

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

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LETTER OF COMRADE DEMAZIERE
TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PCI (FRANCE)

* * *

Paris - March 4, 1948

Dear Comrades:

Last January 31st, a few days after the national conference of my tendency, I addressed a letter to the Political Committee of the PCI, which I asked to be put into the Internal Bulletin, noting the present degeneration of the revolutionary groupings. I pointed out that conditions were ripe for the formation of a group - which for convenience's sake could be called centrist. In the letter, I asserted that the existence, or even the possibility of such a formation, would urgently necessitate a modification of our strategy.

I wrote then: "We must influence all the centrist currents, through our members, with faith and confidence in our militants and their revolutionary convictions. In so doing, our goal cannot be to fish for a recruit here or there, but a through-going, comprehensive and fraternal interpenetration with all those currents who have more or less broken with the SP and CP - in the interests of the regeneration of the working-class movement. Accepting this perspective - and success depends upon it - we must prepare a plan to place our forces in the Socialist Youth, the ASR (Deschezelle group), the BS, Franc Tireur, the International Review group, the personalist centers grouped around Esprit (a literary magazine of Christian-cum-individualist-cum-anarchist views) etc...without fearing to separate ourselves organically from those members who will appear to us to be most capable of undertaking such a large, detailed, slow and painstaking assignment. They will bring to it their experience, a program for advancement along revolutionary paths - without ultimatism, without phrasemongering, without any doctrine of infallibility."

Since this letter, more than a month has passed and events have confirmed my statements. They now make possible a clearer view of the question and although up to now I was primarily preoccupied with tactical considerations, they have helped me to understand that we must arrive at an entirely new evaluation of the political situation. We must resign ourselves to putting aside, once and for all, an entire stock of sterilizing clichés and fatal preconceptions. Such a purging is not without its agony - it was for me, personally an enormous effort. But it is the prerequisite for the rebirth of the working class movement, its only chance of finding a revolutionary way out in such currently decisive situations as those in France and Italy, where an equilibrium still continues between the working class and bourgeois forces.

At the beginning of last month, at a meeting of the Political Committee, I tried orally to defend the ideas expressed in the above-mentioned letter. Two tendencies were revealed within the present PC. The one represented by Comrade Frank, alas, the present leader of the PCI (or what remains of it) - treated my proposals with the most profound contempt. Frank strongly emphasized that the tendencies, groups, currents now forming were simultaneously straddling the tendencies of reformism, Stalinism and the genuinely revolutionary

desires of the masses and were no more than - and I quote - "swarming, writhing maggots" - and that decency and principle precluded our writhing after them. I will repeat to the CC what I said to Comrade Frank, that such blindness on his part may soon enable these maggots to gnaw away at his political corpse - and what is worse, that of our party.

The other tendency, which comrade Mestre seems to represent best, accepted, if only in principle, most of my proposals which were as follows:

- 1) our members should enter the currents now being formed.
- 2) to reject the fusion of the JS, ASR, and the PCI, which is no longer anything more than a maneuver by the top leadership - we will see why presently.
- 3) to support all partial regroupments, even if so based, politically or organically, as to exclude us, implicitly or explicitly.
- 4) to propose to the "Drapeau Rouge" to spearhead a campaign for discussion with those (Franc-Tireur and certain other groups of militants) who want, in their own words, "to try to achieve an all-embracing regroupment of all the vital energies of the people, aimed at forging a real force based on a genuine international, without totalitarian contamination, while at the same time preserving the most comradely and intimate contact with the revolutionary elements of the working class movement.
- 5) to call a National Conference of all working class tendencies which repudiate both stalinism and the "3rd force" in order to build a new workers movement - even if the PCI is rejected as an organization.

(All this was proposed and formulated as early as January 25th, that is well before the formation of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, (RDR) whose initial success astonished even its organizers)

Comrade Mestre took up certain of these proposals, but made the PCI the pivot of the whole matter. I will try to show that it is a question here, not of a secondary or tactical difference but of a very deep divergence which touches upon the evaluation of the French political conjuncture and perspectives - to use our hallowed jargon.

This letter of mine to the Central Committee was in no way intended as a thesis. Even if I had wanted it to be, it would have been difficult for, considering the state of my thoughts and the extraordinary confusion reigning in the workers movement and its vanguard. I could only expect to outline a general orientation. Needless to say, my evolution - which is also, I believe, that of a number of others in the party - was not developed overnight, but is the result of experiences and reflections accumulated over several years.

Regardless of faction, members of the PCI have a habit of commenting ironically on the weakness of their Party, the defeats, the failures to grow, the corpse of members which line our road, the disproportion between 10 and more years of efforts of some hundreds of French Trotskyists and the meagerness of the results obtained. But

that which up to now, has only been a subject for bad jokes, disgust or doubt, must now become the source of somewhat more profound reflection. It does not seem to me to be fruitful, at the moment, to review our conduct before the war, except to say that, in my opinion it prepared us very poorly for winning the masses in the period immediately following - during and after the war. I believe that our present stalemate can be attributed to our behavior during the Occupation. At the time, we made an artificial separation of two tasks: one was the preservation (?)* of revolutionary Marxist values, namely the class struggle and proletarian internationalist; the other, the maintaining of contact with the masses of workers and petty bourgeois who fought the fascist forces of a decadent capitalism with a magnificence unprecedented in history.

In the PCI, our comrade Marcel Hic, with some others, was able to understand that the new situation entailed a loss of political and economic independence for France, until then a leading imperialist country and an eruption of pauperized and enslaved petty bourgeois masses, touched by a mixture of patriotic and anti-fascist sentiments onto the political scene. He was not able to lead the party to accept the tactical consequences of his understanding. I will not take up again here the discussion - so tempting, so often evaded - but our great defeat gives it a continued and even greater importance. Let it suffice for me to say here, to free me from the obligation of explaining myself elsewhere, once again, that the adherence of Trotskyists as such to the Resistance movement was an imperious necessity. By not doing so, we believed we were preserving our ideological values - as if the activities of a revolutionist could be determined outside of the concrete historical conditions of the struggles of the masses. Let us pose the problem practically and suppose - and there is nothing ridiculous about this - that the Trotskyists had reinforced the "Franc Tireur" groups in clandestinity. Who cannot see what enormous possibilities would have been opened for the revolutionary forces after the Liberation? That probably could not have occurred without some really opportunist errors that the Bolshevik formation of our cadre militants would have firmly and very quickly righted. In contrast, if it has to be proved by the absurd, the balance sheet of the four years which have just elapsed is open for the record. NO WORKER, NOT EVEN AMONG THOSE ATTRACTED BY OUR PROGRAMS OF DEMANDS AND OUR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES, DOES NOT BUT RECOGNIZE THAT WE WERE NOT PROFOUNDLY INVOLVED, IN THE WAY HE WAS, IN THE GREAT DRAMA OF THE NAZI OCCUPATION.

All the occupied countries of Europe posed the same problem. And these countries were, and remain, the key to revolutionary development. That is why such error largely explain the stagnation of the Fourth International. The Trotskyists still had not learned to understand the economic and political mechanism of decadent capitalism. Our ritual and schematic application of the Transitional Program (elaborated, incidentally, before the gigantic unsettling that the war brought to minds and action) did not permit us to follow the evolution of the masses in which there existed at the same time a more or less defined desire to have done with the capitalist regime and the prejudices, reticences, fears and deformations, engendered every day by the rottenness of this regime.

How are we to explain otherwise our real successes in certain colonial, semi-colonial and "new" Latin American countries - in relation to our oppressive stagnation in countries of great industrial concentration and old proletarian traditions of struggle?

Stalinism itself, whose analysis is often mysteriously said to hold the key to the problem - without ever defining exactly what lock opened by just this key - can only be understood as the effect of the decomposition of bourgeois society on the proletarian movement and proletarian consciousness.

