

The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International

Chapter 17: The Split in the Fourth International

15 November 2003

It is hardly surprising that the renegade Michael Banda centers his denunciation of the International Committee on the document which summoned Trotskyists all over the world to fight a revisionist cancer which threatened to destroy the world party of socialist revolution.

The “Open Letter,” written by James P. Cannon in November 1953, occupies a unique place of honor in the history of the Fourth International. Its stature can be gauged by the not insignificant fact that after 33 years, it still inspires revolutionists and inflames the anger of renegades. This “Letter to Trotskyists Throughout the World” remains the great political landmark in the history of the Fourth International which has defined the boundaries between Marxism and revisionism for more than a generation.

Since 1953, the “Open Letter” has been the nemesis of every revisionist tendency which has broken with Trotskyism. In opposition to the revisionism of Pablo, the “Open Letter” reaffirmed the foundations and historic perspective of the Fourth International. Inasmuch as virtually all revisionist tendencies since 1953 have done little more than improvise variations on the themes composed by Pablo, the principles articulated in the “Open Letter” and a series of associated documents written by Cannon in 1953-54 have provided Trotskyists with a basic orientation in combating the enemies of the Fourth International.

Although virtually his entire political life was bound up with this extraordinary document, Banda now writes:

The Open Letter and the formation of the IC is being touted around by D. North and his bureaucratic clique as a historic gain of Trotskyism which must be unconditionally defended. This merely testifies to the theoretical poverty, intellectual arrogance and political immaturity of this sorry little gang of liars. The Open Letter was an opportunist response by Healy and Cannon conducted in the most arbitrary and hasty manner to give themselves an alibi for their own incredible political skulduggery.

There was neither logic nor honesty nor truth in this equivocal and undignified manoeuvre. *They fought Pabloism with Pabloism. They first of all deliberately created a Frankenstein Monster in the form of Pablo and then, through the Open Letter, tried desperately to absolve themselves of all responsibility and deliberately prevented any real discussion on and examination of the political, social and historical roots of Pabloism.*

Rather than examining the political content of the “Open Letter,” Banda dismisses it as an “alibi” for the crimes supposedly committed by Healy and Cannon at an earlier stage. What a bankrupt substitute for a genuine

analysis of historical processes! If one were to apply this method to, let us say, the history of the United States, one could conclude that the Emancipation Proclamation was, no less than the “Open Letter,” an “equivocal and undignified maneuver” aimed at covering up Lincoln’s “incredible political skulduggery.” After all, during the first year of the Civil War, he refused to act against slavery, then drafted the proclamation in secret, introduced it only under the pressure of military necessity, was persuaded to delay its publication until the North won a victory and, to top it all off, limited the emancipation order to only those states still in rebellion as of January 1, 1863. That is, he “freed” the slaves only in those parts of the United States where the Union exercised no authority and could not enforce the proclamation!

Why not go even further and condemn the entire Civil War on the grounds that the Confederacy was a “Frankenstein Monster” created by the Founding Fathers whose constitutional compromises legitimized slavery in the South? Professor Banda could justify this condemnation by explaining that Lincoln, trying desperately to absolve the North of all responsibility for the crisis his political forebears had created, appealed “in the most arbitrary and hasty manner” for 75,000 volunteers after the surrender of Fort Sumter in order to prevent “any real discussion on and examination of the political, social and historical roots of” the Confederacy.

For those who would object that the analogy is too far fetched, let us find one that is drawn from the history of the Marxist movement. No doubt if Banda had been in Petrograd in April 1917, he would have denounced Lenin’s “April Theses” in a lengthy tract reminding one and all that Lenin was the author of the notorious theory of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, that he bore full responsibility for the desperate crisis inside the Bolshevik Party and that there “was neither logic nor honesty nor truth” in his attacks on the Old Bolsheviks. Perhaps he would have called his article “27 Reasons Why the Bolshevik Party Should Be Buried and the Socialist Revolution Called Off”!

