

Xs: FD, (Ray), <sup>Mus</sup> I.C., Fred., Steve, Jake, A.B., Michael B., TULB, B/C

May 3, 1979

Dear Ernest:

In your April 11 letter you wrote, "A question: in the minutes of the Founding conference there is a version of the debate on the SWP's amendment to the Transitional Programme concerning the sentence on the bureaucracy having to be expelled from the soviets. From the minutes it appears that only Shachtman defended that amendment. Could you let me know whether this was a unanimous proposal of the SWP NC and (or) PC, or whether ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ there was a majority/minority division on this, pre-viewing the later formation of the Shachtman-Burnham faction?"

I have now been able to check the minutes and the facts and will restrict my reply to these and the probabilities they point to.

At the PC meeting of June 23, 1938, Carter proposed that the Transitional Program draft be amended to eliminate the two sentences you refer to above. A motion was made that he should "write for an opinion on this section to our comrades in the south" (meaning Trotsky); this motion was carried, without any apparent opposition. PC members present were Cannon, Abern, Burnham, McKinney, Draper. PC members absent were Shachtman, Widick. Carter was an NC member but not a PC member at the time. This was around two months after the text had been received in New York.

On June 27, Carter wrote to Crux, telling him about his proposed amendment and the PC's wish to have his opinion about the disputed sentences and the amendment. Carter's letter was published in the SWP's Internal Bulletin, no. 6, July 1938, which also contained Trotsky's reply of July 4 (reprinted in The Transitional Program for Social Revolution) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~.

At the PC meeting of July 21, Carter introduced a motion for the PC to adopt his amendment. The minutes record that the motion was lost; the only name recorded there for his amendment was Carter. The PC members present on this occasion were Shachtman, Abern, McKinney, Draper, and Burnham. By this time Cannon had arrived in England on an assignment related to the coming founding conference.

The major PC action came at its August 4 meeting. PC members present were Shachtman, Abern, Spector, McKinney and Draper. PC members absent were Burnham and Widick. In a letter Burnham asked to be recorded as supporting the Carter amendment, and submitted a two-part motion on the amendment. (I shall have a copy of this part of the minutes attached.) Shachtman then made a substitute motion which, when adopted, became the position discussed at the founding conference a month later. This was carried 4 to 1, with only McKinney opposed; McKinney's motion expressed agreement with the line Trotsky had presented in his July 4 letter. It was opposed by Shachtman, Draper, Spector, with Abern not voting, and NC members Lewit and Clarke were recorded in favor of McKinney's motion. A compromise motion by Abern was defeated two to two, with Shachtman not voting. (The second part of Burnham's motion was tabled by three to two.) It should be noted that the Shachtman-introduced motion approved by the PC did not take any position on the Carter amendment or the Trotsky text; all it wanted was postponement of action on the issue by the conference and an international discussion before the question was resolved.

What happened at the conference: You refer to "the" minutes for a version of the debate on the SWP amendment. But as you know there is more than one set of minutes and, as a result, some ambiguity or uncertainty about certain questions, including this one. The best thing so far is the two sets of minutes juxtaposed in Cahiers Leon Trotsky, no. 1, January 1979; the relevant pages are from 31 to 39. As you can see there, Shachtman did not restrict himself to the PC position (for postponement of conference action until after an international discussion) but began to associate himself with some of the arguments for the Carter amendment, which he had not done in the PC. What did the other two U.S. delegates do? On Cahiers p. 36 Gould said he had not been present at the meeting of the PC which had discussed the amendment to postpone conference decision, that he was inclined

to dissent from the views put forward by Shachtman at the conference, but that the question seemed to require further discussion and he therefore supported the American amendment. And the same minutes have Cannon associating himself with Gould's statement. (Gould had left for Europe ahead of Cannon.)

Fortunately there is some additional evidence about Gould's and Cannon's views at the conference. Because in addition to the two versions in Cahiers, I have just received from Sinclair a copy of the British section internal bulletin of October 1938, no. 1 of the RSL, containing a very interesting half minutes-half report on the founding conference, the meetings of the commissions that preceded them, the youth conference, etc. And here, pp 13-14, they summarize on G and C: "Gould and Cannon were not in the USA when the decision for a postponement request was made. Gould sympathized with the formulation in the the thesis and Cannon supported it. Both, however, favoured a discussion. xxx Votings: ... The American amendment-- For: 5. Against: 15. Abstentions: 2." So Gould sympathized with Trotsky's position in the draft and Cannon supported it. Both favored a discussion and therefore supported the PC motion. But there is no evidence that at that time anybody <sup>in the PC of NC</sup> but Carter and Burnham favored the Carter amendment. And once the conference was over Shachtman denied that he had favored anything except a discussion.

