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National Guard called in against Teamster strike, 1934.

JAMES P. CANNON 1890-1974 IN DEFENCE OF A GREAT REVOLUTIONARY by Tim Wohlforth

PART TWO

In this edition of *Trotskyism Today* we reprint the second and final part of Tim Wohlforth's document *James P. Cannon: In Defence of a Great Revolutionary*. As we explained in introducing Part I of this document, we publish Wohlforth's article *not* from full agreement with all the points he makes - but to begin a broader discussion on the history and problems of the Fourth International. Such a discussion demands a study of the development of the American Trotskyist movement. Our reply to Wohlforth's document, for reasons of space, cannot be included here, and will therefore appear in *Trotskyism Today* Number 6.

In a number of places Banda is critical of Cannon's approach to Stalinism. However, even when Banda raises partially correct points, his argumentation is based on such distortions of history, such ignorance of history, that it brings one no closer to an understanding of Cannon and the problems of constructing a revolutionary movement in America.

For instance, Banda states: "For Cannon, the German events seemed to signify the end of Stalinism not merely as a political tendency but as a working class organization". He then quotes Cannon to prove his point: "It became clear then that these parties had become so bureaucratized, so corrupted from within, so demoralized, that even the cruellest betrayal in history was not capable of producing a real uprising in the ranks". (Quoted from *History of American*

Trotskyism, p110. Banda's emphasis.) Banda draws the conclusion from this that "Cannon's non-dialectical methods could not grasp the contradictory nature of the Stalinist degeneration..." (17)

However, the quote in question is simply a paraphrase of numerous similar statements by Trotsky in that period to the same effect. The reason why Trotsky abandoned efforts to reform the Comintern after 1933 was precisely the failure of the German events to provoke any big explosion within the Comintern. This in no sense means the Communist parties were no longer working class parties nor that they could not recruit workers and grow. If Banda disagrees with this concept put forward in this quote from Cannon, then he should launch his criticism of "non-dialectical" thinking at the real author of that idea: Trotsky himself.

This quote by Banda occurs in a section where he jumps on the famous statement of Cannon's from *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* that: "Except in a few localities, we let the great movement of the CIO pass over our heads." (18) Banda interprets this to mean that because Cannon failed to grasp the contradictory nature of Stalinism, he ignored the Stalinists while the latter moved in to dominate the CIO.

TRUTH

In the first place, there is a certain element of truth in this. A critical assessment of the work of the Minneapolis Trotskyists under Cannon's leadership during the 1934 strike and following reveals that Cannon and his supporters avoided a real struggle with Stalinism in a rounded political and theoretical way. He was convinced that the CP could be defeated simply by exposing their tactics in the course of the mass work of the Trotskyists. He firmly believed that if the Stalinists could be driven out of the unions, then they would be soundly defeated. Therefore, little effort was

made to combat Stalinism politically and theoretically explaining their tactics within the framework of the degeneration of the USSR.

The result was that while the Minneapolis Trotskyists did not succeed in defeating the Stalinists in the unions, the latter won major control and influence within the Farmer Labor Party of Minnesota. Then, in a later period, with certain strength in the CIO, the Stalinists were able to defeat the Trotskyists in the labour movement with the aid of various right-wing forces.

Even this criticism must be placed within a certain framework. In my opinion, Cannon's own judgement of the American Trotskyists in that period was too harsh, reflecting an incorrect conception of the all-sided character of the struggle to build the revolutionary party. The phrase "let the CIO movement pass over our heads" implies that it was possible for the American Trotskyists to lead the CIO movement as they led the Teamsters' struggle in one locality. This is how Banda interprets the phrase.

However, Stalinism was an international phenomenon which dominated the working class in most countries. It arose quickly out of the difficulties of the Russian Revolution, giving the working class little time to assimilate the lessons of this experience. It dominated under conditions of a tremendous capitalist crisis, which impelled masses of workers to turn to it as a way forward in both the fight against the growth of fascism and the brutality of the depression.

In the United States, even though the Stalinists had been isolated in the labour movement right up to the very birth of the CIO because of their ultra-left tactics, they had considerable forces, an apparatus, and the prestige of the Russian Revolution. They were able to move into the CIO movement in a decisive way and quickly dominate huge sections of it.

The Trotskyist movement was a mere fraction of the size of the CP and its proletarian section was largely concentrated in a single and very isolated city. Even then it was rooted in an AFL union. I do not think it was possible for the American Trotskyists, no matter how dialectical their thought, to have prevented the domination of the CIO by the Stalinists. It was possible to do much more than was done to educate a cadre of workers continuously in the struggle against Stalinism in the course of trade union work. The American Trotskyists could have been considerably stronger in the 1940 fight if they had seen matters.

EFFECTIVE

If the turn into the Socialist Party was a bit one-sided, Banda characterised it, to the detriment of the fight against the Stalinists, I do not believe this was a major problem. After all, the American Trotskyist movement was the only group in the 1930s to carry through an effective entry into the social democracy, to grow from it, and not lose cadres because of political confusion. It was a task which had to be carried out. If the trade union work suffered to some extent for a short period, in the long run the Trotskyist movement would be considerably strengthened from it.

Revolutionary work is always a bit one-sided. It is never perfectly balanced. But a revolutionary party develops despite its imperfections and one-sidedness, if it, in an event, tackles its main political tasks. Trotsky understood this in the 1930s and urged a turn to the radicalised layers around the social democracy and a struggle to win these forces to the revolutionary movement.

Banda's entire approach to this question again reflects his idealist method. If only, Banda reasons, Cannon had been a master dialectician, then he would have grasped the contradictory role of Stalinism. With this in his grasp, and while at the same time carrying out a complete entry into the SP, Cannon would have defeated the CP throughout the CIO and the American Trotskyists would have led the CIO in the same fashion as they led the Teamsters. But, in answer, Cannon was not a master dialectician, because dialectics is not learned *abstractly* but out of the kind of experiences, both nationally and internationally, that Cannon was just beginning to pass through. And, we add, dialectics is not magic. With it, one cannot break out of the bounds of the historical period one is passing through. The 1930s, as Trotsky explained so many times in the course of his writings, was a period which confined our movement largely to the sidelines of historical development.

