

The logo for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is displayed in a stylized, white, sans-serif font against a dark blue background.

# discussion bulletin

Published by the  
**SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY**

116 UNIVERSITY PLACE  
NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

Vol. 22, No. 17

June 1961

## LETTERS TO THE PARTY CENTER

By James P. Cannon

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. May 10, 1961, to Joseph Hansen           | 1           |
| 2. May 12, 1961, to Farrell Dobbs           | 4           |
| 3. May 15, 1961, to Joseph Hansen           | 8           |
| 4. May 22, 1961, to the Political Committee | 11          |



20¢



Los Angeles, Calif.  
May 10, 1961

Joe Hansen  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Joe:

Here are my first reactions to your draft of the international resolution:

1. The optimistic accounts of the increasing strength of the noncapitalist countries and the rising tide of the colonial revolution are not sufficiently counterbalanced by a factual and realistic account of the retrogression of the radical workers movement in Europe since the early postwar period, and the deadening conservatism of the labor movement in the United States in particular. It is not enough to mention these weighty factors; they must be reported in detail and emphasized. Otherwise, they get buried under the weight of material devoted to the favorable developments in the noncapitalist countries and in the colonial sphere. This can give a false impression of our view of the total world situation.

The Stalinist and Stalinoid delusions, that socialism will gradually creep over the world by the gradual strengthening of the Soviet-China bloc and the extension of the colonial revolution, can at best be characterized as cheerful idiocy. In reality, it serves to sabotage and betray the revolutionary movement in the imperialist countries. Thereby it helps the trend not toward the world-wide victory of socialism but toward destruction of the world in an atomic war.

Our resolution must frankly and unambiguously declare that the socialist transformation of society depends upon the proletarian revolution in the imperialist centers; and that nothing short of a genuine revival of the revolutionary movement in the imperialist centers can prevent the war or stop it before it gets out of control. The recent events in Japan and Belgium and, to a lesser extent, in Britain are signs of a new upsurge of labor radicalism. But so far they are only signs. The overwhelming weight of developments since the early postwar period has been on the other side.

A recitation of these cold facts in the resolution is necessary to balance the document and bring it closer to a true analysis of the actual situation as it stands at present. This need not prevent us from drawing optimistic conclusions as to the

general perspective. But this optimism must not appear to be derived entirely, or even mainly, from the advances in the Soviet and colonial sectors standing by themselves. We must see them rather mainly as important factors which, sooner or later, must contribute to the revival of the revolutionary movement in the imperialist centers. Everything will be decided there. We must state that flatly.

\* \* \*

2. I am completely dissatisfied with Chapter 8 of the draft resolution on "The Fourth International." Personally, I am extremely doubtful whether we should deal with this problem with specific reference to the Fourth International in the general resolution. It would probably be better to deal with this question separately, as an internal matter.

In any case, the resolution deals with the problem of the Fourth International far too smoothly and optimistically. The reference to "organizational and political differences" on page 46 can give the impression that these are minor difficulties which will be solved in passing. As I see it, this is not really the case at all. The eight-year split in itself testifies to the deep-going nature of these differences; and the failure of previous attempts at unification to make an inch of progress simply reinforces that conclusion. (The Pabloites treated the unity question in 1957 as a shabby maneuver, while the British accepted our proposal with tongue in cheek and deliberately sabotaged it in practice.)

It is true that the Pabloites reacted differently to the Polish and Hungarian events in 1956 than they did to the French General Strike and the German uprising in 1953; and earlier they had backed away from the pro-Stalinist tendencies which they inspired and fostered in France, Britain and the U.S. in the same year. But, on the other side, they seem to be spelling out their liquidationist policy of "deep entry" more precisely than ever before, so as to assign future leadership indefinitely to different centrist and dissident Stalinist formations. And there is no evident modification of their conception of the "International" as a small literary circle which acts both as a substitute for functioning, self-governing parties in the various countries and also as a police agency to disrupt and split national sections which try to do some thinking for themselves on the tactical problems of their own countries.

