regard any sober statement of political agreement or disagreement as a bending of political line or a capitulation. As a substitute for political positions which can be judged by the vanguard in relation to the proletariat as a whole, he pursues a policy of destroying his opponents by attacking them in subjective terms as bureaucratic, dishonest, and deceptive. As he judges the working class politically always as backward and in terms of defeat, so he carries on his politics within the framework of disillusionment and rejection by the working class of political leadership in general. In the name of democracy, he seeks to rally around himself all who have a distrust of the leadership of the SWP and the International but who have no political position except their grievances and disappointments.

With no political positions which can win decisively in the course of the class struggle, Shachtman can think only in terms of "hunger" for blocs which have an immediate practical value in isolating an opponent. So lightly does he take his own political positions that he cannot even imagine that others would go to the political trouble of undertaking a serious collaboration to struggle against them. When confronted with such a possibility, he does not even bother to deny that he is revisionist. In his terror at being isolated, he can only try to drive a wedge between his political opponents by sowing mutual distrust. For what purpose? So he can win one of them to his own political positions? Hardly. His political positions are mentioned only in passing. Rather what he would like to achieve is the winning of Cannon or the Johnson Minority to his "right way" of making politics, euphemistically called "a high maximum of frankness and mutual understanding." Frankness and mutual understanding on what? Political differences? Hardly. Rather frankness in exposure and counter-exposure of every step in negotiations. The membership must be continuously informed of every disagreement, major or minor, every "confidential" letter, until it devotes all its energies to nothing else but speculations and suspicious probings of motives and intentions, and until it regards any judicious and firm leadership as bureaucracy and cliquism, "exclusively at the top." Practical collaboration is necessary in order that the members "will be able to check with each other on 'stories' that are circulating." With such a "right way", the Bolshevik party is to be trained to fight against the bourgeoisie.

In his haste to drive the wedge between the Johnson-Forest Minority and the SWP, and the SWP and the Johnson-Forest Minority, Shachtman divulges to the Johnsonites that "anybody who knows anything about the SWP leadership is aware that it has no use whatever for the political tendency represented by Johnson..." At the same time, he challenges the SWP that the deletion from the article on the Social Crisis in the United States and the General Strike "should be offensive" to them. He chooses to quote what we openly chose to delete after unity was seriously proposed. He did not choose to quote what we stated as our

*This, as we stated immediately, was our contribution to the climate which should prevail at this stage after 7 years of antagonistic separation.*

considered political judgment in our American Resolution of a year ago, when unity was not an immediate perspective, and even before the SWP elaborated its American resolution.

"The Socialist Workers Party has had one inestimable advantage over the Workers Party in that in general, and in particular in its treatment of international news, it shows not the faintest trace of retrogression and places itself before the American working class as the Trotskyist party of the socialist revolution at home and abroad. Not only in relation to Europe but in relation to the United States the SWP propaganda is in the full Trotskyist tradition in that it is conscious always of the challenge to the bourgeois order contained in the aggressive actions of the proletariat. The SWP constantly makes the American workers aware of the coming social revolution in the United States."

At the time this proved to Shachtman that we had "capitulated to Cannonism" and that therefore a "cadre" was necessary. The same Shachtman, who, in the pre-convention period was anxious to prove the capitulation of Johnson to Cannonism, now emerges as the defender of the political differences of Johnson and Forest with Cannon. The role of clarifier of political differences is the one least suited to Shachtman, the ~~incoherent~~ muddler of political positions. We do not need your help in this Comrade Shachtman. Events and politics will influence and decree the relations between the Johnson-Forest Minority, the SWP and the CIO, not your petty-politics. We of the Minority would be guilty of the utmost stupidity if we claimed that we know how the mass revolutionary party in the United States will be built. What we know is that the WP Majority's fundamental premises are wrong and that we have our contribution to make. We do not know who will be on which side and when, what will be the sides, how often they will change. All that is before us now. We of the Minority will put forward our views at the WPC with Bolshevik vigor and full of confidence, hope and excitement that at least the unified movement in the U.S. will develop in the midst of a radicalized working class, and that its major conflicts and difficulties, will take place on the American question under the impact of the greatest social force the world has ever seen--the American proletariat which has at last lifted up its head and is staring the American bourgeoisie in the face, questioning everything it has hitherto accepted.

Shachtman spends a great deal of space on the supposed criminality of the bloc with Cannon against revisionism of the type of the IKD and of Shachtman. Was ever such hypocrisy and stupidity? First of all, there was no bloc. In our conversations with Cannon we talked about our hostility to bureaucratic collectivism, to the democratic political revolution, to everything connected with retrogression. But if there was a bloc, then what? Doesn't everybody know that Johnson and Forest are mortal enemies of these concepts. Haven't we published it far and wide? Here it is again. We are the irreconciled enemy of all this and in the International Movement we shall form a bloc against all this with whom we please, when we please, where we please. We hate it, despise it, we shall stamp upon it wherever we can. All who oppose this are our political allies, all who support this or play with it, are our political enemies. Wherever it is possible to differentiate ourselves from Shachtman and his retrogressionist, defeatist impressionistic politics and his organizational slander campaign, we shall do so. Trotsky, even after characterizing the then SWP Minority as the petty-bourgeois opposition, fought to retain it within the International. We have fought for unity and will continue to do so because of the necessities of the objective situation in the United States. We have been concerned to get the membership away from ~~Shachtman's~~ corrupting and demoralizing influence into Shachtman's

the larger arena of the unified Trotskyist Movement. We have felt that it needs this guidance and further opportunity to learn than the Minority could give it.

