

Bulletin

OF THE WORKERS PARTY

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SPEECH OF F. FOREST, NEW YORK MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE WP, 3/2/47

Comrades, the WP minority which has stood for the unification of the Trotskyist forces in the U.S. from the time when the question was first posed by the SWP Minority, welcomes the prospective unification of the WP and SWP. As the membership is well aware from our resolutions to the last convention, we viewed the question not only in organizational terms but mainly in the context of the needs of the forward-moving American proletariat, whose most advanced section is seeking a revolutionary party. Precisely because we based ourselves on the fact that the developing objective situation will compel unification of the two parties in the U.S., we were able very consciously and very concretely to intervene in the internal situation of both the national and international sections to see that unity does not remain a mere wish. The sequence of events in which the WP Minority intervened (and of which the PC knows) will help the membership understand the present rapidly developing unity negotiations, and it is for this reason that we asked for additional time.

First, on the series of events which occurred last summer when I went to Mexico for personal reasons and took the opportunity to see Natalia. She had, as you know, been for unity and had intervened in the American situation before. However, she felt that she had exhausted her usefulness and could not intervene in the pending SWP convention. She cited the fact that the question had been complicated by the actions of Comrade Goldman who had promised to remain in the SWP until their convention but had joined our Party before then. She was glad that the Johnsonites, on the other hand, behaved in an entirely different manner and did not capitulate to the overtures of the Cannonites. She said that, whereas she could not intervene in the SWP, she meant most decisively to intervene in the preparations for the Extraordinary Congress to see that both the freest possible discussion was held and that participation at the Congress was on the basis of political tendencies in the Fourth. She gave as an example the French party in which there were five different tendencies, all of whom she felt should participate. She thought that the only way to make up for the authority the International lacked since the death of Trotsky, and that was to arrive at a policy on the basis of a full and objective discussion by all the tendencies of all the problems facing the movement.

Second, in the series of events was the arrival last month of a comrade from Europe who met with Comrade Johnson and myself. He told us that he had read all our resolutions and felt that, outside of the Russian question, our line was the same as the general line of the International. He thought that there would be no objection to our being seated at the Extraordinary Congress and none to our entry into the Fourth. On the other hand, he stated that, judging by the feeling of the sections at the time he left, he thought that the WP would not be seated and the prospects of its entry into the Fourth were very small indeed. We informed him that any attempt to exclude the WP would be fought very vigorously by us who considered such an attitude false and leading to dangerous consequences. We would state so openly at the Congress, to which our recently-concluded plenum had recognized our right to appear. We would also fight the SWP's attempt to present its strength in such exaggerated terms as to make it appear that it was already the mass revolutionary party in America.

Finally, we concluded, we would, at the Congress, fight not merely for our Russian position but also for that on the American question and Building the Party, and that we considered both the WP and the SWP as inadequate to the tasks presented by the rapidly developing radicalization of the American working class.

This comrade then took the initiative of arranging a discussion for us with the SWP. We insisted that since our faction was not in existence, we could not consider reorganizing it for the purpose of discussing some formal proposals that they might make; that the SWP had made no political declaration of any kind in the WP minority and we were opposed to negotiations when no declaration was at hand, while all our views were in print and publicly sold. We felt, however, that it would be absurd to continue to avoid any discussion with the SWP, and that we therefore would consent to an informal discussion after we so informed our PC. This we did and they offered no objections.

Comrade Johnson and I then met with Comrades Stein and Breitman. This was reported to the PC, and I wish to read from the report that Comrade Johnson handed in:

"Stein began by informing me that there were certain 'facts' such as the decision of the SWP against unity and the fact that the leading parties in Europe had expressed themselves as in support of the position of the SWP. As far as it is possible to be just to him, I have to say that he gave me the impression that the future was as good as decided. I challenged him very sharply on that, and told him that a conference that would behave as he suggested need not be held at all. He had to admit that individual European branches had not taken a position on unity.

"I asked him why at this point he should intervene in the situation in the WP to the extent of having conversations with me. He said that in the past he hadn't want to embarrass the Johnson Minority, and that they were orienting toward the working class masses and had ignored the WP. He gave me to understand that the problem of the future orientation of the Johnson tendency was my problem. I told him that he was entirely wrong; that the future of the Johnson Minority was in my opinion the problem of the sections in the U.S., and the problem of the whole International; that his saying that it was my problem was part of his whole attitude to the question which in my opinion was false. In my opinion, also, their not intervening in the past discussions in the WP between, e.g., the Johnson, Shachtman and Garrett tendencies was open to implications that he wanted to present the WP to the International as a tendency that was going away from Marxism...

"He asked me what kind of intervention I wanted or suggested. I proposed that the International take up the political positions that would be presented to it and make political characterizations not only to the WP Minority but for the sake of the whole International. This was a necessary political intervention in organizations that claimed to be working together under the same political principles...

"He indicated that the attitude of the SWP would carry great weight with the sections in Europe. I admitted the importance of that but said that if they proposed to draw conclusions as to the incompatibility of bureaucratic collectivism with the Fourth, then the Johnson Minority proposed to oppose that with all its forces."