The 1940 Fight

We now turn to the question of the 1940 fight against the Shachtman-Burnham-Abern petty bourgeois minority. Banda sums up the meaning of this fight as he now sees it: "Trotsky showed that the development of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) into a combat party of the working class depended entirely on the way in which the SWP fought to overcome its chief weakness: indifference to dialectical materialism and its susceptibility to subjective idealism, pragmatism".

Cannon's role in all this is given the back of the hand. Banda states: "... his practical help to Trotsky was



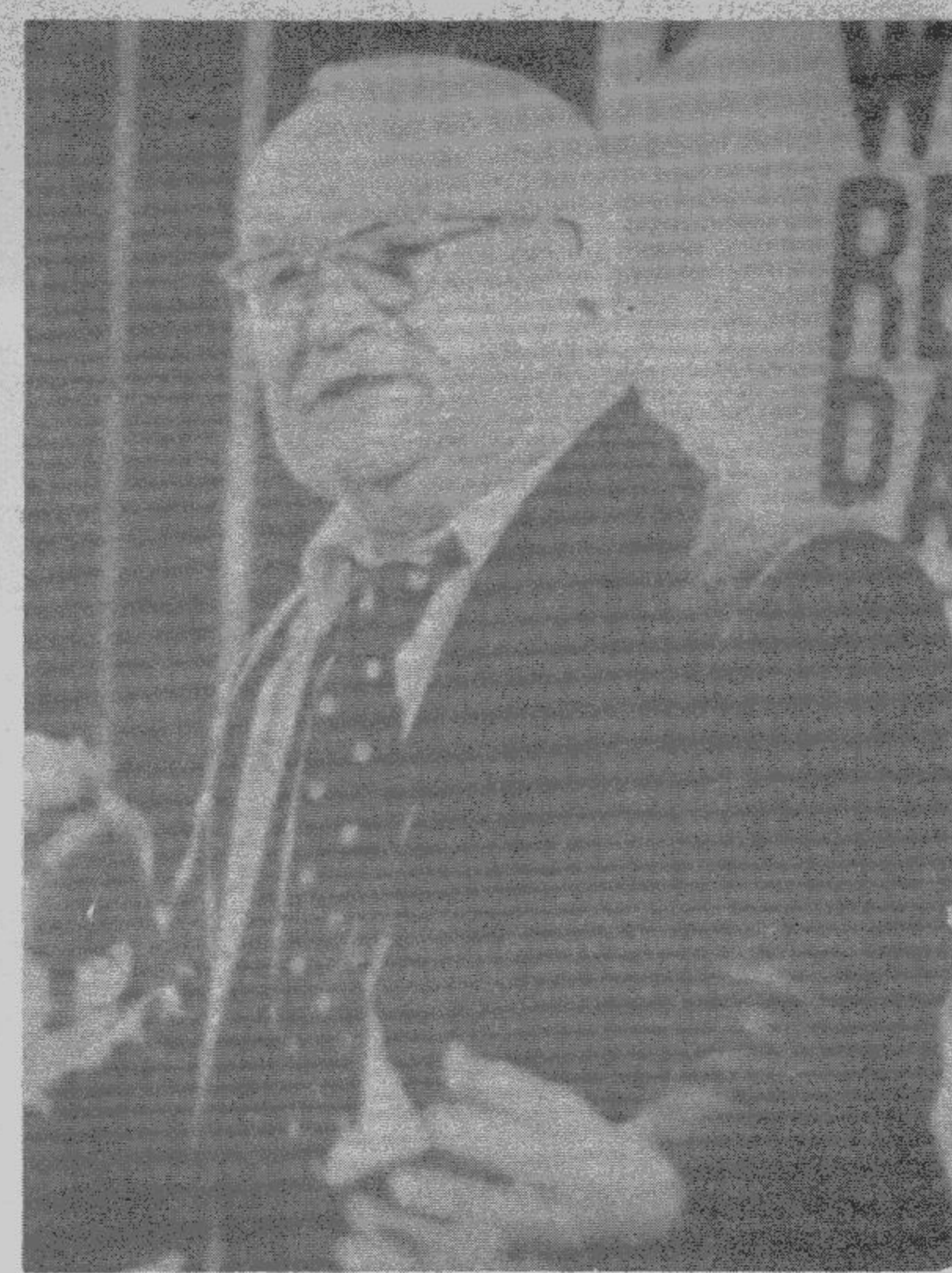
Cannon



Shachtman



Banda



Healy

considerable, but in inverse ratio to his theoretical contribution". His book *Struggle For A Proletarian Party* is criticised for never grappling with the methodological questions involved in the fight.

Trotsky, however, approached the struggle differently. First of all, he saw it as a *class* struggle, as a struggle of actual material class forces within the vanguard party. He insisted upon a class characterisation of the Shachtman grouping as petty bourgeois and illustrated, in detail, its class connections to the capitalists through the radical democratic circles. He explained the turn taking place in capitalism on the eve of World War Two and the pressure brought to bare because of this on this middle class strata. In contrast, he noted the proletarian character of the Cannon group within the party.

It was within this framework that he raised the struggle to the level of the Marxist method. He showed that the pragmatic method of the Shachtman group was an expression of its class character.

Banda completely ignores this side of the struggle. Cannon is viewed only as a man who can contribute practical aid and organisational insight but who, in every other extent is useless, ignorant and pragmatic. When Banda quotes Cannon's proposal for a deeper penetration into the working class and sneers at such a proposal, he is not just criticising Cannon. Trotsky made the same proposal at the time.

Nevertheless, in spite of Banda's criticisms, the facts stare us in the face. It was Cannon's supporters who fought for principles in 1940. These supporters were largely composed of the working class section of the party. This working class section existed because of the efforts of Cannon. Can this be denied? Trotsky does not deny it. Banda wishes to obscure its meaning.