Now we have a new development in what appears to be an outbreak of neo-Oehlerite frenzy in Britain, which can hardly fail to bring them into sharp conflict with us.

In the face of this, how can we talk of "the Fourth International" as an international organization which has only a few "differences" which need to be ironed out? The fact of the matter is that we now have three fairly distinct tendencies -- our own, the Pabloites and the British -- with three distinct conceptions about some fundamental questions of politics and party organization and party building. We think, as we have always thought, that even these differences could be discussed within a single international organization, if adequate guarantees against disruptive police measures are provided. But the two other tendencies are opposed to unification on that basis.

In view of that, I think it would be far better to deal with the international organization of the revolutionary vanguard in the resolution only in a general way, without specific reference to the Fourth International as such. If we are ready to deal with it at all at present, it should be done in a separate resolution. And, in that case, if we deal with the differences, we should deal with them explicitly and state our own position clearly on every point.

Fraternally,

J. P. CANNON

P.S. I will write separately about Cuba. I agree with what you say, only more so. The only revolutionary policy for Cuba is to recognize the revolution there, as it is and as it is developing as a socialist revolution -- and to identify ourselves with it, and to act as a part of it, not as scholastic wiseacres standing outside the living movement.

JPC:jh

Los Angeles, Calif.  
May 12, 1961

Farrell Dobbs  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Farrell:

The breach between us and Gerry is obviously widening. It is easier to recognize that than to see how the recent trend can be reversed. In my opinion, Gerry is heading toward disaster and taking his whole organization with him. The position they have taken on Cuba is much worse than a political mistake. Their approach to the question is not revolutionary, but scholastic, as is the case also with the position of our own minority. And what is worse, if that is possible, it is not objectively motivated.

The arguments already brought forward in the Plenum discussion, restrained and limited as they were, were sufficient to deprive this position of any support among those who are familiar with our political method. But even if not a word had been said, the course of events since the Plenum knocks the props from under the hasty and superficial assumptions of people who don't know a socialist revolution when they see it. The Cuban revolution itself, in all its developments since the Plenum, has pretty well solved the problem debated at the Plenum. And, unfortunately, the course of events cannot fail to deal heavy blows to the political prestige and authority of those who leaped before they looked. That's part of the overhead cost of playing with ideas and realities.

It is clear beyond dispute now that what began as a national democratic revolution, under the leadership of middle-class intellectuals, has developed into a thoroughgoing socialist revolution. And even this momentous and indisputable fact is only half the story. In the process, the middle-class intellectuals at the head of the movement, who began as national democrats, have themselves developed into socialist revolutionists, proclaiming themselves as such and acting accordingly. And they must be supported as such.

From now on, discussion of the next necessary steps in the Cuban revolutionary process -- the formal organization of a revolutionary socialist party and the formal construction of a representative workers' government, based on workers' organizations, must be discussed from these premises, which are not merely assumptions but realities. We must state frankly that the Cuban revolution is our revolution. We must identify ourselves with it, and work within it, and offer our criticisms, suggestions and proposals for the next steps -- as a part of the revolution as it

is, with the leadership as it is. Anything else would be wiseacre scholasticism, or worse.

\* \* \*

This is a fundamental question -- the question of a socialist revolution. All other considerations must be subordinated to the adoption of a clear and definite position on the Cuban revolution by the Convention.

\* \* \*

More than that, I don't think we should take the formal negative arguments on the "Cuban Question" at face value. That appears to be only a peg designed to serve other purposes not frankly disclosed. But the simple fact that people should take the most burning, the most actual problem of revolutionary policy at the present moment as a peg in a factional maneuver for undisclosed aims is in itself a merciless condemnation of their whole approach, their whole method. The hysterical hue and cry about Pabloism is in reality aimed at us and designed to scare us away from the objective consideration of new realities in Cuba. The Oehlerite chatter about the independent revolutionary socialist party is in reality designed to imply that we have abandoned the central purpose of our existence and our work and struggles all these years, and to scare us away from an objective consideration of realities and relations of forces in each particular country and how to work within them to build the cadres of the future party.

