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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

MARXIST POLITICS OR UNPRINCIPLED COMBINATIONISM? -- By Max Shachtman  
(Internal Problems of the Workers Party)

Introduction	Page 1
Two Lines in the Fusion	3
The "French" Turn and Organic Unity	20
Blocs and Blocs: What Happened at the CLA Convention	26
The Workers Party Up to the June Plenum	33

(Continued in Bulletin 3, Section 2)

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MARXIST POLITICS OR UNPRINCIPLED COBBINATIONISM?

(Internal Problems of the Workers Party)

By Max Shachtman

Introduction

The national tour of all the important party branches which I completed several weeks ago brought me face to face with a number of questions and problems which arose in the course of discussion with numerous comrades. These discussions firmly convinced me of the urgent necessity of putting before the entire membership of the party and the Spartacus Youth League a detailed record of what has happened in the year of the party's existence. The ignorance of the party situation which the Oehler and the Abertz-Fieber groups have vied with each other to preserve in the party's ranks, and the systematic confusion and direct falsifications which they have, each in its own way, disseminated from coast to coast, demand that such a record be set down in writing for the information of the membership. The present document, however, pursues no more informational ends; it is not intended to substitute for a history, properly speaking, of our movement. It does aim to extract from the record of the party's history some of the essential and highly illuminating political lessons which our present situation dictates must be drawn if we are to progress along revolutionary lines.

To draw together what seem to be loose ends; to place men and things in their proper place so that an otherwise incomprehensible jumble begins to take on the appearance of a coherent and significant picture; to draw up a balance sheet of ideas, proposals, events, progress, retreats, at every stage of the development of the movement; to compare what was predicted with what finally took place, what was adopted with what results it yielded, what was proposed with what the situation showed was required; to trace a complicated situation back to its causes; to test and check men and groups and ideas on the touchstone of practice -- these are elementary obligations of every revolutionist. But these obligations cannot be properly discharged without a simple working knowledge of the facts. Lies, rumor and gossip are as misleading a factor in casting up a political balance sheet as forged checks would be in casting up a bank balance. And what a mass of political forged checks are afloat in our party! One has only to go through the country and discuss our political problems with an average group of comrades, to be overwhelmed by the realization that a prerequisite for the further progress of our movement is the clear establishment of those facts of party history which are necessary for that balance sheet, that accounting, that report of stewardship which the membership has the right and duty to demand of the leaders at the coming national convention.

"A revolutionary organization," wrote Trotsky on February 17, 1931, in his comments on the crisis in the German Left Opposition, "selects and educates men not for corridor intrigues but for great battles. This puts very severe obligations upon the cadres, above all on the 'leaders' or those who lay claim to the role of leaders. The moments of crisis in every organization, however painful they may be, have this positive significance, that they reveal the true political physiognomy of men: what is hidden in the soul of each of them, in the name of what he is fighting, if he is capable of resistance, etc."

Our party is at present in a crisis. It can emerge from it healthier and stronger than ever only if the nature and cause of the crisis is understood. The politically primitive mind, shallow or entirely empty, or the philistine dilettante who dabbles in revolutionary politics on Monday and retires with a dis-

encouraged sign on Tuesday, can see only the fact that "the leaders are squabbling again". Traux, for example, a former member of our National Committee, who represents the first type referred to, resigns from the party because, he writes, there is "too much factionalism" in it. In the big political disputes agitating the party, all he can see is "factionalism".

This document is not addressed to dillotantes, dabblers and blatherskites. It is meant for the serious revolutionists in the party, both "advanced" and "backward". It is meant above all to the militant, knowledge-hungry youth of our movement. In a sense it is dedicated to them. In the strictest meaning of the word, they are the hope of tomorrow. The devastation of the Stalinist and social democratic parties has virtually wiped out the bulk of the war and post-war generation. Just as the communist movement was built, between 1914 and 1919, primarily on the young generation, so the movement for the Fourth International must draw most of its troops from the young generation of today, those not yet corrupted by the virus of political decay.

But precisely because of that, the youth must be trained in the spirit of revolutionary Marxism, of principled politics. Through its bloodstream must run a powerful resistant to the poison of clique politics, of subjectivism, of personal combinationism, of intrigue, of gossip. It must learn to cut through all superficialities and reach down to the essence of every problem. It must learn to think politically, to be guided exclusively by political considerations, to argue out problems with themselves and with others on the basis of principles and to act always from motives of principle. And in order to think and act correctly, the youth (the adults as well!) must always have the facts before them; and if they do not have them, they must demand them.

This document, therefore, pursues a purely political aim. If the reader grows impatient at this or that point with the multitude of detail, he will have to bear in mind that we desire to present all the facts that have a bearing on those questions in dispute which have engendered our present party crisis. We are loathe to leave anyone a reasonable basis for arguing that we have neglected to reply to one or another point or to throw light on one or another dark corner. We are experiencing, in our opinion, a crisis of growth. We are experiencing what Zinoviev once pithily described as the "birthpangs of a communist party". In the field of obstetrics as well as in the field of politics, these birthpangs can be moderated, and finally eliminated entirely, not by an amateurish approach, not by a futile wringing of hands and whining and whimpering, not by prayer, but by increasing our fund of knowledge.

In the present case, this document aims to contrast two main lines of thought and action: the line of revolutionary Marxian politics -- principled politics, which make possible a consistent, firm and progressive course; and on the other side, personal combinationism, cliquism and unprincipled politics, which can produce only an inconsistent, weak-kneed and essentially reactionary course. The first is the line for which our group has fought, first in the Communist League of America and for the past year in the Workers Party of the U.S. The second is the contribution made by the Abern-Weber group.

The contrast can be made only by presenting the two lines, by describing them, by recording what each of them looked like in theory and practise at each stage of our development, by checking them with the results they yielded. In order that the contrast may be scrupulously exact, we have preferred to present not merely our opinions, but indisputable factual material: minutes, convention records, theses, resolutions, motions, statements, letters, etc. Without them, no objective judgment of the party situation is possible. The work of our coming conven-

tion, which has the task of making just such a judgment, will, we hope, be facilitated by this compilation.

New York, January 20, 1936.

MAX SHACHTMAN

### TWO LINES IN THE FUSION

The Workers Party has its roots in the two groups that came together to found it in December 1934, the Communist League of America and the American Workers Party. If we deal, at least at the outset, primarily with the former, it is not out of narrow patriotism for the organization to which many of us once belonged, but for these reasons: firstly, because an account of what occurred within the CLA, especially in the last year of its existence, is indispensable to an understanding and illustration of the political course of our group; and secondly, because the internal struggle of the same period in the CLA is, in any case, reproduced on a more extensive scale in the WP today.

The CLA was built up in the course of a protracted struggle for the principles of revolutionary Marxism. Occurring as it did in the face not only of the most violent opposition of the powerfully organized Stalinist apparatus, but of a series of discouraging defeats of the proletariat on a world scale, and in a period of social and political reaction, this struggle necessarily limited the scope of the League's expansion and influence. Understanding the nature of this struggle, the leadership of the League set itself firmly against any illusions of an early "mass influence". The main work of the League was conceived to be of a propagandistic nature: the presentation and development of the ideas of the International Left Opposition, and the formation of a solid cadre of revolutionists capable of defending these ideas.

In this respect the CLA was far from unique in the history of the movement. It was merely passing through the first of what may, roughly speaking, be called the three stages of the evolution of the revolutionary organization: a propaganda group which concentrates on hardening the initial cadres on the basis of clearly defined principles; then a more active group in the process of transition to a mass movement, which concentrates on presenting its formerly elaborated principles to the masses in the form of agitational, day-to-day slogans, but which is not yet strong enough to step very far beyond the boundaries of literary and oral agitation; finally, the larger movement, which not only calls itself a party but which can discharge the responsibilities incumbent upon an organization claiming to defend the daily as well as the historical interests of the proletariat, which can actually set masses into motion -- in other words, a party of action.

The objectively unwarranted attempt by numerous wisecracks who refused to understand this process of evolution, and who pursued "the masses" without "wasting time" on forging the instrument -- cadres -- without which systematic revolutionary work in the class struggle is inconceivable, always ended either in opportunism or adventurism. The chief protagonists of such attempts in this country, Weisbord and Field, ended up, as is known, without "mass work" and without cadres. These furious critics of our "sectarianism" finished with the most miserable and sterile of all sects.

The position of the CLA was complicated, moreover, by its position as a faction of the Third International, operating outside of it. Like its propagandistic position in general, this was not a matter of choice, but a condition dictated by a series of objective circumstances, primary among which was the fact that the Comintern had not yet exhausted its possibilities as a revolutionary Marxist

organization, and that it was impossible to establish, a priori, whether or not it could be brought back to the road of proletarian internationalism by a combination of our work and the pressure of events themselves.

With the accession to power of the Hitlerites, and the unanimous endorsement by the Comintern sections of the treacherous capitulation of the Stalinists in Germany, the International Left Opposition voted to cut loose from the Third International. The slogan was issued: Build the Fourth International! Build new communist parties in every country! This decision could not but have profound effects on every section of the Left Opposition movement, and, in turn, upon the revolutionary movement in general.

In every country, at least in the important ones, the sections of the ILO (International Left Opposition) were confronted with the imperative need of making a decisive turn. The role of a faction of the Third International had to be given up, and the road taken towards an independent movement for new parties and a new International. A tremendous historical task by its very nature, it could neither be decreed nor accomplished overnight. Everywhere, the ILO entered a transitional stage, between a propagandist group (a faction) and an independent mass organization (a party). This stage was represented by the interval between proclaiming the need of a New International and new parties and their actual establishment. It was not enough to proclaim the need of the new party, nor even to recognize the gap referred to. The essence of the problem was: how, in each country, to bridge this gap in the briefest possible time allowed by the concrete conditions prevailing in the land and the relationship of forces in the working class and revolutionary movements.

That is to say, the general acknowledgment of the need of the new party related essentially to the reasons for its formation; it was not yet sufficient as the instrument for forming it. The instrument was (and is) the strategy and tactics that must be applied in each specific country in order to arrive in the swiftest and solidest manner at the goal.

In arriving at the strategy and tactics to be employed in the United States for attaining our goal, we were fortunate in having at our command the rich treasure trove of experience of the revolutionary movement for decades back. We invented no new method, because none was needed. We did not have to wonder and fumble, because we were provided by Marxism (i.e., by the distillation of living experience) with the key to our problem. But in no case is this key already completely grooved for every situation. Revolutionary politicians -- like locksmiths -- must take the broad, blank key which is already generally outlined by Marxism and adjust it to the grooves of the concrete situation; otherwise the door to the problem will not yield to our efforts.

In addition to wanting to build something, one must know how. And in the case of building the revolutionary party, alas! there is no simple, universal, rigid formula. The First International, for example, was unevenly developed and heterogeneously composed. The Communist Manifesto was written as the program of the (non-existent) International Communist Party, but it was compelled to set down different tactical approaches to the problem of creating this party in the various countries: to revolutionary democrats, militant nationalists, trade unionists, social reformists, etc. The Third International, which marked the second attempt to form the International Communist Party, came into being after the Russian revolution, which gave it incalculable advantages over its predecessor. Yet even its task was no easy one, and its development was far from uniform. It is sufficient to mention the fact that from October-November 1914, when the need for the Third International was first proclaimed, until the formal founding of the International in March 1919 four and a half years elapsed. And even then, at the first Congress, the Intern

tional was little more than a name and an idea outside of Russia.

The parties themselves were built differently in different countries. In Spain with the revolutionary syndicalists and the young socialists. In Germany, by a fusion of the tiny Communist party with the large Left wing of the Independent Social Democracy. In England by a merger of four communist groups (plus one socialist temperance society). In France and the United States, by winning the majority of the official Socialist party. In Italy by breaking off a minority of the official socialist party, and then by fusing this minority with a subsequent Communist majority of the same SP. In Norway, by the direct affiliation to the CI of the federated Labor party. In Czechoslovakia by the affiliation en bloc of the official social democracy. In China, by the direct transformation of a propagandist group of students and intellectuals into a proletarian communist party.

In a word, there was and could be no universal formula, applicable everywhere and under all conditions. More accurately, if there was a universal formula, it was this: the small propagandist groups of communists must convert themselves into mass communist parties by winning to their side the militant workers who are moving, however uncertainly and hesitantly at first, in the same general direction.