3. The end of the war thus found the Trotskyites heavily handicapped, without a mass base in any country whatsoever. However, at that time it was still possible that a serious political reparation, stemming from a clear understanding of the situation, would have enabled certain of our most importantly situated parties (France, Italy and Belgium) to regain part of the important territory lost under the occupation. It was a question of understanding, without gargling about objective conditions, what a long maturation had to be accomplished in the Stalinist and Social-Democratic masses, and to engage our essential forces in the large workers' organizations to ripen the crisis which had to be produced by their politics of treason and defeat. Some members, among them our comrade Craipeau, defended this orientation. But the party did not follow, except in engaging, mistrustfully in one or two actions in this direction - one of whose political returns (in the case of the Socialist Youth) gave us a glimpse of what such an orientation could mean for us, if it had been understood from the beginning and conceived of as a general strategy for the period then opening. Once again we chose to conserve "our ideological values" in a water-tight, or nearly so, container, while playing at being a Party - a handful of members, without a paper, without means of expression and poor as Job.

Twice already since the war, history has given us the opportunity, at least in this country, to put forward revolutionary Marxism among the masses. Twice we stepped aside - looking elsewhere or disdainfully. Who can be made to believe that the machine - our machine - had not broken down? Do they think that history accumulates favorable occasions for the pleasure of revolutionists? One question burns on the lips of ALL the members of the Party - some pose it, others dare not: when, where and how will Trotskyism be able to develop? Many begin to believe that the favorable situations have passed and ask themselves, even when they pursue their daily routine, if we shall ever progress, now that so many grandiose events, in the course of which we were not able to justify ourselves, are behind us.

And what can be said of a party which disheartens and alienates dozens and dozens of militants and authentic revolutionists - and not the worst elements - without its leadership even being touched by the idea that a serious revision of our attitude and our serious rearmament might be necessary?

4. After the Third Congress in September, 1946 - in the course of which the so-called "right" tendency took the leadership of the party, and under execrable internal conditions, tried as best it could, to play the trumps that the work we had done among social-democratic milieus gave us. After the Socialist Youth had broken with the S.P., we put forth the necessity for a revolutionary regroup-

ment. Afterwards, the members of the S.P., grouped around Yves Deschezelles who were breaking from the shameful social-democracy, adhered to this perspective. But it was there, it seems that the totality of our past errors and the timidity of our interventions would not permit us to accomplish a true revolutionary regroupment - not to speak of the fact that a large number of members of the A.S.R., if not the Socialist Youth, were hostile to organic unity with the PCI.

Our perspective of revolutionary regroupment rapidly found itself bypassed and at the same time cut away from under.

Bypassed: because the events of the last months in France have, while marking a clear ebbing of the workers' movement as a whole, favored the advent of workers' tendencies (larger than those mobilized by the revolutionary regroupment) which are trying to draw the lessons of the defeats suffered and which are laboriously seeking a way out.

Undermined: because these currents have not as objective the formation of the revolutionary party, armed with a revolutionary program, but are developing their own forces in multiple directions, where often the desire to find a way out is the only binding force.

It is thus that the Mouvement Socialiste Unitaire et Democratique (Bataille Socialiste) supported, but not created by the Stalinist was born - its program holding, even more rigidly than does that of the Nenni party with its large working-class base in Italy, to the objective of "Unity of action with the Communist Party of France."

5. It is thus above all that the Rassemblement Democratique et Revolutionnaire (R.D.R.) was born, its creation, structure, composition and declarations best corresponding to the efforts of the militants that the revolutionary core did not know and could not convince. But it is pointless to state simply that the appearance of such a centrist group is the price paid for our repeated failures. It is hardly more useful to state also that the recognition of the existence of the RDR is sharpening the crisis in the S.P. and reveals also the declining prestige of the CP after the strikes of November-December, 1947.

What is essential is to know if and how the RDR can constitute an obstacle to the reactionary development of the political situation; if and how it can be an instrument of radicalization of the working masses. Granted that the "forces of revolutionary regroupment as such cannot play such a role and have never succeeded - except in certain insignificant local actions -- in throwing up a bridge for the Stalinist masses." Centrism in the form of the RDR could only develop because of our errors. But, it is also possible to say that, to a certain degree, they correct them.

- 1) It reveals a great confusion in minds that exists also in facts, above all in economic facts:
 - (a) the persistence in Europe of imperialist traits - at the same time that most of the countries on the continent finds them more and more the vassals of the U.S. - not to speak of the even more complex conjuncture of the U.S.S.R. and its vassals in Eastern Europe.

- (b) the loss of independence for most of the European countries - which, in conjunction with their growing pauperization, makes the petty-bourgeois masses anxious and keeps them permanently in the political arena.
- (c) the birth, with scarcity, of new layers of exploiters and privileged groups (middlemen, cheating shopkeepers, etc.) completely unconcerned with the independence of their country - which sometimes tends to encourage, to add to the confusion, a rapprochement between traditional layers of exploiters and the laboring masses, who are both hostile to the new group.
- (d) the revival of a certain peasant supremacy.

2) It reveals, finally, considering what has gone before, that our general attitude, our language, our approach to movements and masses were singularly narrow and ineffective. It reveals how stupidly impatient we have been, how deluded and deluding. We cannot say we're paying this or that, because we're paying EVERYTHING. Considering only the past year, we cannot say: "We must be the initiators of the Regroupment which is taking place" - for our sectarianism has reduced our margin of manoeuvre to such a point that it is almost no longer possible for us to evolve in the interior of the mass movement.

6. What to do now?

The RDR, slow in coming into the world, seems to enjoy very lively success in its first days. My profound conviction is that it must develop seriously in the weeks to come to the point where it will rapidly reach a membership of some tens of thousands. It is the symbol of the confusion reigning, of the bewildered searchings of thousands of workers, intellectuals and petty bourgeois who do not wish to choose between Truman and Stalin - that is, between the innumerable evils of putrefying capitalism and the inhuman issue of bureaucratic and terroristic collectivism, as the form of society following such prolonged degeneration.

However, we must at all price realize unity with all these searching elements - for, in my opinion, this is now the last chance for a regeneration of the workingclass movement.

For the moment, the diversity of the political elements of the Regroupment hardly matter. Well before its constitution, a month ago on February 1st, I wrote that a centrist regroupment would be a refuge for a rainbow of tendencies, going from more or less openly avowed Stalinism to revolutionary Marxism passing by such politico-sentimental nuances as anti-totalitarianism, pacifism and humanism. That's the sign of the times and so much the worse for those that cannot accept it. It's the same for the presence in the Regroupment of certain wastrels, professional political fugitives or other practical jokers.

SUCH A REGROUPMENT, IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, CAN AND MUST PLAY A PROGRESSIVE ROLE. It is the only brake possible to the retreat of the masses on the reactionary path.

- It can become a serious counterweight to the other Rassemblement, that of the bourgeois camp which is also groping for a path, a program, a situation.

- It is also the only possible pole of attraction for the mass of militants, disheartened by the politics of the big workers' parties.

- It is very certainly going to regroup the greatest part of our tens of thousands of voters with whom we never knew how to bridge the gap.

- It is going to bring to a paroxysm the crisis in the SP, where it is pushing out almost its entire forces.

- It possesses a mass organ (Franc-Tireur), with 250,000 readers, enjoying serious influence among Stalinist workers and creator of important popular agitational campaigns of great significance.

- It is already sowing indecision among the Stalinophile ranks of the Bataille Socialiste.

- The eternally and almost too great pro-unity position of its paper can bring it to play an important role in the trade union movement, if the Unite Syndicale tendency (~~ex~~ Front Ouvrier) engages in politics appropriate to the circumstances.

- Its appeal - which throughout this letter I have taken for granted you are familiar with - must, in the spirit of the founders of the RDR - permit the greatest development of workingclass and truly democratic tendencies. If, once more aping the Stalinists, we insult the RDR, denouncing it as a gathering of rotten elements, pseudo-revolutionaries or agents of the Third Force, we will have understood nothing, we will not have understood what base and what currents are carrying it, and we will have furnished the last historic proof that we are a sect, a vestige of the left opposition, an appendage of Stalinism. I believe that it is now hardly worthwhile to define my conclusion further.