WEAKNESS

We can and must conclude that Cannon's theoretical weaknesses contributed to the size of the petty bourgeois opposition as well as to the theoretical backwardness of his own supporters. It was not all a matter of objective pressures and class origins. But, in the same vein, we must credit the assembling of this proletarian layer and its training to the point where it stood for principles in 1940 also, at least in part, to Cannon.

In fact, we have here an important characterisation of Cannon's, which was reflected in all his writings. He always wrote in the most modest, popular American way. It appears that he is simply passing on bits of wisdom of a practical sort about constructing the party. However, this wisdom is the product of a very rich experience, an experience which he personally passed through as a proletarian fighter who passed through several generations of struggle of the working class and closely collaborated with the leaders of the Russian Revolution.

One can be fooled by Cannon's form of writing and view him as a mere practitioner and his writings as simply organisational in content. However, Lenin in particular taught us that the high point of theory is in the construction of the party. Cannon's writings are actually rich in theory and Cannon himself has made a major contribution to the body of Marxist knowledge necessary to construct revolutionary movements.

There is, of course, a central weakness to all of Cannon's work. Cannon is distinguished from Lenin precisely in his inability to raise the knowledge gathered in the course of party building to its highest theoretical level - to the question of the Marxist method itself. This severe limitation in his writings - itself a limitation in his practice and his education of his cadres - would have highly detrimental effects once he was forced to function without the collaboration of a Lenin or a Trotsky.

What this requires of us is to extract as best we can the knowledge in his writings seeking as we do so to raise this knowledge to a higher theoretical point. But to carry out this task we must first be able to recognise its content and not turn away from it as have the many petty bourgeois critics of Cannon.

Trotsky could not, not living in the country, assemble such forces. His theoretical work was indispensable to their assembly but so also was the day to day fight of Cannon. Unless we believe revolutionary proletarian forces can be assembled through pragmatism, we must see in this an expression of Cannon's strength as a Marxist. He was not a fully developed Marxist. He had pragmatic and nationalist tendencies. But he was without question the best damn Marxist in the Trotskyist movement outside of Trotsky himself!

To hold any different opinion is to view Marxism as some esoteric exercise of the intellectuals, rather than the theoretical knowledge which is developed in the course of constructing the party in the working class itself. This knowledge, of course, incorporates all past knowledge.

itself the product of man's million year struggle against nature, and intellectuals play a crucial role in bringing this knowledge into the workers movement. But this knowledge is *developed* as part of the construction of the proletarian party, a party deeply rooted in the working class but containing the best forces from the middle class.

The Struggle For A Proletarian Party is, like all Cannon's books very modest in theoretical form, but in contains valuable knowledge - Marxist knowledge - necessary to the construction of the party. Anyone who attempts today to build a proletarian party and is ignorant or disparaging towards this book, as well as its companion volume *Speeches to the Party*, will surely fail in that task.

MISTAKE

It would be a mistake to view the fight in 1940 as merely a matter of Trotsky providing the theory and Cannon the practice. It was a common struggle led by two great revolutionaries with different strengths. As in the case of all fundamental struggles, it exposed clearly the weaknesses in past practice. It opened up the possibility of great future developments. This is why Trotsky, so soon after the fight, pursued this discussion to bring about a theoretical development of the Cannon group itself. At the same time, he encouraged and supported Cannon's policies of turning the party ever more decisively into the working class.

The struggle for the Marxist method is indeed critical to building a revolutionary party. Without this struggle there is no revolutionary party - only centrism. However, this fight must be a material fight - a fight to change the practice of the party in the working class itself - to discover the revolutionary layers of that class, to train and develop the best of these layers as mass leaders. To separate the Marxist method from the proletarian character of a party is a turn to idealism. At this point, the pursuit of the dialectic becomes a turn away from the working class and a turn into neo-Hegelian philosophical idealism.

A party must find its way to the revolutionary layers of the working class. Without such layers, a party remains a middle class circle. In Cannon's day the party had, in part, found these layers in the mass of young workers who turned to the organisation and building of the new CIO unions. It was a working class much different from that which we now know. It was a base which could grasp the idea of revolution as something real, something needed, something which the strength of the working class could achieve. Only such layers could have withstood the pressures of the coming war in 1940. Such was the base of the strength of that party in 1940.

American Thesis

In the period immediately following World War II, James P. Cannon found himself in a position quite isolated internationally. Trotsky was dead and there was no one else in the international movement comparable to collaborate with. He was on his own and what he did would have a critical effect on the small forces of the Fourth International scattered around the world.

At the same time, there was a tremendous upsurge in the American working class. This was the period of the great post war strike wave. All the activities of the SWP brought immediate and serious results. The circulation of the press rose, new branches were formed, the party more than doubled in membership in the course of a year or two including for the first time large numbers of Black workers.

The *American Thesis* was developed by Cannon in 1946 in response to this situation. Banda correctly singles out this document as being of the greatest importance in the post-Trotsky history of the SWP. In fact it stands out as the most important development of the whole period between 1940 and 1953. However, Banda refuses to recognise any strengths in the document or to be able to fully explain its central weakness.

The *American Thesis* is the document of a *revolutionary*. Every sentence in the document breathes with the spirit of a man who has learned through experience of the revolutionary capacity of the American working class and who lived through the period of the great battles of the Russian working class during its period of ascendancy.

The movement of American workers brought this strength out of Cannon. On this level this document remains to this day important to the revolutionary movement in this country and internationally. Whatever else is wrong with it, this aspect of it is not to be minimised because so many of the forces of the Fourth International

in the United States and elsewhere were not real revolutionaries, were no more than centrist critics. Banda, of course, denies this side of Cannon completely.

The *American Thesis* expressed a completely *wrong* assessment of the world situation in that it ignored the successful efforts towards capitalist stability already well underway in Europe because of the betrayals of the Stalinists. This created great confusion within the SWP when the postwar upsurge of the working class subsided in the United States and Europe, and a long period of boom and relative quiescence of the working class ensued. The Cochranites were to later take advantage of this disorientation for the purpose of overthrowing the correct revolutionary conclusions of the *Thesis*.