For all the petty-bourgeois philistines who appoint themselves the proofreaders of history, there is no shortage of “typos” to be found in the political biographies of even the greatest Marxists. In the mistakes of these fighters they discover justifications for their own pettiness, lack of character and incapacity for revolutionary action. It is comparatively easy to fault Cannon for not having recognized in 1951 the full implications of the Third World Congress documents. That is a mistake that was shared by many in the Fourth International—including Banda, who though he claimed later to have had doubts early on, apparently kept them to himself. But whatever Cannon’s political limitations and mistakes, he rose to the occasion in 1953 and summoned all his experience and fighting

capacities to oppose the liquidation of the Fourth International. All Trotskyists, including those who had perhaps understood the insidious role of Pablo somewhat earlier, welcomed with enthusiasm the powerful and decisive intervention of this veteran 63-year-old revolutionist against the intrigues of the liquidators. After all, it is rare, as recent experience has again confirmed, to find men anywhere near that age who are prepared to take the field of battle against revisionism!

In this struggle, Cannon represented the historical interests of the working class, that is, its struggle to break free from the stranglehold of Stalinism and all other agencies of imperialism within the workers' movement. Significantly, Banda does not tell us what he thinks Cannon should have done in 1953 to defend the Fourth International under conditions in which Pablo was exploiting the administrative post he held in the leadership of the Fourth International to expel majorities within sections which opposed his liquidationist line. In justifying the need for such drastic action as publicly denouncing Pablo in the pages of the *Militant*, Cannon remarked that when the shooting starts, discussion ends. This is something which Banda most likely does not understand, given the fact that inside the WRP shooting generally started before discussion even began. At any rate, the SWP issued the "Open Letter" when it realized it was dealing with a ruthless and unprincipled clique that was intent on using its control of the International Secretariat to suppress discussion and expel Trotskyists from the Fourth International.

If Banda now objects to the publication of the "Open Letter," it is only because he has come to agree with the political positions represented by Pablo. From where he stands today, Banda wishes that the "Open Letter" had not been written, that the International Committee had not been founded, and that Pablo had succeeded in liquidating the Fourth International.

Banda's repudiation of the struggle against Pabloism is highlighted by the fact that he makes no reference to the major developments within the international political situation which formed the objective background to the split and contributed to clarifying the fundamental issues of program and principle at stake in the struggle: the death of Stalin in March 1953, the East German uprising of June 1953, and the French General Strike of August 1953. As a truly internationalist document, the "Open Letter" dealt with all these questions.

Several weeks after Stalin's death, George Clarke—who, along with Cochran, was Pablo's closest ally in the SWP—delivered a report entitled "Stalin's Role—Stalinism's Future." This speech introduced two fundamental revisions of the Trotskyist appraisal of Stalinism. First, it suggested that "socialist property forms" existed inside the USSR: a claim made by the Stalinists, but always rejected by Trotsky. Second, Clarke challenged the concept of the political revolution as it had been developed by the Fourth International over a period of 20 years. Speculating over the form that the downfall of Stalinism will take, Clarke wrote:

Will the process take the form of a violent upheaval against bureaucratic rule in the USSR? Or will concessions to the masses and sharing of power—as was the long course of the English bourgeois revolution in the political relation ship between the rising bourgeoisie and the declining nobility—gradually undermine the base of the bureaucracy? Or will the evolution be a combination of both forms? That we cannot foresee. *But that this process means not the end of socialism, but its great renaissance—that is certain.*[1] (Clarke's emphasis.)

Trotsky had explicitly rejected any suggestion that the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy inside the USSR could be achieved by anything other than a violent political revolution. But Clarke was now advancing

the conception that there could be some peaceful growing over of Stalinism into socialism, a view that had been originally propounded by Isaac Deutscher, the centrist from Poland who emigrated to Britain and achieved fame as a journalist and biographer of Stalin and Trotsky. In writings which coincided with and influenced Pablo's thinking, Deutscher argued that the realization of socialism would be accomplished through political tendencies that are neither Stalinist nor Trotskyist. Rather, he asserted that the gradual self-reform of the bureaucracy would crystallize in a socialist movement that incorporates that which is historically progressive in both Stalinism and Trotskyism.

