
PARTY BULLETIN

contents

WORKERS PARTY - SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
UNITY NEGOTIATIONS

1. Letter to all Workers Party members -
by Max Shachtman
National Secretary
 2. Letter to the Workers Party -
from James P. Cannon
National Secretary S.W.P.
 3. Resolution on the Unity Proposal of the Workers Party -
Adopted by the National
Plenum, S.W.P.
 4. Plenum Resolution on Unity with the Workers Party -
Minority of Political
Committee, S.W.P.
 5. Statement of Plenum Minority on the Cannon-Stein-Frank
Resolution.
Bennet - Goldman
Morrow - Williams
-

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767

October 16, 1945

TO ALL PARTY MEMBERS:

ON THE QUESTION OF THE UNITY NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN
THE WORKERS PARTY AND THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

We are enclosing herewith all the latest documentary material on the question of the negotiations for the unification of the Workers Party and the Socialist Workers Party.

It includes the following: the letter of our Political Committee to the recent Plenum of the National Committee of the S.W.P. (you have already received this); the resolution presented to this Plenum by Cannon-Stein-Frank, representing the majority faction, and adopted by the almost unanimous vote of the Plenum; the resolution presented to the Plenum by the minority faction, signed by comrades Bennet, Goldman, Morrow and Williams, and voted for by them but rejected by the rest of the Plenum; a statement issued by the four leaders of the minority faction following the adoption by the Plenum of the majority resolution; and finally, the letter sent our Party by the National Secretary of the S.W.P., James P. Cannon, to accompany the Plenum resolution which was sent us.

As you are aware, our Party initiated the proposal for the unification of the two organizations into one following the presentation of a resolution to the S.W.P. on the same subject by the minority group. Our proposal was contained in the resolution unanimously adopted by our National Committee at its last Plenary session held in Detroit on the eve of the Active Workers Conference. Shortly after receiving our resolution, the S.W.P., through its National Secretary, sent us a letter on the question, dated August 27, 1945. Both these documents have been made available to you in the pages of Labor Action and the New International.

Having informed the S.W.P. that we were ready to open the discussion between the two parties, two meetings were held a week apart at which sub-committees represented their respective organizations. At the first meeting, comrades Coolidge, Erber (acting as deputy for Gates, who was then on tour) and Shachtman represented the W.P., and comrades Cannon, Frank and Stein the S.W.P. At the second meeting, we had the same delegation, with the S.W.P. represented by Cannon, Dunne, Stein and Warde.

At the first meeting, we opened the discussion by setting forth our point of view. It was a summary of the views presented in our National Committee Resolution on Unity. We emphasized the following two points:

1. In view of the fact that the slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" has "receded into the background" for the S.W.P., the main political dispute which caused the split between the two groups in 1940 is no longer as acute as it was then. The two groups therefore have enough in common on fundamental program and principles to make possible and desirable their union into a single party.

768

2. The differences that exist between the two groups are of such a nature as makes them compatible with membership in a single revolutionary party.

To this we add the following:

The fact is that there are two ideological or political tendencies involved in the projected fusion. We acknowledged the numerical superiority of the Cannonite tendency and declared in advance that, under the circumstances, the united party would have a Cannonite majority in the leadership and that, where different opinions on policy or theory existed, the party line would be that of the majority. The minority would submit to this majority and its policies, provided it had full freedom to propagate and defend its own position inside the party and until such time as it would itself become, by democratic decision of the membership, the majority of the party,

Because of the fact that there are two tendencies involved, and furthermore because of the fact that a good deal of suspicion and mistrust still exists, the W.P. demanded the right to publish an educational bulletin of its own tendency, edited and controlled by it, the right to publish such a bulletin at its own discretion. We declared further that, in order to avoid recriminations and factional argument if and when we decided to issue such a bulletin in the united party, it should be agreed in advance by both sides that any ideological or political tendency in a Bolshevik party has the right to issue such a bulletin whenever it thinks it necessary or advisable. We pointed out, finally, that this right, like the right to form a group or a faction, had always been taken for granted in the revolutionary Marxist (Bolshevik) movement.

