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DEVOTED TO THE THEORY OF MARXISM

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Series of Articles

C O N T E N T

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in the Socialist Party

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LESSONS ON CENTRISM

The September issue of the Socialist Appeal contains a series of articles by the Cannon-Goldman Trotsky faction of the Socialist Party which reveals the typical hodge-podge centrist position of these blacksliders from revolutionary Marxism. Centrism is able to criticize Reformism from the left, presenting a non-Marxian position clothed in Marxian phraseology. The typical method of centrism is to deal with several Marxian concepts and errors of omission leave out the DECISIVE factors of the question under consideration, or present in one article both the Marxian position and the non-Marxian position. A whole series of paragraphs presenting Marxian concepts will have the heart cut out by throwing in a sentence, clause, or paragraph, which states the opposite.

The outstanding example in the September issues of the Socialist Appeal is the article by Trotsky on, "The Lessons of Spain". The article correctly criticizes the Peoples Front, certain aspects of the question of the workers independent control of the armed forces and the fact that the defense of the Republic is a defense of capitalism.

But the article forgot to mention one word about the ROAD TO POWER for the Spanish workers. One cannot deal with the lessons of Spain and leave this out. The article forgot to mention one word about the ROLE OF THE PARTY. One cannot speak of the lessons of Spain and ignore this question. Many other lessons are ignored, such as the agrarian question, right of self-determination, international relations, etc. etc. Such an analysis by Trotsky today in the period of Civil War contradicts his analysis of several years ago, on the Spanish Revolution.

Trotsky ordered his Spanish section into the SP. Persen and a handful entered the Socialist Party. The mem-

bership voted down the Executive for entry so Nin and Andrade stayed with the membership and formed the PCUM with the Maurin group. What has Trotsky to say about this. This is part of the question of the role of the party. Trotsky is silent on this, as he is silent on the question of the road to power. Such "LESSONS" are valueless to the Spanish workers today and the French workers tomorrow. Trotsky presents a centrist position on this vital question of the hour. This is the results that flow from the non-Marxian New Turn of the ICL.

Consider the second article in the Socialist Appeal on, "The Revolution and Counter-Revolution". The article says Dual Power exists in Catalonia, Dual Power also exists in Madrid, not so clearly developed. Only elements of Dual Power and not Dual Power really exists. Nowhere does the article speak of the positive elements or the negative elements of the EMBRYO dual power. Nowhere does the article deal with the relation of the "Dual Power" to the State power of the Exploiters.

The article speaks of independent proletarian action and the need of independence from the Peoples Front, and criticizes the Communists for their treachery, but nowhere does the article deal with the equally treacherous role of the Socialist Party.

The best way to confuse a comrade on what is meant by Dual Power is to have him read this article. It is another piece of Centrist trash.

The third article in the Socialist Appeal is an article "against" the labor party by the outstanding theoretician of the American Trotskyites, non other than James Burnham. Paragraph after paragraph presents correct arguments against the Labor and Farmer Labor Party, even going so far as to say, "To sum up: A Labor Party, then, like any other reformist party, is not merely non-revolutionary, but ANTI-

REVOLUTIONARY. It is a device for preserving capitalism, not means for its overthrow. It is a mighty obstacle in the path of the revolutionary movement, not a boost forward. Under such circumstances, to ask whether it is a rival to the revolutionary party, or whether revolutionists should oppose it is childish. Of course, it is a rival, of course, revolutionists must oppose it. But it is naturally, a different kind of a rival from any bourgeois parties proper, and requires different kind of tactics of opposition. The first sentence of this quotation already opens the door to what Burnham adds. First, he leaves the impression that the Labor Party is not a bourgeois party. It is a special type of bourgeois party, and as a bourgeois party is governed by the same PRINCIPLE consideration that governs revolutionists action toward other bourgeois parties, even though the TACTICS may be different. To emphasize the tactics, leaving out the DECISIVE question is a typical centrist trick.

Upon this premise Burnham continues, "This year, however, with a still small but growing, strong, militant and revolutionary membership, the socialist Party in Minnesota can correctly give critical support to the Farmer-Labor candidates, with no risk of losses and many prospects of gains from such a tactic."

This one sentence overthrows every correct point, no matter how clumsily formulated, previously made in the same article.

