

The First Trotskyist Group in New England

By ANTOINETTE F. AGNIKOW
Ten years ago in Boston in the first week of November, six of us decided to organize "The Independent Communist League." A month later we published the first and only number of the Bulletin of the Independent Communist League. While the Bulletin was already in the hands of the printer, a mimeographed copy of a statement made by Comrades Cannon, Shachtman and Abern reached us. We succeeded in placing a part of this document in our own Bulletin. The joy of receiving this statement of our New York comrades is difficult now to describe.

The First Comrades
The most energetic among us was comrade L. Schlossberg. His optimism and energy, no doubt, helped us go forward. Schlossberg is an old Bolshevik. He had participated in the 1905 Revolution in Russia and was so enthusiastic about Bolshevism that he had decided to return to Soviet Russia and remain there for good. He went to Soviet Russia in 1926, spent a year there and returned disillusioned and heart-sick. The ruling bureaucracy and the corrupt leaders made work there impossible. He was not readmitted into the party, which probably had been notified about his activities in Soviet Russia.

Comrade Chlipovitz and Weiner, prominent members of the needle trades Union, had noticed the wrong trend of the party long before. They left it in company with comrade Cooperstein, a prominent worker in the shoe industry. Comrade Shechet became our first new convert and proved to be an energetic, conscientious worker in the league. I was the only one who was still connected with the party. For years I had been under suspicion because of my frank criticism of Zinoviev. When I left for Russia at the same time as Schlossberg (1926) I had no sanction from the party, but got there through the personal influence of important comrades. This made it harder for me later to be too outspoken about my experiences in Soviet Russia because of the fear of exposing these comrades to persecution.

Trip to Russia
I would like to sketch a few pictures from Soviet life—which impressed me deeply at the time

and threw a shadow of coming events. Letters of introduction and old pre-revolutionary ties threw many doors open to me. To one of the prominent comrades I posed leading questions like this: "With Zinoviev gone, will we have more democracy in Soviet Russia?" (We knew very little about Stalin then.) The comrade went on tip-toe to the door, opened it, looked right and left, then returned and with averted eyes said, "perhaps." The running to the door was repeated several times but the answers I received were utterly non-committal. This gave me the first idea of the fear of being spied upon prevalent even among prominent officials. I soon caught the infection myself and learned to look around and speak in a low voice.

"How much do you earn a week?", I asked a girl in a candy factory, which I was visiting with many other comrades. "Eighteen Roubles." "Per week, naturally," I inquired. "No, per month," she replied.

Soon I learned that girls walked miles to work or to meetings, as they could not afford cars. Had wages increased since? Not real wages, for prices had gone way up.

"What shall I say to the delegates inspecting the factory?" asked the girl interpreter of the manager, in my presence. The manager looked angrily at her; he knew I was only a visitor. "Why, you know what to say."

Workers in the factory spoke about the party-managers with distrust. "Who are these men going through the factory?" one asked. "They say they are workers." "Oh, they are bluffing us; look how they are dressed. Workers could not dress like that."

Russian is my native language, so I could learn much more than others. While many accomplishments impressed me, while the sincerity and self sacrifice of workers with whom I came in contact was inspiring—the above and other incidents made me leave Soviet Russia perturbed and depressed.

Prepares For Break
The struggle between Stalin and Trotsky was not clear to me but I felt something was deeply wrong. Did I report this when I returned? No, I tried to defend these conditions by the reasoning that Russia was still in the transition state; and I knew too I would be expelled at once, if I were frank. So, I kept officially quiet and tried to find more facts and explanations to strengthen myself for the final break. I am sure hundreds of visitors to Russia acted the same way as I did. But I came at last to the right conclusion. It took me two years 'til I

felt I could submit no longer. The occasion was the demand to vote for the expulsion of Comrade Trotsky. Lovestone addressed our Boston membership of 200 or more, for one-and-a-half hours, trying to prove that comrade Trotsky had forfeited the rights of membership in the party. Several comrades had told me before the meeting they would never vote for Trotsky's expulsion. But I saw some of them grabbing hats and coats to leave the hall; one even spoke up against Lovestone but later voted with the crowd. In my ten-minute rebuttal, I pointed out that we never had a chance to read Trotsky's speeches or documents; that we could not come to correct conclusions without hearing the other side. About Comrade Trotsky's speech to the crowd going to the Red Square, which Lovestone stressed to be a special act of betrayal, I was glad I made the remark: "The speech of Comrade Trotsky, the man who was the right hand of Lenin, may well be considered by us as an S.O.S. to the comrades of the world warning of the great disaster Soviet Russia is facing."

Expelled from C.P.
Soon I received a letter dictated by Lovestone ordering me to appear the next day in New York. I demanded that a local committee take up my case (later I found that the City Committee could not get a majority to expel me.) I refused to appear before the political committee. In a few days I had my expulsion notice.

I review the story of my growing into Trotskyism in detail to acquaint the comrades of today with our experiences ten years ago.

Our Bulletin was widely distributed and aroused consternation and savage anger. Our comrades were insulted and threatened with actual physical violence. Looking back to the years of our first steps, I realize that we were not well supplied with information, our forces were weak, but with all that I think there is no need to be ashamed of our little Bulletin which we worked out without documents or even adequate knowledge of our theories. We were going in the right direction. All six comrades are still with us. A lively crowd of young men and women joined us, so that we kept up headquarters, ran successful lectures and a small school.