We must hold Cannon responsible for this disorientation *but* we must also note he was not alone in this disorientation. *No one*, including Gerry Healy, not a soul within the Fourth International at the time, had a better grasp of capitalist development. The Goldman-Morrow group to be sure saw the restabilisation of capitalism but they saw this as a non-revolutionary permanent state of affairs combined with the growth of what they saw as a permanent "totalitarian" bureaucratic state in the Soviet camp. Germain and Pablo persisted in their rosy conception of the international situation to the point where in 1950 they saw a period of "War-Revolution" in which the objective situation would change the very character of Stalinism and make the Trotskyist movement obsolete.

The greatest weakness of Cannon in the *American Thesis* period lay not simply in a lack of grasp of economic realities which he shared with the rest of the Fourth International but rather in a tendency to jump over the necessary stages in the political development of the American working class. The strength of Stalinism was minimised and the perspective of fighting for a labour party abandoned. In the place of a perspective which dealt with the real historical problems of the American working class, Cannon developed the theory of the *small mass party*. Banda for good reasons does not even mention this theory.

THEORY

According to the theory of the small mass party, the revolutionary movement of the American working class is so powerful that the masses of unpolitical workers will turn directly to the SWP itself by-passing a struggle with the Stalinists and a labour party experience. In this way a very small party can develop quickly a mass base and with this base take the power.

It is important to understand how such an *illusion* developed, for illusion it was... It was not only an illusion because the class struggle wave would soon ebb but because, even if it did not ebb, the American working class would still go through a difficult development with Stalinism and with the labour bureaucracy before it would be broken from a hundred years of domination politically by the bourgeoisie either directly or through radical middle class intermediaries.

The illusion was rooted in a part of reality - in an actual material development around the SWP. The SWP was an effective party with wide support in those days. It appeared to Cannon and many party members that the party was well on the road to power. The illusion of the small mass party was rooted thus in the very success of the party. That success blinded Cannon to the enormity of the political tasks still ahead of the American working class.

The parallel with recent developments in the British movement is striking. In the last few years the Socialist Labour League has met with success. A layer of workers has been won to its banner. A daily press has been built up. A number of projects, like the Right to Work Marches and the Pageant, have met with wide support among workers.

On this basis Gerry Healy and Michael Banda have succumbed to this very thesis of the small mass party. The SLL has been "transformed" into the Workers Revolutionary Party. This party is envisioned as directly recruiting masses of workers.

The British movement has abandoned materialism for pure subjective idealist impressionism. They spot right-wing trends, tendencies, potentials and transform them into immediate realities. They sense the support from the working class around them but develop the illusion that that support can be transformed into party membership by the mere signing of a card in the street. They seek to jump over the laborious task imposed upon British revolutionaries by over 100 years of syndicalist and social democratic traditions in England. They have abandoned the "Transitional Program" and the fight for the millions of British workers who still support the Labour Party.

There is another matter which must be mentioned in relation to Banda's treatment of this period. This is how Banda describes the situation in the United States in 1940:

tendencies which occurred at that time:

"The confusion in the SWP was further compounded at this time by unprincipled unity negotiations conducted between Cannon and the Workers Party of Shachtman. The purpose of these manoeuvres was to split off the Johnson-Forrest group - a state capitalist group completely opposed to Trotskyism - and assimilate them into the SWP. It was a perfect example of Cannon's pragmatic politics and - as usual - came to nought when Johnson-Forest (CLR James Raya Dunayevskaya) denounced the SWP in 1950 for supporting North Korea against the South and US Imperialism in the Korean War and walked out of the SWP never to return".

The unity negotiations with the Shachtman group were not only completely principled but politically absolutely necessary. What they showed, as I stated in my book *The Struggle For Marxism in the United States*, was that the political process of 1940 was not completed. It was necessary to go back to that discussion. After all, involved was not only a grouping within the Shachtmanites, the Johnson group, seeking unity with the SWP, but a grouping within the SWP, Goldman-Morrow, going over to the positions of Shachtman. The discussion which did take place was on the whole a very good one with important articles written on the Marxist method by Novack and by Cochran. It contributed to the education of the movement.

Even the Johnson episode is not to be written off because in the end, four years later, Johnson left. After all many people left in the 1950s. This is an idealist method of history to see this end of a political process as predetermined at the beginning. This way no one ever struggles to change anyone.

The SWP was actually richer for the Johnson experience. It was in 1948 that the SWP finally got around to writing a basic resolution on the Negro question. There is much that is weak in that resolution but it represents an historic step forward for the American Trotskyist movement. Its heart is a recognition of the *revolutionary* potential of the Black masses and its insistence that this potential could only be brought forward on the basis of a *class struggle* program. Johnson wrote that resolution and gave the convention report on it. He fought as part of the SWP leadership for its implementation.