We are informed that the building of new revolutionary parties and a new international is the central problem of our epoch. We know that. Those who don't know that we know it, should be reminded that we joined with Trotsky and other co-thinkers in proclaiming that very idea in 1933 after the German debacle. The same idea was made the central point in the Transitional Program written by Trotsky and introduced in our name at the Founding Congress of the Fourth International in 1938. But the proclamation of the need of the revolutionary party didn't create it; it only created the preliminary cadres. And these cadres can thrive and expand only if they know how to take the real situation in each country as they find it and adapt their tactics accordingly.

If new revolutionary or semi-revolutionary forces won't come to us, we have to go to them. Everybody in our party is, or ought to be, familiar with the various tactical turns taken along this line since 1933 under Trotsky's guidance in France

and the United States in the middle and late thirties, and later in England in the late forties. Can anyone in his right mind imagine that with the present relation of forces in the world labor movement such tactical experiments all lie behind us?

This question has burning actuality right now in Cuba. It arose again in the United States to a limited extent after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. There are disturbing indications that the question can be arising again in Britain.

The trouble with taking a false position on great questions in order to serve some factional local or national momentary interest, real or imagined, is not only that it eventually weakens the authority of the leaders who play this self-defeating game. Another result is that whole cadres become miseducated and disoriented while the sly factional game is being played and they are unable to turn around when the leaders recognize the consequences of their own folly, if they do.

From reading the Newsletter in the recent period, I get the definite impression that the SLL is off on an Oehlerite binge. This can lead to an impatient demand from the ranks for the Trotskyist cadre in Great Britain to cut loose from the Labor Party and its left wing, and to form an independent Trotskyist party and be done with it. I cannot imagine a better way to put the Trotskyist cadres in Great Britain in a corner.

I hope I am reading the ominous signs in the British movement wrongly. But in any case a sectarian-factional policy shall not be imposed on the SWP under any circumstances whatever. If we face this problem squarely and call it by its right name, I have no doubt that the Convention will be as nearly unanimous in its decision as was the recent Plenum.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. CANNON

P.S. I am enclosing a leaflet distributed at the Fair Play meeting for Sid Lens here in Los Angeles last week. It is written by Hal Draper and published by the Bay Area Young Peoples Socialist League and the Local East Bay Socialist Party-SDF. Draper was too old for the Yipsels in 1940, as I remarked at the Convention which preceded the split. But 21 years later he seems to be still Yipseling. I think this leaf-

let can make a good subject for a blistering article in our press. We have to differentiate ourselves pretty clearly now from those who are merely against intervention, but against the Cuban revolution as it is and as it is developing with its present leadership. We are against intervention and for the revolution and its leadership.

JPC:jh



Los Angeles, Calif.  
May 15, 1961

Joe Hansen  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Joe:

I just received your Special Delivery letter of May 12. I am glad to hear your opinion that the drafting committee will check the resolution to see that an overall balance is established along the lines of my previous letter. This is very important, in my opinion.

On point 2. of my letter of May 10. The fact, as you say, that "we have not really seen our way through to the end on this and that naturally leaves an element of uncertainty" -- seems to me sufficient reason why we should deal with the question of international Trotskyist organization in the resolution only in the most general terms. This resolution will be read very carefully everywhere and we must be careful that no misunderstandings are created.

When I wrote my letter I was aware, from previous information sent to me, that the Pabloites are in trouble with their program of permanent "deep entry"; and that many of their Latin-American sections do not practice it according to the Pabloite formula. I was referring rather to the programmatic statements issued by the Pabloite center. That is where the real Pabloism is actually represented. We must not give the impression, even by implication, that we are in agreement or close to agreement with them on this most important question. The danger of optimistic general talk about unity is that it may create the impression that unity is near at hand and will be easily realized. That, as I see it, is far from the case.

We believe, as the Transitional Program of 1938 states, that the basic task everywhere is to organize revolutionary parties of the class-conscious vanguard, and their international union. We don't believe that an international literary center, issuing pronouncements and programmatic declarations, can be a substitute for such national organizations. There can be no serious question of agreement with the Pabloites until this is explicitly stated. They haven't done that yet, far from it. As far as I have been able to read their documents since the split, couched as they usually are in hazy formulations which can be read one way or another, the trend of their thinking since the split has been in the other direction.