The revolutionary vanguard must go to the RDR and play its cards intelligently from within it. In the state of disarray and confusion that the proletarian vanguard finds itself, certain key values will permit our members to find themselves again: the unconditional defense of workingclass demands; effective support of colonial aspirations for complete independence; solidarity with workers of all countries; respect for democracy within the bosom of workingclass life.

For the rest, we must wait until our views are decanted through a considerably larger activity than that we have known until now. It's impossible not to fall into the most sterile sectarianism when for 15 years, a program is elaborated without being based upon a current, however feeble, within the factories. The worst thing would be to believe that in going to the RDR, we were accomplishing a new "entry," carrying, carefully wrapped, but ready for unpacking, our members, our programs, our prejudices, our waste matter. If, on the contrary, we want Trotskyism, as an expression of revolutionary Marxism, not to discredit itself forever, we must give it its last chance to renew itself and prosper.

Reserving the guiding threads enumerated above which are our inalienable attainment, we must make every effort to rid ourselves of our sediment, to acquire new vision - or risk losing our last hope. Nobody yet knows what may happen and in what form the new workers party will express itself. Obviously, one may have doubts about the effects of such an effort upon us, when, for example, one remembers the tempest unchained in our party in November, 1946, by the open letter to the S.P. and C.P. for an electoral united front. So much the worse if the infirm or the cadavers fall by the wayside: Trotskyism - and not its impotent caricature - must live and open the way to the socialist revolution.

It hardly seems worthwhile to me to specify, if we have understood what a chance the RDR still offers us, that our efforts to strengthen it, must take place with the least possible delay. We must understand, even better than the founders of the movement, themselves, who are carried along by the current, that it can only fulfill its function if it gains a large enough number of members. More than that, the rapid adherence of revolutionary groups and militants, will enormously attenuate the risks of serious compromising of the RDR and its utilization by personalities who wish to retrieve their political virginity in the eyes of the workers.

It is senseless to specify here what cannot for the moment be specified: exactly how to adhere to the RDR; what its immediate actions will be; what forms it will take. All these questions, I insist, knowing what the infirm are going to put forward - seem to me pointless. The essential is to be there! As for me, my decision has been taken, because I believe it is time to draw the conclusions imposed upon us by our defeats and aborted efforts. If their organization is insolvent, members must take up their responsibilities within the working class. I have no desire to go into retirement, either by returning home or by continuing to respect the routine of the P.C.I. Therefore, I am joining the Rassemblement Democratique Revolutionnaire.

I hope that you will understand my attitude - whatever my inabilities to explain it - and that it will be possible for me to remain a member of an organization to which, for the past 12 years, I have given the best of myself.

Fraternal greetings,

Demaziere

P.S. Once more, I ask that this letter be published in the Internal Bulletin.

Oakland, Calif.
March 17, 1948

E. R. McKinney
National Secretary

For the Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

Attached please find an article I have prepared for the Bulletin. I regret its length, as well as the length of time it has taken me to prepare it and circulate it for signatures. But the pressure of other things made it impossible for me to get it in sooner.

Since this article was written, the tendencies criticized in it have become more marked rather than less so. In our handling of the UE situation, in the discussions of the rupture of the CIO Council in New Jersey and now in Los Angeles, we seem prepared to justify or at least not to seriously condemn any action of the native bureaucracy, no matter how vicious and anti-democratic, as long as it is directed against the Stalinists.

I hope this article will at least arouse serious discussion in the party. I request that it be published in full. In the event that it is absolutely impossible to grant this request, I suggest that Section II, "A Question of Party Procedure," be taken out in its entirety. Though I am very concerned that this question get the careful attention which it deserves, I believe the other portions of the article which deal with policy are even more important.

I request, further, that this letter be included with the article in the Bulletin.

Fraternally yours,

Larry O'Connor

P.S. In addition to myself, the following have indicated a desire to have their names attached as subscribing generally to the views expressed in the article:

Arnold	Abbott
Barton	Russel
Byer	Carol
Robertson	Christiansen

THE WORKERS PARTY AND THE UAW

Introduction

This article is a criticism of the way in which our party's policies in the UAW have been presented in Labor Action. To avoid any misunderstanding, we wish to point out that our criticism bases itself on complete agreement with the party's position that in the faction fight in the UAW the Reuther caucus had to be given organizational support against the Thomas-Addes-Stalinist caucus.

The question at issue revolves around how this policy was carried out. The fact that some of our criticisms may be, or may seem to be, similar to those voiced by the SWP or other opponents of our party, or that such a criticism may be pleasing to enemies of our party should not and cannot deter any serious revolutionist from exerting every effort to correct or to accept a correction of actions which are wrong and can be very harmful to the party if they are permitted to remain uncorrected.

In preparing this article we have only two sources of information, only two things to go by. These are the extensive treatment in Labor Action of the whole UAW situation before, during and since the convention, and the discussions and motions recorded in the minutes of the PC. In judging party policy we contend that these sources should be sufficient. If they have, perchance, led to any misunderstanding on our part of the role played by the party at the UAW convention and inside the Reuther caucus, that can be attributed solely to a failure on the part of those responsible to keep the party and its sympathizers adequately informed.

I. The UAW CONVENTION AND THE TAFT-HARTLEY ACT

"We do not for a single instant give support to a political program or a policy which is not ours or which we consider false or dangerous. We continue our criticism of even those leaderships we support. We continue to advocate our own program and policies. All this without concealment and without apology."

Max Shachtman, Labor Action, Dec. 8, 1947

"...not every bloc represents a capitulation of one side to the other. Far from it. That is true only of those blocs in which one side, without political explanation and justification, abandons the positions it has held up to yesterday or 'adjusts' these positions to those of the partner in the bloc."

Max Shachtman, "Two Lines on Unity,"

W.P. Bulletin, Vol. II, No. 4, p.18.

It is our contention that in handling the UAW convention in Labor Action the party did, in fact, give support to a program and a policy which was not ours, and for much longer than a single instant. Further, that this constituted the abandonment of positions which had been held up to the convention, or at the very least, their "adjustment" to those of a partner in a bloc, namely a section of the Reuther caucus. This was done without political explanation or justification to the party till more than two months after the convention, and in clear violation of the decisions of the competent party body, which were not reversed till some time later.

A. The Taft-Hartley Affidavits.

Up to the time the UAW convention met, our party had a clear, correct program on the question of what the policy of the labor movement should be with regard to signing the so-called "non-communist" affidavits required under the Taft-Hartley Act. This position had been formally laid down in a motion of the Political Committee on July 17, 1947. In brief, our position was that the labor movement should refuse to sign these affidavits on the grounds that we are against government intervention in the internal affairs of the working class movement, and especially against government intervention in the political life of the unions or imposing upon union officials a specific political faith or affiliation.

As applied to the UAW, this position was carried prominently in Labor Action till the eve of the convention. The issue of November 10th, which greeted the convention, had two articles in which Reuther's capitulation to the affidavits was condemned, one of them ending: "UAW militants! To fight the Taft law, follow the lead of the miners and seamen, not the lead of Murray, Addes, Leonard and Reuther."

Then came the convention. As far as we can gather from the paper, the sole major debate at the whole convention was held on this question. And what was the sum and substance of our reporting and comment on this issue? In the three editions of LA written during and immediately following the convention, we apologized for Reuther on a question on which, according to the last article in the Shachtman UAW series, Reuther capitulated to the government and did great harm to the labor movement and the UAW!

There are many ways in which you can apologize for an ally who is embarrassing you. One of them is to say nothing about what he is doing, while denouncing his opponents. Read the paper as carefully as you may, this is in substance what it says: the Stalinists and Addes-Thomas were demagogues on this question. They and Reuther are both guilty of not proposing a full program for the defeat of the Taft-Hartley Act. There is only one difference between them, i.e., one bunch is for signing, the other against. But those who are against signing are phonies and Stalinists, while those who are for signing are the "militants."