The question came up again at a plenum of the NC in November, after the founding conference. There Burnham and Carter introduced a motion calling on the plenum to suspend any declaration of agreement or disagreement with the disputed sentences until after a membership discussion. This was defeated 18-3, with one abstention. Shachtman made a motion: "Since the International conference provided for an international discussion of this paragraph, the plenum of the SWP instructs the PC to provide for an educational discussion of the question." This was adopted, 20/for, with three abstentions, including Burnham and Carter. At a PC meeting of December 12, Shachtman introduced a motion to inform the SWP branches that the pages of the New International and the discussion bulletin were open for a free discussion on the question and the motion was passed. But I don't remember any discussion actually being printed at that time.

To conclude: There was no unanimous PC proposal; the nearly unanimous proposal was Shachtman's August 4 motion, adopted 4 to 1; and it was nearly unanimous because it was limited to asking the conference not to act on the question until after a discussion was held. The Carter-Burnham position was a definite minority in the SWP leadership, and never was adopted by any SWP national body. I don't think it previewed the later Shachtman-Burnham faction except very indirectly. It was more an extension of the Burnham-Carter bloc at the end of 1937 against the idea that the USSR was a workers' state. Shachtman opposed them in 1937 and 1938, as you know. It is unwise to be too categorical about such matters. Both Shachtman and Burnham had been rattled earlier in 1938 when Trotsky first presented the Transitional Program and were sore at Cannon when he put pressure on them to support it at the April 1938 plenum. This was eventually smoothed over but during that experience Shachtman and Burnham undoubtedly found a certain kinship that flowered eventually, under the pressure of the war's outbreak, into their fatal factional combination.

Couradely,

*George Breitman*

Excerpt, PC Minutes, SWP, No. 29, August 4, 1938

Letter from Comrade Burnham read. He requests to be recorded in P.C. minutes as voting in favor of the Carter amendment to the International Thesis (P.C. Minutes No. 27, 1st page). Presents the following motions in connection with this amendment:

#1. Since the policy and slogan proposed in these two sentences of the International Thesis have never been submitted to the discussion of either the national or international organization, action on them<sup>s</sup> for the time being suspended. Our delegates to the International Conference are instructed to advocate postponement of definitive action on them, together with provisions for subsequent decision by the international organization. Discussion on the position in question shall be opened in our own organization, and decision on the disposal of the matter shall be referred to the next plenum of the National Committee.

Substitute motion by Shachtman: Since the policy and slogan proposed in these two sentences of the International Thesis have never been discussed either by the national or international organization, action on them for the time being is suspended. Our delegates to the International Conference are instructed to present the position of the Political Committee in favor of advocating postponement of definitive action on them, together with provisions for discussion on them and for subsequent decision by the international organization. Discussion on the position in question shall be opened in our own organization, and decision on the disposal of the matter shall be referred to the next plenum of the National Committee. Carried -- 4 for -- 1 (McKinney) against.

Motion by McKinney: The Political Committee reaffirms its previous position on this section of the International Thesis with the explanation given in the Crux letter. Lost. For--1 (McKinney). Against: Shachtman, Draper, Spector. Abern not voting. Lewit and Clarke recorded for.

Amendment to Shachtman motion by Abern: That our delegates to the conference be instructed to recommend discussion on these two sentences; and that the International Conference take a stand on this particular section of the thesis. Lost. 2 for; 2 against. Shachtman not voting.

Burnham motion #2: Since the policy proposed in these two sentences of the International Thesis is inconsistent with numerous provisions of our Declaration of Principles, formally adopted by the National Convention, the highest body of the party, in particular inconsistent with the sections of the Declaration dealing with democracy, the nature and function of the soviets, and the nature of the Workers State, action on this policy is for the time being suspended. Our delegates to the International Conference are instructed to advocate postponement of definitive action on them, together with provisions for subsequent decision by the international organization. Discussion on the position in question shall be opened in our own organization, and decision on the disposal of the matter shall be referred to the next plenum of the National Committee.

Motion by Shachtman: To table. Carried. For--Spector, Draper, Shachtman. Against--Abern, McKinney.