But, and here we come to another difficulty from the other side in the international movement -- we do not believe, in the present condition of the international workers' movement, and the numerical weakness of the Trotskyist cadres, that new parties, in the real sense of the word, can be created by simply proclaiming them. All kinds of flexible tactical operations will be required in a long process to reach that goal. But the goal will never be reached if the aim is not stated.

The necessity of creating a new leadership was stated in the Transitional Program, and then repeated and explained as a process in the Manifesto of the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International in 1940. (This latter document is worth a re-study from this standpoint.) I don't think we should undertake at present anything more than a general statement of our conceptions of the international and of the building of national parties as explained in the Transitional Program and in the Manifesto of 1940, which has guided our course all this time.

\* \* \*

Much more to the point at the moment is a clear and explicit statement of our position on the Cuban revolution. In the light of the May Day declaration that the 1940 Constitution is out of date; that the revolution has definitely become a socialist revolution; and that it will require a new constitution -- our Cuban resolution should be brought up to date. The new developments should be the take-off for explicit statements in our Cuban resolution somewhat as follows:

First, the projected new constitution should provide for a representative workers' government based on workers' organizations or councils.

Second, stemming also from the May Day declaration, our Cuban resolution should declare that this representative workers' government has to be lead by a mass revolutionary party, formally organized and open to the most conscious and active revolutionary fighters.

Third, the leadership of this party at its formal organization cannot be any other than that of the present leadership of the revolution and the defense of the country against the invasion.

Fourth, the new constitution should provide for a regime of genuine workers' democracy, in which all tendencies supporting the revolution have full freedom of expression and association.

Fifth, the Trotskyists, organized as a propaganda group, representing the tradition and unbroken continuation of revolutionary theory and practice, will take their place as a definite tendency, like all other tendencies supporting the revolution, within the new revolutionary party.

\* \* \*

Strangely enough, these definite proposals may conflict with some sectarian tendencies not only of our own Latin-American co-thinkers but also of the Latin-American Pabloites. But a clear and explicit statement of our position, along the lines of the above proposals, from the SWP which has consistently defended the Cuban revolution under the most difficult circumstances, should carry considerable authority. It might open the way for possibly better consultation and collaboration with the Latin-American Trotskyists of both camps.

That, in my opinion, can be a more effective step towards a possible future unification than anything else we could do at the present time.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. CANNON

JPC:jh  
Spec. Del.

Los Angeles, Calif.  
May 22, 1961

To the Political Committee  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades:

I have carefully studied the PC minutes of May 3. The remarks of Morris Stein, Murry and Bob Chester on the world movement are very much along the line of my own thinking. I also agree with the remarks of Dobbs to the effect that our international resolution now being drafted, giving a positive statement of our own views at the present time, is the best way to begin our contribution to the international discussion.

I think it should be frankly presented as such -- as our contribution to the international discussion -- and, consequently, as Farrell indicates in his remarks, that it will be subject to possible modification later on in the light of that discussion. That is simply another way of saying that we are willing to learn as well as to teach; that we do not begin a discussion with ultimatums.

I am not entirely sure right now, but I incline more and more to the idea that this international resolution, as it eventually may be adopted by the Convention, should be published in our magazine. We want to reach the widest possible audience in all sectors of the international movement. This will not be possible if we simply pass it back and forth among a few people in mimeographed form.

The "fragmentation" of the international movement, which Murry spoke about in his remarks, is in my opinion, not entirely, nor even mainly, a negative manifestation. It appears to me that the whole international movement, in all its branches and affiliations and independent sectors, is in a process of fermentation and re-examination of the problems of party building. That puts a serious discussion on the agenda. And that, in turn, can lead to a broader eventual unification of the international Trotskyist forces, and others who do not yet recognize themselves as Trotskyists.