In the work of building the American section of the Fourth International, the leadership of the CLA derived its "national" line from the international line. Six years of intensive assimilation of the ideas of proletarian internationalism as set forth in the programmatic material and defended in the struggles of the ILO (now the ICL) had prepared the CLA to act automatically in that spirit. The international line was dictated to us by a universal turn from propaganda groups or sects to the mass movement, to the masses, toward the formation of independent parties internationally. In this sense, the turn of the ICL was basically an international turn. (Only because it has entered into our current jargon shall we speak henceforth of a "French turn" too; in essence, it is really a misnomer, for the tactic employed by the French Bolshevik-Leninists was merely an application, in the field of concrete French political realities, of the international turn from propagandist faction to independent party.)

Because conditions differ in each country, because the relationship of forces is different, the tactical line that must be applied to reach the goal of the new International and new parties must also, of necessity, differ. At this point, one can establish the difference between the sectarian idealist and the active, Marxian materialist. The former proceeds from an idea, rigidly conceived and unadjustable to concrete material realities. Wherever the latter fail to conform to his preconceived idea, he turns his back contemptuously and angrily upon them and enters a world of fantasy which corresponds to his idea. That is why sectarianism means isolation, unreality. The Marxian materialist not only derives his ideas from the material and concrete reality, but bases his activities upon it, and, taking things as they actually are, plunges into the living world in order to shape it into "what it should be". If the Marxian philosopher must not only interpret the world, but also change it, it is necessary, in order to accomplish the latter, to approach it first as it is in reality, and not as if it was already "what it should be", as if it was already changed.

That is why the Marxists in every section of the ICL applied the international turn concretely, i.e., in different ways in each country, differing in accordance with the realities of the organized social and political life of the working class and yet were able to endorse each other's tactics without, by that fact, revealing any difference in principle or strategy. In France, the tactic used to carry out the international turn carried the Bolshevik-Leninists into a section of the Second International. In England, it made them a faction of a Centrist party affiliated

with none of the Internationals. In Holland, it carried them to a fusion with a leftward moving centrist organization -- the O.S.P. -- for the purpose of forming an independent revolutionary Marxian party of the Fourth International. In Australia, it carried them to their self-transformation into an independent party -- as it did in Chile and elsewhere. In other countries, the international turn did not (nor, given the concrete conditions, could it as yet) change the organizational position of the section of the ICL. Widely though the tactics differed in each country, the CLA leadership and membership was able to support them all, with understanding and enthusiasm, because there was no conflict in the various tactics pursued so far as intelligent Marxists were concerned.

In carrying out this international turn from a faction to an independent party, the ICL underwent an acute crisis.\* This crisis has more than a purely "historical" significance, because at bottom the problems involved are identical with those which underlie the present situation in the Workers Party.

At every turn in world politics, especially when it is an abrupt turn, the revolutionary movement experiences a crisis of greater or lesser acuteness. It may be characterized as the crisis engendered by the need of adaptation to the new situation or the new requirements. In this period, two currents tend to crystallize in the movement. One, represented by the conservative, sectarian element, clings to the yesterday, which the new situation has rendered obsolete. The other, the progressive element, brings over into the tomorrow only that part of yesterday which fits the new situation. In a small propaganda group, a sect (be it in the best or the worst sense of the term), the crisis seems to assume particularly acute forms. The group is rigidly trained, and this is its great positive side because it steels a firm cadre. But inevitably, some, instead of becoming steeled -- that is, firm but flexible -- become petrified and are unable to bend to the requirements of the new situation. Therein lay the essence of the crisis of the ICL, which produced rifts in a number of its sections.

Politics and the class struggle are hard task-masters. They command and we must jump. Else we remain marking time, on one spot, and the living movement leaves us behind. The group, instead of contributing its trained cadres to the living movement, becomes a reactionary obstacle to proletarian progress. On the whole, it may be said that the years of training the cadres, prepared the CLA for the "jump" from a faction to a party. But it would be blindness to deny that, in another sense, the past of the CLA -- its isolation from healthful contact with the mass movement -- was a heavy heritage. Its leadership was composed not of "group people" but of "party people", founders and builders of the Communist party in this country and even of the revolutionary movement before it. They did not "choose" the group existence; it was forced upon them. They could not arbitrarily or artificially break out of the circle existence whenever they wanted to (as Weisbord and Field tried to do with such fatal results). They had to wait for the proper moment and the propitious situation. The international turn of the ICL was the indication that the moment and the situation had arrived.

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\*Not the ICL alone, to be sure. The debacle in Germany left no section of the labor movement unscathed. If it necessitated the turn of the ICL which thereupon produced a crisis in its ranks, it should not be forgotten that it also produced the complete upsetting of the "Third Period" philosophy in the Third International and the still far-from-ended convulsions in the Second International. The CPLA, for example, also felt its effects, for what happened in Germany and subsequently precipitated the movement for a new party in the ranks of this semi-trade union, semi-political organization and led to the formation of the American Workers Party in Pittsburgh in December 1933, an event of signal progressive importance. In the CPLA (1933-1934) the effects of the world crisis in the labor movement manifested themselves in an almost exclusively progressive and healthy manner.

But it cannot be underscored sufficiently: the whole history of the labor movement reveals an iron law operating in the evolution of such groups. Under certain conditions, they -- and they alone -- play a consistently progressive role. Under other conditions, they may be converted into their opposite and play a reactionary role. Under the new conditions of the struggle, the CLA leadership (Cannon, Shachtman, Swaback), in harmony with the decisive elements in the IGL, declared: If we do not break out of our sectarian, propagandistic existence, we are doomed! This formula we repeated and repeated until it became part of the living consciousness of the bulk of the CLA membership and thus prepared them for the big step forward that had to be taken.

This indisputable formula encountered, however, not a little resistance. We who had stood firmly by the principles and organization of our movement for years, resisting successfully every effort to dilute them in an opportunistic sense, undisturbed by the superficial critics of our intransigent and stubborn adherence to fundamental principle (which they erroneously labelled "sectarianism"), were suddenly, but not unexpectedly, confronted by comrades who had gotten a rush of organizational patriotism to the head -- at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong way. What? We are doomed, you say? "Cannon and Shachtman have no faith in the CLA" -- "The CLA is not just a 'nucleus' of the new party" -- "The CLA is not a swamp or a sect" -- "They are preparing to liquidate us into some con-trist morass or other" -- and more of the same.

Yet, our formula remained indisputable. A propaganda group which, when the situation demands a turn to the masses, does not make this turn, and make it resolutely and decisively, is doomed to hopeless sectarianism and S.L.P.ism in various degrees of disintegration. Witness Lluklier in France, Weisbord in the United States -- to go no further back into the history of the revolutionary movements. The idea that under such conditions the menace of disintegration can be shouted away by patriotic declamations or decreed away by law, is infantile. That such infantile ideas actually existed in the CLA is attested by the fact that, in the course of the negotiations between us and the AWP, a motion was introduced into our New York branch "rejecting" the "theory" (!) that the League must disintegrate if the fusion between the two organizations is not consummated". The adoption of such a resolution, especially if it were done by unanimous vote, would undoubtedly have been a great help ... something like a witch doctor's incantations against evil spirits.

Those general considerations determined the line of the CLA leadership in carrying out the international turn in the United States. We started from the premise that the CLA was not the new party, but one of its component parts -- not a small or insignificant one, but still only a part. Our problem, essentially, was to find that particular link in the chain which, when grasped, could pull along as large a part of the chain as conditions permitted. Our task was to grasp the link closest at hand.

Our first approach was to the Gitlow group, not because we were groping about uncertainly, nor yet because, together, we could launch the party. Gitlow was then closest to our position and our plan was to establish with his group a cohesive principled bloc with which to approach other, larger groups. With Gitlow, we were infinitely more intransigent and curt than subsequently with the AWP, just because, formally speaking, Gitlow was closer to our views than the AWP. The apparent contradiction is resolved by this consideration: The Gitlow group was composed of a handful of members, politically already matured, and not representing a movement, both from the standpoint of forces and of direction. The negotiations with Gitlow failed because of his opportunistic position, from which he could not be swayed for the essential reason that he did not base himself upon any movement



that could be gotten to exert pressure upon him in our direction. The negotiations with the United Workers Party, also undertaken by the CLA at about the same time, likewise failed, because of the UWP'S ultra-Leftism.

Our attitude towards these little groups was not arbitrarily determined, and we did not bring our negotiations with them to a speedy conclusion out of caprice or neglect. Our conduct here, as in the case of our totally different conduct towards the AWP, which was programmatically speaking, to the Right of these groups, was determined entirely by a thought-out political line. As we wrote in the pre-convention thesis of the CLA concerning the difference in attitude: "As with the Gitlow-Field clique, so with Weisbord, any more time spent in considering collaboration or unity would be so much time wasted, and wasted just when we require it most. If we turn our backs completely upon this perfidious sect (read also: UPW, etc.) which is 'closer' to us, and at the same time approach the AWP which is 'not so close' to us, there is nothing arbitrary in our respective attitudes. It merely means that just because we are engaged in dealing and possibly fusing with a group which contains centrist trends, it is necessary for the Bolshevik-Leninist group to be firmer, more homogeneous, and to resist every effort of disloyal phrasemongers to disrupt our ranks. Any other attitude would not be serious." At the same time, by our brief negotiations with these groups, by "skirmishing" with them first, we disposed of them, that is, we exhausted them as possibilities for the new movement.

It was the development in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA) which presented the CLA with the first serious movement for the new party. In December 1933, the CPLA, at its Pittsburgh convention, converted itself into the American Workers Party, separate and apart from the SP and the CP, and elected a Provisional Organizing Committee to prepare a convention for July 4, 1934 at which to launch the new party definitely.

The task of a leadership is to be on the alert for developments, to take the initiative, to foresee, to act in time, in a word -- to lead. Because we had seriously adopted the orientation towards a new party, and refused to console ourselves with the ridiculous and misplaced patriotic cry -- "We must have faith in the CLA" -- the AWP occupied our attention from the very first day -- and even before then! On November 23, 1933, we adopted a motion in our Resident Committee which read: "That we confer with C. of the CPLA attempting to get him to take up the fight definitely for the New International at the convention and that we also communicate with Allard to the same effect." After the Pittsburgh convention, the January minutes of the Resident Committee of the CLA read: "Reports by Shachtman and Swaback: A lengthy discussion ensued on the AWP at the end of which it was agreed that the emergence of the AWP is to be given the most serious attention since it is the strongest single group which has come out for a new party. It was further agreed to address an open letter to the AWP the purpose of which is to involve them in a discussion on the principle foundation for a new revolutionary party in America. Cannon, Shachtman and Swaback assigned as a sub-committee to draft this open letter, which is to be based upon the general conclusions of this discussion."

The open letter to the AWP, which inaugurated the discussions that finally led to the fusion, was not sent on the assumption that the AWP was a communist organization which stood on the same principles as the CLA. Our conception was that the AWP represented a Centrist formation with highly significant Left wing elements in it and even more Left wing potentialities. Left "to itself", the AWP might develop into a considerable centrist force in the United States and seriously impede if not entirely prevent, for a period of time, the crystallization of the revolutionary Marxian party. And the problem of building the revolutionary Marxian party is today, for the Workers party, just as much a problem of preventing the growth of a strong centrist party in this country, as it was a dual problem two

years ago when the CLA first approached the AWP.

We analyzed the AWP not only as it was, but as it was becoming, that is, in the process of its development, which revealed the great capacities it had for moving to the left, along the line of revolutionary Marxism. We did not -- we had no right to -- condemn it because it was a Centrist organization and not yet a full-fledged communist movement. None of us had been born "Trotskyists"; all of us had had to go through more than one stage of development before reaching the position we then occupied. It would have been, and it still is, the height of sectarian insolence on our part to "forbid" anyone else the possibility of developing -- at a later stage than we -- in the same direction. Precisely because we had no sectarian prejudices we conceived it our revolutionary duty and task to facilitate the further development to the left of the scores of revolutionary militants who had grouped themselves around the AWP.

Our approach to the AWP was therefore calculated to facilitate contact with it, to begin to break down not only those prejudices which naturally existed between the two groups, but also those which were shrewdly cultivated in the ranks of the AWP by such incorrigible right wingers as Salutzky-Hardman. We counted firmly upon the inherent potential strength of those elements in the AWP who really wanted a Marxian party, in contrast to the Hardmans who were striving to establish an "American" centrist organization.