Burnham continues, "Of again: In the elections this year in this country, circumstances indicate imperiously a direct open revolutionary campaign thru the organization and for the candidates of the Socialist Party, in spite of the fact that the American Labor Party has entered the field." This faker, and centrist Trotskyite forgets to inform you that Thomas, whom the Trotskyites are supporting in 1936 is not running

upon a revolutionary election platform, Thomas is running upon a election platform of REFORMISM. Such a miseducators must be driven out of the labor movement.

In the same article other arguments for tactical support of the Labor and Farmer Labor Party are presented, under chapter "Basis for participation in Labor Party." To justify this tactic our educator tell us, "Marxists work, for example, in craft unions". To compare the work of Marxists in the ECONOMIC organizations of the different types of bourgeois parties, i.e., Labor Party, is to ignore the APC of Marxism these centrists talk about.

We cannot deal with all of the articles in the September issue of this centrist group. In conclusion we want to make one point about Albert Goldman's article "A Campaign for Socialism".

He says, "The healthy attitude of the majority of the active workers of the party is easily recognized in the decision to conduct a vigorous campaign with Norman Thomas as the party candidate." This is said in opposition to the "right wing sentiment" which wanted to have a free hand to support Roosevelt. This makes Goldman a "left" according to his article because he wants to support Thomas and not Roosevelt.

Again, we repeat, he forgets to mention the small fact that Thomas is campaigning on a REFORMIST ELECTION PLATFORM. There is nothing Marxist in this "left" position. It is the old game of the centrist acting as the figleaf for the Reformists.

The present programmatic basis of the Trotskyites, of the SP, can only result in the formation of a CENTRIST organization when they are expelled. The rank and file who have followed these backsliders to Centrism, with Burnham as a scout in the Land of Reformism, must retrace their steps before it is too late. They must adopt the Leninist program and join the Revolutionary Workers League and the Young Workers League.

AN AMERICAN TROTSKYITE STRAITS - ON WAR

Review of "Socialists and the Coming War" by James Burnham - American Socialist Monthly, August 1936.

Taking advantage of the bourgeoisie "freedom of criticism" allowed him in the Social Democracy, and denied him by Bolshevism, James Burnham, of the late Workers party, has determined to show the working class how a man may be a Socialist and a Communist at the same time. Tackling the foremost question confronting the world proletariat, the problem of war, he went to work and attempted a Marxist study of the question -- within the confines of the Declaration of Principles of the Socialist Party. The result of his labor is what every revolutionist might have expected, especially from an avowed "Trotskyist", namely, an article with a foundation and a framework of centrism stuffed with polemic against Stalinism and confidence in the Social Democracy's future righting of its wrong views. The position of the Second International is left unscratched by his "brilliant" analysis on war.

"On the question of war we must speak the exact and whole truth". So says Burnham; so say we. But does he fulfill his obligation? Let us see. After lamenting the fact that "The circumstances of the (Cleveland) convention, unhappily, prevented (the war resolution's) discussion from the floor: the resolution on war adopted at the Cleveland Convention taken by itself, is a confused centrist document. While it analyses correctly the causes behind Imperialist War, it is utterly vague and confused when dealing with the practical measures to struggle against it.

Furthermore, a party is not to be judged simply by one or another of its platforms, which isolated from everything else might be or is a correct platform. Marxists analyze the party through its complete program, and not that alone, it watches the actions

behind it. Thus behind the centrist war document of the SP we find the other documents all adopted at the same convention which are out and out reformist, and thereby negate the war document. The Trotskyist Burnham refuses to see that were the war document, which he criticizes so mildly, a Marxian document, the stricture upon it is immediately supplied by the amended resolution against armed insurrection, its advocacy being incompatible with Party membership, and for the maintenance and strengthening of democratic institutions. But this is not all. The war resolution has been singled out by the Trotskyites as the "real McCoy" just like a hog pushes out his cleaved hoof. But they say absolutely nothing about the agrarian platform, labor defense, trade union, nay something more fundamental, the role of the Party and the road to power. After Burnham omits the above points, "He proceeds to praise the official party position on the "decisive question". Its basis, the analysis of war as an integral function of capitalism, says our scholar, "is firm". And, consequently the struggle against capitalism and for socialism". There, points, Burnham, disciple of Leon Trotsky, "is indeed the heart of a correct position on war". Is this the "exact and whole truth"? No! Every scientific Socialist (in Marxian analysis) knows that the heart of a right standpoint toward war is not the idea Burnham boasts, the opinion held by countless social-patriots before and after the World War!

The heart of the war question is not the (abstract) struggle against capitalism and for socialism; on the contrary, the heart of the struggle against war, the axis of a Marxian position on the war question, is the line of revolutionary defeatism.