In conclusion, we asked the S.W.P. delegation to express itself precisely on the basic conceptions that we put forward, or else to advance its own conceptions of the basis for unity if they differed from ours.

The S.W.P. delegation took the following position:

It was present at the discussion only for the purpose of exploring the question. The S.W.P. had not yet decided on the question of unity, had not even voted on whether or not the unity was desirable. As to our basic propositions, they might be granted, as the S.W.P. comrades put it, "in the abstract" But they were not interested in the question "abstractly," but "in the concrete". What they wanted to establish for themselves first of all was this, in the words of Cannon: "Will it work?" (that is, will the unity work in practice). It was acknowledged, particularly by Cannon, that in the past of the Trotskyist movement, the publication of independent bulletins by an ideological or factional grouping had been permitted without question. For example, in the old Communist League of America and later in the old Workers Party, the Oehler group had been freely permitted to publish an internal bulletin of its own without organizational measures being taken against it. Cannon declared that even the publication of a public organ by a minority was not a question of principle. However, he added, it is a "concrete question". It is a question of "Will it work?"

We asked the S.W.P., what guarantees, in its opinion, were required in order to assure them that the unity "would work". Shachtman asked Frank: "Suppose we were to withdraw our proposal for an internal bulletin of our own, would that be sufficient guarantee for you?" Frank replied: "That would remove one of the danger spots." Shachtman then asked: "All right. What other danger spots are there that have to be removed to assure a healthy unity?"

Frank did not answer, nor did any of the other S.W.P. delegates. The same silence was observed in answer to our question, "What do you comrades propose as the basis for unity? What guarantees do you comrades propose to us?" The only thing approaching an answer was the declaration that the S.W.P. had not yet voted on the question, that the delegation was present only for the purpose of hearing our proposals and bringing them back to its Committee in the form of a report. It might be added that the S.W.P. delegation professed itself "shocked" at our proposal for an internal bulletin of our own.

It was finally decided to hold another meeting a week later, the delegations meanwhile reporting to their respective committees and reflecting on the discussion that had already taken place.

At the second meeting, which was much shorter than the first, no further progress was made. We simply recapitulated our views on the question of the basis for the unification and the question of our own internal organ. We reported that our Political Committee was disturbed by the apparent resistance of the S.W.P. to our proposal for an internal organ, especially because all the arguments advanced against it could just as easily apply to discussion of political and theoretical questions in any internal bulletin, even if published officially by the party, or even ordinary discussion in branches. We pointed out emphatically that we rejected the concept of a "monolithic" party as alien to our principles and conceptions, and alien to the whole tradition and struggle of Trotskyism. The S.W.P. delegation did not commit itself any further. As at the previous meeting, it did not categorically reject our proposal nor did it accept it. It merely stated that it would report our proposals to the Plenum of the National Committee of the S.W.P. called especially for the purpose of discussing the unity question, and that after the Plenum adopted a position it would be communicated to us.

A number of secondary questions were briefly discussed - such as practical collaboration between the two parties (the S.W.P. and ourselves substantially reiterating our respective positions); the perspectives of the movement in this country; the question of the Stalinist parties, etc.--but nothing more was said or done to advance us in the question of the unity.

At the S.W.P. Plenum, we learn, a furious attack was made on the Goldman-Morrow group (charges of "disloyalty", "anti-Marxist," etc.), to which the minority replied with militancy and frankness. As to the unity question itself, it was clear from the resolution submitted and adopted that the S.W.P. intended to take no serious steps toward achieving unity, but merely to stall the question indefinitely. The only reason, so far as can be seen, why they did not put down on paper just what they think and want, namely a formal breaking off of the unity negotiations, is that they do not want to come into head-on collision with the most important groups of the Fourth International abroad, which favor, with increasing firmness, the unification of the two parties. Politically, the resolution is a step backward even as compared with the unsatisfactory initial letter sent us by the S.W.P. The first part is an insulting attack upon our party, calculated to deepen the hostility and prejudice of the S.W.P. membership toward our Party and our comrades. The part dealing with "probing" the political differences to the "depths", is one of the two things, which in practice, come to the same thing: Either it represents the monolithic conception of a party, namely, one in which there can only be one opinion on political and theoretical questions; or, it represents an attempt to stall indefinitely while "probing" into the differences whose nature is no less well known to the S.W.P. than it is to us or even to an interested outsider.