In all our dealings with the AWP, therefore, our tactics contained this highly important ingredient: to crystallize the left wing, to strengthen its hand, to heighten its consciousness and to isolate the Right wing. How strengthen the left, itself not very mature? By depriving the right wing of one after another of its demagogic and reactionary arguments, by preventing them from playing on the prejudices of the backward elements, by making it possible -- by our own conduct -- for the left wing in the AWP to continue the fight for unity with the CLA. Ultimately, peremptory demands for a "complete program", intransigent tones and demands for a "complete program", intransigent tones and demands, would have played right into the hands of the Right wing. Any indication that we were merely interested in a "clever maneuver", in chipping off a few left wing members, or not being seriously concerned and determined about the fusion, would have amounted to so many gifts to the right wing.

It should be remembered that, ostensibly, this Right wing was powerful. At the Pittsburgh convention of the AWP, Salutzky was the dominant figure, the political key-note and tone-setter. Yet, it was precisely our estimate of the AWP as a movement which caused us so little apprehension about his significance. We judged him to be -- and correctly -- an accidental and not an "indigenous" element in the AWP, composed as it was of proletarian militants who wanted to be revolutionists, and not clever Menshevik politicians like Salutzky. We believed (and in this we showed far more "faith" in the CLA and its forces than all the clamorous pseudo-patriots in our own ranks) that, step by step, and not ultimately, at one blow, we could bring the decisive forces of the AWP to the position of unity with the CLA on a revolutionary platform and reduce the right wing to insignificance and impotence. But this could only be accomplished by an at once firm and flexible policy, above all by a positive policy which drove consistently in one direction.

In one direction? Then you had no alternative variant? How many times we heard this "criticism" in the CLA from the Cehlerite and Weberite opponents or skeptics of the fusion, most of whom were so sure that there would never be a fusion, that they kept demanding another variant! But this possibility was also taken into consideration by us, for unlike our opponents, we tried to think things out to the end -- always a good procedure in politics.

"The AWP is a centrist party, with a centrist program and a centrist leadership," we wrote in our pre-convention thesis for the CLA. "What is important in our approach to it, however, is the fact that it is moving in a leftward direction and is the only one of the sizable groups to record itself for a new party. Our attitude toward the AWP must be based upon the dynamics of its evolution and not the statics of its program or leadership. It must be based upon the realization that the steps to the left already taken officially by this party must reflect a growing left wing pressure exerted not only by ourselves and by events from the outside, but also by forces within its own ranks or sympathetic with it. It must especially be based upon the conception that our task is not only to help in the formation of the new communist party but also to prevent or to impede the formation of a new centrist party....."

"If we do not succeed in adopting a jointly satisfactory program and the fusion does not take place at the present time, our fundamental attitude toward the AWP does not change, at least not for the next period. Should it hold its own convention and officially launch its own party, it cannot but be a centrist party. Under such circumstances, we would continue, still from the outside, and in close collaboration with all sympathetic elements within to put forward our demands for fusion on a principled basis, always proceeding from the standpoint that our object is not only the formation of a new communist party but also to prevent or hamper the formation of a centrist party."

It is in the sense indicated in this thesis that there was at least one kernel of truth in the famous motion presented in the New York branch of the CLA "rejecting the theory" that the CLA must disintegrate if there is no fusion. If the failure to fuse could be placed at the door of the Right wing leaders of the AWP, it would disintegrate, and not the CLA. But if the failure to fuse was due to the stupidity or sectarianism of the CLA, not even a motion of the NY branch could have prevented it from falling apart. We pursued such a policy as made it impossible for the Right wing opponents of fusion in the AWP to pull their organization away from the unity. And the results of our policy, in contrast, as we shall presently see, to Cehler's, put the AWP right wing in a position where they could not move effectively against the unity.

No clearer confirmation of the correctness of our course is required than the elaborate minutes of the special POC meeting of the AWP held in New York, a few short weeks before the fusion convention -- November 6, 1934 -- when the Right wing made a desperate last minute effort to sabotage the unity. The dilemma into which we had put the Right wing was expressed by several of the POC members: "Some people have been attracted by talk of merger," said Budenz, "and not going through with it would be hard to explain away.... Those who oppose merger must make plain who will preserve the AWP and what we'll use for material resources, because if we change our minds now we'll seem to oppose unity and we'll have a lot of explaining to do....."

Precisely! That is precisely what we meant when we wrote in our pre-convention thesis about the eventuality of no immediate fusion; that alone would suffice to answer all the triumphant questions about the "second variant". "If merger is called off now," added Karl Lore, "we'll be called traitors and fakers, but that doesn't bother me. What does bother me, is that we'll get the horse-laugh. We can stand practically anything but being thought damned fools; that's hard to live down." Although Lore exaggerates a little here, he is essentially correct in revealing the position the AWP would have been put in if it decided to face the CLA with the need of dealing with the "second variant" so dear to the Cehlerites and Weberites.

By following an elaborated political line, thought out to the end and uninfluenced by any accidental or episodic phenomena -- which threw our CIA critics into a panic or a frenzy every other week during the course of the negotiations -- we succeeded,

In involving the AWP so thoroughly in discussions of the fundamental principled questions that it was politically impossible for the Right wing to pull the AWP out of the negotiations;

In having the AWP drop the idea of formally launching their party, by themselves, at the originally proposed July 4th convention;

In helping to crystallize and strengthen the hand of the left wing around West, Hook and Mazzaglia;

In driving a deep wedge between the militants in the field and the Right wing politicians at the center (Salutzky and Co.);

In accomplishing a progressive improvement of the program, by means of one revision after another -- by means of public criticism in our press and comradely discussion in the negotiations -- until the final adoption of the Declaration of Principles;

In involving the AWP to a certain extent in joint practical work (anti-war, unions, unemployed, mass meetings, joint statements, etc.) so as to establish harmonious contact between the ranks and to diminish the chances for a rupture of the negotiations;

In completing the isolation of the Right wing and the total elimination, in the end, of its most dangerous spokesman, Salutzky.

And finally, in actually consummating the fusion on a "rigidly principled basis", as Trotsky puts it.

The policy was not carried out by the CIA leadership without opposition -- now overt now covert -- in the ranks. That iron law of which we spoke above, operates not only with organizations as a whole, but more specifically it affects individuals and sections or groups in them. At the time the sharp turn becomes imperative to the progress of the movement, they find themselves unable to accommodate themselves to the new situation. They cling to the past, to the comforts -- physical as well as political -- of a circle existence, to ideas and phrases learned by rote, important enough in themselves but no substitute for the living movement. They translate their sterile sectarianism into a strident radicalism; their conservatism into an ultra-revolutionary intransigence, their inertia into a suspicion of every step forward as "opportunism" and "liquidation". To be sure, nobody was opposed to the fusion explicitly. But that was little consolation, for even Bismarck knew that the most effective way to oppose an idea is to favor it "in principle". What is politically important is that tendencies were clearly evident in the CIA which objectively opposed the fusion. Some manifestations of these tendencies were:

The League should immediately declare itself the party;

"Just look at who is leading the AWP: Salutzky, Kusto, Budenz!" -- the tendency that saw this or that or those leaders, but not the ranks.

"The AWP has no membership anyway; there isn't a single AWP'er in Chicago" -- a complete failure to see the significance and importance of the organization, of the movement.

"We can't fuse unless we go into the new party as a faction" -- the assumption that the new party would be Centrist.

"After they agree to our program, we should refuse to unite with them until a long period of practical collaboration during which we'll test them."

And more of the same.

The most consistent spokesman of all these anti-fusion tendencies, the rallying center for them, was the Oehler-Stamm faction. At no time did Oehler reveal that he had the slightest understanding of the problem involved, of the strategy and tactics to be pursued, any more than he showed an understanding of the simple, clear-cut tactic adopted by our French comrades in entering the SP. In both Oehler's case and ours, the problem in both countries was fundamentally the same; only we approached the problem from the standpoint of living Marxism and Oehler from the standpoint of ossified sectarianism.

"The decisive question to determine a Marxian party and non-Marxian party or groups today," read Oehler's motion in our Resident Committee, February 26, 1934, "revolves around the question of the permanent revolution and the theory of socialism in one country....The Left Opposition will not compromise on principle to form a new party. We will not enter a party that has a non-Marxian program through omissions. Compromise on other questions only on the basis of a fight for these points first."

The Oehlerite conception, therefore, was that the new party could be formed by a fusion between the CLA and AWP only if the latter agreed to the theory of the permanent revolution and included it in the program -- it and a few dozen other things, for "we will not enter a party that has a non-Marxian program through omissions". Sinful opportunists that we are, we had an entirely different conception. In the first place, we do not believe that a national section of the Fourth International can write its own program; that is the work of the International, for our program can only be the world program; a declaration of principles or platform is adequate for the time being. Secondly, O sin of sins! we were prepared to fuse with the AWP even if we could get no agreement on the declaration of principles, to fuse on the basis of a concrete program of action for the next period which did not stand in conflict with our principles, and to depend upon joint collaboration and discussion during the course of it to bring closer the day when a Marxian platform or program could be adopted by the united party. From the very beginning, therefore, we found ourselves in irreconcilable conflict with the Oehler standpoint, the adoption of which would have made fusion impossible from the start.

Oehler's attitude towards the famous first draft of the declaration of principles drawn up by Shachtman and Kuste again indicated his purely negative position. This draft, inferior though it was from a Marxian standpoint to the second (final) draft, was quite sufficient -- assuming an immediate improvement had not been possible -- for unity. On the fundamental questions, it took the correct position. Oehler denounced it as centrist "through and through" and rejected it as a basis of fusion. Yet, it was precisely this draft which made it possible to drive deeper the wedge between Kuste, who then occupied an intermediate position, and the left wing of the AWP on the one side, and the Salutzky Right wing on the other. By isolating the Right wing on the basis of the first draft, the hand of the pro-fusion and Left wing elements was so strengthened that the reinforcement and clarifications of the second draft were made possible in the subsequent negotiations. Oehler simply did not understand that every successive blow at the Right wing facilitated the advancement and joint adoption of a more thoroughgoing and comprehensive Marxian position. The difference between this "radical" and us "opportunists" was that his policy would systematically play into the hands of Salutzky.

Oehler's attitude towards the discussion of organizational questions with the AWP again betrayed his fundamentally anti-fusion position. As late as October 23, a few short weeks before the fusion convention was scheduled to convene, when it was essential to discuss the distribution of positions, merger of the press, etc., etc. -- all these questions without which the very next step on the fusion agenda

could not be taken -- Oehler voted in our Resident Committee against dealing in organizational questions with the AWP representatives. And on the very eve of the fusion convention, November 19, 1934, Oehler "withholds" his vote on the organizational proposals jointly arrived at by the negotiators. It is evident that to have attempted to come to a fusion convention without common agreement, not only on principles, but on organizational questions, would have been equivalent to calling off the fusion convention entirely.

Towards the very end, the convention city took on an unusual importance. Our proposal was to hold the separate conventions of the AWP and CLA simultaneously, in the same city, and at the adjournment of the individual conventions to reconvene in the joint fusion assembly. We knew that the AWP's Right wing was trying desperately to stall off the unity at all costs and by any means. The old CLA decision in favor of Chicago as the convention city was out of the question for two reasons, one practical (the Chicago organization could not house anything like all the delegates) and the other political (the AWP would not consider Chicago as the convention city, and that for legitimate and convincing reasons). In spite of the obvious wisdom in our proposal, Oehler insisted on Chicago.

Finally, to climax a course that would mean blowing up the fusion for the coming period, Oehler proposed that we hold our own convention at the same time as the AWP held its gathering, but instead of reconvening into a unity convention immediately upon adjournment, the delegates should be sent home to "discuss" the question of fusion (we had been discussing only for a year!) and then come back, a month later, to a unity convention! Not only was this an infuriatingly irresponsible proposal to sabotage the unity, but it was the direct counterpart of the AWP right wing's plan for disrupting the fusion! Almost at the very moment that Oehler was making this scandalous proposal in the CLA committee, the Right wingers were mobilizing (fortunately, in vain, but not through any fault of Oehler's!) at the special POC meeting of the AWP on November 6. The crucial significance of the Oehler proposal may be judged from the minutes of this POC meeting.