The Cleveland Convention ignores this question, and so does the centrist Burnham ignore it. Burnham approves the Socialist party's stand on the colonial question. Its policy is non-Marxian. He says nothing about the social-imperialist policies of the SP in the United States on Porto Rico, of the Social Democracy colonial policy in Spain, Belgium, French (to name only a few countries). Nor does he speculate on the revolutionary potentialities of a party which has nothing conclusive to say against its reformist brothers in Europe and elsewhere.

He does enter into a long discussion of pacifism, its impotence and treachery. He attacks the pacifists who lead labor, like "the Weldmans, and Oneals and their reformist counterparts throughout the world". Not a word (the exact whole truth) about Norman Thomas, Devere Allen, and other of Burnham's comrades, more outspokenly preachers of class and international peace than those he names. Above all he storms against Stalinism and its social-patriotic crimes politely omitting reference to the same sins of the SP. But nowhere in his essay will the revolutionary worker discover a word about the supreme instrument of the proletariat against capitalist war, the civil war of the classes. Nowhere the clear concise phrase of Lenin: "Revolutionary Defeatism". Nowhere the battlecry of Karl Liebknecht: "The chief enemy is at home."

The weaknesses of the Socialist war resolution, complains our Trotskyist, are of two kinds: ambiguities in what is said, and omissions of what should be said. He sins in the same centrist style: being ambiguous and turning the "struggle against capitalism" into a "struggle for socialism", and omitting what Lenin termed "the first condition for the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat and the reconstruction of the international" - "the ruthless struggle against social-imperialism!" Lenin said unity with social patriots is unity with the class enemy.

To leave this out is to leave the minds of workers the worse illusions and false hopes concerning the International of Vandervelde, Ilum, Caballero and Thomas. To leave this out -- is characteristic of centrism, the policy of facing both the ways of Socialism (considered as a party program) and Communism (Marxism, simultaneously). On the front question of the time Trotskyism is silent -- or gives the workers half-truths. Nothing else can be looked for from the tip feathers of the "Left Wing" of Social Democracy. Scientific, revolutionary Socialists must learn the "exact and whole truth" the truth about the war and every question. That the resurrection of the Second International from its World War grave is a worthless dream; that it cannot be reformed or used as an instrument of revolution. The struggle for communism can only be fought out to victory under the standard of the Revolutionary Workers League, along the line of revolutionary Communism.

Articles appearing in the next issue
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(A struggle between the
Pound and Dollar)

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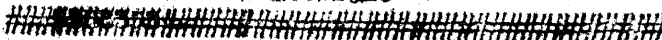
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MARXIST INTERVENTION IN AN CENTRIST ORGANIZATION

The role of the POUM in the civil war in Spain and the attitude of communists and centrists toward it, poses anew the question of the relations between communists and centrists. The concrete question that confronts the RWL is: What can we, and for that matter other communist groups in countries outside of Spain, do to help the Spanish proletariat to create its communist party? What can we do, and what must we do? The situation is characterized by the absence of a communist international and the absence of a communist group in Spain outside of the POUM, through which the RWL could work. A small communist organization in one country, not backed by a communist international confronts a centrist organization in another country, member of a centrist international (the London Bureau).

Our first task is to characterize that organization correctly. We characterize the POUM as a centrist organization. Our second task is to answer the question: Can a centrist organization of its own, i.e., without the existence and correct action of an independent communist organization outside, evolve into a communist organization? We answer this question emphatically with: No! But we add immediately two things: firstly, that even where this independent organization exists outside it will not be the centrist organization, as such, which can be brought to a communist position in program and action, but only a fraction of it; secondly, that even where no independent communist organization exists outside of the centrist organization, a communist faction can evolve within it, but only on condition that its perspective is ultimate split and formation of an independent organization.

In retrospect, in relation to the POUM we can now say that we made a first rate error in our evaluation of that party when it was formed. We considered the POUM, in the International News, a Marxian party with centrist

baggage carried over from the IAG and ICL. Later when we received more letters and information we became more critical, and when it took part in the Peoples Front election, pointed out its centrist character and from then on called it a centrist organization.

We must frankly state now, that we were wrong in saying that the POUM was a Marxian organization at the beginning. At that time it had the "all inclusive party" concept, the centrist formula on Organic Unity. No party with a false concept on the party can be a Marxian party. The Workers Party of the United States adopted a false position on the party at its October Plenum when we said that the final evolution for nine months has now resulted in a transformation to a Centrist Party.