Clarke's revisionist line was further developed by Pablo in an article entitled "The Post Stalin 'New Course'," in which he projected an irreversible "de-Stalinization" of the bureaucracy. In appraising the significance of the East German uprising, Pablo saw it neither as a harbinger of political revolution against Stalinism nor as a demonstration of the irreconcilable antagonism between the working class and the bureaucracy, despite the violence which accompanied the uprising and the ruthlessness with which it was suppressed. Instead, Pablo placed central emphasis on the political concessions made by the bureaucracy to the East German working class: "But once the concessions are broadened, the march forward toward a real liquidation of the Stalinist regime threatens to become irresistible." [2]

Proceeding from this conception that Stalinism would be liquidated through a process of concessions to mass pressure, Pablo saw the victory of socialism within the USSR and Eastern Europe as the outcome of "violent interbureaucratic struggles between the elements who will fight for the status quo, if not for turning back, and the more and more numerous elements drawn by the powerful pressure of the masses..." [3]

The response of the Socialist Workers Party was diametrically opposed to the Clarke-Pablo line. It denounced the so-called concessions of the Stalinists as aimed at enabling "the regime to continue holding the workers by the throat," [4] and insisted:

This political uprising of the German workers laid bare the irreconcilable conflict between the working masses and the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy. The relations and conditions which produced the East German events are not limited to East Germany; they prevail throughout the buffer-zone countries and within the Soviet Union itself. East Germany thus foreshadows the revolutionary developments and struggles that lie ahead in the Stalinist dominated countries. [5]

Pablo's repudiation of the political revolution and his projection of bureaucratic self-reform represented the culmination of the liquidationist line which he had been developing since 1949. By 1953, under conditions in which the working class was entering into direct struggle against Stalinism, Pablo's role had become that of an attorney for the Soviet and East European bureaucracies.

Thus, it was no longer possible for Pablo to conceal the revisionist and liquidationist content of his political line with all sorts of superficially plausible references to the need for the Trotskyist movement to "break out of its isolation" and other much-beloved arguments of opportunists. By the time Pablo published a further "concretization" of the strategy of the Third World Congress, a document entitled "Our Integration in the Real Mass Movement, Our Experience and Perspectives," it had become clear that he was consciously working for the transformation of the sections of the Fourth International into little more than appendages of the Stalinist bureaucracies or whatever petty-bourgeois apparatuses dominated the mass labor movements in different countries. His proposals for universal "entryism" amounted to an organizational prescription for the political

dissolution of the Fourth International as a revolutionary Marxist party of the working class.

While our strategy, as the only revolutionary Marxist tendency, is the conquest of power by the proletariat and the triumph of the socialist revolution on a world scale, our tactic must take into account the concrete objective and subjective conditions so as to create the most timely and the most effective possible regroupment of conscious revolutionary forces larger than our own, and to form in the fusion with them big Marxist revolutionary parties.

In the final analysis our tactic is aimed at the creation of such revolutionary parties which are indispensable for the rapid and complete victory of the world socialist revolution.

But we envisage their creation concretely as part of the process of the movement of the class itself in each country, in the course of its maturing politically through its concrete experience, which will be assisted on the one side by the favorable objective conditions of the period, and on the other side by our own participation in the real class movement, with the aid of our program, ideas and our activity. [6]

All this talk about “the movement of the class itself” was nothing less than glib rationalizations for the betrayal of principles and the subordination of the Fourth International to alien class forces.

We take the class as it is in each country, with its peculiarities, we study its natural movements, we discern in them the progressive features, and we adopt our tactic accordingly.