"I would like us to discuss the proposition that talk of joint convention be suspended till the AWP convention passes on it," said Hardman-Salutzky. "We must have separate conventions so that if merger fails to go through the reaction will be as slight as possible," said Badenz. "I propose that we call off all negotiations for the time being to give our members a chance to study the matter and prepare for the AWP convention," argued another worshipper of democratic formalities and opponent of fusion, McKinney; and he added: "I think...that the CLA is rushing things. In my opinion there's no hurry about this merger, and all negotiations towards a unity convention must be suspended...."

Again, Hardman: "Motion to instruct negotiating committee to continue to discuss programmatic and organizational questions but to postpone the joint convention till the AWP convention passes on it." The proposal to postpone the joint convention was being fought for in order to stall the fusion, to strengthen the factional fences of the right wing, and eventually to defeat the fusion. As Arnold Johnson put it: "We can talk of postponement in hope of defeating merger, or of merging later on. I believe we are too far committed to withdraw. The AWP is only provisional and we have no right to insist that others join us. The time to vote No was at Valencia. I understood the Valencia decision to mean that we merge as soon as possible...."

As can be seen, the question was not at all of a technical order, but of signal political significance. The Oehler line, at every stage, would have played right into Salutzky's hand. Nor is this astonishing. It would not be the first time that sectarian rigidity feeds right wing opportunism and is fed by it. The

revolutionary Marxian line cuts across them both. The spokesmen for this line summed up the Oehler position in the Resolution of the Nineteen (Shachtman, Cannon, St. Paul, Levit, Forkeson, Carter, Wright, etc., etc.) to the New York membership meeting to elect delegates to the CLA convention:

"In the United States, the policy of the Oehler group would have made it impossible for the League even to approach the AWP and to influence its evolution and in a progressive sense, at best it would have reduced the whole problem to the level of a mere maneuver, barren of any serious political results, and would have totally excluded the possibility of bringing the AWP and the CLA to the present point of agreement on a Declaration of Principles and the holding of a fusion convention. The adoption of the Oehler policy, even at this late date, would directly jeopardize the completion of the fusion. By its formalistically rigid and negative approach to the problem, the Oehler group would deprive the CLA of that combination of firmness and flexibility which is necessary to the final adjustment of the extremely difficult organizational arrangements still pending. The manifest aim of the Oehler group to maintain a permanent faction and to carry its struggle against the National Committee and the International Secretariat into the new party, carries with it a direct threat to the success of the new party and to its normal evolution towards a firm Bolshevik position. The emphatic rejection of the position of the Oehler group by our national convention is a prerequisite for the successful development of the New party and the increasing influence of the Bolshevik-Leninist kernel within it."

But that is precisely what the national convention of the CLA failed to do in the explicit, clear-cut Bolshevik way that the situation demanded of it. And it failed to do it because the resolution of Cannon and Shachtman was voted down by a combination of Oehlerite and Weberite delegates, so that Oehler was able to enter the new party without the CLA convention characterizing his political line on the fusion. And as will be seen, this was not the last time the Weberites played their role of shields for Oehler.

What was the Weberite position towards the whole fusion movement? Contrary to all the expectations of the critics, the unity negotiations were so patently successful and our line so unassailable, that even though Weber refused to characterize the political line and tendency of his ally Oehler, he was nevertheless compelled to present a motion endorsing the "main line of the National Committee in the course of the negotiations as basically correct and making possible the realization of the fusion". All the skeptics, the opponents of all varieties and degrees, suddenly became not only warm supporters of the fusion but in their tardy enthusiasm and zeal soon talked as if they had always been heartily in favor of it.

"We (we!) were always in favor of fusion on a proper basis (as we would be with any socialist left wing that agrees to a Marxist program)," writes Weber virtuously, in his December 29, 1935 letter to the International Secretariat of the IGL. "We may add that it was after discussion with Comrade Weber and on the latter's suggestion that Comrade Shachtman introduced the first motion into the N.C. of the CLA to start negotiations with Comrade Muste and the AWP. Our (our!) attitude towards the fusion was never lukewarm -- nor on the other hand was it uncritical."

Not uncritical, to be sure. And the criticism? That is also recorded. "We took issue with the Cannon group on the question of fusion," said Gould at the New York membership discussion meeting on July 27, 1935, in a speech circulated throughout the country as a Weber caucus document. "We did not stand opposed to the fusion, nay, we were wholeheartedly for it... Cannon saw no future in the CLA. He lost faith in it and felt that without a fusion we would perish. Hence he proceeded to rush the party (Gould means the CLA.--MS) into the fusion. His policy was fusion

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willy-nilly. It was not the rapidity with which the fusion was affected that was here objected to. It was the fact that the membership was not properly educated or prepared for the fusion. It was a top fusion, typical of the Cannon method."

For a leader of the group which recently fused "at the top" with the Huste group on the basis of purely "top" discussions between 2-3 Weberites and 2-3 Husteites, presumably on the "French turn", Gould is obviously the person chosen by nature and destiny to polemicize against "top fusions typical of the Cannon method". But let us put aside for a moment this school-boyish objection to "top fusion" which reveals such a thoroughgoing ignorance of politics, strategy, tactics, tact and plain common sense, to say nothing of a cavalier contempt for facts. Let us concentrate instead on the other contentions.

According to Weber, "we" were always in favor and "our" attitude was never lukewarm. He echoes Glotzer who makes the same assertion in his letter to the IS. And Glotzer merely echoed Gould, according to whom "we" were not merely never lukewarm, but were wholeheartedly for it. Bear in mind these vehement protestations and then compare them with the truth which is not established by the above assertions (it is brutally violated by them!) but by facts and documents.

The trouble with us, do you see, was that we saw no future for the CLA, we had lost faith in it and "felt that without a fusion we would perish"; so we rushed the CLA headlong into the fusion, because we favored it "willy-nilly". It is futile to ask for facts to sustain these assertions; none will be forthcoming, for the simple reason that none exists. But Gould's very criticism betrays his position. It was merely one side of the coin on whose obverse side was imprinted the policy of the AWP right wing.

Gould's arguments against us (made six months after the fusion; imagine how much sharper they must have been -- and were! -- six months before the fusion) are simply identical with the arguments made by Salutzky, Howe, McKinney, Cope and Budenz against the fusion with the CLA! Let us refer again to those highly instructive minutes of the special meeting of the POC of the AWP already referred to. We have already quoted from them to show who was opposed to the Cannon-Shachtman line when, as Gould puts it, they "proceeded to rush the CLA into the fusion", and why they opposed us. Now let us quote some more to show that, just as Gould (unlike the faithless Cannon) had faith in the CLA, there were others who "had faith" in the AWP; that just as Gould did not think we would perish if there was no fusion, there were similars in the AWP who had the same view; that just as Gould merely wanted to prepare their membership for the fusion....

"McKinney: I propose that we call off all negotiations for the time being to give our members a chance to study the matter and prepare for the AWP convention... I don't believe that we must necessarily build our party on the merger of groups. I think also that we must not ignore the past of the CFLA and that the CLA is rushing things. In my opinion, there's no hurry about this merger, and all negotiations toward a unity convention must be suspended.... If we don't merge with the CLA I think we'll get their good people anyway.

"Howe: It is often said or implied by certain comrades that we are lost unless we fuse; do you agree?

"McKinney: I think we're more likely to lose out if we do fuse. Fusion doesn't matter in Pittsburgh. We'd get perhaps 8 more members. Why, we can get 3 or 28 without fusing.

"Cohen: Why don't you?....



"Howe: The AWP is not bankrupt and merger if proposed as a last resort is based on a false premise. I see no sign of revolt in the CLA (Howe had evidently not heard of Gould!--MS) but I see no reason either to merge the bankrupts or to merge a healthy AWP with a bankrupt CLA....

"Cope: There is a feeling that without the CLA the AWP can't exist. That means we started out bankrupt or got that way in the past year. I disagree. What strength will we gain? What material advantage is there?"

But let us examine even more direct evidence of what "we" were always in favor of and how "our" attitude looked, not in the hazy post-fusion memories of the recently converted zealots, but in reality. "We" evidently means the leaders of the Weber caucus: Weber, Abern, Glotzer. Let us take them one by one.

On the question which revealed the basic divergence between our conception of the fusion and Cehler's, manifested in the Cehler motion of February 26 on "not entering a party that has a non-Marxian program through omissions" (referred to above), the Weberite caucus organizer and spokesman in the Resident Committee, Abern, declared "that he will reserve his vote for a subsequent meeting". Two meetings later, Abern, according to the records of March 21, 1934, requested that he be "recorded as voting for Cehler's motion in minutes #210 (that is, the February 26th meeting) dealing with position in regard to the negotiations with the AWP". The March 21 meeting was the one at which Glotzer, just back from Europe with the latest dope on what to do and what not to do with centrists, made his international report. Abern's vote for Cehler was therefore cast after consultation on the question with Glotzer. And more specifically what Glotzer's views on the fusion were, we shall soon see.

The key importance of the connection between the simultaneous separate conventions and the immediately following joint fusion convention, has already been discussed. What was Abern's position on this crucial point? Let the CLA committee minutes for October 22, 1934, supply the answer. Swaback had just reported the AWP proposals for the convention:

"Motion by Shachtman: On the question of the unity city we orient on the following basis, the League and the AWP hold their conventions simultaneously and in the same city and at the adjournment of the regular business of the two organizations, the joint fusion convention shall thereupon take place.

"Motion by Cehler: The CLA hold its convention in Chicago as previously agreed 3 times by the full NEC. That if the AWP cannot arrange its convention in the same city then we hold the joint convention later in another city, suitable to both organizations. That we endeavor to have at least a month minimum between the conventions, to enable the League delegates to return to our own branches following the CLA convention with the League convention report for branches to assimilate and to enable one or more issues of the Militant to follow up our own convention before we dissolve the League."

Cannon being out of town, the Resident Committee voted as follows: Shachtman and Swaback for the former's motion; Abern and Cehler for the latter's motion! This alarming deadlock was of course broken by Cannon's subsequent vote, much to should Salusky's eyes ever peruse these pages -- to the latter's chagrin. But let us imagine that in addition to Abern, there had been another Weberite on the committee that evening who was just as "wholeheartedly" in favor of the fusion. The deadlock would have been broken... the other way, Cehler's way! Let us imagine that the other Weberite was Glotzer. Being among those whose attitude was never "lukewarm" on the question, whose line would he have supported? Let us read his

own words. They are just as long as they are wrong. And what is important in them is not only that they reveal a line on the fusion just a few shades more incorrect than Oehler's, more sterile in their pseudo-intransigence, but also a general line of thought which has manifested itself since the consummation of the fusion on other questions, and is manifesting itself at this very writing on the key question now before the movement. And here is again an indication that we are dealing not with faded reminiscences of the past, but with political lines that relate to our present-day problems! But back to wholehearted Glotzer of 1934:

"What I told the European comrades and LD was, I found out later, my own opinion and not the opinion of the National Committee. I told LD that our aim in addressing the statement to the Kuste party was for the purpose of forcing a discussion in this Centrist organization with the aim of winning the best elements to our point of view. I told him further that we regarded Kuste, and not alone him but the entire leadership of the AWP as a typical centrist leadership, people who will never become communists (What power of prediction! What penetration! What analysis!--MS)...I don't think that anyone raises objections," continued Glotzer in this letter, written March 26, 1934, "to negotiations or discussions. What is objectionable is the perspective of the Committee, which has already put upon the agenda the question of fusion...I told the Committee that the perspective of fusion in the immediate future or 'at the next convention is not correct. That is not the first step.

"The next step after an agreement on fundamentals is a protracted period of collaboration in order to determine the meaning of the change on the part of the centrists. If after such a period of collaboration it is seen that these people have seriously made a step towards communism and are developing in our direction, then, of course, the question of fusion can be taken up, but by no means to now discuss 'practically' how the fusion will be carried through. You undoubtedly will understand that Oehler supported the remarks I made in the Committee meeting. (Undoubtedly understand, is hardly the word! - MS)...Why has our NC acted in this way? Here is my opinion. Our committee has no confidence in the organization...

"I don't regard the League as a 'swamp' whose only hope is fusion with the AWP. Anybody who feels that way should draw the conclusions of that position or perspective and act on the basis of this opinion. The League is no swamp. The League is healthy in its ranks, it has vitality, it has power, it has every possibility of forging ahead. (Follows more patriotic pathos.-- MS)...The lunge for the AWP on the part of the NC must be described politically (and actually you know this to be so), as a lack of confidence in the organization. That is why Cannon said at the NY functionaries' and membership meeting that our hope lies in the fusion with the AWP. Do I have to add that I do not agree with that?