It is possible to bring a communist organization which is falling under the influence of revisionist concepts, back to a Marxist road, from within that organization, as Lenin has shown in April, 1917. But this is something totally different from entering into a centrist organization in order to transform it into a communist organization. This concept of the Trotskyists, the RWL rejects not only where applied to right-centrist (in many cases, as in the USA and Belgium, outright reformist) organizations, but also in relation to left-centrist organizations. In other words, the RWL would not approve of a small communist group in Spain, if such existed, entering the POUM, in order to "reform" it. Such a reform of a centrist organization the RWL regards as impossible. The task of a small group of communists existing outside of the POUM would be to carry its criticism of the latter's centrist program and activity into the membership of the POUM, and into the proletariat generally and to work for the formation of a communist opposition within the POUM, giving itself the perspective of split, at the pro-

per moment. Such a group outside, and such an opposition inside the POUM could have played a positive role before and during the civil war, even if it had been still too weak to play the role of the party. Since actually no group and no such opposition exists the task of the RFL and similar organizations in other countries is to work for their formation, by all means at their disposal.

The position of the RFL with regard to centrist organizations of the POUM type flows from the position we have taken in the past towards centrist organizations: the SFIO, and the SAP, the IAG, the ICL since the French turn. In each case the axis of our position has been: that the task of communists is to work, not for the conservation, but for the disintegration of centrist organizations and the winning of their members to communism, ideologically and organizationally. The building of an independent communist organization, therefore, the central task of communists. The building, by this independent organization, of communist factions within centrist organizations is nothing but an auxiliary tactic.

To confuse the road of liquidation with that of sending a faction into a centrist organization is the path to defeat. The guiding line of the question of the role of the party is the political and organizational independence of the party.

LENIN ON DICTATORSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

"What then is the relation of this dictatorship to democracy ?

We have seen that the Communist Manifesto simply places side by side the two ideas: the "transformation of the proletariat into the ruling class" and the "establishment of democracy". On the basis of all that has been said above, one can define more exactly how democracy changes in the transition from capitalism to Communism.

In capitalist society, under the conditions most favourable to its development, we have more or less complete democracy in the democratic republic. But this democracy is always bound by the narrow framework of capitalist exploitation and consequently always remains, in reality, a democracy for the minority, only for the possessing classes, only for the rich. Freedom in capitalist society always remains just about the same as it was in ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave owners. The modern wage-slaves, owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, are so much crushed by want and poverty that "democracy" is nothing to them; "politics is nothing to them"; that, in the ordinary peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participating in the social and political life."

From "State and Revolution"
by V.I. Lenin

22-11

A N O P E N L E T T E R T O T H E M E M B E R S O F T H E

CANNON GOLDMAN ABERN FACTION OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

Comrades:

Six months ago the bulk of your faction entered the Socialist Party with the avowed purpose of "educating the leftward moving socialist workers to revolutionary Marxism. Your leadership maintained that it was "theoretically possible to 'reform' the S.P." (June 1935 Plenum, Cannon Schachtman resolution).

The price for this entry was enormous. You liquidated a party which only a year before had been established with 1,000 members, amidst the greatest enthusiasm of the whole advanced radical movement. You gave up your program. You gave up an independent weekly paper, the New Militant, after seven years of immense hardships to establish it. You gave up your theoretical organ, the New International. You liquidated the largest and most militant unemployed organization in the United States, the National Unemployed Leagues. You broke up a class struggle defense league, the N.P.L.D. You stripped yourself of everything that could identify you as a distinct political force. You submerged your identity both organizationally and politically.

And your leadership told you that entry into the Socialist Party was worth even such a price. A golden opportunity.

But your entry immediately had the effect of arresting the development of all the sections of the centrist left wing. The RPPA, which only a short time ago was conducting negotiations with your leadership and planning to split, dissolved itself and went meekly into the "militant" caucus. "Leftward moving" leaders, like Gus Tyler, introduced reformist resolutions making "the advocacy of armed insurrection incompatible with membership in the Socialist Party" and calling instead for the social-democratic formula "maintain and strengthen existing democratic" (bourgeois) "institutions". The "militant" caucus cast overboard its draft program and revised the old Detroit right wing program - to the right.

Instead of winning sincere workers for an independent revolutionary Marxist Party, you started an influx into a reformist party, the Socialist Party. (If such left-wingers as the Trotskyists enter the Socialist Party, then of course the Socialist Party must have become revolutionary"). Instead of weakening the reformist leaders like Thomas and Hoan you bolstered them up to the point where today they control the whole party and all of its policies.