The form matters little to us; the class content often deformed, concealed, latent or even potential, is, however, of decisive importance. But to discover this requires a high level of maturity of which our movement has generally given proof. [7]

Whoever wants to understand the nature of Pabloite revisionism should carefully study the above two paragraphs, which represented an updated version of the old opportunist formulation, “The movement is everything; the final goal nothing.” Pablo was the first in a long line of revisionist “operators” inside the Fourth International who made a virtue of unrestrained opportunism. They always justified their tactical improvisations with references to the smallness of the Trotskyist movement, its need to break out of isolation, etc. To say, “The form matters little to us” amounted to a justification for unprincipled relations with virtually every species of political organization, regardless of the class character of their social base and program. The assertion that the “deformed, concealed, latent or even potential” class content of organizations is “of decisive importance” was to declare war on the Marxist, historical materialist, conception of politics. Such an approach led inexorably to a modus operandi in which impressionism, maneuvers and tactical hocus-pocus became the day-to-day axis of sections which accepted this method.

For all his doubletalk and diplomatic evasions, Pablo’s “entrist” proposals were based on the conception that the injection of Trotskyist serum into Stalinist, reformist and bourgeois nationalist organizations would, through some obscure process of political alchemy, convert these anti-socialist forces into the medium through which the proletarian revolution was eventually achieved.

Pablo denounced as “sectarianism” the basic conception which underlay the founding of the Fourth International in 1938: that the crisis of

revolutionary leadership could only be resolved by the Trotskyist movement, which alone represented the heritage and continuity of Marxism. Trotsky had maintained that outside the Fourth International “there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name.” [8]

This belief in the decisive historical role of the Fourth International was rejected contemptuously by Pablo, who wrote in October 1953, “In the present concrete historical conditions the variant which is more and more the least probable is the one where the masses, disillusioned by the reformists and Stalinists, break with their traditional mass organizations to come to polarize themselves around our present nuclei, the latter acting exclusively and essentially *in an independent manner, from without.*” [9]

Pablo considered it unrealistic to believe, as Trotsky certainly did, that the sections of the Fourth International could repeat the feat accomplished by the Bolsheviks in 1917 when, within the context of a revolutionary situation, they rose from a comparatively small minority within the working class to become a mass party in just a few months. Pablo argued:

The general historical conditions characterizing the international workers’ movement, and the Russian workers’ movement in particular in 1917, are no longer the same, were it only because of the subsequent existence of the Soviet Union and Stalinism.... the case is entirely different now in the big capitalist countries, especially where a traditional mass movement exists, organized under a reformist or Stalinist leadership. [10]

This was the real perspective of Pablo: the Fourth International could never aspire to the leadership of the working class; it could never successfully challenge the Stalinists and social democrats. There was no point in fighting patiently to extend the authority of the Trotskyist movement through implacable struggle against the powerful bureaucracies. Instead, the Fourth International had to dissolve itself into the Stalinist parties in Europe (or into whatever other mass movement dominated the labor movement in other countries, e.g., Peronism in Argentina). Pablo’s petty-bourgeois pessimism was disguised with the demagogic rationalization which is still repeated by all varieties of anti-Trotskyist revisionism: “We want to be and we will be with the real revolution.” [11]

Pablo’s message was welcomed by the demoralized petty bourgeois and conservatized workers within the Fourth International who no longer believed in the viability of a Marxist perspective within the labor movements of their own countries and who were fed up with Trotskyism. While they pretended that Pablo had found the magic formula for the building of mass parties, they understood that he was really legitimizing their “integration” into the swamp of existing reformist working class organizations. In October 1953, an Australian supporter of Pablo, Win Brad Jr., wrote an angry letter to the SWP editors of *Fourth International* in which she denounced Morris Stein’s critique of Clarke’s line on the East German uprising:

Leon Trotsky died in 1940—13 years ago. A new generation, of which I am a member, has arisen since who will build socialism on a world scale. This new generation most probably can’t even remember when Leon Trotsky was alive. We cannot remember for we were hardly born in the days of the Moscow Trials, the days of the Popular Front and the United Front. We have only a very dim recollection of the Second World War and the only period we know is the period since the war and the only thing we’re really conscious of is that the final showdown between the old and the

new orders—capitalism and socialism, will occur before we are middle-aged.