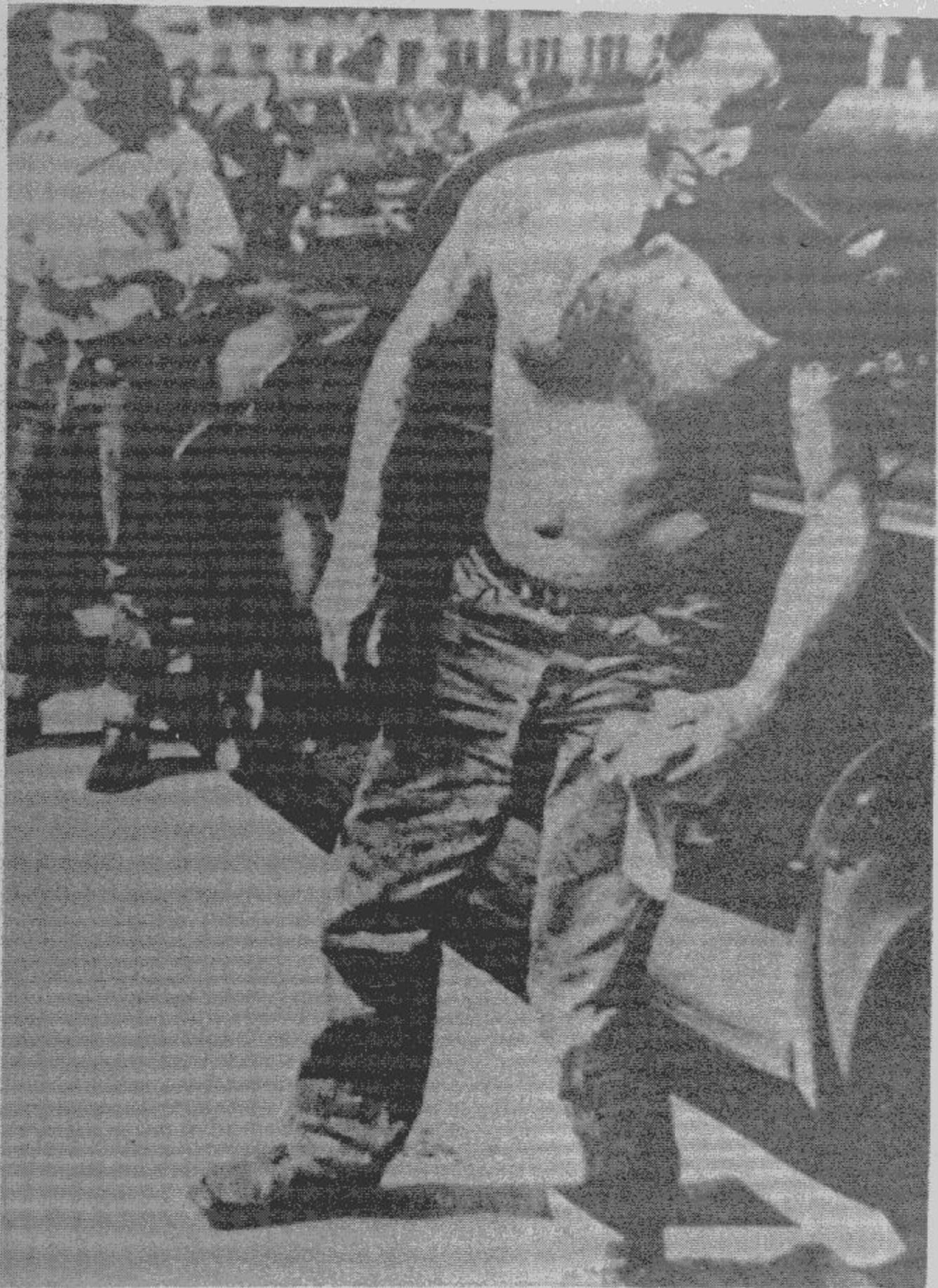
It was also the Johnson tendency who were the first in America to take up the fight against Pablo, posing the differences between the positions of Pablo and those of Cannon. While they did this from their state capitalist point of view, it was nonetheless an important contribution to a discussion no one in the Fourth International at that time seemed to want to carry through to the end.

Can we say now that the evolution of Johnson was inevitable? Was it not possible that, given a somewhat different set of objective circumstances in the 1950s, he could have been broken from his false theories? Was his break with Shachtman a manoeuvre or a real principled movement toward revolutionary perspective?

The 1953 Split with Pablo

The greatest distortion of history on the part of Michael Banda occurs in his account of the 1953 split which led to the formation of the International Committee itself. Anything which touches on these events touches the very heart of Trotskyism, the very foundations of our movement. For ten years now, the SWP leadership has done its best to minimise the significance of this fundamental and principled break between Trotskyism and revisionism. Nonetheless, the very issues of 1953 are now at the center of the divisions within the United Secretariat. (The United Secretariat was formed when the SWP rejoined the original Pabloite international group headed by Ernest Mandel).

Michael Banda today, for his own factional reasons, seeks to obscure the fundamental issues at stake in that split and to slander those, like James P. Cannon, who carried out the world historic task of defending Trotskyism against the threat which almost destroyed the international movement. James P. Cannon's role in 1953 is at least equal to his contribution in 1928 when he first stood up for



Beaten US carworker - victim of McCarthyite anti-communist hysteria.



Detail from a mural by Diego Rivera. Top row: (left to right) Stalin, Marx, Lenin, Engels, Trotsky; below them, Bukharin, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin; bottom row, Foster, Lovestone, Cannon, Ruthenburg, Wolfe.

Trotskyism laying the basis for the continuity of Marxism in America and greatly strengthening it internationally.

To understand 1953, we must first understand the character of the Fourth International in the postwar period. There existed the SWP as the only serious section of the international with a history, a developed leadership, a proletarian base and a solid party apparatus. However, the SWP leadership, particularly Cannon, were not fully developed theoretically. This theoretical backwardness was most clearly expressed in the abandonment of any real *perspectives* for the construction of a party in 1946 accompanied by a turn away from the development of a perspective for the international movement as a whole.

The tasks of developing an international perspective and overseeing international work was left largely to the European group. There a small group of talented but inexperienced intellectuals - Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel were the most typical - had set up an international center. However, that center was not based on any solid parties or experienced cadres. It acted, in effect, as a leading committee for all the European sections. None of its leaders were tested in the day to day hard work of constructing sections and that is the life, the heart of the development of Marxist theory. There was only the French section and that section was rife with factionalism and dominated by warring groups of intellectuals distant from the powerful French working class whose postwar upsurge was directed primarily through the French Stalinist movement.

The development of the British movement within this context is important to note. Banda, who was a participant in these events and is today a leader of the British movement, says not a word about this development. The British movement was very much in a position politically as well as geographically between the European and American types of parties. Until 1949, the leadership was in the hands of the Haston group, a petty bourgeois grouping like the worst in the European movement. Haston supported the Shachtmanites in the United States, opposed work in the Labour Party and in the end broke completely with Trotskyism to enter the right wing of the Labour Party.

MINORITY

However, there also existed an important minority led by Gerry Healy. This minority had close working relations with the SWP, particularly with Cannon that went back to 1943 when Cannon assisted in the unification of the Healy group with the official Fourth International section. This grouping looked to the SWP politically and the aid which the SWP gave to this group represents perhaps its most important contribution to international work in that period. It is doubtful if that group could have survived without that support *and* political guidance. Healy was at that time a member of the IEC in Paris, and particularly in the post-Haston period, also developed a close working relationship with Pablo.