The suggestion that they made to us that we leave the WP where our sphere of influence was exhausted, and join the SWP with the understanding that all privileges that could reasonably be expected would be granted to us, was rejected by us. They said that they had originally been for unity, but as the negotiations developed they considered it a maneuver on the part of Shachtman, and that the September NI which, they said, raised the question of the necessity of the "destruction of Cannonism" showed clearly that he was not coming in to build the party but to build a faction in the party. We insisted, however, that there is nothing in the record of the SWP that stands up so well as the offer of our party to liquidate the party and the press, and enter the party in which we would be a minority. All therefore that had to be done to expose the "maneuver" of Shachtman was for them to accept that offer. Furthermore, we made it clear that our resolutions state unmistakably that we are for the unification of the two parties, not for splits from one Trotskyist group to another. We had opposed the Goldman split and we would surely not engage in such actions.

Shortly after this discussion, the SWP accepted the party's proposal for a joint picket line in front of the French consulate protesting the Viet Nam massacre.

The week of the City Convention a representative of the Committee arrived and tried to reach us but as both Comrade Johnson and I were attending our convention, they had not succeeded. However, at the end of it, an SWP member finally located us in a restaurant and told us that the comrade in question was at Cannon's house. We said that we would be glad to meet him but not at Cannon's house, or in the presence of SWP members with whom we would discuss only after we had discussed with the representative. The message was relayed and the representative came over to my house. He informed us that he had already met with Comrade Shachtman who personally had agreed to the proposal to participate in the Extraordinary Congress on the condition that we would abide by its decisions and that it would lead to the unification of the forces in the U.S., and that Shachtman had invited him to present his views to the PC as a whole. He said that he felt that the plenum which the SWP was convoking would also come out for unity. We expressed our satisfaction with that development and made clear our loyalty to the Fourth and our refusal to accept any ultimatum from the SWP as if it were the whole of the Fourth.

Only two more facts need to be added to this report. At our plenum it became clear that some of the comrades thought that this was just a maneuver on the part of the Cannonites to get the Johnsonites over. It was stated by Comrade Garrett that if Comrade Cannon was merely building a bridge for the Johnsonites, he may not be willing to play. We stated that we felt that the unity proposals are being entered into honestly. We were not afraid to go into the SWP alone. But this was not a political question. The political question was that the needs of the movement demand a unified Trotskyist movement and that and not individual splits is what we fight for.

A few days after the plenum we met Comrade Cannon (Stein, Clark and Gordon were also present) and informed him of the fear on the part of some comrades who had thought he was only playing for the Johnsonites. We made it clear that if the unity negotiations were only a maneuver, we would be no party to it. Cannon stated more em-

phatically that he was for unification of both parties, that he felt that the plenum of the SWP which was to meet that weekend would so express itself, and in fact that so far as the SWP was concerned, the actual date of unification was up to the WP.

We have reported every step to the PC and informed the Committee that we believed the Minority was able to exercise an influence upon the International for unity, and that we intended to begin such an international campaign, and also to initiate discussion wherever possible with sympathetic leaders of the SWP. We never at any time thought that unity was off for some historic period, but that it was still on the order of the day. Fortunately, we had proved more correct than we thought.

Now that it is so near, it is indeed peculiar, comrades that there is developing in our party who was the champions of unity, a group of comrades who wish to fight against unity, and more or less on the same basis that the Cannonites fought it - political incompatibility, now called "desirability". It is said the WP Minority are for unity because their line approximates closer to the International; if that were the case, we could have entered the SWP long ago. The WP Minority has been for unity because the first necessity to make the American revolution is the building of a mass revolutionary party. This can best be begun by the unification of the Trotskyist forces in the U.S. This will also serve the greatest blow to the Stalinists who are our biggest competitors for the working class moving toward a revolutionary party. We stated a year ago in the American resolution:

" The only serious barrier to unity, the problem of the harmonious functioning of two organizations with different political views, is in the last analysis to be solved by the proletariat. Both organizations recognize in theory and practice that the success of the Fourth International is rooted in the maintenance of closest contact with the proletariat. The safeguard for the maintenance of unity against irresponsible factionalism in both parties is the growth of the revolutionary party in correspondence with the opportunities and responsibilities which will be presented to it by the march of the American proletariat toward the social revolution."

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REPORT OF JOHNSON TO PC of MEETING WITH STEIN - 1/24/47

I went with Freddie to the discussion with members of the SWP under circumstances which the PC knows. The two members of the SWP who came were Stein and Breitman and I think that what took place at this discussion was of sufficient importance to warrant a rather extended report. This is a preliminary report for the record and for some recommendations which I propose to make for the Committee afterwards.

Stein began by informing me that there were certain "facts" such as the decision of the SWP against unity and the fact that the leading parties in Europe had expressed themselves as in support of the position of the SWP. As far as it is possible to be just to him I have to say that he gave me the impression that the future was as good as decided. I challenged him very sharply on that and told him that a conference that would behave as he suggested need not be held