To prove and to base an argument on the quotation of a man who died 12 years ago—no matter how brilliant the man, how profoundly correct his ideas, without any resort to the world since 1945 does not satisfy us. Leon Trotsky wrote for a particular period and for a particular set of circumstances.... Twelve years is a long time, particularly in this century and the period of 1933-41 is not the same as the period 1945-53.... [12]

By the autumn of that year, a virtual civil war had erupted in the Fourth International. Those who supported Pablo became uncontrolled in their factional hatred of Trotskyism and were openly embracing the counterrevolutionary politics of the Soviet bureaucracy. Another example of the life-and-death character of the struggle being waged inside the Fourth International was the position adopted by the Cochranites in the Seattle branch of the SWP. We quote from a report written to Farrell Dobbs by George Flint, a supporter of the SWP majority:

Sylvia, Bud, Roger and Jim O. finished neck and neck at our Thursday night's branch meeting, in their race to leave the party of revolutionary socialism and enter the party or the milieu of counterrevolutionary Stalinism.

Sylvia in her statement said that she repudiated all concepts of Trotskyism and considered the CP a historically revolutionary party.

Roger said that he was never fully integrated in the Trotskyist movement because he never considered the CP to be a counterrevolutionary tendency.

Bud said that after 6 years in the SWP he decided he must take himself out of the movement that is unreal with wishful thinking about the world today. Our party, he said, feeds on anticommunist sentiments of the masses.

They announced that they were also speaking for Jim O. He came in later after they had left and confirmed this.

In answer to a question at the meeting Sylvia said she considered the murder of the Left Oppositionists in the Soviet Union progressive and necessary because it served the needs of defense of the Soviet Union. [13]

The summer and early autumn of 1953 was the turning point in the struggle inside the Fourth International. The eruption of the general strike in France exposed the practical implications of the Pabloite line inside the workers' movement. Pablo opposed characterizing as a betrayal the role of the Stalinists in bringing the mass movement under control and heading off a revolutionary confrontation with the state. He merely accused them of a "lack" of policy. Moreover, Pablo's French supporters specifically endorsed the refusal of the Stalinist-controlled CGT trade unions to advance political demands.

The experience of the August general strike removed any lingering doubt that Pablo's call for deep entry into the Communist parties was part of a wholesale capitulation to Stalinism and the renunciation of Trotskyism.

Now confronting the direct opposition of Cannon to his rightwing line, Pablo's factional maneuvering assumed a desperate and reckless character. Banda's denunciation of the "Open Letter" as "an arrogant ultimatum" turns historical truth upside down. In fact, Cannon's decision to make a public appeal to Trotskyists all over the world was taken to protect the physical existence of sections of the Fourth International. As

Banda well knows, the most dangerous situation existed within Britain, where a faction headed by Lawrence, functioning under Pablo's direction, was threatening to destroy the organization unless Healy toed the Paris line and severed his political ties with Cannon.

In an extraordinary letter to Healy on September 23, 1953, Pablo warned that he would destroy Healy politically if the latter did not submit to Comintern-style discipline, keep his differences to himself, and support the International Secretariat against the Socialist Workers Party. The real "arrogant ultimatum" was delivered by Pablo, who instructed Healy:

a. To circumscribe strictly the struggle on the political plane of ideas, conducting yourself as a member above all of the IEC [International Executive Committee] and of the IS who defends until the 4th Wd. C. [World Congress] the majority line and the discipline of the International.

b. To cease to act as a member of the majority American faction and to await from it the political line to defend, and to cease to have circulated its documents in your faction in England, before you make known to the IS and to the IEC your eventual political divergences.

c. To abstain from any organizational measure in opposition to the comrades in your section who defend, as they ought, as you ought to do yourself first of all, the line and the discipline of the International. [14]

Cannon was stunned by this letter, which included an open threat that the IS would judge Healy "with an extreme severity" if he permitted any discussion of the opinions of the SWP within the British section. Having lived through the Stalinization of the Comintern, when a grotesque caricature of "international discipline" was used to suppress the discussion of Trotsky's views within the sections of the Third International, he was horrified by Pablo's attempt to revive these politically-corrupt practices inside the Fourth International. Pablo was demanding that Healy keep his mouth shut and accept the takeover of the British organization by a group of pro-Stalinists led by Lawrence, who was already in close contact with the British Communist Party.