In general, the resolution of the S.W.P. can be very well characterized in the words of the straightforward declaration issued on it by the Goldman-Morrow group, copy of which is enclosed to you. Indeed, very little need be added by us to this declaration.

No proposal has been received from the S.W.P. to continue the discussion between delegations of the two parties, or to hold any joint meeting whatsoever. We learn, without official confirmation as yet, that the "probing" of the political differences is to go on for a long, long time. It is to take the form of articles in the "Fourth International" for their side, to be accompanied by articles in the "New International" for our side. Obviously, this means that the S.W.P. has taken the question of unification off its agenda.

In the next few days, we shall address a communication to the S.W.P. giving our estimate of its Plenum resolution and putting forward what our Political Committee considers its final proposals. This communication will be sent to all our members as well. In addition, all the documentary material will appear in full in the "New International", and a summary of the negotiations will appear in "Labor Action". Finally, in the near future, the membership will receive a document containing a complete analysis of the question of unity and our opinions on it.

Meanwhile, it goes without saying, our main preoccupation is, more than ever before, with concentrated work to recruit for and build up our Party. Thus far, we have made every effort to accomplish the unification of the forces of the Fourth International in this country. The Cannonites have not only made no efforts in this direction, but have put obstacles in the road. The responsibility for the situation, as the declaration of the S.W.P. minority rightly says, falls entirely on the shoulders of the Cannonites. This fact should and will be brought home not only to every member of the S.W.P. but to all the sympathizers of the Trotskyist movement in this country. We do not exist, however, solely for the purpose of pursuing indefinitely negotiations with the S.W.P. Such an aim would be a trap of our own making. Our main task remains: Build and strengthen the Workers Party! Into the factories, into the unions, into the mass work!

With Party Greetings,

Max Shachtman,
National Secretary

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
116 University Place
New York City

October 10, 1945

Max Shachtman, National Secretary
Workers Party
114 West 14th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrade:

Your two letters dated September 15 and October 4, together with the Resolution of your Active Workers Conference as well as a report of the oral discussions between the Sub-Committee of our P.C. and a corresponding Sub-Committee of your organization were submitted and discussed at the Plenum of our National Committee held October 6 and 7.

I am sending you herewith a copy of the Resolution adopted by the Plenum.

Yours fraternally,

J.P. Cannon
National Secretary

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RESOLUTION ON THE UNITY PROPOSAL OF THE WORKERS PARTY
(Adopted by the Plenum, October 6-7, 1945)

1. The proposal for unification made by the Workers Party to the Socialist Workers Party comes after more than five years of bitter hostility and struggle between the two organizations.
2. The split in 1940 was preceded by a protracted factional fight which involved not only the position of the Fourth International on the Russian question but the most fundamental questions of our movement: Marxist theory, tradition, political program, methods of party-building, the party regime, etc. The issues in this historic struggle have been explained and amply documented in the two books: "In Defense of Marxism" and "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party".
3. Our characterization of the petty-bourgeois tendency represented by the faction which later became the W.P. was not predicated solely upon their view of the nature of the USSR and their attitude toward its defense but upon their rejection of the theory, methods and traditions of Marxism, a rejection which was rooted in their social composition and direction. Trotsky wrote: "We, too, have attempted above to prove that the issue concerns not only the Russian problems but even more the opposition's method of thought, which has its social roots. The opposition is under the sway of petty-bourgeois needs and tendencies. This is the essence of the whole matter." (In Defense of Marxism, p.59, our italics).

4. The 1940 split which gave birth to the W.P. was a heavy blow aimed at the Trotskyist movement in the United States, and throughout the world. The petty-bourgeois faction split our party at a time of grave social tension and crisis preceding the entry of the United States into the war, when every revolutionist had the responsibility of remaining at his post and adhering without compromise to the positions of the Fourth International. This split broke away 40 percent of the membership from our party and served to disorient and mis-educate many potentially excellent revolutionists. During the ensuing five years the W.P. has pursued the policy of irreconcilable antagonism toward the S.W.P. with the object of discrediting, undermining and overthrowing it as the vanguard of the American working class.