Unfortunately, the SWP leadership bears its share of responsibility for the influence of the WP Majority over the membership. The SWP is the official section and the majority. From 1940 to today it has refused to recognize openly that its judgments in 1940 (a) that the WP was afraid of the war, (b) that it was afraid of the tasks of proletarianization, were absolutely false. It allowed the WP, up to the intervention of the CIC, to take all the initiative in regard to unity. It has read the internal bulletins where the WP passionately sought a way out of its failure to build a mass party. It rejoiced at the difficulties, saw only their negative side and hoped for the disintegration of the WP so as to be able to say: "We told you so." All this was only added material for the WP leadership. We are confident that in the unified movement the mischief that the WP leadership has made with the fundamentals of Marxism will be short-lived. They were able to continue it only because they were isolated in the period during the war. We were confident that sooner or later as the international Movement once more developed and events began to unroll, the political rubbish which Shachtman had accumulated would be blown to the winds. The SWP leadership would be committing a mistake in regard to the WP if it did not see this barrage of anti-Cannonism, anti-Johnsonism for what it is--the recognition of coming defeat.

Who Has Muddied Up the Waters?

We ask the WP membership the following question: Who has muddied up the waters on unity? Johnson and Forest have given a full account of ... discussions on unity with the SWP and the representatives of the IS. But even if they had not, what then? Johnson and Forest went out of their way to tell Cannon that there were suspicions within the WP that the offer of unity on the part of the SWP was a maneuver to win the Johnsonites. We said we did not believe this but if it were, we would not be a party to it. This, if you please, was after the WP plenum had decided to accept the conditions. (We had deliberately avoided seeing Cannon or the SWP officially before the WP had taken its decision.) Now if when we said this, Cannon had asked: "Suppose the WP is carrying out a maneuver, what would you do?" and we had replied: "If the WP is not sincere and is maneuvering, then certainly we shall not collaborate with them on it either", or, more precisely, "We shall split." Even if this had happened, which it did not, we ask, what then? How did this muddy up unity?

The WP leaders assert that they took their decision under no threat. We agreed that their decision had been arrived at because of their position on unity. The X letter was published along with the comments by Shachtman. Wasn't that enough? No. The PC had a weapon in its hands. Look at the result. We repeat: If the waters were muddied, who muddied them? Johnson and Forest have been told in the PC by Gates that he can no longer speak freely in the PC in the presence of Johnson and Forest because of their political orientation. This statement, made by Gates before he went on tour, was protested by Johnson, who, however, said that he would not force the protest. Since Gates' return, he has repeated it unchallenged. So Johnson and Forest are agents of the SWP in the PC who will report the discussion and decisions of the PC of the WP to the SWP. All this is supposed to be Bolshevism and lead to clarification of political issues. When, as it inevitably must, all this comes before the membership, it is supposed to educate and prepare it for a fruitful unity. We have already made the following statement to the PC:

"In the past, Johnson and Forest have always kept the PC and the party fully informed on all questions dealing with negotiations or discussions with the SWP or other representatives of the CIO concerning unity. In our opinion, however, the question in the Committee has now reached a stage where what is at issue is the discrediting of a political opponent and not the advancement of unification or the clarification of the membership of the parties concerned and of the Movement. To the same degree that consistent with political principle we did everything possible in the past to advance the political struggle for the unification of the two parties, so now we do not propose to assist the Committee in diverting the discussion. We would, however, remind the Committee that the relations of Johnson and the Minority as a whole to the Committee and the party have a long history. We are prepared to go into it only, however, when it will have been made plain to all concerned who forced the issue, what purposes it was intended to serve and those who forced it are prepared to bear the full responsibility of the consequences. We are not prepared at this stage to make any statements other than those we have made or protestations of loyalty to this committee. If the Committee is dissatisfied with our statements on the questions at issue, it is in command of a sufficient majority to take whatever steps it pleases."

Finally, we ask the membership to note that in our opinion the shameful politics of the PC had reached a stage where we considered that it was time for the faction all over the country to be personally informed and consulted. Johnson asked for permission to go on tour and it was granted. Johnson and Forest have been in communication. We take note of the fact that unity negotiations are now in the hands of the leadership of the WP, the SWP, and the CIO, to be ratified at the EPC. It is inconceivable to us that our movement will make a comedy of these serious matters or that they are nothing more than scraps of paper to be torn up at the slightest opportunity. On that basis, Comrade Johnson and Forest shall take on themselves the responsibility of initiating in the faction

(1) a discussion on the best and most effective means of bringing before the International our version and analysis of the recent events and the political organizational course which they represent.

(2) a reconsideration of our previous attitude to the PC and the WP as expressed in our statements to the Convention and in the introduction to the article on the general strike.

The Party will be duly informed of our decisions. Until that time we propose to take no notice whatever of rumors, trick questions, publications of our private correspondence, or other political methods of the Majority.

J. R. Johnson  
F. Forest