\* \* \*

Unification is definitely not on the agenda now, and it would be unrealistic to talk about it in concrete terms. But the perspective of a broader unification than we have ever known before has to be kept in mind all the time as the goal toward which the discussion is aimed. The unification we foresee and aim at must not be simply the unification of those organizations and groups formally affiliated to the International Committee and the International Secretariat, and those other Trotskyist groups which at present remain independent.

New revolutionary forces are emerging, notably at present in Cuba, and probably throughout Latin America, which have never had any previous international affiliation or even formal organization on national grounds. We also know of several split-offs from the Stalinist party in Mexico. There are deep divisions in other

Stalinist parties in Latin America. The Indian independent Trotskyists have recently made a fusion with a group of former Stalinists. There is a group of former members of the CP in Japan. Etc.

If our movement should fail to foresee and consciously aim at collaboration and eventual unification with new people who are actually engaged in carrying through a socialist revolution, or striving toward it, it would brand itself as a futile sect and not a living, expanding revolutionary movement, as Trotsky envisaged it.

The aim of the discussion is not to produce new splits and splinters until there is nothing left but a sterile little church of self-satisfied scholastics. To be sure, the discussion of obvious differences will, in its first stage, draw clear lines of differentiation. But the aim of this method of procedure is not simply to freeze old splits and to manufacture new ones. The object, rather, is to get all points of view on the table for consideration and discussion, with the expectation that some, if not all, of the participants in the discussion will change and learn from the arguments and the unfolding events and come closer together in a broader unification.

\* \* \*

In working out our tactical approach to this complex problem, we should draw on all the experiences of the past, not simply the experiences of yesterday or the day before. The history of our own movement since 1928 is very rich in these experiences. But the principal guiding lines go back much further than that. The struggles of Bolshevism, from its beginning in 1903 up to the October Revolution, and through the first years of the Comintern until the death of Lenin, are an important part of our heritage.

The idea of a monolithic international and monolithic national parties cannot draw any support from these experiences. The history of Bolshevism, from its beginning up until the October Revolution, was a history not only of splits but also of unifications and attempted unifications with the Mensheviks. It was not until 1912 that the Bolsheviks formally constituted themselves as an independent party and no longer as a faction of the Russian Social-Democracy. And after that, it shouldn't be forgotten -- because the fate of the revolution depended on it -- the Bolsheviks made a unification with Trotsky and his group after the March Revolution, and also kept the door open for any signs of a revolutionary turn on the part of the left Mensheviks.

\* \* \*

The Communist International was not built into a mass movement in its early days simply by proclaiming the need for new parties in each country. There was a rather prolonged process of unifications and splits in the different countries before the national sections of the Comintern were firmly established.

The Communist Party of Germany originated with the Spartacus group of Liebknecht and Luxembour. But this was followed two

years later by a unification with the left wing of the Independent Socialist Party, which gave the Communist Party of Germany for the first time a mass base. In England, the Communist Party was established through a fusion of a number of sectarian groups, none of which had been Bolsheviks originally. In France and Italy the syndicalists were invited. In the United States, the Comintern invited the Socialist Labor Party, the IWW and the left wing of the Socialist Party to participate in the Second Congress of the Comintern.

The same process of splits and unifications took place in practically every other country in the early days of the consolidation of the parties of the Comintern. In the early congresses of the Comintern deep and serious differences on the most important questions were freely discussed. Lenin and Trotsky didn't try to eliminate them by expulsions and splits. "Monolithism" began with Stalin, not with Lenin.

\* \* \*

The Left Opposition of the Russian Communist Party was first organized in 1923. But in 1926, when Zinoviev and Kamenev broke with Stalin and Bukharin, the Trotskyist Left Opposition made a bloc with them and gained a much broader base as a result.

Trotsky's method in creating the first cadres of the international Left Opposition, after his deportation to Turkey in 1929, was to draw clear lines of demarcation for the new movement; and then to build it, not only by splits but also by unifications with other oppositional groups. And then, after the original cadres of international Trotskyism had been consolidated, Trotsky initiated a new series of discussions and negotiations with left-centrist elements in independent parties and others still remaining within the parties of the Second International.