5. Despite this, the S.W.P. has not only recouped the numerical losses suffered in the split, but under the adverse conditions of the war has made considerable gains in numbers, influence and prestige. It has become genuinely proletarian both in membership and in its predominant leadership. It is deeply rooted in the mass labor movement. Its ranks have become ideologically homogeneous and steeled in the fires of the class struggle.

6. As a result of the successes scored and the experiences undergone during the war, the ranks of the S.W.P. face the coming period with unlimited confidence in the prospects of the party and its eventual development into the mass revolutionary party of the American workers. The objective conditions are extremely favorable for the rapid growth of our party. The profound revulsion of the peoples all over the world against the consequences of the war; the resultant radicalization of the masses; the growing militancy of the American workers expressed in the present national strike wave -- are bound to accelerate the expansion of our party in all spheres. The response of the workers to The Militant, the steadily rising rate of recruitment, the establishment of new branches, and the extension of our influence in the key unions are sure signs of this trend.

7. The Workers Party, by contrast, has shown no ability to grow and attract workers in significant numbers. It has gained no significant influence in the labor movement. The disproportion in the numerical strength of the two parties is growing from month to month.

8. After more than five years of warfare against the S.W.P. in an attempt to supplant it, the Workers Party has come forward with the proposal for uniting the two organizations. This action marks a significant turn in their policy and opens a new stage in the relations between the two tendencies.

9. In view of this change in the situation, the Political Committee of the S.W.P. expressed its willingness to consider and discuss the question of unification in all its aspects. Its reply of August 27, 1945 to the letter of the W.P. stated that "unity would be a good thing if it is firmly based and leads to the strengthening of the party and the building up of the party. On the other hand, a unification followed by a sharp faction fight and another split would be highly injurious to the party."

10. Unifications like splits are the most serious steps in the life of a revolutionary party. Neither the one nor the other should be undertaken lightly or precipitately, without the most scrupulous survey of all the circumstances and the most careful calculation of the consequences. The advantages and disadvantages of such a move must be carefully appraised in the light of the tasks and perspectives of the party at the given stage of its development. A poorly-prepared and ill-considered unification could easily paralyze the work of

the party, provoke a new outburst of factional animosity, and lead toward a new split.

11. The P.C. pointed out in its letter: "We have always proceeded from the point of view that programmatic agreement on the most important and decisive questions is the only sound basis for unification." That has been the basis of all previous unifications in the Marxist movement. It is clear that such a basis for unification does not exist in the present instance. Both parties acknowledge that the programmatic differences which led to the 1940 split have not been moderated but that, on the contrary, some of them have been deepened and new important points of divergence have developed in the interim.

12. Thus we are confronted by the proposition of uniting into a common organization two tendencies with sharply divergent political points of view on many questions and sharply conflicting theories of party organization. This proposed unity without programmatic agreement, in fact with acknowledge disagreements between the two tendencies, has no precedent, so far as we know, in the history of the International Marxist movement. In preliminary discussions between representative sub-committees of the two organizations, the delegates of the W.P. emphasized their intention to come into the united party as a separate and distinct tendency. They stated, furthermore, that they would insist on the right to publish their own discussion bulletin under their own control.

13. Can we contemplate, nevertheless, a unification of the two organizations despite the important differences that exist on political and organizational questions? In other words are the differences compatible inside of one Leninist party? We have taken the position that this question cannot be determined by any abstract rule, it can only be answered concretely. Five years ago, the faction which later became the Workers Party decided that the differences were not compatible with remaining inside the S.W.P. In the five years that have elapsed, life again proved the differences incompatible, as the W.P. carried on unremitting warfare against our organization, our principles, our methods, our leadership. Has the W.P. sufficiently changed to make these differences compatible inside our party today? In other words can a genuine unity be effected with the W.P., as distinct from a purely formal unity which would actually mean two parties under one roof with a new split in prospect? This can only be answered with sufficient concreteness after the most through-going discussion and probing of all differences to the bottom.

