

BULLETIN  
OF THE  
WORKERS PARTY

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National Secretary,  
Socialist Workers Party.  
( Reply to the Resolution of the  
National Plenum of the Socialist  
Workers Party.) -----

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National Secretary,  
Workers Party.

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October 29, 1945

James P. Cannon, National Secretary,  
Socialist Workers Party,  
116 University Place,  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrade:

Our Political Committee has discussed the resolution adopted by the Plenum of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party on the question of unity. Before making a definitive reply to this resolution, we wish to afford the S.W.P. the opportunity to make clear to us its position on a number of points. They relate to matters on which the resolution is either ambiguous or erroneously motivated, or which it does not deal with at all.

Your resolution states that "Both parties acknowledge that the programmatic differences which led to the 1940 split have not been moderated but that, on the contrary, some of them have been deepened and new important points of divergence have developed in the interim." So far as any acknowledgment on the part of our delegation to the preliminary discussions is concerned, this statement is erroneous, at least in part. The "programmatic differences which led to the 1940 split" were confined to the question of the "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" in the war. Our delegation did not and could not acknowledge that the difference on this question has not moderated but deepened. On the contrary, the first resolution on unity adopted by our National Committee took "note of the fact that the S.W.P. itself has officially taken the view that the slogan of 'unconditional defense of the Soviet Union' does not, at the present time, occupy the prominent position it was given at the beginning of the war, that it has receded into the background." The only political difference involved in the 1940 split was the one over unconditional defense of Russia. If there were other, and programmatic, differences, they have not yet been brought to our attention. It is true that since the split other differences have developed between the two organizations. It is also true that on many questions these differences have deepened. We have not sought to conceal this fact or its importance. We emphasize at all times our attachment to our point of view. What we find it necessary to insist upon, however, is that these differences, deep as they are, are compatible with membership in a revolutionary Marxist party, as contrasted with a party based on the concept of monolithism.

Your resolution refers also to "This proposed unity without programmatic agreement." If this refers, as it seems to do, to our proposal for unity, the statement is erroneous. We have indeed mentioned in other documents our "important differences with the S.W.P. on a number of political and theoretical questions." If, nevertheless, we declared that unity is both desirable and possible, it was, as stated in our letter to you on September 15, because of the fact that on this plane, the plane of basic program and principle, the two parties are close enough in their positions to require and justify immediate unification, on grounds similar to those which made their membership in one party possible and desirable in the period prior to the split." If it is your view now that there is no

programmatic agreement between the two parties, or no programmatic agreement worthy of significant consideration, an explicit statement would contribute to the necessary clarification.

Your resolution states further that "This proposed unity without programmatic agreement, in fact with acknowledged disagreements between the two tendencies, has no precedent, so far as we know, in the history of the International Marxist movement." This statement is also erroneous. Our delegation stated that it was hard to recall an example of a similar unification between divergent tendencies<sup>s</sup> in the International Trotskyist movement. This is so, largely because the Trotskyist movement was for so long a faction, formally or in fact, of what it considered the International Marxist movement. However, this faction (tendency) repeatedly proposed unity with the then International Marxist movement (Comintern), which meant its unification with the Stalinist faction, that is, a tendency with which it had far less in common in any field than exists in common between the S.W.P. and the W.P. today. Furthermore, the International Marxist movement is much older than the modern Trotskyist movement. If the S.W.P. is concerned with precedent, the more than a hundred-year-old history of the International Marxist movement offers any number of precedents of good and healthy unifications between groups and tendencies with greater divergences than exist between ours.

Your resolution concludes with the decision "To reject any united front for propaganda." This statement is erroneous, because it is misleading. It gives the impression that such united fronts have been proposed by the Workers Party. You must be aware of the fact that this is not the case. As we recall them, not one of our proposals for united action between the two parties could be placed in the category of united fronts for propaganda. All of them dealt with proposals for united action in different fields of the class struggle. We proposed, for example, united action in the Minneapolis defense case; in the fight against Fascism (anti-Smith campaign); in the trade unions, on such questions as all progressive unionists, let alone revolutionary Marxists, can and do unite on; in the New York election campaign. We reiterate our point of view on such practical agreements whether or not unity between the two organizations is achieved.

A more important question is the question of unity itself. In our letter to you, dated October 4, we made several specific requests of your Plenum.. Except perhaps for the last point, that dealing with practical collaboration, we do not find in your resolution a specific and precise reply.

We asked the Plenum to take steps to terminate the situation where your delegation "cannot and does not make any proposals of its own on the question of unity, where it cannot express itself definitely on proposals made by us, and where it is even unable to declare that the SWP has decided in favor or in opposition to unity itself."

Your resolution replies with a vigorous attack upon our party. That is of course its right. The attack can and will be answered in due course and in such a way as to promote clarity and understanding of the differences between the two tendencies.