"I think if you were to complete your national tour\* and continued to follow the line that you are presenting, you may convince half or the majority of the organization because the matter more or less lies in your hands. That is the occasion for my letter. I want to ask you to please consider very seriously what I say and change your approach on this question. I don't propose that you speak against

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\*Shachtman was then making a national tour for the CLA, reporting also to the membership in every branch on the facts and perspectives of the fusion, i.e., contrary to the absurd falsehood of Gould, he was seeing to it that the membership was "properly educated" and "prepared for the fusion". Gould's trouble then, like the trouble of all the Weberites (with the prominent exception of Satir, who understood the line of the NC and agreed with it), was that he refused to be educated and prepared in favor of the fusion. He was "wholeheartedly" in favor of it...just like Glotzer.

the negotiations because they are absolutely correct. What I propose is that you do not prepare the membership for a fusion but, quite the contrary, prepare them for ensuing conflicts. I think you should tell the membership that if we do get a fundamental agreement there, the next stage is a protracted period of collaboration on practical questions in order to prove these people. Only such a period of collaboration can determine the question of fusion. To assume that the Musteites or Muste himself actually accept, believe and will work for our point of view or, say, for a communist point of view, is assuming entirely too much and is overlooking the fact that these people are centrists and not communists."

One cannot but feel that this is enough for the day to prove to the hilt Gould's contention that Cannon's crime was that he didn't prepare or educate the membership for the fusion, and that therein and only therein lay "our" difference with Cannon. Ah, what a fatal day it was for some people when the typewriter was invented! If this was Glotzer's opinion when he was "not lukewarm" but "wholehearted" in his support of fusion, what in god's name would it have been if he were lukewarm, or, heaven forbid! if he were downright cold toward it? But this was in March, it will be said, and anybody can err. In the first place, a revolutionist should not conceal so serious an error of judgment; in the second place, he should not condemn those who failed to make his error but who had, instead, the correct line; and in the third place, the error was not fleeting in duration. On July 4, 1934, Glotzer still writes: "I am inclined however to think that even now, after all that has happened, you cling falsely to the hope that anything may come out of the negotiations. I am more and more convinced that there is nothing to be gained from them either in repute or in numbers. And I wonder whether you agree with Jim who says: We have got to unite with the AWP...."

But couldn't this have been an aberration of an isolated Weberite, not infused with the same limitless enthusiasm for the fusion that made, let us say, Weber himself such an ardent and uncontrollable supporter of the fusion? The idea is preposterous. Glotzer complained at the CLA convention at the end of the year that we had not received any information about the fusion from the Resident Committee. However that may be (and it does not happen to be the case), he did receive plenty of "information" and views upon which he based the line of his letters, from his caucus colleagues, Weber and Abern. He was merely expressing the common opinion of the national Weber caucus -- defended by Abern and Weber in New York, Glotzer in Chicago, Rae Ruskin in Los Angeles. What Weber thought of the question -- we will not allow ourselves to quote from memory his week-in-week-out sniping attacks on the National Committee line in New York branch meetings -- he put down black on white. In his statement in favor of the "French turn", written, not in March and not in July, but on August 20, 1934 (printed in the CLA International Bulletin #17), he wrote:

"There remains the question of the international effect of this movement in France.... It does not follow that we must pursue the same tactics now or necessarily orient our sections everywhere for the same policy. Yet such a merger carried out in France creates a predisposition in favor of the same kind of merger. Given the development of the same situation -- and we see this on the way in America too -- here, we are prepared to pursue the same policy that we urge on our French comrades."

Was our difference with the Weberites, therefore, over the question of our "bureaucratic indifference" towards preparing the CLA membership for the fusion, as it is put by Gould and other Weberites, who foolishly think that nobody will trouble to read what they would like to forget? Not in the least! It is characteristic of the Weberites that after they have taken an "independent" political line, and this line has proved to be wrong a dozen times over, they seek to conceal their debacle by insisting that they were always in political accord with us but

that they differed with us merely on some organizational defect of ours.

Our line was to drive for the fusion and prepare the membership for it; their line was to prepare the membership against it. Our perspective, in February, in August, in November, was that the next step to be taken in forming the revolutionary Marxian party was the fusion with the AWP; their perspective, as late as the end of August, did not even mention the AWP, but envisaged the development of a situation -- "we see this on the way in America too" -- in which the CLA would emulate the French Bolshevik-Leninists, that is, enter the American Socialist party. (I say "their perspective" and not merely Weber's, because all the Weberites on the NC -- Spector, Abern, Glotzer and Edwards -- voted without reservations to endorse the Weber statement.) And yet, since we are neither Oehlerites nor Weberites, we did not foam at the mouth and break out into a hysterical rash at the "liquidators" and "opportunists" whose perspective it was to "dissolve the independent" organization into the SP. We voted against the Weber statement and attempted to argue it out objectively. We burned no crosses on the hills to call together the paladins of the clan to protect the sanctity of our independence from the "Weberite liquidators". We leave that kind of politics to the old women from whom nothing better can be expected.

One of the favorite accusations made against us by the Abern-Weber faction, spread down the corridors and along the national grapevine, and repeated constantly among themselves between sighs and moans over the sad state of the nation, is that we are "tail-endists". More will be said on this score later on. Suffice it for the moment to remind the reader: During the whole year of 1934, when the strategy and tactics of the fusion with the AWP were being elaborated in the Committee and discussed -- in New York almost constantly -- not one single leader of the Weber group made a solitary positive proposal on the matter; not one single idea was contributed by it that would advance the fusion; on not a single occasion did any of them take the initiative in the great work which, at the convention, they grudgingly acknowledged had been accomplished. Nothing, literally nothing!

Where they couldn't give direct support to the Oehlerite agitation, they remained silent entirely. Where they contributed an idea, it was not towards fusion, but like Glotzer, against the fusion, or like Weber, for the perspective of entering the SP and letting the fusion with the AWP go hang. The initiative at every stage, the tactics, the complicated and delicate work of negotiation, the work of educating, enlightening and rallying the membership, fell exclusively to the lot of the bureaucrats, opportunists and men of little or no faith, Cannon, Shachtman and Swabeck. And by some miracle, compared with which the transformation of the wafer and the wine into the body and blood of Christ is a commonplace occurrence, the fusion was accomplished on a sound, satisfactory, revolutionary basis -- as Gould, Glotzer and Weber will eagerly explain to you -- in spite of everything Cannon and Shachtman could do to stop it.

One important stone is still missing from the mosaic of this instructive chapter of the record. In reply to a copy of Glotzer's letter on March 26, 1934, to Shachtman, a leading European comrade whose opinions Glotzer elicited, wrote to him on April 10, 1934: "There must be revolutionary elements in the AWP who are pushing toward us, for otherwise it would be incomprehensible why the leadership has committed itself so far. This situation must be utilized. If we declare ourselves ready for the fusion and the right wing of the AWP then puts on the brakes or prevents it entirely, we then have a very favorable point of departure toward the left wing... We must not only understand and criticize Centrism theoretically, not only submit it to political tests, but we must also maneuver organizationally towards it. Under certain conditions, fusion is the best maneuver. Only the fusion should not be superstitiously regarded as the termination of the process (that is, of the

struggle against centrism. -MS) The fusion can, under certain conditions, only yield better conditions for the continuation of the struggle against centrism. Naturally, the methods of the struggle must then be adapted to the united party."

It would surely have been regarded as a libel on the already harassed Glotzer to have predicted at that time that, not much more than a year later, he and his caucus colleagues would be, first in a bloc and then in a single faction with those whom Glotzer himself designated as "people who will never become communists" -- a faction whose primary aim is the smashing of those communists with whom Glotzer has always protested his fundamental solidarity in principle. But these miserable clique maneuvers, the politics of unprincipled combinationism, deserve more ample and searching treatment.

### THE "FRENCH" TURN AND ORGANIC UNITY

The minutes of the third national convention of the CLA, which took place in New York at the end of 1934, directly on the eve of the fusion convention which launched the Workers Party, are, unfortunately, so tersely summarized that, without further elucidation and commentary, they do not afford the reader the possibility of getting a rounded picture of how the internal developments culminated in that organization before its dissolution into the new party. On all divisions in the convention there were not just two groups casting identical ballots, as was to be expected from the two fundamentally different lines of principle that separated the League, but three. It is with this third group, as we shall see, that we must occupy ourselves in greater detail, all the more so because its origin, its political existence and position are more often than not shrouded in obscurity.

The position of the Cehler faction -- formed months before the convention on a national scale and steadily nursed by an unceasing flow of factional documents -- was entirely clear, more or less open and avowed, and, considering the fact that it proceeded from fundamentally wrong premises, the element of ambiguity in it was reduced pretty much to a minimum. The Cehlerites took a flatfooted stand against the so-called "French turn" on the grounds that the entry, even of a small group or faction (what they called the "embryo party") into a reformist or centrist organization, regardless of the principled platform upon which it entered or for which it fought once inside, was equivalent to capitulation to social democracy, the furling of the revolutionary Marxian banner, liquidation of the organized Marxian movement, and consequently objective aid to the social patriots.

Like Bauer in Germany and Lhullier in France, they opposed the "turn" on grounds of principle. That this sectarian view was not accidental or episodic was demonstrated by the policy they advocated with regard to the fusion. The Cehler group, therefore, on the touchstone questions before the CLA -- the "international" and the "national" -- represented a fairly consistent, ultra-Leftist sectarian current. Because it was so flatly and openly avowed not only orally but in recorded documents, it was possible to deal with this group politically. Its position being clearly discernible, one could give it political support, or political opposition.

The position of the CLA leadership (Cannon, Swaback, Shachtman) -- which formed a group in New York only one month before the convention and never formed a group at all on a national scale -- was equally well known and (in our opinion) even more consistent. Proceeding from conceptions already set forth on previous pages of this document, it took just as firm a stand for the entry of our French (and later our Belgian) comrades into the social democracy, as it did in favor of a policy which would make possible the speedy fusion with the AWP for the purpose of founding an independent Marxian party in the United States. And as has already been made

clear, these were the two decisive questions facing the CLA during the last year of its existence.

Yet, while the great majority of the members of the League could not but support the basic position of the CLA leadership -- and did in fact support it -- and at the same time could not but reject the position of the Oehlerites -- and did in fact reject it -- the leadership found itself in the convention with a minority of the delegates supporting it. Why? Because in addition to the two groups referred to there was present a bloc of delegates representing a third group -- Abern-Weber.

Another group? But a group must justify its organizational existence by a political platform. It is of the essence of political irresponsibility to form groups or factions on this, that or the other triviality, for such a course would inevitably end in the complete disintegration of the movement into light-minded cliques to whom politics is a sport. The "normal" state of the revolutionary movement is that in which each member presents his standpoint freely, is thus able to influence other members and be influenced by them. A revolutionist does not recoil in moral horror from the prospect of forming a faction, even in a revolutionary Marxian organization, but only when political differences with other comrades, or aggregations of comrades, are so clear as to make the joint presentation of a platform or a systematic point of view, and its common, disciplined advocacy and defense, unmistakably advisable; or else, when bureaucratic repression in the organization so constricts the normal democratic channels of expression that a viewpoint can be effectively presented and defended only by the concerted action of a group.

Now, the latter situation did not obtain in the CLA and nobody made such a contention. No comrade submitted a document on his point of view which was not presented to the membership for discussion and decision (for example, the Weber and Abern statements on the "French turn"; a statement on the same question by Oehler, another by Glee); an internal discussion and information bulletin was at the disposal of the membership; membership discussion meetings of the broadest and most democratic kind were provided for throughout the country and, in the city where the leadership exercised the greatest political and organizational influence -- New York -- discussion meetings of the membership were held almost week in and week out for a solid year, at which all comrades, with all points of view had the most ample conceivable opportunity to debate their positions; a nation-wide tour was organized in which a National Committee member (Shachtman) held membership discussion meetings with every single branch in the country for the purpose of presenting the N.C. position and discussing contrary positions, etc., etc. What, then, was the political basis upon which Abern-Weber-Glotzer organized a faction in the CLA?

It should be borne in mind, furthermore, that factions cannot, must not be organized because they agree with the basic political line of other factions, but because they disagree with those basic lines in so clear-cut a manner as to warrant the formation of a new group.