14. The extraordinary nature of this unity proposal makes it all the more imperative that all the programmatic questions in dispute be thoroughly clarified and all the differences between the two parties probed to the depth so that not the slightest ambiguity remains. This preliminary work of ideological clarification and demarcation is the indispensable precondition for any definitive disposition of the proposal for unity and a correct settlement of the relations between the S. .P. and W.P.

15. To this end, this Plenum of the National Committee convened for the special purpose of considering this question therefore resolves:

a) To endorse the letter and actions of the Political Committee ~~in response~~ in response to the letter from the W.P.;

b) To authorize the Political Committee to prepare and carry through a thorough discussion and clarification of the theoretical, political and organ-

zational issues in dispute, and fix the position of the party precisely on every point in preparation for the consideration and action of the next party convention;

c) To reject any united front for propaganda. The S.W.P. must continue to conduct its propagandistic activities in its own name and under its own banner and utilize these activities to aid direct recruitment of new members into the S.W.P. At the same time, the Plenum authorizes the Political Committee to invite the W.P. to collaborate with our party in practical actions in those cases, where in the judgement of the Political Committee, such collaboration would be advantageous in serving practical ends without blurring or compromising political lines.

PLENUM RESOLUTION ON UNITY WITH THE WORKERS PARTY

(Submitted by the Minority of the Political Committee) of the S.W.P.

1. The Plenum declares that the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party are sufficiently in agreement on basic program to require and justify unity. The political differences between the two are compatible with membership in one revolutionary party.

2. The Workers Party resolution and letters on unity constitute a significant change in the policy of that group. Hitherto it had justified its split and continued separation from the S.W.P. on two grounds: (1) Its opposition to the S.W.P.'s defense of the Soviet Union, (2) the bureaucratic regime in the S.W.P. Recently, as the question of defense of the Soviet Union receded into the background, the W.P. had based its entire justification for separate existence on the regime in the S.W.P. Now, however, the W.P. is compelled to admit that it cannot continue to defend this position; it states that "the interests of uniting the Fourth Internationalists in the United States on a sound foundation are more important than the regime in the S.W.P." When the W.P. now states that the political and theoretical differences "do not go beyond what is permissible within the ranks of a single revolutionary party," it is at last accepting the position laid down by our party at the time of the split in 1940.

3. In the united party, the present program of the S.W.P. will prevail, by virtue of the fact that we, as the W.P. admits, constitute the majority. The W.P.'s communications to us explicitly recognize the principle of democratic centralism, thus pledging that as a minority it will be bound by discipline in action.

4. These commitments clear the path of practically all obstacles to unity except one. The remaining obstacle is a fear of unity by many of our members and perhaps also by members of the W.P. The factional strife of 1939-40, the split, and the more than five years of separate existence have left deep scars. It is advisable to eradicate this subjective element before formally consummating unity.

5. We believe the necessary spirit of unity can be created by a period of collaboration and cooperation prior to unification. Having declared ourselves for unity, such collaboration and cooperation is conceived by us, not as a united front between parties with a perspective of separate existence, but as concrete preparation for unity. Among the preparations there shall be joint membership meetings, joint discussion bulletins, collaboration in trade union work and other fields of activity.

6. The comrades of the W.P. have asked recognition of their right to publish a bulletin of their own within the united party. Such a right of any tendency in a Trotskyist party is taken for granted by us. But to recognize such a right and for comrades to exercise it, are two different things. Normally, where the party provides adequate opportunity for discussion in bulletins and the theoretical organ, the interests of the party as a whole and of the minority are better served by refraining from publishing a separate bulletin.

7. While we explicitly recognize the right of any group within the party to have its own bulletin if it so desires, we urge the comrades of the W.P. to refrain from exercising this right under the given circumstances in order to achieve unity on a proper basis. We guarantee them ample opportunity to present their point of view.

* joint public meetings,

8. However, both we and the comrades of the W.P. will be in a better position to decide this question at the end of the period of cooperation and collaboration. We therefore propose to leave final decision on it until the final steps for consummation of unity, with the understanding that we do not make it a condition of unity that the comrades of the W.P. refrain from issuing their own bulletin.

