

February 27, 1975

TO POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached is a proposal from George Breitman and Les Evans to the Pathfinder Executive Committee on the Cannon publishing project. George and Les would like any ideas Political Committee members have.

Comradely,

Jack

We have completed the first preliminary examination of the material in the Cannon archive and have reached the following conclusions and recommendations. Jim's files, the back issues of The Militant, the magazine, and the internal bulletins contain a wealth of publishable material. It is impossible at this stage to make an exact projection but it would appear that there are between seven and nine potential books here. This estimate is based on a conception of publishing a large and inclusive selection of Cannon's writings and letters, but not a complete works in the style of the Lenin Collected Works. Repetitious speeches, ephemeral correspondence and notes, and nonpolitical private correspondence would not be included.

### Chronological vs. subject presentation

One of the major questions our preliminary survey of the archive was aimed at answering was whether the material should be presented in books on specific topics, such as trade-union problems, internationalism, party building, etc., or by year as in the Trotsky writing series. After serious consideration of both alternatives we are agreed that the second form is by far the best as well as being the more practical. There were several reasons for this decision.

At present the archive is arranged chronologically. Although there are several subdivisions by subject (Correspondence, Party History, International, Cannon-Trotsky Correspondence), these are not very precise and in most cases they are not specific enough to be useful in selecting books. There is no catalog for the archive, with the exception of part of the correspondence. To catalog the archive is a full-time job of at least three months. To read and evaluate its entire contents would take approximately two years before work could even begin on a topical selection. These are technical considerations, but they indicate a considerable delay in the beginning of publication if a decision were made in favor of thematic books. In addition to these considerations there is a more fundamental objection to the subject approach that we found decisive. After the publication of two or three goods books on particular topics, we would be left with a great mass of excellent material that fit into no particular subject category and would have either to be dropped or brought out in chronological form anyway.

The books that we envision would be like the Trotsky Writings in that they would show the full range of questions that occupied Cannon in a given period, from public agitational speeches to internal letters on party policy. These would generally cover a longer time span in each book than is the case with Trotsky -- usually from two to four years per book. This gives the editors the opportunity to choose the beginning and cutoff points for each book so that they cover a distinct period in the life of the party and tell a particular story.

### Where to begin?

The most logical place to begin a chronological series would be with the earliest book -- in this case either with the expulsion from the CP in 1928, or even earlier with the record of Cannon's role in the CP. We decided at the outset to set aside the CP material until the very end of the publishing project and to make

no decision at this time on whether or not there is a book here. We felt that for our prospective audience the material on the Trotskyist movement would be of more immediate interest than the preceding period, which is adequately covered in Cannon's First Ten Years of American Communism. Moreover, because of the Stalinist burglaries in 1928-29 much of the written record, particularly the correspondence, is missing from the archive and the record remaining is quite incomplete.

A similar but not so serious problem arises for the decade 1929-39. There is a considerable amount of material, which could be made into either two or three books. These would begin with the expulsion from the CP and end where Struggle for a Proletarian Party begins. These could be divided roughly as follows: 1928-33 (the Left Opposition period), 1933-37 (through the SP experience and containing all the material on the regroupment of the 1930s), and 1938-39 (the founding and first stage of the SWP). Depending on the amount of material, this might be just two volumes: 1928-34 and 1935-39.

Although the record for this decade is fairly complete, we have reason to believe that more material can still be obtained. In particular it is known that Shachtman over the years appropriated correspondence from the National Office records. We are now in process of negotiating access to Shachtman's archives where we hope to obtain copies of these letters. It could take from six months to a year before this is completed. We would prefer not to hold up the series until these negotiations are completed and we are opposed to publishing these particular volumes until this avenue has been tested.

We propose to pick up the chronological thread immediately after the Shachtman-Burnham split, and that the first book of the project cover the years 1940-43. This would document an important period in party history and fill in a large gap between two of Cannon's previously published books: Struggle for a Proletarian Party and Letters from Prison. The book would show the party's antiwar role in World War II, the proletarian military policy, our response to the death of Trotsky, our election policy in 1940, the Minneapolis trial, our reaction to the attempt to suppress The Militant, and the beginning of the Goldman-Morrow fight. The book would begin and close on dramatic chapters in party history: the split of the petty-bourgeois opposition and the departure of the eighteen for prison.

The principal alternative starting point for the series would be at the end, working backward from 1974. We both felt that this would be a weak starting point, as Jim wrote very little the last twelve years of his life.

#### The other published works

There are at present nine books in print by James P. Cannon. Two are collections that span decades: Speeches for Socialism and Notebook of an Agitator. It is possible that some of the material in these two books will have to be reprinted in the chronological series to round out particular points.

Four of the books were written as books or transcribed from testimony at the Minneapolis trial and do not affect the chrono-

logical series: First Ten Years of American Communism, History of American Trotskyism, Socialism on Trial, and America's Road to Socialism.

Three of the books are themselves chronological collections much like the ones we propose to publish, although in two cases they are limited to only one question of the period they cover, a factional struggle in the party: Struggle for a Proletarian Party, Letters from Prison, and Speeches to the Party. The first and second present no difficulties in editing a fuller collection of Cannon's writings. Other materials from 1939 can be included in the last volume from the first decade. Letters from Prison is self-contained, covering everything Jim wrote in 1944 and early 1945. The period 1952-55 will have to be approached carefully so that sufficient material for an entire book is left on each side of the material collected in Speeches to the Party and so that the considerable other material by Cannon of 1952-53 is fitted into one or another book.