Moreover, what is more important than all the rest - YOU YOURSELVES HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO NOTHING MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER CENTRIST GROUPING INSIDE THE SOCIALIST PARTY!

You claim, of course, that you are for revolutionary Marxism. But every single act of your belies that!

1- You claim you are for a PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION IN SPAIN
BUT IN ACTION

Not one of your articles, from the articles of Trotsky down to Burnham presents a Marxian position on the road to power, and the character of the revolution. Nowhere do you speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the need for a Revolutionary Marxist Party in Spain. Your Spanish comrades are still in the Socialist Party of Spain which today is busy beheading the revolution and protecting private property. Instead of independent political action in Spain and on an international scale you are supporting the Socialist Party - except your French section which supports the centrist P.O.U.M.

2- You claim you and your international leader, Trotsky, are presenting the MARXIAN LINE FOR THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

BUT IN ACTION

Trotsky's article in the September Socialist Appeal "The Lesson of Spain", is in direct contradiction of his former correct position before the new turn of the International Communist League. It fails to present the Marxian ROAD TO POWER as the major lesson of the Spanish events. One glance at Trotsky's previous pamphlets on Spain will clearly reveal the revision.

3- You claim you are FOR ARMED INSURRECTION as the only means by which the working class can seize power.

BUT IN ACTION

You did not raise a finger to oppose the Tyler resolution at the Cleveland Convention "making the advocacy of armed insurrection incompatible with membership in the Socialist Party". AND YOU CONTINUE TO REMAIN IN A PARTY THAT OUTLAWES THE MARXIAN ROAD TO POWER.

4- You claim you are AGAINST SOCIAL PATRIOTISM.

BUT IN ACTION

You live in peace in the same party and international with social-patriots. Lenin once said "Unity with the opportunists (social patriots) is an alliance of the workers with 'their' national bourgeoisie, and a split in the international revolutionary working class."

5- You claim you have a MARXIAN POSITION ON WAR

BUT IN ACTION

You present a centrist position on revolutionary defeatism in the I.C.L. thesis on War and the 4th International. You did not raise a single objection at the Cleveland Socialist Con-

vention to the Socialist War Position (this includes its war resolution) which is REFORMIST, and contains such reformist gems as neutrality legislation, disarmament, maintenance of friendly relations with the other imperialists, and even national defense against an aggressor.

6- You claim you are OPPOSED TO THE PEOPLES FRONT

BUT IN ACTION

You have never repudiated your comrade Zeller's position for a "Peoples Front of Action". You gave up your organ the New Militant, handed over its mailing list to the Socialist Call and are now distributing the Socialist Call which BETRAYS the People's Front.

7- You claim you are AGAINST THE FARMER-LABOR PARTY

BUT IN ACTION

You voted for a farmer-labor party at the Washington Unemployed Convention.

You voted for it at the City Projects Council in New York.

You voted for it at the New York May Day Conference.

You voted for a resolution on the Labor Party at the Cleveland Convention which was supported by the Old Guard - a resolution which was non-Marxian.

In the September issue of the Socialist Appeal, a member of your leading committee, Burnham, presented a centrist position on the Labor Party which is both for and against the labor Party in practice.

8- You claim you are AGAINST REFORMISM AND PARLIAMENTARISM.

BUT IN ACTION

You call on workers to vote for Norman Thomas -

who is against revolution

who tells workers they can solve their problems by the ballot

who is running on a reformist platform which in certain respects presents a more narrow-nationalist solution than the Republican and New Deal platforms (nationalization of industry, agrarian).

9- You claim you are OPPOSED TO BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY

BUT IN ACTION

You did not raise a finger at the Cleveland Convention - or in the Socialist Appeal afterwards - against the Tyler resolution which says that the Socialist Party stands for the maintenance and strengthening of the existing democratic (bourgeois) institutions.

10- You claim you are FOR THE CLASS STRUGGLE

BUT IN ACTION

You voted for the Washington Unemployed Conference class-collaboration program of the stalinist-socialist leadership - a program which is wrecking the unemployed movement and which you are faithfully carrying out.