9. In view of the above decisions, the plenum considers that there is a basis for collaboration between the majority and minority in the S.W.P. in effecting the steps toward unity with the W.P. The Plenum therefore accepts the offer of the minority to collaborate in this task and instructs the Political Committee to give representation to the minority on the negotiating committee. The Plenum takes note of the statement of the minority that, having formed its faction on the issue of unity, it will dissolve its faction when unity is consummated, leaving the remaining differences for discussion on the plane of tendency articles and lectures in the party organs and branches.

BENNET
GOLDMAN
MORROW
WILLIAMS

STATEMENT OF PLENUM MINORITY ON THE
CANNON-STEIN-FRANK RESOLUTION

1. The resolution is designed to prevent unity. Opposition to unity is the privilege of any comrade. What is reprehensible in the Cannon-Stein-Frank resolution is its refusal to answer any of the questions which are central to the unity proposal: its evasion of an answer to the question whether or not the two parties are sufficiently in agreement on basic program to required and justify unity; its evasion of an answer to the question whether or not the political differences between the two parties are compatible with membership in one party; its evasion of an answer to the question whether or not the aim of the discussions with the Workers Party is to ascertain more accurately the political positions of the WP or the aim is to attempt to get the WP to abandon some of its political positions as a precondition for unity; its evasion of an answer to the question whether the WP's proposal for a tendency bulletin in the united party is or is not a right of any tendency in a Trotskyist party.

In their speeches the supporters of the resolution pretend that the difference between them and the minority is that the minority wants to rush speedily into unity whereas the majority wishes to move more slowly. This is completely untrue. As the minority plenum resolution makes clear, we insist on a considerable period of preparation for unity by means of cooperation between the two parties after a decision by our party in favor of unity. This period of preparation is made necessary above all because the majority leaders have prejudiced the membership against unity.

On the other hand the position of the Cannon-Stein-Frank resolution is not one of moving more slowly toward unity, but not to move at all towards unity.

2. In paragraph 11 the resolution repeats the formula of previous majority documents that programmatic agreement is the basis for unification. We of the minority have vainly attempted to get the majority to state unambiguously what it means by this: (1) that the WP must abandon one or more of the political positions on which it differs from us -- an absurd demand since it is inconceivable that the WP will abandon its position on the Russian question, the principal disputed issue; or (2) the legitimate proposition that the WP, as an admitted minority, must abide by the discipline of the majority program -- which the WP has already agreed to do.

It was bad enough that the majority insisted on using this ambiguous formula in its first letter of August 27 answering the unity proposal -- bad since the minority had vainly attempted to amend the letter to state that the political differences are compatible with membership in one party. It was worse still, that, in his speech of September 1, Comrade Cannon, despite a direct question from Comrade Goldman, refused to specify what the majority meant by its ambiguous formula. It is nothing less than outrageous that the majority repeats this patently-dishonest ambiguity again now, after the WP negotiating committee has repeatedly asked for clarification.

Comrade N. has reiterated the minority position that: "A thousand times more important (than the question of defense of the USSR) is unification, rather than the existence of two independent groups who in the fundamentals march under the one and the same banner. The program of the minority (i.e. WP) is known to the majority from the former's literature; there is no necessity to discuss it."

If the authors of the resolution disagree with that position, let them say so in their resolution: let them say either that they do not know the program of the WP and must now study it, or that they know the program of the WP and it is in agreement with us on fundamentals or that it is not; let them say whether they agree or do not agree that unification is more important than the question of the slogan of the defense of the USSR.

Anyone who assumes to play any role as a leader in our party certainly knows what the political differences are between our party and the WP. Are these differences compatible with unity? Anyone who thinks they are not compatible should have voted against unity discussions with the WP. Conversely, anyone who voted for unity discussions should have been ready to say that the political differences are compatible with unity. We are confronted with a monstrous paradox. In 1940 and thereafter we of the SWP always maintained that the political differences were compatible with party unity. Now the P.C. majority refuses to affirm our 1940 position. The argument justifying this refusal is absurd: "Five years ago, the faction which became the WP decided that the differences were not compatible with remaining inside the SWP. In the five years that have elapsed, life again proved the differences incompatible..." The WP was wrong when it considered that the differences were not compatible with remaining in the same party, and we and Trotsky said they were wrong, and we did not abandon this position simply because "life" i.e., the mistake of the WP, led it to leave the party.