But LA and the Workers Party who do not, we are told, for a single instant give support to a policy which is not ours or which we consider false or dangerous, what did we do about it? For nine issues of the paper following the convention, each of which had a lengthy article on the UAW, the Workers Party could not find its tongue to criticize Reuther and his followers for capitulating to the government on this issue. In the December first issue, Coolidge informs us that "...in the main speech by Abner (Reutherite) on the affidavit question, the Stalinist-Addes position was cut to shreds." Practically the sole comment on this question, other than the above, in the articles of the representative of the party who is specially concerned with the direction of our trade union work, is a remark that as the convention had voted to sign the T-H affidavits, any discussion of wages and how to fight the Act as a whole would have raised a political debate which Reuther was anxious to avoid in view of his support of the Democrats. That is all!

Now how are we to explain not only silence on this question, but a line of discussion which clearly could have only one effect: to apologize for the position taken by Reuther? How are we to explain the fact that though the party had established a clear position on this question, a delegate at the convention who listens closely to what we have to say voted with the Reuther caucus to sign the affidavits?

The P.C., subsequent to the writing of these articles by McKinney, Jason and others, discussed the question of the affidavits again and reached a conclusion which was expounded in the final article on the UAW by comrade Shachtman. This conclusion will be discussed separately, on its merits. All we are trying to point out here is that even prior to changing the position of the party, responsible members of the organization in fact "adjusted" our position so that it did not come into head-on conflict with the Reutherite "militants."

Succinctly stated, and without embellishments, what is the new position of the PC? They say that the T-H affidavits are a bad thing, directed at interfering in the life of the labor movement, etc. (Even Governor Warren says the affidavits are a bad thing.) But they are not the whole Taft-Hartley Act, in fact are only a relatively insignificant part of it. It would have been a fine thing if the labor movement had taken our advice and refused to sign as part of an all-round, general offensive against the Act and the whole anti-labor drive. But, alas, this was not the case. Many labor leaders, and among them many "progressive" ones either rushed to sign the affidavits, or got around to signing at their leisure. We don't take responsibility for the fact that they have led the labor movement into the corral on this question. But this is all water over the dam. Since most unions have signed, it now becomes very hard for those unions which haven't signed to hold out.

But, we may ask, does this "embarrassing" situation into which the labor bureaucracy has led the American labor movement make it incumbent on the revolutionists to support them in further capitulations to the Act and hence to the capitalists? The resolution is silent. You are left to draw your own conclusions. The conclusions which have actually been drawn are plain to see. Labor Action reports every single situation in which this question comes up in such a way as to justify and in fact insist on the labor movement submitting to the affidavits!

B. The General Struggle Against the T-H Act.

It is an old truism for revolutionary Marxists that radical phrases can often cover opportunism in practice. In this case such phrases are provided in ample measure. As is invariably the case in such situations, the radical phrases have a most general, abstract, purely formal character. For each apology for Reuther on the specific policy at issue, you will find several general assertions that we don't support Reuther when he is wrong. Accompanying our complicity in this capitulation, you will find numerous assertions that Reuther and his colleagues in the labor movement have completely failed to mobilize the workers for an all-out offensive against T-H, that it is our job to help the labor movement to stem its retreat, consolidate its forces, and turn to the offensive. You will not, in

all the tens of thousands of words written in the past months on the UAW find a concrete statement of what our policy is with regard to fighting the Act, of how we propose to start stemming the retreat, of what we now urge the labor movement to do. No, the above is not altogether correct. You will find one and one policy alone referred to. That is that labor must build a labor party.

Is this all we have to say to the workers on how they are to defend their unions against the employer-government offensive? It is not all we used to say to them. There are resolutions of the Political Committee on this question also, resolutions which seem to have been as completely forgotten as was the resolution on the T-H affidavits until the writer of this article called it to the attention of the PC.

On June 26, 1947, the PC passed a series of seven resolutions on the policy to be advocated by our party in the fight against the Taft-Hartley Act. These summarized were: The workers must continue to struggle to maintain their standard of living, regardless of the Act. That we hold out the example of the UMW as the way in which the labor movement should struggle on the economic field against the Act. That we continue to advocate the 24-hour general strike as a protest against the act, as a political demonstration, and as the starting point for an organized, general counter-offensive by labor. That we continue to advance our slogan for a labor party in line with our other slogans. That we keep on calling for a general strategy board of labor and for democratically elected local councils of action.

These motions have never been **replaced** by others. Has the passage of time and the developments in the labor movement rendered them inapplicable?

It would appear that in the minds of members of the PC this is the case. It is much easier to speak in generalities about stemming retreats, organizing defensives and launching counter-offensives than it is to say what the labor movement should actually do next.

It is our contention that the above motions, as well as the original motion of the PC on the affidavits represent the correct line which the party should follow propagandistically in its press. The immediate state of the labor movement should dictate the degree of prominence given each slogan, or should dictate whether some of the points in the resolutions of June 26th should be put forward as slogans at all as distinguished from educational, explanatory articles.

C. Alternatives for the Working Class and the Party.

As we see it, the labor movement is faced with only two probable alternatives this spring. When the contracts in the major industries approach their dates of expiration, either the capitalists will yield some pacifying wage demands which they can well afford with continuing inflation, or they will launch an all-out offensive against the labor movement.

If the first alternative comes to pass, it is quite likely that the present relative class peace will continue in the country. The bureaucrats will put over acceptance of the economic crumbs on an uneasy and dissatisfied working class. In that event, the retreat of

the labor movement will continue on all fronts. Politically with the support of Truman, economically with grudging acceptance of high employment and high prices. Which will mean for the party the least favorable opportunity for putting forth its program and building its forces in any but an almost purely propagandistic manner.

Should the employers use the Taft-Hartley Act to launch an all-out offensive on the labor movement as a whole, or even on certain selected and particularly vulnerable unions, we will have an entirely different situation, and one which will be most favorable to us, provided we haven't frittered away our political potentials in advance by wrong policies.

Perhaps the party is not sufficiently aware of the fact that the majority of the unions have not yet actually come face to face with the Taft-Hartley Act. The Act was designed consciously so that it would not hit all the unions at once. Unions which had signed contracts before its passage (most of the big ones) were not affected by many of its most onerous measures till their contracts come up for re-negotiation. Others were able to work out "deals" with the employers which can be explained only as a conscious policy on the part of the latter to give concessions to one group so as to break its solidarity with other unions when they are attacked. (The SUP was thus able to work out a deal with Taft himself which permits them to retain their hiring hall. The longshoremen, we predict, won't be so lucky in their friends.)

If the employers, or some of them, decide to launch a major assault on the unions with the aid of the Act this spring, the retreat of labor will come to an end. With their backs against the wall, the workers will have to turn and fight. It is possible that this spring we will have a strike wave which will make the wave of 1946 look like a ripple; a strike wave featured by violence, by the calling out of troops to enforce the law, by the jailing of union militants and officials in droves, by injunctions in sheaves, by sympathy strikes and general strikes of a demonstrative and perhaps not purely of a demonstrative character.

This is the situation for which the party must prepare itself, its sympathizers and the readers of Labor Action now. And they must be prepared not merely by articles which point to the possibility of the development of the struggles sketched above, but with a policy which is explained, educated for, urged upon them week-in, week-out. It is in the light of this perspective that we believe the PC's present policy on the affidavits is not only an opportunist capitulation to Reuther, but, as with most opportunist policies, a short-sighted policy which appears "practical" today but which will be regarded as weak-kneed and reactionary by the worker militants tomorrow.

It is in the light of the above perspective that we consider the PC's dropping, for all practical purposes, of its policies with regard to propagandizing for 24-hour general work stoppages, and particularly for general and local committees of action, and their exclusive concentration on the labor party to be a short-sighted policy which will leave the party and its followers in no position to capitalize on the up-swing of workingclass militancy which may lie ahead.

