

9/28/47

Dear Natalia:

I return to your letter of August which I heretofore merely acknowledged. The accusations in your letter evidently stem from lack of information, so let me clear that question up first.

Of course, Natalia, it would be unprincipled to give up one's program for an episodic or real appearance at the world congress. But who gave up his program? Surely, not the tendency with which I am associated. Since our departure from the WP, we have published, besides a weekly Internal Bulletin, the following: (1) "The Economist Tendency in the Fourth" by Ria Stone, which will be published by La Quatrieme in the next issue; (2) reprinted the ~~XXXXX~~ previous articles by Johnson and myself on the Russian Question, with a new Introduction called, "World Perspectives and the Russian Question"; (3) "The Balance Sheet of Trotskyism in the United States, 1940-47", which, although its major burden is necessarily against the revisionism of the type of the WP, includes also our criticisms of the SWP; and (4) our major document for presentation to the WC, "The Invading Socialist Society", which has as its major burden the attack of the official position of the Fourth on the Russian Question. You will see from it that we do not spare the suicidal position of the Fourth either in content or even in political form. Moreover, that document takes up not merely the Russian Question, but the Transitional Program and the Tasks of the Fourth. Here, although we criticize Munis in what we consider his sectarian approach to the slogan of SP-CP-CGT, we align ourselves clearly with him in his conception of the self-mobilization of the masses and world revolutionary perspectives.

At the same time we did not limit ourselves only to publications of our polemical articles, but stressed the fact that what is of greatest importance, is a positive approach to the building of mass revolutionary parties. In America we made our contribution in this sphere back in 1944 with our article "Education, Propaganda, Agitation" (which we have reprinted, again in 1946 with our American Resolution (including the Negro Resolution) and the Building of the Revolutionary Party, and finally now with a rounded philosophic conception of the role of the American proletariat, which is based on a study by a worker of the life of the workers, "The American Worker." In that regard we naturally welcomed the American Resolution of the SWP and the speech of Cannon which clearly posed the question of the perspectives of the American Revolution in a positive manner, and in a manner in which we can subscribe, while the WP had produced the most opportunist and Menshevik resolution on the question that had ever been presented by a Trotskyist party.

Let me now take up another weakness of your letter: your subjective appreciation of the question of our leaving the WP. You say that it hurt unity as much as Goldman's leaving the SWP. But you forget (1) Goldman had no political platform. He did not disagree with the official position of degenerated workers statism of the SWP, which organization he was leaving; and he did not agree with the position of Bureaucratic Collectivism of the WP, an organization he was joining. He did not even pose the question of the perspectives for the American revolutionary party. He left merely on an organizational question, which is exactly what was unprincipled about the 1940 split which Trotsky so correctly condemned. (2) Goldman before the convention of his party and before exhausting the possibilities for International's intervention on unity question.

On the other hand, the Johnson-Forest Tendency, although

it found that it had principled disagreements with the WP on every fundamental problem facing the 1946 convention, we still decided to remain within the WP on the ground that as a prerequisite to building the mass revolutionary party in the US, it was necessary to unite the two Trotskyist parties. We never viewed unity in organizational terms, but within context of the objective situation on a national and international scale. We refused to split from the WP and made our contribution to seeing that unity pact was signed between the two organizations. With that our obligation was discharged. We should, as politicians, then have turned to the balance sheet, which we had said at the 1946 convention, must be drawn of the evolution of the WP. Now, I admit that here we did not do so, but rather acted subjectively, and said we would be willing to trail behind Shachtman, with whose political positions we had nothing in common and against whose "unique contributions" we had in fact been waging a ceaseless struggle, so that nothing at all would mar the actual unification. But the series of incidents which occurred after unity was signed pulled us sharply up, making it necessary to discharge the debt to our political past.

What happened after the unity pact? Firstly, it became evident that the unanimity with which the leadership voted for unity when the Goldman-Morrow Minority first proposed it in the SWP, was broken now that unity was actually in the offing; and that part of the right wing now considered unity wrong and undesirable for the future development of "the unique contributions to Marxism" the WP had made on the National Question, on Bureaucratic Collectivism, on the "All-Inclusive" Revolutionary Party (everybody quietly forgetting the equal contribution to monolithism made by Shachtman, his only really original contribution, on the question of the "cadre"). Secondly, to preserve its distinct identity, the WP leadership thought nothing of launching an unbridled campaign for "honesty", which honestly included the very political designation of liar of everybody from Cannon to the general secretary of the International, and of course not forgetting their own "enemy", the Johnsonites. Thirdly, the unloosening of all forces against the Johnsonites, including unityites and anti-unityites. Now, the series of provocations by the WP did not mean that the SWP had to react in so violent a manner as it did (and you will see that we criticize the SWP for it and for other positions on unity in our Balance Sheet). But it did also mean that for us to trail behind Shachtman who was helping Goldman shout that "Johnson does not belong in our party" would be as unpolitical a gesture as politicians could make. We thereupon called a national conference of our tendency, and after a thorough discussion of all aspects of the question, we decided to ask for a transfer of membership from the WP to the SWP. I might also add that this was motivated not only by national considerations, but international ones. We had long felt that we should throw our weight to the side of the International in its fight against centrifugal tendencies.