Why does the P.C. majority cling to its ambiguous formula about programmatic agreement? Is it possible that, after a period, the P.C. majority is going to confront us with "proof" that the political differences make unity impossible? But such "proof" must already exist, since we all know what the political differences are. In that case, in all honesty the P.C. majority should have said to begin with that it does not believe that the political premises exist for unity - more accurately, it should have continued to say this after the WP proposal for unity as it had said this previously.

In his September 1 speech "explaining" the P.C. letter's ambiguity on this question, Comrade Cannon claimed he was answering this question when he stated: "It is up to the WP to demonstrate that the political differences are compatible with unity." Absolutely false: we have to determine this question for ourselves, independently of what the WP does nor does not do.

Comrade Cannon went on to identify this question with the question, "will the WP'ers be loyal this time?", i.e., will they abide by party discipline. This is a different question. It is a legitimate question. In view of the attitude of the WP leaders in the split of 1940, it was necessary to put the question to them. An affirmative answer to that question assures unity and the WP has answered it satisfactorily. But, before we asked the WP leaders to answer that question, our party should have answered for itself the question whether the political differences are compatible with membership in one party. Otherwise, it is pointless to ask the WP leaders whether they will abide by party discipline -- or indeed to ask them any questions or conduct any discussions.

Until the P.C. majority adopts the position that the political differences are compatible with party membership, the danger will continue to exist that the P.C. majority will, on the basis of facts already known to all of us, suddenly "discover" that the political differences bar unity. In that case it would be clear to all that its agreement to discuss with the WP was nothing but a maneuver designed to confuse the party and the International.

We demand an answer to this question. Is there sufficient agreement on the fundamentals of program to make unity possible and desirable? One can honestly answer yes or no; but to refuse to answer the question, after all that has transpired, is clearly a subterfuge.

3. The result of this subterfuge is that we are asked to vote on the absurd proposal of discussions with the WP without any principles laid down as to what shall be the basis for unity. Shall our discussion sub-committee tell the WP negotiators that the latter's position on the Russian question is or is not a bar to unity? No answer in the resolution. Shall our discussers tell the WP negotiators that the aim of the discussions is to ascertain the differences, or that the aim is to get the WP to abandon its positions? No answer in the resolution. Shall our discussers say that the differences on organizational questions are or are not a bar to unity? No answer. In a word, discussions are to be carried on without indicating to our discussers the basis on which they are to discuss. What is the difference, then, between the previous meetings of the Cannon-Stein-Frank committee with the WP committee, and those which presumably will follow the plenum? The previous meetings were characterized by the Cannon-Stein-Frank committee as not negotiations but discussions since, they stated, they had no authority to negotiate and no instructions on what basis to negotiate. Future meetings, on the basis of their resolution, will be no different than the previous ones. In that case, why call a plenum and adopt a plenum resolution? Why, indeed, except to go through the motions of pretending to consider the unity proposal seriously.

4. The WP negotiators have asked a series of key questions concerning the basis and purpose of the discussions. They summarize these in their letter of October 4 to the plenum and request of the plenum that it answer these questions. They ask that an end be put by the plenum to the situation wherein the SWP committee is "in a position where it cannot and does not make any proposals of its own on the question of unity, where it cannot express itself definitely on proposals made by us, and where it is even unable to declare that the SWP has decided in favor or in opposition to unity itself." They further ask the plenum to take a position "on the series of proposals made by us for the basis on which the unification should be achieved..." These requests are not only reasonable but one can hardly imagine how discussions can continue without answering them. Yet the resolution evades them. It will be an evasion of its duty, if this plenum closes without answering these proposals of the WP. One can accept them, one can reject them, but to evade them is politically indefensible.