Let us deal right now with the possible charge of leftist sectarianism which may be levelled against us. We have already stated that it is possible that the employers will not bring things to a head this spring, that their profits and prospective profits under the Marshall Plan will induce them to postpone the issue. In that event, would the policy for the Party and LA put forth here make of us a sectarian voice crying in a wilderness of happy class-collaboration? We don't think so. Every contact with the real militants in the labor movement leads us to believe that they are as acutely aware of the danger which hangs over their heads as we are.

Right now the workers are able to get by without a fight. Prices keep leaping ahead of paychecks, but employment is high and they don't know just what to do about prices. Their unions and the job conditions protected by them are not under direct assault. T-H hangs over their heads like a sword of Damocles, but it hasn't fallen yet. Nevertheless, they know pretty well what lies ahead, if not this spring then a little later, and hence they hail with enthusiasm actions such as John L. Lewis' refusal to sign the affidavits. In this they see a symbol of the resistance, of the end of the retreat, of the coming struggles. John L. is a demagogue, but, for a bureaucrat, he is uniquely sensitive to the moods of the workers. His gesture cost him little; it re-won for him the admiration of the militant workers.

We are not demagogues. We really intend to lead the workers, as best we may, in the struggles ahead. Why then should we fear that the militants will not also see in us champions of their cause if we urge a program which gives them a specific idea of how they must organize the fight in the future?

It is in the context of the perspective of serious struggles ahead that the T-H affidavits acquire great importance. Those comrades who think that the question of the T-H act now boils down to a parliamentary fight to repeal it on the statute books, with or without a labor party, display a really dangerous degree of parliamentary illusions. Refusal to sign the affidavits has become a symbol in the minds of thousands of workers of an end to the retreat. When they are confronted with the "practical difficulties" involved in refusing to sign, they may buckle on the question. But they are not conscious revolutionists who look ahead. Even when they give in on a narrow trade-union basis to the "necessity" of signing the affidavits, they still hail those unions which refuse to sign as the champions of the coming battles.

We feel that it is absolutely mandatory for our party to change its position on this question. It is mandatory that we put a halt to this practice of verbal radicalism accompanied by practical capitulation. Labor Action must cease explaining why, in this or that situation, it is necessary for union leaders to sign, and start ringing the tocsin for the struggles which will be fought primarily on the picket lines, and not at the ballot box or in the halls of Congress.

II. A QUESTION OF PARTY PROCEDURE

A. How a Policy Is Changed

"...as it's so often the case in the SWP (the new policy was abruptly announced) without consulting the membership and with an explanation from the leadership only when it was forced to give one."

Max Shachtman, Labor Action, Dec. 29, 1947

From the context of the above quotation, it would appear that comrade Shachtman, at least, considers this a bad way for the leadership of a revolutionary party to change a policy. Unfortunately, his description is not fully accurate as it applies to the SWP where their policy in the UAW is concerned. Much more unfortunately it is, with one modification, an all too accurate description of the way in which the leadership of the WP changed our policy on the Taft-Hartley affidavits.

Just to keep the record straight: how did the SWP really arrive at its change in policy on the UAW, from a strictly organizational point of view?

First, their National Committee, in plenum assembled, held a full-dress discussion on the question. The disagreements were so great that it was decided to consult their supporters in the UAW on the question. A conference was held attended by their friends from all parts of the country at which the majority, for good reasons or bad, voted to cease supporting Reuther and to support the Thomas-Ades-Stalinist caucus. This decision was communicated to their Political Committee which, in turn, held a referendum of their National Committee. After concurrence of a majority of the SWP National Committee with the proposals of the UAW conference, the new policy was announced in an editorial in the Militant.

It is true, there was not a full discussion in the whole SWP membership on the question. Yet, when we take into account the time they had at their disposal, and the normal way in which trade union policy is adopted even in the most democratic parties, we must affirm that this was not at all bad for a bureaucratic organization.

We have already had quite a bit to say about how the policy of the Workers Party was changed on the question of the T-H affidavits. On this question, comrade McKinney might just as well cease trying to convince the PC and the membership that no change in policy has taken place. His assertions will not stand up against the political facts. In addition to our intelligence we also have documents which have been summarized in this article.

Our National Committee also held a Plenum just before the UAW convention, and the friends of the WP in the UAW held a conference. Both these gatherings were held after everyone knew that the Reuther caucus would have a two-to-one majority at the convention. We also know that Reuther and his whole caucus leadership had already committed themselves to signing the affidavits. Hence it need not have taken more political intelligence than was assembled at our plenum and conference for us to foresee that the UAW convention would go on record to sign.

Yet not a word was said by anyone, to our knowledge, either at the plenum or the conference about the necessity of changing our position on the basis of the new situation which this would bring about, despite the excellent opportunity afforded by these gatherings to inaugurate the discussion. Needless to say, the ranks of the party were not consulted either.

We said above that though the quotation from comrade Shachtman accurately describes the way in which our policy was changed, it needs one modification. That is: the new policy was not "abruptly announced" to the party. Rather, it was apparently first adopted on the spot by our representatives at the UAW convention. It was hinted at and doled out by implication in two issues of the paper written before the PC had even held its preliminary discussion on the question of changing the policy.

The sad fact is that the party was only informed that the PC was considering a change of policy on this question by a circular issued by the National Secretary on December 3, two days before the final motions were passed.

The San Francisco Bay Area Branch, however, had sensed from the apologetics for Reuther in the Labor Action articles that something was cooking. Due to the extreme preoccupation with polemicizing against the SWP, however, the readers of the paper had to wait week after week for promised discussions of the T-H affidavits. On December 12, however, when the above-mentioned circular was read to the branch, a unanimous motion was passed as follows:

"That the organizer write the PC asking them that if they are considering any substantial revision of our attitude towards the Taft-Hartley Act, such revision not be made without previous consultation and discussion with the membership of the party."

This resolution was mailed to the National Secretary on December 13th. As far as we know, it was never brought to the attention of the PC. Some ten days after the final discussion had been held in the PC, and the motions voted, the members of the NC were informed of the discussions which were taking place.

As far as the National Committee is concerned, the delay in their appraisal of the discussions leading to the new policy can no doubt be ascribed to technical difficulties at the center. The membership, however, was informed in full of the new policy only in comrade Shachtman's article in LA of December 29, and in a circular from the National Secretary about ten days later. (This was about 50 days after the policy was actually put in effect.)

Now it may very well be that the comrades of the PC were of the opinion that this question was not of sufficient importance to warrant a full party discussion before a position was formally adopted. Such opinions were expressed in some speeches in the PC. They are rendered ridiculous by the fact that the PC was itself compelled to devote almost two full meetings to this question before it could arrive at a final decision; by the further fact that the National Secretary now formally suggests that a discussion would be fruitful in the branches; and finally by the application of elementary political intelligence to the problem.

B. A Few Questions.

Unfortunately we are compelled to arrive at a much more distasteful conclusion as to the real reason for the disregard for our traditions of party democracy shown in this case. This conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that comrade McKinney still finds it necessary to argue that there has, in fact, been no significant change in party policy. He attempts to "prove" his argument in two ways: 1) by vigorous assertion: 2) by a blatant distortion of the motivation of the PC resolution of July 17, 1947, which laid down the original policy. (A motion, incidentally, made by McKinney.)

Now why is it precisely comrade McKinney who is so concerned to prove that no change has taken place, to pacify those in the party who object to the new policy and particularly to the method by which it was adopted and put in effect?

In our opinion, because a clear and honest view of this affair makes it necessary for comrade McKinney to answer a number of questions, not only from the point of view of politics in general, but specially from the point of view of party procedure. We will now proceed to ask these questions. We think we already know the correct answer to some of them, but we hope we are wrong. Others concern matters of fact with regard to which we think we have deduced the correct answers. On these we are anxious to have empirical confirmation or denial.

1) Is it not a fact that the position of the party on the affidavits was laid down in a specific resolution of the PC of July 17, 1947; that this resolution had never been superseded prior to December 5; that the line of this resolution was carried in all articles in Labor Action up to and including the issue of November 10?