Now we have already seen that politically the Weber faction declared its agreement with Cannon and Shachtman on the policy pursued with regard to the fusion, i.e., with one of the two main and decisive questions before the League. When our motion to endorse the NC policy on the fusion and to reject Oehler's policy was defeated because the Weberites dared not offend their Oehlerite allies by a political characterization of their fusion position, it was nevertheless Weber who introduced the motion which endorsed "the main line of the NC in the course of the negotiations as basically correct and making possible the realization of the fusion". To add that Weber & Co. had this or that incidental criticism to make (and what else could it be but incidental?) of our conduct during the year in connection with the fusion question, does not eliminate the decisive political fact that he was com-

• polled to endorse our main line; and what counts, or what should count with Bolshevik politicians is precisely the main line.

On the other of the two principal and decisive questions before the League, namely, the entry of the French comrades into the SFIO, documents and oral statements again attested to a political solidarity between the NC and the Weberites. Both took an identical position on what was decisive in the dispute: they endorsed the entry of our French comrades as tactically correct, permissible from a principled standpoint and both rejected the sterile yappings of the international Bauerites.

Where, then, was the political difference of the Weberites with us that justified their formation of a separate faction?

If it is understood (and we shall prove it up to the hilt!) that the Weber group was not formed to fight for the "French turn" or against it; that it was not formed to fight for the fusion or against it; that it was formed in the dark of night without a political platform and without ever, in the two whole years of its existence, having drawn up a clear political platform; that its basis of existence is that of an unprincipled personal combination, of a clique that refuses to live down ancient and completely outlived personal and factional animosities; that its principal aim is to "smash Cannon" (and Shachtman, because of his association with the latter) without at the same time having the political courage to take over the responsibilities of leadership -- if these things are understood, it becomes clear why, even without political differences, the Weberites came to the CLA convention with a faction and -- O God help us! -- with a "platform" on which to justify their politico-organizational existence.

And what was this "political platform"? Nothing more and nothing less than .... "organic unity". A more wretched (and at the same time thoroughly false) cloak for the organization of an unprincipled clique could hardly have been chosen. This document has no intention of developing into a treatise on the general question of "organic unity", or even on "organic unity" insofar as it affected or affects the present situation in France. It deals with the question only to the extent required to cast some light on an otherwise unclear side of the matters under consideration.

One of the arguments advanced by those favoring entry into the SFIO was this: the movement for organic unity of the Stalinist and socialist parties has taken on serious proportions; the organic unity party can only be a reactionary party under the aegis of Stalinist ideology; in the process of effecting the organic unity of the two parties into one, the question of the program for the new party will be advanced; the Bolshevik-Leninists, on the outside looking in, will be unable to influence the direction which the workers, thinking of the new program, will take; as a constituent part of one of the parties (the SFIO), the Bolshevik-Leninists will be able to advance their revolutionary Marxian position as the programmatic base for the new party -- not the new party of the Stalinist-Social Democratic "organic unity", but the new revolutionary party that will be constituted in the course of the regroupment of forces.

So strong was the "organic unity" wave in France, that some of the Bolshevik-Leninists were swept away by it. They took an uncritical attitude towards it. In the early days of the discussion on the question of entry (and even later), some of our comrades took the inadmissible position of becoming advocates of the slogan, thus making themselves, willy-nilly, the objective assistants of the dupery planned by the old-line leaders. Some (notably Molinier), as per his article in the New International for July 1934) replied to the question -- "Organic unity?" -- with the simple, enthusiastic affirmation: "Yes!"

Neither the French Ligue nor Comrade Trotsky ever advanced such a position, despite the assertion of the Oehlerites, who condemned this untaken position, or the Weberites, who approved this untaken position. In a criticism of some of the youth comrades who also picked up this reactionary slogan -- the essence of which is and cannot but be, both theoretically and concretely in the minds of the masses, a sloganized affirmation of the possibility of reformism and Bolshevism coexisting in one party -- Comrade Trotsky wrote:

"The aim of this text: to correct the slogan of organic unity, which is not our slogan. The formula of organic unity -- without a program, without concretization -- is hollow. And as physical nature abhors a vacuum, this formula fills itself with an increasingly ambiguous and even reactionary content. All the leaders of the Socialist Party, beginning with Just and Marceau Pivert and ending with Frossard, declare themselves partisans of organic unity. The most fervent protagonist of this slogan is Lebas, whose anti-revolutionary tendencies are well enough known. The Communist leaders are manipulating the same slogan with increasing willingness. Is it our task to help them amuse the workers by an enticing and hollow formula?

"The exchange of open letters of the two leaderships on the program of action is the promising beginning of a discussion on the aims and the methods of the workers' party. It is here that we should intervene vigorously. Unity like split are two methods subordinated to program and political tasks. The discussion having happily begun, we should tactfully destroy the illusory hopes in organic unity as a panacea. Our theses: the unity of the working class can be realized only on a revolutionary basis. This basis is our own program.

"If fusion takes place tomorrow between the two parties, we place ourselves on the basis of the united party in order to continue our work. In this case the fusion may have a progressive significance. But if we continue to sow the illusion that organic unity is of value as such -- and it is thus that the masses understand this slogan and not as a more ample and more convenient audience for the Leninist agitators -- we shall be doing nothing but making it easier for the two conjoined bureaucracies to present us, us Bolsheviki-Leninists, to the masses as the great obstacle on the road of organic unity. In these conditions unity might well take place on our backs, and become a reactionary factor. We must never play with slogans which are not revolutionary by their own content but which can play a quite different role according to the political conjuncture, the relationship of forces, etc. . . . We are not afraid of organic unity. We state openly that the fusion may play a progressive role. But our own role is to point out to the masses the conditions under which this role would be genuinely progressive. In sum, we do not set ourselves against the current toward organic unity, which the two bureaucracies have already cornered. But while supporting ourselves on this current, which is honest among the masses, we introduce into it the critical note, the criterion of demarcation, programmatic definitions, etc."

The position of the majority of the NC of the CLA was formulated in the instructions to Cannon who was delegated to represent us at the 1934 Plenum of the International Secretariat of the ICL: "to oppose the standpoint that 'organic unity' as such, is a 'progressive step', and that the Bolsheviki-Leninists shall become the proponents of such a slogan. That in all conditions and with all developments that may take place in the ranks of the working class or in the bureaucracy of the two principal parties, the Bolsheviki-Leninists shall under all circumstances point out the illusory and reactionary character of 'organic unity' as such (even under present 'French conditions') and to emphasize instead unity on a revolutionary program and in a revolutionary party".

At whom was this sharp formulation directed? Not only at some of our French



comrades who had made this slogan of bureaucratic duplicity their own (a year and a half later, the logical conclusion of their error was manifested in the treachery of Molinier and Co.) but at the American Weberites who took, if anything, an even falser position in the belief that...that was I.D.'s position. At the CLA convention we were treated to learned and mocking disquisitions on our (!) conception of "organic unity as such" and informed that outside of Kant there was no such thing. But it is precisely against a metaphysical, uncritical, tail-endist subservience to organic unity "as such" that the NC majority was compelled to polemicize. Again let us refer to the documents.

In the statement in favor of the "French turn" already referred to, Weber wrote on August 20, 1934: "It is no accident that this in itself would indicate the progressive character of the move for organic unity." "This in itself" referred to the fact that "it is necessary to protect the vanguard by enlisting the support of the organizations of the working class". And the vanguard whom this "progressive organic unity" would protect was the French Bolshevik-Leninists and Comrade Trotsky, then being hounded by French reaction: Will Abern, Glotzer, Spector and Edwards, who voted for Weber's statement (it is reproduced in the October 1934 Internal Bulletin #17 of the CLA) kindly tell us where and how this "unaccidental" thing finally "indicated the progressive character of the move for organic unity"?

Further on, Weber wrote: "From our point of view it would seem that there is no other choice — that we must choose the progressive road of organic unity....At present the interests of the French proletariat, of the French revolution make mandatory that we hail the move for organic unity and put ourselves at its service." (My emphasis. MS.)

That is precisely what we would not consent to do! We refused to join in the enthusiastic "hailing" of organic unity which was (and is) helping to deafen the French proletariat to the call of its class interests. We refused to join in putting the Bolsheviks "at the service" of this reactionary conspiracy of Blum-Thorez bureaucracy. If they are so inclined, will Weber, Abern, Glotzer, Spector et al., tell us if they still hold to the position they voted for in August and September?

But, it will be said, the Weberites considered the move for organic unity progressive only because the Bolshevik-Leninists would be inside it fighting for a revolutionary Marxian program for this unity. Unfortunately, they do not even have this straw to grab hold of. Let us read the famous Abern motion, to be found in the same CLA Internal Bulletin, which endorsed the Weber exposition of the question and proceeded to enlarge upon it:

"Should a merger of organic unity between the Stalinist and Socialist parties of France emerge as a result of the development of the present united front, it is Comrade Swabeck's conception (cf. his statement) that it must be the deliberate object of the French LC to engineer a split in this merged party in order thereby to achieve the new communist party of France, in case it should gain admittance into the French SP as a bloc, is wholly false. (Oh scornfully Swabeck! MS.) He thereby conceives our object in endeavoring to join the French SP in the narrowest sense of a maneuver and fails to realize properly the gigantic objective factors which impel a move in this direction, and further fails to realize the revolutionary potentialities for the Left Opposition in the event of such an organic unity....It must be recognized that despite Stalinism and SP, the achievement of organic unity, after a period of united front action, between the SP and CP, even if temporarily excluding the Bolshevik-Leninists, would be a progressive step at this stage, representing the healthy will of the masses for revolutionary unity."

Do Weber-Abern-Glotzer-Spector, who voted for the Abern statement too, still

support this standpoint? Do they still think that this reactionary conspiracy of the two old bureaucracies, this organic unity of social patriotism, with the Marxists expelled, is a progressive step? Do they still think that now, with our youth and party comrades expelled by Blum-Cachin, the "organic unity" would represent the "healthy will of the masses for revolutionary unity" (what sticky, liberal sentimentalism!)?

Do they still agree with the Gletzer amendment made in the name of their faction to the Cannon-Shachtman resolution on the French situation -- made as late as December 1934: "The striving of our French League to bring about the regroupment of the militant workers in both parties as well as those outside these parties in a single revolutionary party through the gateway of 'organic unity' is a progressive step in the direction of the creation of the French party of the Fourth International"?

Do the most recent events in France confirm their prognoses and proposals, or ours? Do they still "hail" organic unity? Do they still put themselves "at its service"? Do they still propose to support as a progressive step the idea of forming the new party in France "through the gateway of 'organic unity'"? Or is it necessary, as we declared a year and a half ago, to denounce the reactionary conspiracy of "organic unity", as such, for what it is and "to emphasize instead unity on a revolutionary program and in a revolutionary party"?

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To the extent, therefore, that "organic unity" was an "issue" in the CLA, the Weberites were, to put it with restraint, hopelessly muddled. But the plain truth of the matter is that it never was a real issue in the CLA. It was picked up and inflated by the Weberites in order to give them a "plank" for their platform of differences with us, in order to give them an ostensible basis for a separate faction. And conclusive evidence of how little the Weberites were really interested in the question one way or the other is supplied by this fact: At the pre-convention membership meeting in New York where resolutions were being voted on, Weber offered to withdraw entirely from the floor his resolution in favor of "organic unity" if we would consent to withdraw from our resolution the paragraph on the same subject quoted above in the instructions to delegate Cannon! Weber's resolution had served its purpose; he had formed his ludicrous "organic unity" faction on the basis of it and gotten a quota of delegates from New York in the proportional representation provided for by the N.C. voting regulations.

As is the rule with us, we had a position, we argued for it, we put it to a vote and were not prepared to dump it down the drain just because Weber, whose position had been battered to bits in the discussion, was ready to "forget all about it". How serious shall we say a politician is who, after fighting for three months in defense of a special position which distinguishes him from all others in the organization, ends up at the decisive moment, when positions are to be adopted (i.e., at the final voting), with a proposal to let the whole matter drop? And to let drop a matter which, in the course of the whole year of 1934, constituted the one and only point of political difference, anywhere recorded in the organization between the Weberites and ourselves!