Does all this mean that we have given up the fight for unity? Not at all. (I am asking J whom I sent copy of my speech before the IEC on this question to send you the copy.) But we did not feel we could any longer influence the situation in the WP; that this petty bourgeois opposition needed to be disciplined in a ~~xxx~~ wider arena than that which the tendency could offer. At the same time we wished to do our talking to the official ranks of the Fourth, and not waste ourselves in futile discussions with the WP. This does not mean giving up a program, but presenting it and fighting for it, just as it is necessary to fight positively in the class struggle itself.

to make that the principled question. Does this mean we "approved" the alleged bureaucracy of the SWP? No, we have had our fill of putting organizational questions above politics, and seen what it has led the WP to; we have subordinated the question of organization to politics, however, not only in SWP, or "Cannonism" to which we are supposed to have "capitulated to"; but also the WP. The WP makes a great stir on the question, and takes advantage of our "capitulation" to Shachtmanism in not having previously revealed: (1) that it took three years for the WP to publish my study on the Russian question; (2) that it threatened Johnson with expulsion if his attack on the IKD's thesis of historical retrogression were not modified; (3) that, although we represented one-fifth of the WP membership at the 1946 convention, not only were we not given 3 out of a NC of 15, but we were even refused the two we asked for, and that Shachtman had the further gall, to criticize the choice of myself ~~as NC alternate~~ (instead of Allen who had not functioned with our faction) as NC alternate. We never revealed this. Why? Because the political line of the WP is what we fight, and the danger of the theory of the "third alternative" is far more vicious than any lack of democracy, which can be overcome in the process of fighting for a revolutionary policy in a serious and principled manner.

You say we did not help your fight for democratizing the world congress, but rather helped Cannon's hand. But, Natalia, your document and Munis's was discussed at the IEC and unanimously rejected not because they feared democratizing the congress, but because, among other things, it was based on completely inaccurate information on the actual strength of the various parties, etc. etc. But even if you were entirely correct, surely you will agree with me, that not the procedure for calling the congress, but the political issues facing the congress, are of primary importance.

In this regard, let me return to the question of Russia once again. You say we must be revolutionary defeatists. Absolutely correct. But revolutionary defeatism means not only defeatism against Russia, but revolutionary perspectives for the world revolution. Doesn't this bring you into primary contradiction with your own position, then, to speak merely of defeatism without putting the major stress on the revolutionary perspective? The latter is the primary division in the International, as it always has been in all serious disputes in the revolutionary movement. It was Trotsky who, in arguing against the theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism as a theory of "the profoundest pessimism" stressed best what is the very foundation for the elaboration of any revolutionary policy, when he said: "In the years of darkest reaction (1907-1917) we took as our starting point those revolutionary possibilities which were revealed by the Russian proletariat in 1905. In the years of world reaction we must proceed from those possibilities which the Russian proletariat revealed in 1917. The Fourth International did not by accident call itself the world party of socialist revolution." Now, the defeatism of the WP wishes to revise the entire concept of our epoch within the context of the defeat of the Russian revolution, or rather its degeneration. We have fought instead to revise the concept of workers statism (and hence defensisms) within the content of the Leninist-Trotskyist concept of world revolution. We have said to Shachtman's flirtations for an indiscriminate bloc of defeatists: We are not exchanging Russian defeatism for "critical support to Mickolaczyk."

Now, perhaps, I am too much influenced by the American experience. All right, let me give you an example in the French party. The Guerin tendency were kind enough to invite me to address it. As you know, they are not only defeatists but correctly characterize Russia as state capitalist. When we spoke negatively, then, of Russia and defeatism, we were in complete

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accord. But the minute we came to speak of positive revolutionary perspectives, we were at opposite poles. Sophie was present. I believe she agreed with me that the paralysis of the French party is due to such a lack of perspective. What would then be gained even if defeatists were substituted for defensists, ~~since~~ since once they came to power, the question of revolutionary perspective would again become paramount and its lack would paralyze the party. The same thing is true of the International as a whole. We are and will continue to exert all efforts to break the suicidal policy of the International on the Russian Question. But we consider it unprincipled to build a defeatist bloc without at the same time inquiring into its revolutionary perspectives. It is in this spirit that we wrote the article in our Internal Bulletin, on the question of blocs, "Who Will Lead Whom Where?"

This letter has grown too long, but still I wish to ~~add~~ say one more word on the question of democracy. I was present at the international discussions held in August. The Russian Question took up 4 out of the 9 days; I had not only the same time as the reporter to present my position, but had more time since I was given extra time to answer questions and all questions were directed at me. I was present at the IEC sessions; it did not suffer from lack of democracy. So far as I can judge the European parties there is full freedom of discussion, and any lack of publications is due more to lack of finances than it is to bureaucratism. I do not intend to blind myself to any bureaucratism. But here too I wish to follow the example of Trotsky who offered Burnham a "bloc" to fight any manifestations of bureaucratism, but demanded, one, an unequivocal position on the political issues, including the basic fundamentals of Marxian dialectics; and, two, a unified revolutionary party. The primary task for all the parties of the Fourth International is to turn to mass work, to transform our groups into mass revolutionary parties. In that task, they need political clarity and organizational strength. Let us put first things first, and help them revise their wrong concepts of Russia, and do so from within the Fourth.

The other questions I shall leave for another time. Perhaps I shall come down to see; I would love to, you know; perhaps it will be possible to take my New Year's holiday in Mexico and we can once again proceed to a holiday in Veracruz.

How are you feeling physically? You said not a word. Do let me know. How is Munis? Will he still be there if I ~~can~~ do succeed in getting down to Mexico January? How is Clara? Do remember me to all of them, and also to the Mexican comrades.

*W. J. W. 100 5/27*

I am returning to the States the end of October. So please write me to the old address.