You are trailing behind the Lewis C.I.O. class-collaboration policy. Nowhere have you explained that support of that policy means defeat for the steel workers; that to organize workers, to win strikes, to defeat the bosses, the workers must fight on two fronts, against the bosses and the Green and Lewis class-collaboration policy. Nowhere have you called upon the workers to organize themselves into progressive blocs against the fake Lewis leadership. You continue, instead, to trail behind the Socialist Party policy of full and unconditional support to Lewis and Co.

11- You claim you are educating workers NOT TO JOIN THE BANKRUPT 3RD INTERNATIONAL

BUT IN ACTION

You instruct them to join another bankrupt international - the 2nd International.

12- You claim you are FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

BUT IN ACTION

You tell workers to join the 2nd International. When you entered the Socialist Party you publicly announced you were going in as loyal and devoted members to BUILD the Socialist Party. And Schachtman, one of your leaders, calls the Socialist Party "the only Revolutionary Party in the U.S."

It is clear from all the foregoing that your words are as foreign to your deeds as Marxism is to reformism. Your leadership has become branded with an indubitable mark of centrism - centrism moving to the right. To the skeptical in your ranks your leadership can point to its former Marxist position; to the socialist worker it can point to its centrist and reformist deeds. That is the unmistakable mark of centrism.

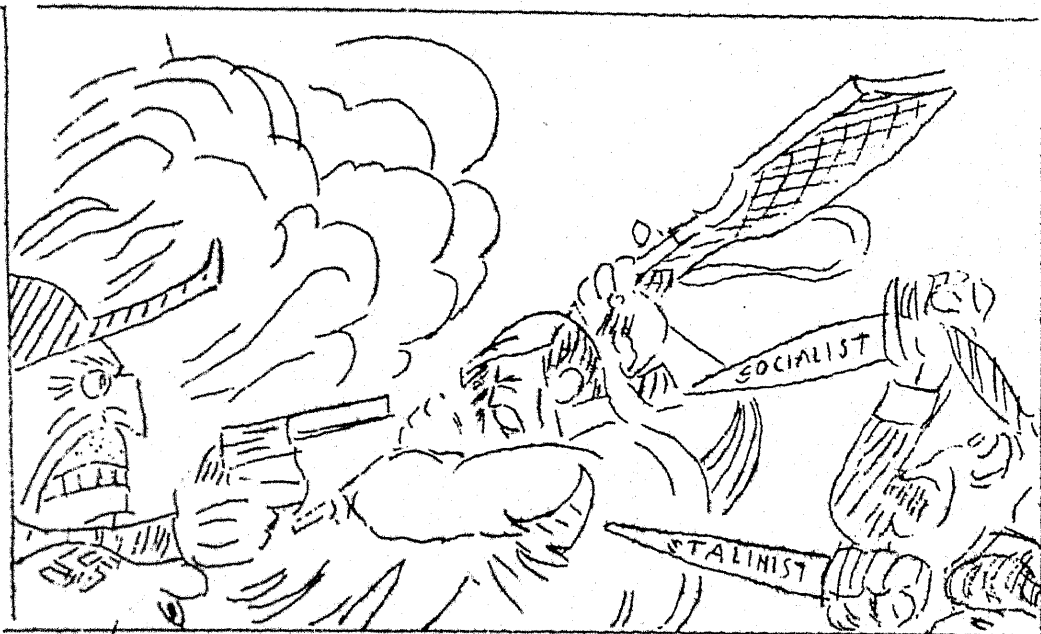
It is not a question of becoming a Marxist organization again once you have split from the S.P. Some of you are still under that illusion. But whether you split or are expelled your organization is doomed to centrism. The pressure of the centrist and right wing elements (now in your ranks forces your leadership to remain centrist (and even move towards reformism) just as the pressure from the left forces it to still pay lip service to Marxism.

Whether you split of your own accord or are expelled you can not organize a party of Marxism. You can merely organize the American equivalent of the S.A.P. of the French Trotsky group.

To retrace your steps back to Marxism, it is necessary for every sincere worker in the ranks of the Cannon-Goldman-Abern caucus to break with his leadership; to break politically and organizationally with all shades of reformism and centrism, and join the Revolutionary Workers League.

Every sincere left-winger in the Socialist Party who is coming towards revolutionary Marxism should get in touch with The Revolutionary Workers League. Only by a sharp break with the bankrupt 2nd and 3rd Internationals and all other liquidationist ideologies and a unification of such forces with the Revolutionary Workers League can the Revolutionary Party in the United States, section of the Communist Fourth International, be formed.

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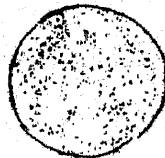
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