Anywhere recorded in the organization, we repeat. For, though the Weberites differed with us in their whole conception of the fusion, as we have showed, and were wrong on the question, they nevertheless recorded themselves finally in endorsement of our "rain line". Their only recorded political difference with us was a "organic unity" and this constituted the ostensible political basis for organizing their faction. What the real basis for the faction was, and what led it ever deeper into the morass of clique politics and combinationism, we shall see presently. For the moment, however, let us proceed to the CLA convention itself.

BLOCS AND BLOCS: WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CLA CONVENTION

The division at the CLA convention was as follows: The Oehlerites had 10 regularly elected delegates, organized long before the convention as a tight faction. The Weberites, also with a faction of long standing, had 13 delegates. National Committee supporters amounted to 17. Two unaffiliated delegates completed the total of 43 voting delegates. In their efforts to put us in a minority without ourselves taking the responsibilities of a majority (that would be too much of a burden for people who must travel light!), the Weberites overreached themselves.

The small Davenport branch, which had been organized on the twin slogans -- "Up with organic unity! Down with Cannon!" -- carved a niche for itself in communist history by sending a blank credential to be filled in by the Weber caucus! When this -- shall we say, unusual? -- procedure was challenged, the caucus leaders hastily wired Davenport which promptly wired back that what the blank space was supposed to represent was the Weberite, Comrade Ruskin -- a not entirely groundless supposition. Carried away though they were by their position as a majority in combination with the Oehlerites and against us, the Weberites nevertheless bethought themselves that this was too raw and they themselves withdraw the Davenport credential. The same held true of another "delegate", Papcun, a young militant whom they rendered virtually useless to the movement by systematically poisoning him with their methods and practices. Papcun came to the convention with a forged credential. When it was exposed by us, the Weberites, Papcun included, shamefacedly withdrew his credential and declined to contest our challenge of his right to vote. The control commission elected to look into Papcun's action reported the "decision of the commission that Comrade Papcun be censured for credential irregularity". For that proposal, too, the Weberites were compelled to vote, as did every other delegate to the convention. In revenge for our communist action on their two fraudulent delegates -- actions they were compelled to support -- they joined with the Oehlerites to unseat a delegate regularly credentialled by the San Francisco branch, who had committed the crime, not of forging a credential, but of supporting the N.C.I.

This disgraceful overture to the convention had its counterpart at the final session in an episode which, while not edifying, throws a glaring, merciless light on those unprincipled combinationist practices that have characterized the course of the Weber caucus ever since that time.

Not being anarchists, bohemiens, sewing circle habitues or syndicalists, we lay great store by the question of leadership. Without a leadership, the revolutionary movement is headless. With a bad leadership, it is in just as fatal a position. A revolutionary leadership is not created overnight. It is constituted in the course of years; it grows and learns and is tested in the course of political struggles -- on the arena of its own organization and in the broader theater of the class struggle. In an even higher sense than the cadre as a whole, the leadership is the product of a selection made jointly by events in general and in particular by those it leads. While the Leninist conception provides for the steady introduction into the leadership of new and fresh elements and the sloughing off of decayed elements from the leadership -- contrary to the American syndicalist who rules that a man can occupy an official position for only one term, Lenin stresses the idea of the continuity of leadership, so that it may become trained and experienced in the tremendous and exceedingly difficult task of leading the movement of the proletarian revolution.

The Lenin view has nothing but scorn for amateurish prejudices and "democratic" panderings to "rank and file-ism" or for the hypocritical coyness of those "reluctant" and "modest" gentry who are eager to be coaxed into the responsibilities of leadership. It has proper respect for those who insist on the Bolshevik idea of

leadership, who, having a firm political line, fight for this line and for a leadership qualified to execute it. The Stalinist practice of "making" a leader overnight has nothing in common with Lenin. Neither has the Stalinist practice of "unmaking" leaders overnight. Although, it should be added, the kind of "leaders" produced in that school are, after all, just as easily unmade as they are made.

A party without a firm majority in its leadership, following a consistent political course, especially in a situation where there are clearly two basically different lines counterposed to each other in the organization, is a ship without sail or rudder, torn and tossed about by every wind that strikes it. The same holds true of the highest authority of a party -- its national convention. It is the shortest irresponsibility to hold a convention of the revolutionary organization at a time when it must decide upon basic questions of far-reaching significance and when two irreconcilable views on these questions exist in the convention, without seeking to establish a firm majority for one basic view as against the other. Unless this is done, you court the risk of having the questions involved settled by chance, by accidental combinations.

The problem of giving direction to a convention does not end, naturally, with the adoption of formal resolutions; it ends with the selection of a leadership standing on those resolutions and qualified to execute them in life. The CLA convention was faced with two questions of vital importance, on both of which two distinctly different tendencies were manifested. One question (the so-called "French turn") involved either the organizational and political rupture of our League with the world movement for the Fourth International (specifically, the ICL), or continued political solidarity with it. The other question (fusion with the AWP) involved either laying the ground for a speedy disruption of the fusion, of the new party, or the consummation of the fusion on a proper and healthy basis. In both cases, the Oehler faction represented the former tendency, and we the latter.

Faced with the anomaly of this political situation and a division of the delegates to the convention which did not correspond to it organizationally, it was the duty of the NC to make efforts to solve the difficulty. At the very outset of the convention, therefore, we called a private conference with the entire Chicago delegation and proposed to them the formation of a political bloc which would establish a majority in the convention, thereby giving it the indispensable political direction, and which would jointly select the new leadership to represent the CLA contingent in the fused party. Our opinion of the unprincipled origin and conduct of the Weberites did not, it goes without saying, alter the following facts: 1) they represented a measurable group of delegates in the convention and consequently among the membership, whose existence had to be taken into consideration; 2) they asserted their political solidarity with the NC on the two decisive political questions before the CLA. These objective facts entirely warranted the formation of the bloc which we proposed, because of the simple reason that it would be principled. Whatever minor differences might exist between the two component parts of the bloc, and especially organizational differences, could and should be decided within the bloc which had a common basis in principled agreement.

"It was revealed in the discussion at the CLA convention that the Cannon group had proposed a bloc to Oehler in order to fight the Weber group with whom they were in supposed political agreement," writes Gletzer in his November 20, 1935 letter to the IS of the ICL.

If this were the case, then our proposal to the Chicago Weberites would indeed stand exposed as a shabby, unprincipled maneuver on our part to establish a majority at any cost and with any body. But Gletzer's assertion is simply -- to use a long word where a shorter one would sound better -- a falsehood and a deliberate

one. Like every delegate and visitor to our convention, Glotzer knows that while the highly "principled" Cahlerite, J. Gerion, and one or two others, did approach Cannon and Shachtman with the proposal to form a bloc for the purpose of keeping Weber off the new National Committee, Cannon and Shachtman and their whole group promptly and categorically rejected any idea of any sort of bloc with a faction with whom they were in absolutely no principled solidarity whatsoever. If the fantastic bloc about which Glotzer speaks did not come into existence, it was not because of the reluctance of the Cahlerites -- quite the contrary! -- but because of our unhesitating rejection of it. What purpose does Glotzer think to serve with this stupid invention? The purpose of muddying things up and of covering up the actual, verifiable facts about what took place.

Now, what was the reaction of the Chicago statesmen to our proposal for a bloc? They rejected it out of hand! Because they disagreed with our main political line on the main political questions? No, as has already been shown by documents, they endorsed it. Because they disagreed with the continuation of the same majority in the leadership, and proposed that a new majority, a new leadership should be elected? No, not even that! Difficult as it is to believe about these people who, both then and now, inveigh so violently against the "Cannon-Shachtman" leadership", they not only insisted that the sub-committee of Cannon and Shachtman should continue with the final official negotiations with the AWP (without the slightest proposal to change the composition of this sub-committee, which, according to Gould, did such an "opportunistic" job of it), but they protested their firm intention to vote, at the end of our convention, for a new National Committee in which the old N.C.-majority (the same scoundrels, Cannon and Shachtman) would continue to have a majority. We thus have the following indisputable political facts -- not inventions, but facts:

- 1) The Weberites did not challenge our main line with regard to the fusion; on the contrary, they endorsed it.
- 2) The Weberites did not challenge our main line with regard to the "entry" in France; on the contrary, they endorsed it.
- 3) The Weberites did not even contest our leadership of the CLA: despite this sniping criticism and that one, they insisted that we continue to predominate in the leadership.

What would a Bolshevik politician conclude from these facts? If you intend to vote for a leadership to continue in office, if you have no intention of replacing that leadership with one of your own; if, in other words, despite minor criticism, you insist that a certain group continue to take the political and organizational responsibility for the party's leadership, it is your political duty to solidarize yourself politically with that group, with that leadership, and to defend it from the attacks of another group with which you are fundamentally in disagreement (in this case, the Cahler group). If you do not fight for the leadership yourself (and we insisted in our conference with them that if they do not support us, then they should themselves take over the responsibility of leadership), it is your political duty to make a bloc with that group and the leadership for which you are going to vote in order to establish a firm political majority in a convention where the relationship of forces threatens to have questions settled by chance. But we said this is what a Bolshevik politician would conclude. The Weberites came to an opposite conclusion.

An opposite conclusion because they were (as they still are) animated not by political and principled considerations, but by pottifogging personal antipathies, by the yearning to revenge old, outlived, unimportant scores, by fear of tying themselves down politically in such a way as to interfere with their desire to fish around for unprincipled combinations in every direction.

The bloc with us was clearly indicated by the situation: by political agreement, by agreement on decisive leadership, and by the anomalous relationship of forces at the convention. But the Weberites would not take the step that was clearly indicated. They were interested in "taking a crack" at the outgoing NC-majority for its "organizational methods" and its "delinquencies", and in getting J. Weber elected to the incoming NC.

So far as the latter point was concerned, we stood firmly opposed to putting Weber on the NC for the two good reasons that (1) in the preceding six months in particular he had more than sufficiently demonstrated his political irresponsibility, lack of seriousness and balance and (2) we saw no reason why the convention should put a premium on the kind of clique politics which, especially to the New York comrades, Weber symbolized. That our opposition to Weber was not aimed to "disfranchise" a "political tendency", as some would try to claim, is evidenced by the fact that we proposed that Satir and Glotzer, or any two chosen from their ranks by the Chicago delegation, should be placed on the incoming NC; by the fact, further, that it was Shachtman who insisted that Glotzer stand as candidate for the NC when the latter sought to decline when nominated. (And, let it be added parenthetically for the benefit of those who have been victims of the Weber caucus lie factory story that we kept Abern off the NC, Abern had not only announced months before the convention that he would not accept on the next NC, but not all the efforts of his caucus colleagues at the convention could prevail upon him to take up the responsibilities devolving upon any NC member; he did not choose to run.)

So far as the first point is concerned, there were, beyond any dispute, more than enough grounds for complaint against the manner in which the outgoing NC of the CLA had functioned. It was far from a model of efficiency. But for members of the NC like Glotzer, Edwards, Abern and Spector to lead the "fight" against the "Cannon-Shachtman-Swabeck NC", was nothing more or less than brazen impudence. So far as the actual functioning of the old NC was concerned, it was confined exclusively to the three members whose "regime" the Weberites tried to make their target, with the possible addition of Cehler who at least took his share of the responsibility for the organizational work of the League and did not retire to his tent to sulk. The whole burden of the League's work, conducted under the greatest of handicaps, and the whole burden of the League's political line, fell upon the shoulders of the three comrades named.

If they did not discharge themselves of their tasks in an exemplary manner, they were nevertheless the only ones who did carry out the responsibilities of leadership: the work of administration, of editing the periodicals, of doing the writing, speaking and touring for the League, of representing it publicly and defending its line in the working class, of laying down the political line (and a correct one) of the League on the decisive questions facing it. And this was done under the "terrible regime" of the three comrades without the slightest assistance from Spector, who left his responsibilities in the Resident Committee to return to Canada; from Glotzer, who also left his responsibilities in the Resident Committee to return to Chicago; from Edwards who never came to New York, it is true, but who was systematically passive in the Chicago organization; from Abern, who absented himself from Committee meetings for months at a time and who took over the management of the theoretical organ only after he had literally been beseeched for months to take over some responsible post.

The whole Weberite attack on the "regime" was exploded into thin air when we presented our resolution on the organizational report of the NC. In this document, which we do not hesitate to call a model of revolutionary self-criticism, the actualities of the situation in the leadership were presented to the membership in so trenchant and incontrovertible a manner that, minority though our group was in the

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convention, the resolution was adopted by a majority vote. Not only for its intrinsic value, but because of the true and revealing picture it gives of the situation in the CLA leadership and ranks, we reproduce the full text of the resolution as an appendix to this document.