When Pablo began to develop his pro-Stalinist revisionist and liquidationist views in the course of a discussion of the nature of the Buffer Countries in the 1949 and 1950, the resistance within all sections of the Fourth International was confused and muted. This included both the SWP *and* the Healy group which at that time was in a period of the closest collaboration with Pablo. Michael Banda himself even participated in an international work brigade in Yugoslavia.

When the Third World Congress codified Pablo's revisionism in its major documents, these documents were voted for by *both* Healy and the Americans, though to Cannon's credit he tried to get some amendments submitted. When Pablo turned against the French majority and expelled this group, the first step in what would be his drive to liquidate the old cadres of the FI, he received the support of *both* Healy and Cannon. This is the record. This is what actually happened. And it was in many ways an understandable state of affairs given the level of experience and development of the whole Fourth International at the

time of Trotsky's death, an international movement which had only known isolation and defeat.

Nonetheless Pabloite revisionism was finally resisted. It is significant to understand where this resistance originated, why it took place, and who led it. The resistance centred in those parties which had sought to root themselves in the experience of 1940, to learn the lessons of both Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism* and Cannon's *Struggle For A Proletarian Party*. It came from sections which had taken seriously the day to day work of building parties in the working class. It did not come from isolated intellectuals and theory spinners.

Pabloism was only seriously resisted when it struck the heart of the SWP itself. When the theories of Pablo found an expression within the American party in the form of a liquidationist faction, the Cochranites, Cannon fought back. He fought back under extremely difficult circumstances of highly unfavourable political situation in the United States. He fought back in the beginning as a minority within his own leading committee. This fight back laid the basis for the future development of the Fourth International. We can never forget that.

SUPPORT

The initiative did not come from Healy. Healy's strength was that once Cannon had taken on Cochran and began to draw the international conclusions from Pablo's support to Cochran, Healy supported Cannon. It was Healy's support to Cannon which led Pablo to organise a faction against him led by John Lawrence who ended up in the Communist Party.

We do not wish in any way to minimise the importance of this intervention of Healy's. It was of the greatest significance for it was the only serious support the SWP was to get internationally at that point. At the same time, it made possible the continuity of Trotskyism in Britain. Therefore it made a major contribution to the development of the Fourth International. Nor is it a matter of retrospective blame or attack on Healy. The man, like Cannon, was a product of a certain stage of the development of the Fourth International. His movement was considerably smaller and his cadres lacked the experience of the SWP in the struggles of the 20s and 30s and the close collaboration with Trotsky. Nonetheless if Cannon's slowness to act against Pablo is a sign of his theoretical backwardness, his pragmatism, then we must make a similar judgement of Healy's own history. At that point in time, there was no qualitative difference between the two on matters of the Marxist method.

When it came to illusions about Pablo those were on Healy's side not Cannon's. Let us look at the record. Writing as late as May 27, 1953 to Jim Cannon, Gerry Healy states:

"The problem of Pablo has for some time been a source of great anxiety for me. For the past few years I have been extremely close to him and have grown to like him considerably. On the present issue I thought and still think that it would be possible to prevent him from making serious errors, by endeavouring to hold him back until the issues in the SWP become sufficiently clear. At this stage, however, we need to get together and exchange ideas . . . I think we must do everything possible to prevent a head-on collision between Pablo and you".

Michael Banda points out that Cannon sought to straddle the full political meaning of the struggle against Pablo by claiming to support the Third World Congress documents while disagreeing with their application to the United States. He correctly blasts this position as theoretically wrong and pragmatic. But this was also the position of Gerry Healy. Not only did Healy support the Third World Congress documents, but he skirted opposition to them during the first stages of his own struggle with Pablo. Not only that but when the revisionist Fourth World Congress document *Rise and Fall of Stalinism* was placed before the IS for a vote, he declined in the name of the IS. He reserved the right to make amendments which he, however, did not carry out.

The truth is only *one* person in the anti-Pablo camp

proposed the policy which in retrospect Banda correctly proposes today - a head-on attack on the Third World Congress documents. That was the position of Sam Gordon, a leading SWP cadre then living in Britain. Whatever else may be said about Gordon before or after 1953, he was proven correct at that time. Neither Cannon nor Healy supported him in this move and were openly embarrassed by his stand. However, they correctly collaborated with him in a joint struggle against Pablo.

STAND

The only honest assessment we can make of James P. Cannon's role in 1953 is that the man took a stand for Trotskyist principle. He fought when his party was threatened with liquidation and extended that fight internationally. He *alone* laid the basis for the continuity of Trotskyism after 1953. He was the *most developed* Marxist leader of the Fourth International at that point in history. At the same time, he was a man of grave theoretical weaknesses, weaknesses which had contributed to the difficulties in the FI and in the SWP. He needed to go forward from 1953 to overcome these weaknesses if Trotskyism would develop. He did not do this. Gerry Healy did, and that was his greatest contribution to Trotskyism.

But the question is not ended there. Today, if we are to build the revolutionary movement, we must ask ourselves, what theoretical contributions, what content, can we draw from this 1953 fight to aid us? Did a *development of theory* take place in the course of the practice of this great struggle with Pablo despite the theoretical limitations of *all* the participants? We hold that there is such content in these events. Banda obscures the essential theoretical gains of struggle.

(1) The Nature of Internationalism. In this period Pablo posed as the greatest exponent of internationalism against what he considered the provincial and isolationist position of the SWP. While these characteristics certainly were to some extent true of the SWP, it was Pablo, not Cannon, who in that period almost completely destroyed the international. Cannon insisted that an international movement had to be seen in relation to its actual stage of development. It must be composed of parties with an indigenous leadership, a leadership with support among the ranks and experience in the working class. Those parties must each day be involved in the struggle to build the movement within the labour movement, learning each day from that experience.