In order to facilitate working around these previously published books and at the same time having the series go to press in a reasonable amount of time we propose not to jump around chronologically but to proceed in the series straight from 1940 up to 1974 in order. This means that the second book in the new series would pick up immediately after Letters from Prison, covering the years 1945-48, including the American theses and ending with the Wallace campaign. The third book would cover the years 1949-52 and include Cannon's writings on the witch-hunt, the Korean war, and the beginning of the Cochran fight.

There appears to be material for two volumes following Speeches to the Party. There are a great many valuable letters on international problems, McCarthyism, our resistance to growing isolation, the Krushchev revelations, and the regroupment experience for the years 1954-59. Jim's output was maintained through 1961, after which it drops off considerably. It may be possible to include all the remaining speeches, articles, and letters in a single volume for the period 1960-74.

The above proposal concerns the order of publication of the material from 1940 to 1974. It is understood that at any time that we are able either to complete the collection from Shachtman's papers for the 1929-39 period, or become convinced that this material is not forthcoming, we can interrupt the post-1940 series to publish the deferred volumes from the 1930s.

#### The Goldman-Morrow book

In the last year of his life Jim worked with Pathfinder to prepare a collection of his writings on the fight with Goldman and Morrow. This manuscript is almost ready to go to press. In our opinion the acquisition of Cannon's entire archive and the chronological format in which we have recommended publishing the best selections from it preclude going ahead with this book as originally planned. Even apart from our new publishing project the book as outlined is not fully satisfactory if compared to either Struggle or Speeches to the Party, in that it is not a self-contained record of the dispute it documents. Much of the story is told by Letters from Prison, and some of the material important to the fight goes back even earlier. This early material has already been dropped

from the proposed book for space reasons and will appear now in the first of the new books for 1940-43.

A more important consideration is what to do with Cannon's other writings of 1945-47 if the major political dispute of the period, which became a focus for the discussion of party perspectives, is omitted. This would much reduce the interest and value of the remaining material, increase the difficulties of annotation and introduction, and compel the reader to go to at least one or two other books to follow what was going on.

Our proposal is not to drop anything of importance from the proposed manuscript of the Goldman-Morrow book, but to incorporate it into the publishing project along with all the rest of Jim's previously unpublished or out of print writings in a rounded collection.

### Introductions and annotation

Until his permanent move to Los Angeles in 1952 most preliminary discussion leading to party decisions was carried out verbally in the center. There are important exceptions when Jim spent long periods on the West Coast, the earliest being during the entry in the SP in 1936-37. Thus the correspondence, which will constitute an important part of the new books, is often an incomplete record. In many cases the reader would have to be informed in a footnote what was said to Jim by one of his correspondents in order to understand Jim's reply. Unlike the letters in Struggle, which were devoted to a single dispute in the party, the letters in the archive range over too many questions to be easily followed without explanation. We propose annotation approximately comparable to that used in the Trotsky writings series.

In addition, each volume can be made understandable to a reader lacking historical background if the introduction describes the objective situation faced by the party, the major events in party life for the period covered by the collection, and Cannon's particular role as well as that of other leaders of the party. Al Hansen's introduction to Speeches to the Party is an example of the kind of introduction that would make the volumes of this collection understandable to new readers.

### Projected publishing schedule

If agreement can be reached rapidly on the proposal for chronological publication and on where to begin the series, we believe that it is practicable to complete the first book in time for Oberlin this year. This means giving the shop adequate lead time by getting the manuscript to composition before the annual summer crunch begins. To ensure publication without disrupting the shop schedule we propose a deadline of May 1 for handing the manuscript to the shop. That is approximately two months from now. In our opinion this deadline is feasible from our end.

On future volumes in the series, this must be integrated into Pathfinder's overall publishing projections. So as not to weight the reduced list for the next year or so with Cannon titles we suggest perhaps one new Cannon book every eight months, three books every two years. It is possible editorially to produce the books faster but if this were done it would be at the expense of other titles already decided on.

Given the very limited time that remains in relation to the amount of work required to produce a book by August, and the expectations of the contributors to the Cannon Fund who would like to see the project underway, we hope there will be no unnecessary delay in considering and deciding on these proposals.

/s/George Breitman

/s/Les Evans

Addendum to the Cannon Proposal

At one time George had proposed publication of a series of SWP documents along the lines of the Documents of the Fourth International. With the cuback in the publishing schedule this no longer appears practicable for the foreseeable future. He suggests that one possibility that could accomplish part of this purpose would be to include in each of the new Cannon volumes an appendix containing major party statements and resolutions for the period covered.

Les is in agreement with this proposal provided that it does not mean substantially increasing the size, and hence the price, of each book or the number of volumes in the series. It is impossible to determine this precisely at this point in time as we do not yet have an estimate in book pages of the length of the Cannon material for each of the books projected.

George is not asking that this matter be acted on now, only that it be considered for decision later. It should be viewed as separate from the basic publishing proposal outlined above and should not figure as an issue in acting on that proposal.

Also, the editors would welcome suggestions for a title for the series or opinions as to whether the individual volumes should each have their own title.