2) What efforts did our friends at the UAW convention make to get the Reuther caucus to adopt a position in line with the above-mentioned opinions of the party?

3) Did you advise any of our friends who may have been delegates at the convention to vote on this question in accordance with the above decisions? If so, did they follow your advice?

4) In your opinion, what political-organizational principles justified the publication of articles by yourself and others in Labor Action between the dates of November 10 and December 5 which not only failed to criticize the Reuther faction for adopting a position on the affidavits contrary to the views expressed in the resolution of July 17, but which rather constituted an apology for the faction on this question?

5) What efforts were made by friends of the WP at the convention to influence the Reuther caucus to adopt a resolution on the labor party?

6) What efforts were made by our friends to get the convention to consider such questions as the Marshall Plan, the labor party, an economic policy?

7) What efforts were made by our friends to get the Reuther caucus and/or the convention to adopt a general policy to fight the T-H Act, and if such efforts were made, what were the specific planks of the policy advocated?

The reasons for these questions should be obvious. We don't want to, nor can we conceal our motives. The change of policy on the T-H affidavits without consultation with the party gives us reason to be fearful that other things were done or were left undone at this convention which cannot be justified by any previous decisions of the party or its competent bodies. These fears are not allayed by anything we have read in LA. Quite the contrary. The lack of a large delegation at the convention should not, we feel, be given as an excuse. Though we had few delegates, we had a vast (for us) aggregation of talent in and around the convention. What did they do?

The past UAW convention has been hailed in unrestrained terms by our leading UAW supporters and those primarily responsible for our trade union policy as a great victory for the working class. We are gratified, as much as anyone else, at the organizational victory over the Stalinist machine. Yet we fail to perceive, by anything written in the paper, that the convention adopted on any other question a policy which could be remotely identified with any known party policy or portion thereof.

There would be no grounds for disquiet if, in addition to hailing the victory over the CP, our paper reported debates or discussions either within the Reuther caucus or at the convention in which our positions had been presented and received, if not a majority, then at least encouraging support. There are no such reports.

In their absence the question rises to mind: just what did our comrades and supporters do at this convention which can be considered a positive gain for the party? In what way did they seek to implement the general policies of our party as they apply to the labor movement? In a word, did the activity of our friends and supporters at this convention really reflect the positions of our party, or were they so directed and watered down that they became indistinguishable from the general activities of the Reutherites?

III. THE STALINISTS, THE "MILITANTS" AND THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS

A. An Adequate Formula?

Some time ago the party adopted a position which goes something like this: We consider the Stalinists the greatest internal danger to the development of the American working class. Therefore, in situations in the labor movement where the only practical alternative we have is a choice between organizational control of the unions by the Stalinists or by the native American labor bureaucracy, whether this be progressive or even conservative, we will give organizational support to the bureaucracy against the Stalinists.

This kind of a position has one great virtue: it is simple. It is so simple, as a matter of fact, that any fool can go into a union with it in his pocket and know how to vote in any union election.

The only information he would need is: who are the Stalinists and who the native bureaucrats.

As with most things in real life, the virtue of simplicity has its dangers as well as its advantages. The history of the revolutionary movement is littered with excellent formulas which served a useful educational and propagandistic purpose as long as the organizations which operated by them could do little more than educate and propagandize. But the moment these organizations were placed in a position in which they were able to apply these formulae to real situations, they were forced (in those cases when they acted intelligently) either to modify the formulae very drastically, or even to ignore or abandon them.

In his speech to the New York membership of the SWP, reported in the December 8 Militant, Cannon invokes another formula as a guiding line for the policies of his organization.

The criterion, he said, by which the SWP decided its policies in the labor movement is the criterion of the class struggle. What serves this struggle they do, and what does not serve it they abstain from doing. No one in the whole movement, we are sure, can object to this also very simple formula. In the past we have filled it out a little more with content by saying that in the labor movement we believe those policies serve the class struggle which tend to increase the independence, consciousness and combativity of the working class.

Now the question is: will a policy which in every case dictates the selection of the native American bureaucracy over the Stalinists in the labor movement also invariably lead to the increase of the independence, consciousness and combativity of the working class? Will such a policy also invariably lead to the greatest democracy in the unions, to the creation of the most favorable circumstances for the development, operation and eventual triumph of a really class-conscious, socialist caucus?

It would not be difficult to give hypothetical examples of situations in which this is very doubtful. In a struggle between Joe Ryan's gangsters in the ILA and an opposition led by Stalinists, or influenced by them, which side should we support? In a struggle between Tobin's goons, whose attitudes towards Trotskyites is well known, and a Stalinist opposition, to which side should we throw our support?

It is clear that in the UAW the Reutherites are in no way to be compared with Ryan or Tobin. That is not our contention. The difficulties in applying a policy show themselves not in the extreme cases, but in the border-line cases which are much more common and usually much more important.

We are and were for the support of the Reuther caucus against the Thomas-Addes-Stalinist bloc. But unless we are corrected by factual data which appear neither in Labor Action nor in any other communication to the party, we are forced to conclude that the way in which we supported the Reuther caucus did not, in fact, serve to put forth a policy which will increase the independence, consciousness and combativity of the UAW to the maximum. For these working class virtues are not and cannot be concretized solely in an organizational fight against the Stalinists or other reactionary opponents. They can and

must be concretized also in a program for the union such as that presented in the issues of LA preceding the convention. These issues revolve around the creation of an independent labor party, the wages program, opposition to the government's imperialist foreign policy, the launching of an all-round struggle on the picket line as well as in a legislative program against the Taft-Hartley Act and the reactionary offensive which it symbolizes.

Yet, from all we read in the paper, our comrades had little or nothing to say about any of these issues at the convention, except for the emission of sighs of regret that Reuther and the "militants" didn't see the thing the way we saw it. As the convention passes farther into the background, we are gratified to see that the sighs are becoming louder, the criticisms more pointed, vigorous and concrete. Yet the fact remains that there at the convention, when the heat was on from allies and enemies alike, we played no independent role and hence could not hope to rally anyone to us, to attract any core of real militants to us on the basis of such a role.

B. For an Independent Policy

The difficulties in our so-simple formula arise out of the circumstance, perhaps, that it directs the attention of the party to the question of present organizational control in the labor movement rather than to the specific and unique task of the revolutionists which is to prepare for the future. Thus the party and its unionists become more and more preoccupied with the present raging fight for control between two fundamentally anti-revolutionary groupings in the labor movement rather than with the hard and painstaking task of building the revolutionary grouping. The fact that such a policy makes it possible for us to participate in large and powerful caucuses, to talk to many workers instead of few, to enjoy relative prominence and prestige in the union fight has a very definite allure for every person who wants to be in the thick of things.

Yet all this may very well impede our specific task of building those forces which will one day be in a position to actually challenge the two present main contenders. Our program tends to be identified in the minds of the workers and of ourselves solely with the slogan "smash the Stalinists" rather than with a militant policy which may not be popular today, but which is the only way out of the blind alley of labor's great regret. Our momentary prestige among many workers and labor officials is gained at the expense of that fundamental and indispensable work of counterposing a real fighting program to the demagoguery of the Stalinists and the conservative and even reactionary policies of the liberals who are spearheading the retreat of labor at the present time.

We are fully aware of the fact that no formula can be a complete manual of instructions which will lay down in advance the correct tactics for every conceivable situation in the labor movement. But if in situation after situation we find that our comrades are tailing along behind the labor fakers in policy, and that the idea most consistently drummed into the heads of every reader of LA is that every defeat dealt the CP is a cause for rejoicing, whether or not the victory was gained at the expense of fundamentally democratic traditions and procedures in the labor movement, it is high time for a re-examination of where the formula is taking us.

We are not for scrapping the formula. We are for reducing it from first place in our tactical arsenal to tenth place, or thereabouts. We are for concentrating the attention of the party not on every bureaucratic squabble between the fakers and the CP, but on the question of how to build really radical, militant groupings in the labor movement based on our ideas. We are for de-emphasis in our program and reporting in LA of the organizational aspects of the struggle, and placing main emphasis on the program offered the workers by the CP, the fakers and by ourselves.