But the resolution does not in any way inform us, or any other reader, of the position of the S.W.P. on the most important questions relating to unity, or even inform us as to whether or not such a position has been taken.

Is the S.W.P. now in favor of unity, or opposed to it? In the preliminary discussions, we were informed by the S.W.P. delegation that the Plenum of its National Committee was convoked for the purpose of giving an answer to precisely this question; in fact, that the date of your Plenum had been advanced to give the earliest consideration to this question. We do not find the answer in the resolution. At least, it is nowhere stated explicitly. We are therefore obliged to conclude that the S.W.P. has rejected the proposal for unity, either as put forth by ourselves, by the minority group in the S.W.P., or by anyone else, and to act on this conclusion unless you indicate to us that we are in error.

Is the S.W.P. now in a position to act on the concrete proposals made by us on the question of unity? In the preliminary discussions, your delegation pointed out that it was not authorized to do so until its National Committee met and arrived at decisions. We find no answer in the Plenum resolution to our proposals.

Our delegation stated our point of view as to the basis for the unification. Summed up in one sentence, it is this; Sufficient programmatic agreement actually exists between the two given organizations to warrant and make possible unity, and the differences that actually exist are compatible with membership in a single revolutionary Party. On this basic question, your resolution takes no position except to say that it "cannot be determined by any abstract rule, it can only be answered concretely." We remind you that the question was not put by us abstractly, but quite concretely. The nature and views of the two organizations are well-known to both, and could not be more concrete. Their range of agreement is as well-known and as concrete as their range of differences. Our proposals as to the steps to be taken for effecting the unity, are not general, but specific - concrete. There seems to us to be no sound reason for failing to take a concrete position.

Our delegation states, as your resolutions puts it quite exactly, "That they would insist on the right to publish their own discussion bulletin under their own control." We asked that your Plenum take a position on this proposal. Your delegation indicated that this is what its Plenum would do. Your resolution, however, merely records our statement, but does not say if the S.W.P. accepts or rejects our proposal.

Your delegation at the preliminary discussions was not in a position to make counter-proposals, or proposals of any kind, until the meeting of its Plenum. In the resolution adopted by the Plenum, we find only the proposal "to authorize the Political Committee to prepare and carry through a thorough discussion and clarification of the theoretical, political and organizational issues in dispute, and fix the position of the party precisely on every point in preparation for the consideration and action of the next party convention." The resolution also states that "all the differences between the two parties (should be) proved to the depth so that not the slightest ambiguity remains."

We for our part welcome any discussion of the differences between the two tendencies and are prepared to participate in it to the best of our ability so that the positions are precisely fixed and all ambiguity eliminated. But ambiguity on the question of the unification itself must also be eliminated.

However, your resolution does not give any indication of how the discussion

is to be carried on, or what its purpose is with reference to the unification of the two groups.

It is possible that not all the members of the two parties are acquainted with the full nature and the full scope of the differences. A discussion will help acquaint them. But the leadership of the two parties is quite well aware of the nature, scope and depth of these differences. It has expressed itself on them repeatedly and in public. This was also established "formally", so to speak in the preliminary discussions. The head of the S.W.P. delegation observed, and rightly, in our view, that for the present period the differences are not only known but "frozen". The question we raised then, and now, was simply this: Knowing the nature and scope of the differences as it does, and knowing also that for the present period these differences are "frozen", does the leadership of the S.W.P. consider that unity is possible and desirable? Does it consider that the differences are compatible within one revolutionary party? Your resolution, which was adopted, we note, by the leadership of the Party, fails to give an answer to these questions. The same holds true, we note also, of the question asked with regard to the position of the S.W.P. on the right of a minority in a revolutionary Marxist party to issue a bulletin of its own tendency inside the party.

We agreed with what you wrote in your letter of August 28, that "the question of unification must be discussed with complete frankness and seriousness." You will understand from what we have written above that we find your resolution erroneously motivated, in part, and in other parts ambiguous or silent on what we consider the most important questions. We have before us the statement issued at your Plenum by the minority group in the S.W.P. on the resolution adopted by the Plenum. It declares: "The resolution is designed to prevent unity." We do not wish to agree with this conclusion. That is why, before we arrive at a definitive conclusion of our own, we wish to have from you a reply to the questions we have raised in this letter, and elsewhere, and which your resolution either deals with unclearly or fails to deal with at all.

Upon receipt and discussion of your reply, our Committee will be better able to express its opinion in detail and to make any further proposals it may have. In this connection, we ask you to consider now the matter which has thus far not been dealt with in our discussion, namely, the matter of informing all the other groups of the Fourth International about the developments in the unity question in the United States, and of the contribution to solving this question that they are called upon to make.

Fraternally yours,

MS/CW

Max Shachtman, National Sec'y  
Workers Party