5. The August 27 letter of our P.C., in rejecting the WP proposal for cooperation between the two parties, stated it would agree to cooperation at a later date only "if, in the course of the discussions, it appears that we are approaching agreement on the most important political questions...But to attempt to begin with such practical cooperation, prior to a definite approach to unification, would seem to us to put things upside down and lead to a

sharpening of conflict over secondary questions rather than to their moderation!

What, then, is the purpose of the resolution in proposing now "to invite the WP to collaborate with our party in practical actions in those cases where such collaboration would be advantageous in serving practical ends without blurring or compromising political lines." According to the August 27 letter of the P.C. such cooperation would lead to a sharpening of conflicts unless the fact was first established that we are approaching unification definitely. Now without establishing this fact, the P.C. proposes cooperation. Here is confusion worse confounded.

We bluntly warn the party and the International: Cooperation after a declaration for unity would prepare the memberships of both parties for unity, but the so-called limited cooperation without a previous declaration for unity can very well serve the aim of preventing unity. Under the given circumstances it is necessary for those who sincerely desire cooperation as preparation for unity to vote against the formula of cooperation without a declaration in favor of unity.

6. Anyone who understands the ABC of politics knows that the August 27 letter of the P.C. agreeing to discuss unity with the WP was a political victory for the P.C. minority whose initiative had led to this development. Quite apart from the principle of minority representation, those who initiated the unity proposal were entitled to participate in the unity discussions. Yet the very same P.C. meeting which sent the letter to the WP also barred the minority from the P.C. sub-committee which met with the WP.

And this was merely the forerunner of a renewed barrage against the minority which had dared to fight for unity.

In his September 1 speech explaining the P.C. letter on unity, Comrade Cannon accused the minority: "Perhaps their new idea is unity first and then a bigger split." The "perhaps" does not save this from being an outrageous accusation. Outrageous not merely because it is not true, but because if the P.C. majority were to act on it, unity would be put off to the Greek Kalends. For if one does not accept the propositions of both the minority and the WP that the political differences are compatible with unity; that unity is more important than the regime; that unity can be achieved on a lasting basis -- then no political criteria remain for determining the aims of both the minority and the WP. There remains then only the capricious and arbitrary psychologizing of the P.C. majority concerning what is going on in the minds of the minority and the WP. This approach has nothing in common with Marxist politics.

Superficially more political was Comrade Cannon's further declaration that before unity can take place, the party must first "stamp out disloyalty in the ranks and restore discipline in the party." Certainly this would be true, were there disloyalty and indiscipline. But Comrade Cannon falsely applies these terms to the minority's fraternization and discussion with WP leaders and members. We of the minority declare that no amount of such threats and abuse will swerve us from our politically correct and organizationally loyal policy of continuing to urge the WP to persist in its course toward unity despite all obstacles placed in the way. To put off unity until after "stamping out" the pro-unity minority is scarcely the prelude which would usher in unity! It is

clear that the attack on the minority as "disloyal" is in reality an attack on unity.

This attack continues at the plenum. It is "cleverly" left out of the resolution, which tries to assume a statesmanlike tone, but it is the main burden so far of all the speeches of the majority spokesmen. On this question, too, we demand an end to ambiguity. If the majority really means what it says, then let it adopt an unambiguous rule governing the situation: one which would forbid the minority from discussing with the WP leaders. In that case we would have to submit to the decision or leave the party. Such a ruling would be proof conclusive of the deep-going degeneration of the party leadership. But its verbal assertion to the same effect is also such a proof.

7. It should be obvious to any political person that the absurd basis on which the discussions are left -- on no basis except the whims of the SWP discussers to drag out the talks endlessly -- may soon prove unacceptable to the WP. With none of their proposals accepted, with no alternative proposals offered, with nothing decided by the plenum, the WP may very well conclude that there is no point in continuing such formless discussions. The resolution appears aimed to test the patience of the WP negotiators to the breaking point by an endless series of pointless meetings. In a word, it is calculated to throw responsibility for disruption of discussions on the WP, whereas the reality is that the course set by the resolution must inevitably lead to disruption of discussions. We brand this as trickery and declare that if this resolution becomes party policy the responsibility for disruption will be on the shoulders of this plenum.

Bennett
Goldman
Morrow
Williams

October 7, 1945.

782