This all needs discussion in the party. We have no ready-made programs to present all the important trade union fractions. But that is fundamentally what the party should be concerned with right now. We don't even have a good answer to the obvious question: how, if you concentrate your fire on the programs of the fakers and the CP, are you going to be able to make electoral blocs with the former against the latter? Fakers don't like to bloc up with people who are always blasting their programs or lack of programs, while the Stalinists will often, for demagogical reasons, cook up programs which are closer to ours than those of the fakers. How will we be able to convince the workers that they should vote for the group which has the less militant program, the one which we have to attack most vigorously on programmatic questions?

Should such questions be asked they would but serve to throw into high relief the dangers of our present policy. For this would demonstrate that in the minds of the questioners the formula "we support the fakers against the CP" is not just a tactical organizational formula, but has become the program of the Workers Party for the labor movement. This would mean that we have come to accept the present relations of forces in the working class as the only ones possible (at least for a considerable period), i.e., that we have discounted in advance the possibility of building the revolutionary caucus as a force. This leads to one other, and really devastating conclusion: that for the foreseeable future there is no prospect for the working class to take the initiative, to play an independent role in society.

If this is indeed the opinion of the leaders of our party, and of our trade union cadres, they should say so explicitly. Otherwise, confusion, fundamental disorientation, flagrant opportunism will inevitably lie ahead for all of us.

C. Who Are the "Militants" Now?

According to Labor Action's reporting of the UAW convention the WP was in closest alliance with the "militants" of the union at the convention. This brings us directly to the question: "Who are the militants?" That is, from among what kind of people in the labor movement can the party hope to recruit in the present period, and hence in what kind of people should the party be most interested now. This is a vitally important question not solely from the point of view of directing the contact and recruitment campaigns of the party, but also for the determination of the character of Labor Action, the form and content of our propaganda, etc.

To date, those directing our UAW policy have justified their line chiefly by stating that the "militants" in the UAW are in the

Reuther caucus. Their proof that those they call "militant" are such in fact is the record of these people during the war and since.

Now we think the record is very important. But at least equally important is how men behave now, what they propose for the future. The history of the labor movement is chock-full with the biographies of militants turned conservative; of fighters turned time-servers; of rank and file leaders turned bureaucratic pie cards. This historical fact should make us a little cautious in pinning the badge "militant" on a man on the basis of his past record alone.

And we should be doubly cautious if this man or group of men have just been placed in official control of a union in which they were in opposition, during their militancy of record. There is nothing like a little power, a few posts, a little responsibility for turning the most vigorous militant into a good bureaucrat, or supporter of bureaucracy. This danger is great even among socialists, it is almost overwhelming among those workers who have not arrived at a socialist view of society.

We are not here contending that the shop leaders of the Reuther caucus have ceased to be the best militants in the union, the hope, as Comrade Shachtman has it, of the labor movement. But we do contend that nothing in their record at the convention as portrayed in Labor Action can be adduced as evidence that this is indeed the stratum from which the militant and even more, socialist, leadership of the future is to be expected. The fact that some speeches were made or conversations overheard to the effect that "Reuther has now been given the leadership and he had better deliver" is no evidence for this. It is our experience that the real fighters in the labor movement demand a program of action immediately and are ready to immediately denounce the lack of such a program. The "militants," it seems, were far from anxious to work out a program at the convention and since that time have been content to defend anything Reuther has offered them.

If we have no proof that the Reutherite shop leadership has turned conservative, it may be asked, why do we raise the question at all? For one simple reason. We feel that the opportunism involved in the general line taken at and immediately after the UAW convention by those in charge has tended to cover itself freely by reference to "the militants" in the union. We wish to be convinced that the selection of the "militants" was not just as opportunistic as the uncritical attitude toward Reuther's program, more concretely, that the party is not being led into a situation in which we go along with Reuther's program on the grounds that this is the only way to maintain influence among the "militants" only to find that by the "militants" is meant simply those who go along on Reuther's program.

Here again we come down to the simple question: what is the specific role the revolutionists have to play in the labor movement today and tomorrow? Is it to draw themselves as close as possible to, that is to make themselves as indistinguishable as possible from, the most liberal wing of social-democratic, i.e., bourgeois trade unionism? Or is it to propagandize for a program which will attract perhaps fewer but more revolutionary workers to our banner? And for this, isn't it the most elementary condition that we must have a ban-

ner which is clearly distinguishable at all times from that of the social-democrats....even during the height of convention faction fights?

For those excellent comrades who feel that this is a sectarian approach we have only this question to ask: how many workers have been drawn close to the party (as distinguished from individual party members in the shops) or have been recruited to the party as a result of our whole strategy in the UAW to date? And in answering, could they please bear in mind that this strategy has been hailed as one of the great victories of the Workers Party since its founding.

D. Appeasement plus Sectarianism.

From the way in which the UAW convention was handled in Labor Action (and this specific point applies equally to the articles of Shachtman as to those of McKinney, Jason et al), we are forced to conclude that these articles (aside from their unwarranted appeasement of the Reutherites) were directed to a stratum of workers which is deeply interested in the views of the SWP vs. those of the WP on this question. This conclusion is compelled by the fact that almost every single article devoted from a fourth to three-fourths of its space to polemics against the SWP position.

If we were convinced that a half of one percent of the membership of the UAW is interested in these matters we would feel that the policy was justified to the full. These thousand workers would obviously be the ones to whom the party should address itself, for they would be the ones we could hope to recruit in the present period. This would be doubly true if the bulk of these workers were not petty bureaucrats in the union who are interested in our disputes with the SWP solely from the point of view of the support they could hope to get from one or the other party in their fight in the union, but were rather militants whose political development leads them to take an interest in the views of the revolutionists in their union.

Unfortunately, we feel that such an interest, even among a thousand or even five hundred members of the UAW still has to be created. That means that we must approach them first by giving them an explanation of the events in their union which attracts and educates them at their present level of consciousness, and seeks to raise that level. It is our contention, however, that in a great majority of the men among whom the party members in the union have influence no such level of consciousness is present, and that therefore they regard such a treatment of their convention as a squabble among sects which interests them not at all. They are concerned with what the convention did, not from the point of view of SWP vs. WP policy, but rather from the point of view of the prospects opened up for the betterment of their wages and conditions on the job.

We do not hold the impossible view that LA should simply have ignored the role of the SWP and their attacks on us in the Militant. Such a course would be disastrous for our party membership which is concerned with the differences, as well as for the development of attitudes inside the SWP which we wish to develop. But this is a specific purpose which could be handled in specific articles on the question. Instead, every article was rendered either nonunderstand-

able or at least uninteresting to the average militant we are trying to approach by the polemical preoccupation which dominated its writer.

From this experience we feel that it not only would be very fruitful, but that it is absolutely necessary for us to get some kind of view of just whom the party can hope to influence and recruit in the labor movement at the present time. Unless the party and its trade union militants decide this question, we will find that time after time favorable opportunities will be missed by the misdirection of our propaganda at precisely those times when the development of events opens most ears and attracts most eyes to us. One such period missed can prevent us from capitalizing on hard work done by our trade unionists over a period of months and even years.

We solicit the opinions of all party members and particularly our trade unionists on this question.

LETTER TO THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE ON
LABOR ACTION ARTICLE

* * *

New York, N.Y.
March 14, 1948

Political Committee
Workers Party

Comrades of the Political Committee:

Irving Howe's "Observations on the Events in Czechoslovakia" (LABOR ACTION, March 8, 1948) involve considerations not immediately related to the subject matter, which, it seems to me, deserve some close attention.

You comrades must, of course, be held responsible for the opinions expressed by Howe quite as much as he, since he is a well known representative of the Party and since you as the editorial board of the Party's official press allowed these opinions to be published.