Any attempt to create an international from on top, to construct an international apparatus of rootless individuals cut off from the responsibility of building national sections could only lead to what it did lead to - the destruction of the international. Interventions into the internal affairs of sections based on discipline and fiat rather than on open political struggle was in the tradition of the decay of the Comintern and not of the Fourth International.

This is how Cannon expressed this approach in a letter to Farrell Dobbs:

"You know I am super-sensitive about any manifestation of 'Cominternism'. I have had experience with this business in my life-time and the burnt child fears the fire. Any one can be as 'internationalist' as he wants to be, but he can't make the different national parties uniform and subject to handling by a uniform method. The weakness and inexperience of the different European parties and of all of them together, due to the failures of past leading cadres in each of the parties, imposed upon the IEC the task of virtually leading each one of the national parties directly. The IEC is in effect the leading body of a *European Trotskyist party*, and this had been the case ever since the first European conference which was held toward the end of the war.

In my opinion this is not the best system. No national party will amount to much till it throws up a qualified, indigenous leadership of its own selection. The more or less direct leadership of the IEC in the meantime was the best that could be done under the circumstance. I think we have all recognised this and made due allowances for the exceptional circumstances. But I have never agreed with those who saw in this set-up the model for all time. The IEC, in my view, will not accomplish its real work until the various national parties, with the help and guidance of the IEC, finally develop a national leadership in each case".

This view was shared completely by Gerry Healy at that time. In the same letter previously quoted to Jim Cannon, he writes:

"Pablo suffers badly from isolation in Paris. That French movement is a 'killer'. It really is impossible to hold an international centre together when you have no national section to help it. Real international leaders can arise no other way except through a basic experience and training in building and leading a national section. Pablo has not got to this and as a result has grown impatient. . . ."

In 1966, in his pamphlet *Problems of the Fourth International*, Healy returns to the same point but enriched by the theoretical development over the next decade: "Once a Marxist departs from a continuous study of the workers' movement from the standpoint of the struggle to build the revolutionary party, he departs from the science of Marxism and becomes an impressionist".

LINK

Here we can see the link between what appears to be an organisational question - the need at all times to begin with the construction of concrete parties in actual countries developing and testing a serious cadre and leadership in the process - and the theoretical and philosophical question - the impressionism which led Pablo to liquidate the party in favor of various schemes involving the Stalinists and later the colonial movement. Marxism is a materialist science and, as such, must be rooted in a practice. Once Marxism is separated from the day to day party fight in the class, it is transformed into an idealist revisionism. The full implications of this theoretically were not seen until a decade later but the rudiments are crystal clear in the experience of 1953 and in Cannon's writings based on the experience of the international workers movement since 1919.

In the recent period, Gerry Healy has turned back upon these great lessons learned through such bitter experience. His recent actions in changing the indigenous leadership of the American Workers League is stolen from Pablo with one qualification. That is that just as the Third World Congress decisions were not to apply to the SWP, so Healy's new "internationalism" is not to apply to his own party, the Workers Revolutionary Party. We say without qualification that if we had listened more to the Jim Cannon of 1953

(and, we might add to the Gerry Healy of 1953) and less to the Gerry Healy of recent years, the Workers League would be far stronger today.

(2) The Nature of a Proletarian Orientation. Trotsky insisted that a central lesson to be learned from the 1940 fight was the necessity at every point to root the party in the working class. The rebellion against Trotskyism within the SWP was rooted in a middle class layer which had refused to make a turn into the working class, while the resistance to this revisionism was centred in the proletarian cadres of the movement. This is why Trotsky endorsed so warmly Cannon's book *The Struggle For A Proletarian Party*.

In 1953, the situation looked, on the surface, quite different. The main base of the Cochranites lay precisely in the section of the party which was in the trade unions. What conclusions do we draw from this experience? The conclusion Banda appears to draw is that the question of the class nature of the party is unimportant as long as there is a struggle for the "Marxist method".

Cannon gave a different answer to this question in his excellent article "Trade Unionists and Revolutionaries" in *Speeches To The Party*. He wrote:

"This apparent contradiction - this division of working class forces in party factional struggle - is not new. In the classical faction struggles of our international movement since the time of Marx and Engels, there has always been a division, in the party itself, between the different strata of workers. The proletarian left wing by no means ever had all the workers, and the opportunist petty-bourgeois wing was never without some working class support, that is, working class in the technical sense of wage workers. The revisionist intellectuals and the trade union opportunists always



Mandel

nestled together in the right wing of the party. In the SWP at the present time, we have a repetition of the classical line-up that characterised the struggle of left and right in the Second International before the First World War".

Cannon then discussed the great CIO movement from the viewpoint of these different strata in the working class:

"These new unions had to split with the conservative labor fakers of the AFL before they could consolidate unions of their own. The drives behind the 1934-7 upsurge were the bitter and irreconcilable grievances of the workers; their protest against mistreatment, speedup, insecurity; the revolt of the pariahs against the pariah status.

This revolt, which no bureaucracy could contain, was spearheaded by new people - the young mass production workers, the new, young militants, whom nobody had ever heard of. They were the real creators of the CIO. This revolt of the 'men from nowhere' reached its high tide in the sit-down strikes of 1937. The workers' victory in these battles definitely established the CIO and secured stability of the new unions through the seniority clause.

It is now sixteen years since the sit-down strikes made the new CIO unions secure by the seniority clause. These sixteen years of union security, and thirteen years of uninterrupted war and postwar prosperity, have wrought a great transformation in the unprivileged workers who made the CIO".

In conclusion, Cannon notes:

"There is a mass of younger workers who have none of these benefits and privileges and no vested interest in the piled-up seniority rights. They are the human material for the new radicalisation. The revolutionary party, looking to the future, must turn its primary attention to them".

This marks a highly important contribution to the development of a revolutionary perspective particularly in America but also in other countries. First, we can now see that the proletarian base of Cannon in 1940 was made up primarily of younger workers who had experienced the great CIO upsurge. Even Farrell Dobbs was still a very young man. The workers of the Cochran group had gone through a material transformation over two decades reflecting actual changes in the nature of the American working class movement. Thus, they developed a natural affinity for the petty bourgeois liquidationist elements in the party like George Clarke and Bert Cochran.