And now back to the question of the "blocs". We refused to make a bloc with the Cehlerites because we had no political agreement with them. The Weberites refused to make a bloc with us although they did have political agreement with us. But we do not imagine that their refusal was based on any opposition to blocs "as such". Just as we and Marxists in general argue that any bloc is good if it has a common political basis, even, as Trotsky once put it, a "bloc with a Sancho Panza" like Kamenev, so the Weberites argue that any bloc is good if it has a common basis of opposition to Cannon-Shachtman and their "organizational methods". So that, at the end of the convention, after having voted together with the Cehlerites on one organizational point after another, even to the extent of supporting Stamm's resolution on the NC organizational report, the Weberites finally consummated a formal bloc with the Cehlerites against us!

Time and again, the Weberites have of course sought to deny this fact, which we made so uncomfortable for them. When they do not deny it, they try to pass it off blandly as a trifle, as a matter of course, as something that causes them honest puzzlement when it is attacked. "It is also stated," writes Glotzer in the aforementioned letter to the IS, "that the Weber group made a bloc with the Cehler group at that time. The bloc consisted in this: Cehler's agreement to vote for Weber as a member of the NC and the rights of all viewpoints to be represented on the NC." So far as the second point in this unprincipled pact was concerned, there was never any ground for it for nobody challenged the right referred to. We had made adequate provisions in our NC slate for representation for both the Weber and Cehler groups. The basis for the bloc was simply a cheap horse-trade in which the Weberites pledged themselves to vote for Stamm on the NC in return for the Cehlerite pledge to vote for Weber on the NC.

This piece of unprincipled vote-swapping was officially endorsed by the two caucuses, and formally arranged by MacDonald, the Weberite fraternal delegate from Canada, who acted as intermediary in the negotiations for the bloc and who, in general, played, to put it bluntly, a shabby and not very glorious role in the whole miserable business. Just how putrid the deal really was may be seen from the CLA convention minutes, which we quote hereafter.

On the first vote, the following ten were declared elected to the National Committee: Cannon (42 votes; unanimous); Shachtman (42); Cehler (42); Skoglund (41); Swabeck (41); Dunne (40); Satir (39); Lewit (26); Sam Gordon (26); Stamm (26). Glotzer, Giganti and Weber, with 22 votes each, were tied for the eleventh place. What had happened? The 13 Weberites, loyal to the bargain, had joined with the 10 Cehlerites to elect Stamm. But the Cehlerites did not stay so loyal: one of their ten, out of spite against Weber, voted instead for Sam Gordon, thus electing him and...double-crossing the Cehlerite ally, Weber! The honest indignation of the Weberites knew no bounds. How could people be so dirty! The convention minutes then read:

"Chairman proposed that the three names (i.e., Glotzer, Giganti, Weber) be placed before the convention for voting. Comrade MacDonald of Canada objected to procedure, stated that it was clear that the results of the election did not represent the wishes of the majority (!) of the convention and proposed re-opening of nominations and elections...Proposal by Cehler that the Weber group should choose which of the three tied nominees should be a member of the N.C. Objection by Cannon -- proposal that the three should be voted on. Accepted by MacDonald...."



In the discussion that followed, lasting through the night, we hammered away so powerfully at this unprincipled bloc that the majority was finally broken! Yet, until then affiliated with the Weber group, could not stomach the deal; nor could Morgenstern, till that point a supporter of the Oehlerites; Weiss, another Weberite, finally decided to abstain. When the vote was finally cast, it stood: Glotzer 21, Weber 20, and 1 abstention. In the voting for the alternates, however, the shattered bloc rallied somewhat, with the result that Weberites and Oehlerites together made Basky the first alternate and Weber the second.

What was the political basis, the essence, and the lesson of the bloc? It should be emphasized that this must be understood not only in order to realize what happened at the CLA convention, which is of comparatively remote importance, but to realize the political character of the groupings now appearing before our second national convention.

1. The Oehlerites denounced the Weberites as representing the Right wing of the CLA; Oehler declared he had nothing at all in common, politically, with Weber; if anything, said Oehler, he had more in common with us, presumably because of our position on "organic unity" with which he agreed; finally, the Oehlerites had proposed to us a bloc against Weber.

2. The Weberites denounced the Oehlerites as representing ultra-Left sectarianism in the CLA; Weber declared, as he still does, we take it, that he had nothing at all in common, politically, with Oehler, and everything in common with us, except for the secondary point on "organic unity"; finally, the Weberites insisted that we retain the leadership of the organization.

Is it permissible, then, for the Right and the ultra-Left to form a bloc - Oh, not a very big one, of course; just a little organization bloc -- against, let us assume for a moment, the "Center"? In our opinion, and in the opinion of every Marxist who stands on principled grounds, it is impermissible! But it will be said -- and it was said in greater detail later on, in the WP -- they both had organizational differences with the "Center" and the bloc was "only" on an organizational question; they both disagreed with the "organizational methods" of Cannon-Shachtman; and that consideration justified the bloc. The argument is fundamentally reactionary. Let us see what the established Marxian view is on this question.

In 1928-1929, the Bukharinist Right wing broke with the Stalinist Center and started secret negotiations for a "little organizational" bloc with Left Oppositionist elements in order jointly to combat the detestable organizational methods of Stalin. Politically, the Right had much in common with Stalin and nothing in common with the Left; politically, the Left had much in common with Stalin (at that junction) and nothing in common with the Right; both Right and Left, however, had, or seemed to have, something in common "organizationally" against Stalin. Here is what Trotsky wrote at that time concerning the bloc proffered by Bukharin and Co.:

"Shall we make a bloc with the Right wing to revenge ourselves upon the Stalinists, for their rudeness, their disloyalty, their expulsions and abuse of loyal revolutionists, for Article 59, for the 'Wrangel officer'? No, we the principled Bolshevik-Leninists can never make a bloc with the Right wing against the Centrists. On the contrary, insofar as the Centrists fight the Right wing we support them, while criticizing their half-heartedness and putting forth our own line. Blocs between the Right and the Left have been made in other revolutions, but they have also ruined these revolutions." (Appeal to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern.)

And again, in his polemic shortly afterward against the leader of the German Left Opposition, Urbahns, who proposed a "little organizational bloc" with the

Right wing Brandlerites against the Stalinists, Trotsky wrote: "How can factional collaboration with the Right wing, who adopt an opposite principled position, bring the Left closer to the conquest of the party? It is clear that the only thing that could be produced here is an organizational combination which breaks into the principled position. A group could enter into such a combination only if it strives and hastens to adopt a place in the party which absolutely does not correspond to its ideological-political strength. (Note that well, Weber!) But this is the road to suicide and nothing else. I have more than once been forced to observe that political impatience becomes the source of opportunistic policy... The factional mechanics of the struggle must never stand above its principled content, even if only for a single hour."

Finally, writing about the case of Mill, who had also made a "little organizational bloc" -- just a temporary one! -- with a group in the French Left Opposition which he had defined as non-Marxist, against another group which, although he called it Marxist, was charged by him with having bad "organizational methods"; Mill, who logically concluded this political practice by passing over to the Stalinists -- Trotsky summarized the situation in a letter written October 13, 1932: "For Mill, principles are in general clearly of no importance; personal considerations, sympathies and antipathies, determine his political conduct to a greater degree than principles and ideas. The fact that Mill could propose a bloc with a man whom he had defined as non-Marxist against comrades whom he had held to be Marxists, showed clearly that Mill was politically and morally unreliable and that he was incapable of keeping his loyalty to the flag. If he betrayed on that day on a small scale, he was capable of betraying tomorrow on a larger scale. That was the conclusion which every revolutionist should have drawn then...."

Is it any wonder, therefore, that we who had been taught for years in the school of Lenin and Trotsky to shun and combat the kind of politics described so biting by the above quotations, should have fought so bitterly against the unprincipled Weber-Oehler bloc at the CLA convention? What was decisive with us was not the question of one more or one less "opponent" on the NC the majority of which was already conceded us. What was decisive was the necessity of smashing this conception of politics as soon as it showed its ugly head, of preventing such poison from entering the system of our organization, of educating the membership to detect unprincipled combinationism and clique maneuvers and of teaching it how to struggle against them, even on a small scale, so that when our revolutionists face such practices on a bigger scale in the class struggle, they will more effectively be able to deal them mortal blows.

One need not go to quotations from Trotsky. Picture a situation in a trade union which is led by a more or less "progressive" leadership which carries on reprehensible organizational machinations against the extreme Right as well as against the revolutionary Left wing of the union. Such situations have existed and do exist in this and other countries -- by the hundred. Each from his own (i.e., from opposite) principled standpoint fights against the bureaucratic progressive administration which, while progressive in comparison with the Right wing it has replaced, nevertheless resorts to bad "organizational methods" against both its opponents. (The Lovestone-Zimmerman administration of Local 22, striking at the extreme Right and at the proletarian Left at the same time, might serve as a good case in point.) Election time arrives. Neither the Right nor the Left is strong enough, by itself, to oust the administration. Is it conceivable for Marxists to agree under any conditions to an organizational bloc -- be it even for one or two more members of the two oppositions on the incoming executive board -- between the Left and the Right? For Marxists, no, no, no! The Stalinists have made such blocs and do make them today. But that's precisely why we denounce them as traitors to revolutionary principle.

We are not now even arguing whether or not Weber and Oehler were right in condemning our "organizational methods" of our "regime". We contend of course that they were wrong. But let us assume for a moment that there were ground for their condemnation of us. Even in that case, the bloc was absolutely impermissible. The Weberites, had they been principled politicians, would have had to say: The organizational methods and regime of Cannon and Shachtman are indubitably bad. Furthermore, by their false position on "organic unity" they are able to fight the Oehlerites only half-heartedly and half-successfully. Yet, on the decisive political questions, we agree with the main line of C-S, and with the main line of their fight against the ultra-Left sectarians, international splitters, the anti-Trotskyists, that is, the Oehlerites. We must therefore ally ourselves at every point with the NC which is fighting the menace of Oehlerism; if it is weak, we must strengthen it; under no circumstances, however, will we give the Oehlerites the slightest bit of comfort, either political or organizational. Our organizational differences with the NC-majority we will settle -- but within the sphere of our principled agreement with it, in our own way, and without allying ourselves for this purpose with those elements with whom we have nothing at all in common politically, with whom we are irreconcilable in principle.

Had this been the Weberite attitude, had they not been animated above all by the contemptible urge to get another vote on the NC even if they had to pay for it by voting for an opponent in principle (and ending by being double-crossed!), their line might have been clear and would not have the stigma of unprincipledness branded upon it. They would have helped educate the party and youth comrades, and their own faction members to boot; they would have helped prepare the CLA comrades for the eventuality of a struggle against the anti-Trotskyists in the new party instead of preparing them to serve as shield-bearers for this reactionary tendency. They might have served as a progressive factor; they served instead as a retrogressive one, as an obstacle to the advance of the movement, as the mud in every clear stream.

Yet, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. If the Weberites, by their shameful conduct at the CLA convention, contributed nothing positive to the movement, they at least created a situation which afforded us the concrete opportunity of drawing a living contrast between Marxian politics and unprincipled combinationism, between admissible blocs and inadmissible blocs, between revolutionary principle and clique intrigues. It is this contrast which facilitated the solution of the internal problem with which we were soon to be faced inside the united party.

#### THE WORKERS PARTY UP TO THE JUNE PLENUM

The building of an effective political party, especially a revolutionary Marxian party, is hardly the simplest thing in the world, and unfortunately there are no cut-and-dried universal formulae which can be applied to every situation at every time. What we have to go by are the general experiences of the revolutionary movement; what we can always guide ourselves by is the good rule: base yourselves always on the tested and unassailable principles of Marxism and after making a political analysis of each concrete situation, act politically; avoid rigid formalism, subjective considerations, personal combinations, old prejudices; allow for the aid which time and corroborating events will always bring to your political line. But above all, have a political line, based upon a political analysis of the situation or problem which is before you concretely.

With these general rules for building the party, we have been able to see more than a day ahead and to be prepared in advance accordingly. That too is why our organizational methods, so violently criticized by all our inner-party opponents, were not the product of caprice, of accident, of episodic contingency, but, on the contrary, the logical, thought-out product of a consistent political line.