I take no issue with Howe's appreciation of the Stalinization of the working class and the dark threat this poses to the Socialist perspective. Rather, it is his "conclusions" and the general tenor of the article with which I am concerned.

"Sober realism," as Howe himself states, is the only basis for useful discussion; but he cannot separate his "sober realism" from "honest pessimism," and what he means by that he suggests in the last paragraph of the article. His "honest pessimism," however, not only negates the "sober realism," it robs the discussion, insofar as it is carried on within the context of the revolutionary party and its tasks, of its purpose.

The comrades of the Political Committee seriously impair the claim to political leadership their positions imply if "the most worthy and useful of dedications" of the party is allowed to become the "guarding and nourishing" of the "spark" of the "socialist dream." The import of these remarks is the abdication of political responsibility, of demoralization in quarters from which resoluteness and leadership is expected (or, at the very least, a measure of pedagogy); it is an attempt to turn the vice of the Party's isolation into a virtue. Struggling humanity, however, has always been excluded from monasteries, and monasteries have somehow always managed to refrain from the dirty immoral work of its liberation.

Howe's positive "program," confining itself to a call for an "independent socialist movement... if only it will be independent" sounds, in the context of his article, like a call in the wilderness, foredoomed to not being heard. It is still time for men to act, he says; but far from impelling to action, the way he says, this induces petrification. His despair is entirely understandable, but it is intolerable that it should find expression in an organ which is supposedly devoted to facing and grappling with political problems, rather than despairing of them.

The problem of how the Party can intervene in the political life of society is not quickly or easily solved, to be sure; its solution depends upon the initiative and self-confidence of the leadership no less than upon outside factors. The attitude expressed in Howe's article and the fact that the latter was permitted to appear in LABOR ACTION, cannot but reflect upon the willingness of the comrades on the Political Committee to help the Party break out of its isolation.

I request that this letter be reproduced in a forthcoming PARTY BULLETIN.

Fraternally,

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DISCUSSION OF STATEMENT ON UAW POLICY

By Ben Hall

My objection to the latest statement on UAW policy is not in the slightest degree motivated by any disagreement with its analysis of Reuther or of the general situation in the UAW (although I think that the reference to the complete rout and disintegration of the Ades-Stalinist camp is overstated. The mopping up of the faction fight is still taking place. Moreover, the Wallace campaign and the support it will inevitably get in the ranks of the union may enable the Ades-remnants and the Stalinists to win back influence within the next year.)

The practical tasks assigned to the party and its members in the UAW is impossible of achievement and the attempt to carry them out will lead us off the track. In particular, I refer to the proposal that we take the initiative in establishing "systematically and on an all-locale scale" of a broad progressive group or groups. If it were possible to carry out this directive, it would mean a gigantic step forward for the party, it goes without saying, and it would have great effect in actually influencing the course of development of the union. From this point of view, it is a tempting proposition. Even if we do not succeed, one might feel, it is worth a damn good try. Despite this fact, which I certainly have in mind, other considerations should make us pause.

The statement says that "the situation in the UAW has not yet developed to the point where these militants are prepared to organize an independent group with a bold program in open and clear-cut opposition to Reuther." That is true. But the conclusion that you draw is that the party must therefore organize these militants (even though our initiative is not ostensible) into a grouping which is independent of Reuther without calling for a head-on struggle against him. I would say 1) these militants are not yet ready for a head-on fight against Reuther, 2) the party is not able yet to organize them toward this goal, 3) the general formation of an independent progressive grouping is not yet a practical possibility and must await further developments, 4) wherever it is possible for us on a local scale to take such steps because of exceptional circumstances, we should do so.

Not too long ago we had a UAW conference. This was very successful and considering the party, its history etc., etc. an inspiring accomplishment. But can anyone say that it demonstrated that we can take the step now called for? In any case, nobody suggested it, although it was not very hard to visualize in advance the present, post-convention situation of the UAW. (And although there was not a breath of discussion of the new move, even as a possibility, at our UAW conference, we have not even had a preliminary discussion among our UAW people before its adoption by the PC.) With what forces and where can we start to set up these broad groups? It is not good enough to decide the "general line" first and then discuss the manner of carrying it out. The decision here can be made only after a discussion of the realities of our situation.

"The party is concerned with taking the real initiative; the question of who can be persuaded to take the formal initiative is to be decided practically in every local instance." My question is:

who can be so persuaded? That too, it seems to me is a key question. Are there six or ten or a dozen men in the UAW with a following of some kind or another who are under the influence of the party or of members of the party who can be convinced to start the ball rolling? And who are they? I don't think that we have such people...at the very least not enough of them to base a general policy upon. I have heard about a lot of well-meaning employees of Reuther who salve their socialist ex-consciences by tipping their hats to our noble efforts in the UAW; and as one who is known to appreciate the good feelings of all, I am naturally quite gratified by these well-wishers. I would be equally gratified to receive news of even a handful of serious active militants who are ready to push our project forward.

"Any step or act which would create the impression that these are 'Workers Party groups' will automatically limit the composition of the groups to members of the Party and their immediate sympathizers, that is, to those militants who should properly constitute the Party's own fraction in the union."

With small party forces and without a real following of union militants who are party sympathizers, the real effect of this new attempt can only be quite the opposite of what we hope for. To "persuade" some innocent to take the initiative, the party members (in order to hide the WP initiative) will try to hide their own identity or where this is not possible to become inoffensive, that is, not to put forward the party. Without serious non-party forces behind our groups, the more we try to avoid limiting their broadness, the more the party members will be induced to hide the party. If the situation were really ripe for our move, there would be no real problem. The influx of UAW militants would take care of it. Such a situation existed at the beginning of the fight against the no-strike pledge. We had to avoid trying to embrace the thing to death but there was a real movement, a real grouping. In this case, however, where the situation is not ripe we will be, at best, engaged in a futile maneuver with ourselves and our sympathizers and at worst appendages to someone like Mazey, perpetually attempting to "persuade" him.

For the party to enter or even form a genuine broad progressive grouping in the UAW would in fact give us a wonderful arena for party activity and recruitment. To try to form this proposed grouping will in fact mean a suspension of the party.

No delusions of grandeur! The party is not strong enough in numbers or in influence to do what is required at the present time to intervene in the life of the UAW in such a manner as will organize a broad layer of UAW militants and through the experience of action teach them about Reuther. We are not able to influence the general course of developments inside the UAW and we cannot adopt a party policy based on such a possibility. The chief fact that we have to drive home in our UAW fraction is the need to expand the influence of our party, as the necessary prerequisite to playing a genuine role in the union. The new policy turns the helm in a totally different direction. The influence of the party in the UAW as everywhere else is measured by 1) how many workers have we recruited, 2) what is the circulation of the party press among UAW workers, especially the active unionists, 3) how many UAW workers, especially union activists come to party meetings, including open fraction meetings, 4) how many UAW workers, especially etc., contribute money to the party. The answer to these questions in this situation tells us that the emphasis of the latest directive is false.

Point number 3 lists the possible points in the program of the proposed progressive groups. They are all correct as a guide for our own agitation in the union. Our aim should be to create a working alliance with individual readers and groups of readers of our paper and sympathizers of our party in pressing for these ideas 1) inside the union as a whole, 2) and within any of the local and inter-local caucuses that will be formed and that are already in existence. Our emphasis should be on the party fraction, on getting militants to work with our fraction knowing who and what we are. If there is a favorable local situation somewhere, where we are in a position to organize a broad progressive group on the basis of previously fruitful work, we can proceed in that situation as indicated in the PC decision. That will be the exception and cannot be the guide for general UAW policy now. Even in that case, I would advise the comrades involved to work out a division of role among themselves. If two fraction members play a leading role in the life of the group, let two others play a passive secondary role and concern themselves with the circulation of party literature, subscriptions, talking about the party to individual workers etc.

Prepare for the next stage in the life of the UAW, including the possible development of new independent groups by building formal and informal groups of Workers Party sympathizers and LABOR ACTION readers.

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