Cannon left Los Angeles for emergency discussions with the political committee in New York on the crisis within the Fourth International. On October 25, 1953, Farrell Dobbs, who was now supporting Cannon, sent Healy a detailed report which clearly explained how the SWP had arrived at the decision to issue the "Open Letter" and established the completely principled basis of this document:

Since Jim's arrival in New York, we have been reviewing the trend of the international struggle and assessing the latest developments. We have read attentively all of your letters and they have had a profound influence on our thinking on the international question.

Most sinister of all is Pablo's ultimatum to you signifying his intention to move in and help the revisionist minority overthrow the majority in your party. We note that while launching this vicious attack on you, he remains much more cautious in his attitude toward us. There is a reason for that. He wants to keep us immobilized on the international arena and preoccupied with the struggle against our own revisionists to whom he has given only clandestine support, while he tries to cut to pieces, one at a time, your group and other orthodox Trotskyist groups.

We think the best service we can render the international movement is to cut through the whole web of Pabloite intrigue

with an open challenge of their revisionist liquidationist line. We think the time has come for an open appeal to the orthodox Trotskyists of the world to rally to save the Fourth International and throw out this usurping revisionist clique. The movement must be put on guard against the Pablo tactic of splits and expulsions, against his abuse of administrative control in an effort to repeat on an international scale their trick in France of overthrowing a majority with a minority.

In line with this decision to pass over from the defensive to the offensive, we are changing the whole character of the draft appeal we sent you. That draft limited itself to a description of revisionism in our party and Pablo's support of the revisionists, with an appeal for the aid of world orthodox Trotskyism in *our* fight. We now intend to issue from our Plenum an open manifesto to the world movement sounding a call to arms against the Pabloites on the *international* field.

The manifesto will take as its point of departure the criminal policies of Pabloism with regard to the revolutionary events in East Germany, France, Iran, and the new developments in the Soviet Union. We will demonstrate that the lines of political cleavage have become so deep and the Pabloite organizational methods so alien to our movement that a modus vivendi is no longer possible. The conduct of the Pabloites shows they disdain the real relationship of forces in the movement. They act as though Pablo and his coterie own the international. The orthodox Trotskyists must kick out Pablo and the whole clique around him who leave no room for a modus vivendi apart from the complete submission to their criminal line.

It is necessary to recognize that a showdown cannot wait until the next Congress, as many had previously expected. The Pabloites have already shown by their actions in France and their movements and threats against you in Britain that they will not permit a democratic Congress. Their plan is to get rid of the orthodox Trotskyists before the Congress ever convenes. We must act now and act decisively. This means we must launch a counter-attack without delay. We can have no illusions that there can be a peaceful settlement or compromise with this gang.

This change in tactics, which has been unanimously decided on here, has arisen particularly from our deliberations of how we can best help you in your fight. As matters now stand, you are caught in a web of slanders and trumped-up legalisms that keep you on the defensive. You are compelled to fight on Pablo's ground with inexperienced comrades who can be taken in by his sowing of political confusion and his use of organizational intrigue.

A direct and open political challenge of Pablo by our Plenum turns everything around, cuts through his confusionist strategy and provides an excellent basis for you to pass over from the defensive to the offensive in support of our manifesto. You can thus quickly mobilize and arm for battle all the orthodox Trotskyists.

The fight we are now up against is no less vital and decisive for the future than the great battles waged 25 years ago, in which the original Trotskyist cadre were assembled. In the face of these political imperatives, petty scandals and organizational maneuvers pale into significance. Through an uncompromising political challenge you will quickly weld your forces together in a faction which will become the future movement in England.

If we permit the fight to be conducted much further on the present level, you run the unavoidable risk of having demoralization and confusion disrupt your movement. And that is what we fear most at the present time.