\* \* \*

Trotsky never envisaged the Fourth International as a monolithic, purely Trotskyist organization, but as a broad revolutionary movement in which we, orthodox Trotskyists, might possibly, under certain conditions and for certain periods, be a minority. He stated this explicitly in one of his letters prior to the Founding Congress in 1938. He proposed that Chen Tu-hsiu, who at that time was in sharp conflict with our Chinese section over some important questions, should be invited to be a member of the International Executive Committee.

The internal regime of our international movement during the lifetime of Trotsky never tried to enforce monolithism. That began with Pablo. The Discussion Bulletins of our international movement throughout this period show that differences of opinion on the most important questions arose again and again and were freely discussed. A large part of our education in fact was derived from these discussions.

The recognition of the Soviet Union as a workers state, and of the obligation to defend it against imperialist attack, was a cen-

tral principle of our international movement all the time. This characterization and this attitude was challenged time and again, year after year, and freely discussed without expulsions or threats of expulsion.

\* \* \*

In the classic battle of 1939-40 with the Burnham-Shachtman faction, they were about as wrong as it was possible for a faction to be in America under conditions of that time. Shachtman thought we were engaged in a "polemic" and conducted himself like a high school debater scoring points. He didn't really know that he was dealing with a question of a revolution and that it was dangerous to play with such a question. He didn't know it because he didn't feel it.

It was a red hot question for us at that time, just as the Cuban Revolution is at present, because public opinion was being mobilized every day by all the imperialist agencies against the Soviet Union. It was particularly reprehensible for Shachtman to choose that period to wash his hands of it. But despite this deep and terrible difference on such a burning question as one's attitude toward a revolution in existence, Trotsky did not advocate a split, not even if we should turn out to be a minority in the Convention struggle. The split followed only after the minority refused to accept the Convention decision.

That is still not the end of the story. Seven years later we conducted serious negotiations for unity with the Shachtmanites, despite the fact that they had not changed their position on the Soviet Union in the meantime. Those who may be playing with the idea of a "monolithic" party and a monolithic international will have a hard time finding any support for it in the teachings and practice of the Old Man.

\* \* \*

I suppose all the participants in the present discussion know that the American Trotskyists made a fusion with the Musteites in 1934, and then joined the Socialist Party in 1936. But it should not be forgotten that these tactical turns, which contributed so greatly to the expansion of our movement in members and influence during the Thirties, were not smoothly accomplished. We first had to settle accounts with the Oehlerites. They gave us very stern lectures about the principle of the independent revolutionary party and accused us of liquidation, betrayal and other assorted crimes. The Oehlerites diagnosed our position incorrectly, as further developments amply demonstrated. But when a real threat of liquidationism confronted us in 1953, we showed that we knew how to recognize it and how to deal with it.

\* \* \*

All this is part of the experience of the past which should be borne in mind, and even studied, in the present period. The real problem, now as then, is not to recognize the necessity of new parties

and a new international -- we have known that for a long time -- but rather how to build them and broaden them into a strong revolutionary force.

Fortunately, the problem now under discussion is not academic. It centers, at the moment, on Cuba and the Cuban Revolution and the leaders of this revolution. In exceptional circumstances, these people have changed Cuba and changed themselves. They have carried through a genuine socialist revolution, and armed the working population, and defended the revolution successfully against an imperialist-backed invasion. And now they openly proclaim themselves socialist, and say the 1940 constitution is out of date and that a new constitution is needed.

In my opinion, that's pretty good for a start -- and I am talking here about the leaders as well as the masses who support them. If such people are not considered as rightful participants in a discussion, and possible collaborators in a new party and a new international -- where will we find better candidates?

Trotsky, in the middle Thirties initiated extensive discussion and collaboration with left-centrists who only talked about the revolution, and even that not very convincingly. The Cuban revolutionists have done more than talk, and they are not the only ones on trial from now on. We are also on trial. What would our talk about revolution be worth if we couldn't recognize a revolution when we see it?

Fraternally,

(signed) JIM

James P. Cannon

JPC:jh  
Spec.Del.