Next we can grasp in Cannon's writings in 1953 great lessons for a revolutionary perspective today. Today also many revisionists turn to so-called "work" in the trade unions which amounts to little more than syndicalist action combined with the maintenance of little petty bourgeois radical circles far from the real movement of the American working class. The only revolutionary perspectives in America today, the only road to the working class, is to turn to the working class youth, including the young workers in the trade unions.

At this point we can add to Cannon's understanding. Because of the particular history of the United States, which created a racially discriminated against minority within the working class, it is particularly among the mass of minority working class youth, the result of massive migration into the industrial cities beginning with World

War I, that a revolutionary party today will find the human material to fight to win over the working class as a whole. This is today's equivalent of the young production line pariahs of the 1930s.

This is precisely the orientation we fought so bitterly for within the Workers League over the past few years. It brought about a *class resistance* as powerful and as centrist as the Shachtmanites of 1940 and the Cochranites of 1953. It led to a section of the party leaving as individuals while another section remained in to resist this turn. In August of 1974 Gerry Healy intervened into the Workers League just as Pablo did in 1953 in the SWP, to support this right-wing group and to remove the leadership which was in the forefront of the turn into the working class. The new leadership of the Workers League follows the IS and similar groups in an orientation towards the high seniority workers while maintaining an isolated middle class circle existence.

(3) The Theoretical and Philosophical Roots of Revisionism. The 1953 fight was only the beginning of the fight against the *new revisionism*, the modern day betrayers of Trotskyism. We are not yet at the end of that fight. But it is wrong for us to judge it as if it could be the end - the full and rounded understanding of the nature of revisionism and its roots. We have sketched above two important contributions of Cannon to an understanding of revisionism - the need to proceed at every moment from the actual practice of party building in the working class movement and the necessity to root the party in the revolutionary strata of the class - the working class youth. However, this is only a beginning and not an end to the process of understanding Pabloism. In 1953, outside of an important reassertion of Trotskyist fundamentals, the movement did not go beyond this level.

Here we come up against Cannon's greatest weakness. Marx explained that the dialectical method requires that we begin from the concrete material world around us. We can only begin thinking from our experiences in this world. But then the task is to abstract the lessons from this experience in order to understand what underlies the surface facts before us. These facts are actually abstractions themselves in that they are only a part of nature, a part which appears to us in disconnected fashion until we probe through a cognitive process for the connections. Also, we do not come into practice empty headed nor is all knowledge simply a result of the immediate practice. We bring about an opposition, a conflict, of our previously developed abstract knowledge, itself the product of the past struggle of man with nature over thousands of years, with the new, changing material world which appears to us as facts, particulars.

On this basis we can return into this material world armed with an enriched and rounded perspective as the basis for our practice - a universal enriched with all the content of the particular, a concrete which is no longer the "imaginary concrete" to use Marx's term, but one which reveals all the levels of interconnections between the facts.

Cannon limited his understanding to a lower level of abstraction. He had a grasp, an understanding of party building, of cliques, of the working class, gathered in a long history in the Marxist movement. But the relationship between one observation, no matter how correct, and another was rarely made.

DEAD END

Practice in the party is the *source* of new knowledge for Marxists but not all practice brings with it scientific knowledge. This is a *conscious* practice which requires training in dialectical thinking combined with a rich knowledge of the past theoretical conquests of the workers movement. If we do not grasp this then we fall into the activist position which leads to dead-ends such as Cannon's small mass party illusions of 1946, and the road presently being followed by the WRP in England.

A beginning to grapple with the problems posed in 1953 on this higher theoretical level was made primarily at the initiative of Gerry Healy in the 1961-71 period. Cannon did not take this road. In the end he fell back into the revisionist camp turning against all he had fought for all his life.

But it also follows that one cannot master the Marxist method in an abstract way. It can only be done *through* a turn into the potentially revolutionary strata of working class youth and bringing to a theoretical level the problems of the party which must arise out of such a turn. It can be further stated that a party which is not allowed to make its own experiences and develop its own leadership, is not capable of training cadres to *think* independently as Marxists, to assess on their own the meaning of the rich experiences they are passing through. Since Marxism is a science, it cannot flower under conditions of suppressions of tendencies, organisational fiat and the like. This Cannon understood and this Healy has completely violated.

FOOTNOTES

1. The material referred to was reprinted in the *Bulletin*, twice-weekly organ of the Workers League, from November 8th, 1974 to November 22nd, 1974.
2. See *The Struggle for Marxism in the USA*, by Tim Wohlforth, Labor Publications, New York, 1971.
3. See *The First Ten Years of American Communism* by James Cannon, Pathfinder Press, 1962, and *The History of American Trotskyism*, James Cannon, Pioneer, 1944.
4. *Bulletin* series, Part One, November 8th, 1974.
5. *Ibid*.
6. *Bulletin* series, Part Two, November 12th, 1974.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, *Letters to Americans 1848-1895*, International Publishers, New York 1963.
9. See "Left Wing" *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, by V. I. Lenin, International Publishers, New York, 1940.
10. *First Ten Years of American Communism*
11. *Bulletin* series, Part One, November 8th 1974.
12. Juan Farinas was a member of the Workers League. He had been framed upon a charge of refusing induction into the army in 1968. He was convicted and sentenced to two years in the Federal Penitentiary at Danbury Connecticut. He was released on parole in the Spring of 1973. The Workers League conducted a mass defense campaign based on the principles of the old ILD.
13. *Bulletin*, Part Two, November 12th 1974.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*.
16. *Bulletin*, Part Three, November 15th 1974. Banda is referring to the complete collapse of Stalinist policy in Germany with the coming to power of Hitler in 1933.
17. *Ibid*.
18. Cannon, James P., *The Struggle for A Proletarian Party*, Pioneer Publishers, New York, p 59.

The next issue of *Trotskyism Today* will appear in *Socialist Press* number 29 and will contain our reply to Wohlforth