We had a preliminary test of the effectiveness of this change of tactics at an internal debate on the French general strike here in

New York last Thursday night. In this discussion for the first time we opened up on the sacred cow, Pablo. The Cochranites seemed surprised and shocked that we dared to do so, while our own forces were elated that the war with Pablo is finally out in the open. The Cochranite surprise at our slashing attack on Pablo tends to confirm our estimate that he thought we were afraid to join open battle with him. He thought that by playing a crafty double game with us, he could keep us immobilized in the international fight until he had finished doing a French job on the British party.

The most decisive factor about the debate was the eagerness with which our rank and file responded to the signal that we are opening war on Pabloite revisionism and liquidationism in the world movement. We think this healthy reaction will be duplicated everywhere in the movement among those who have not forgotten what Trotsky taught them and who, as you have mentioned several times, have been waiting for the SWP to speak. [15]

Throughout the summer of 1953, the Cochranites refused to acknowledge the authority of the SWP leadership and systematically sabotaged the work of the party. They refused, for example, to sell its press or raise funds. This antiparty campaign reached its climax on October 30, 1953, when the Cochranites in New York refused to attend a banquet called in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Trotskyist movement in the United States. This public boycott of the party by the Cochranites amounted to a split and the SWP leadership recognized it as such. At the plenum of the national committee of November 23, 1953, the SWP expelled Cochran, Clarke and all others who participated in the boycott.

Reviewing the history of the protracted struggle against Cochran, Cannon summed up the significance of the split in his closing speech to the national committee plenum:

Leadership is the one unsolved problem of the working class of the entire world. The only barrier between the working class of the world and socialism is the unsolved problem of leadership. That is what is meant by "the question of the party." That is what the *Transitional Program* means when it states that the crisis of the labor movement is the crisis of leadership. That means that until the working class solves the problem of creating the revolutionary party, the conscious expression of the historic process, which can lead the masses in struggle, the issue remains undecided. It is the most important of all questions—the question of the party.

And if our break with Pabloism—as we see it now clearly—if it boils down to one point and is concentrated in one point, that is it: the question of the party. That seems clear to us now, as we have seen the development of Pabloism in action. The essence of Pabloist revisionism is the overthrow of that part of Trotskyism which is today its most vital part—the conception of the crisis of mankind as the crisis of the leadership of the labor movement summed up in the question of the party.

Pabloism aims not only to overthrow Trotskyism; it aims to overthrow that part of Trotskyism which Trotsky learned from Lenin. Lenin's greatest contribution to his whole epoch was his idea and his determined struggle to build a vanguard party capable of leading the workers in revolution. And he did not confine his theory to the time of his own activity. He went all the way back to 1871, and said that the decisive factor in the defeat of the first proletarian revolution, the Paris Commune, was the absence of a party of the revolutionary Marxist vanguard, capable of giving the mass movement a conscious program and resolute leadership. It

was Trotsky's acceptance of this part of Lenin in 1917 that made Trotsky a Leninist.

That is written into the *Transitional Program*, that Leninist concept of the decisive role of the revolutionary party. And that is what the Pabloites are throwing overboard in favor of the conception that the ideas will somehow filter into the treacherous bureaucracy, the Stalinists or reformists, and in some way or another, "In the Day of the Comet," the socialist revolution will be realized and carried through to conclusion without a revolutionary Marxist, that is, a Leninist-Trotskyist party. That is the essence of Pabloism. Pabloism is the substitution of a cult and a revelation for a party and a program. [16]

Notes:

[1] National Education Department Socialist Workers Party, *Towards a History of the Fourth International*, June 1973, part 4, vol. 3, p. 110.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.* p. 126.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 125.

[6] *Ibid.* p. 130.

[7] *Ibid.* pp. 130-31.

[8] Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International: The Transitional Program*, (New York: Labor Publications, 1981), p. 42.

[9] SWP, *Towards a History*, part 4, vol. 3, p. 141.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[13] SWP, *Towards a History*, part 3, vol. 2, p. 98.

[14] SWP, *Towards a History*, part 4, vol. 4, pp. 150-51141.

[15] SWP, *Towards a History*, part 3, vol. 2, pp. 122-23.

[16] James P. Cannon, *Speeches to the Party* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), pp. 181-82



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