The Stalinists, the "Twentieth Century Americans," had much larger meetings than we; so had the Democrats and Republicans. We were not afraid to start our work when there were only six isolated from everybody (as we thought)! We still swim against the current, but so did Lenin. Such is the pioneer work of all revolutionary forces.

by illusions, false leadership and false policies. The problem of the practical-revolutionist is how to bridge this gap. The Fourth International offers its solution—the Transition Program, a program of action for mobilizing the masses.

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Progressives Merge With Fourth International

By JAMES BURNHAM
Co-Editor, *New Internationalist*

The Conference for Progressive Labor Action came together in 1928 primarily as the result of the then existing situation in the American labor movement. The trade unions, cramped in the corsets of the craft form and a passive and entrenched bureaucracy, were lethargic. No direction was being given to the growing millions of unemployed. The Communist Party, by its insane Red Union tactics dictated by the strategy of the "Third Period," had succeeded in isolating itself and the many militant workers under its influence from the main stream of the labor movement. The Communist League of America, not yet emerged from its stage of functioning as an opposition faction to the Communist International, was active only to a negligible degree in trade union situations.

There was thus no center for the development of progressive influence within the trade union movement itself. The conception of the founders of the C.P.L.A. was, at first, that of such a center: an organized group of militants who would promote progressive trade union policies, by propaganda, but in particular through direct participation in the mass action of the unions, in strikes, demonstrations, organizing campaigns, and in building up the organization of the unemployed.

Not A Party
It was believed that for such a task no specific party formation and no specific party allegiance were necessary. The C.P.L.A. did not regard itself as a party. At the beginning its membership included a number of members of the Socialist Party, as well as many without any party affiliations. It was soon apparent, however, that its path led necessarily away from the existing parties, and within a brief time the Socialists had dropped out.

The task which the C.P.L.A. had set for itself was beyond its powers; but in spite of the smallness of its numbers and resources, its mark was definitely and in a number of instances splendidly felt within the American labor movement. The militant and determined work of its members in a series of notable strikes was climaxed at the great Auto-Lite strike of 1934 at Toledo. The National Unemployed Leagues, organized under its leadership, played a small part in forcing the federal government to accept some measure of responsibility for relief, and gave an example of class struggle methods which has not yet been equalled in the unemployed movement.

The experiences of the C.P.L.A. in the class struggle were not long in proving to its membership that the scope of its perspective would have to be ex-

panded. The problems posed day by day within the trade union and unemployed movements were seen to be, in the last analysis, political problems, and to demand precise and unequivocal political answers. The existing political parties not being able to give such answers, the issue presented was realized to be nothing else and nothing less than the building of a new political party of the working class.

This realization was expressed at and by the Convention held at the end of 1933. The resolutions adopted at the Convention stated the need for a new party of the workers, divorced from the Socialist and Communist Parties; declared the period of the C.P.L.A. finished; and elected a Provisional Organizing Committee for the American Workers Party.

Choices of the A. W. P.
This great step, however, could not conclude the evolution of the C. P. L. A. Once having shaken loose of the social-democracy and of Stalinism, once having recognized and asserted the need for the new party, it was faced positively and inescapably with the central fact of the new epoch then beginning: with the Fourth International. The sole completion to its progressive evolution meant: fusion with the movement for the Fourth International. Failing this, the embryonic American Workers Party could only reverse direction, and fall back into the blind alleys of reformism or the 4th International movement altogether. This was the choice for the group as a whole and for every individual one of its members.

Fortunately, the greater part of the membership both of the A. W. P. and of the Communist League understood the need for the bringing together of all available forces into the movement for the new party. And fortunately, also, there were those in both organizations who saw clearly just what steps this need called for. Negotiations, discussions and united activities reached their fruitful conclusion in the fusion of the two groups in December, 1934, under the banner of the Fourth International.

Obstacles Met
All was not, of course, smooth sailing. Within the C. P. L. A.—A. W. P. there were those who were at heart bitter enemies of the new perspective, who made nominal declaration for a new party in 1933 only under the compulsion of events too strong for them to withstand; and there were others whose backbones, adequate for the earlier tasks, were not strong enough for the stern jobs that lay ahead.

Their resistance, treacherous and disloyal from some, confused or weak-kneed from others, could not alter the outcome. Their own fate—bought off for a few contemptible dollars by Stalinism, or sliding back to an evangelical God, or pulling up the stakes from the labor movement as a whole—points in its own way to that great lesson from the history of the A. W. P.: that today there is no neutral ground. There is only one way to cast off the dregs of reformism and Stalinism, of imperialism which finally these serve: by taking the road of the Fourth International.

A Foreshadowing
The A. W. P. found the road. It was this that proved its own basic health and vitality. Its own accomplishments, and all that is finest in its traditions have become incorporated organically into the young but sturdily growing body of the new International.

Just how or by what stages the Fourth International will complete its development we cannot know in advance. The fusion of the A. W. P. is, however, in many essentials a correct foreshadowing. The Fourth International is projected into the historical arena as a political magnet. Its function and its destiny are to draw to itself all those, from whatever quarter, who resolve to break from the old world and its refuse, and who set for themselves the goal of the new world of international socialism.

The Struggle for Marxism In the Socialist Party

By GLEN TRIMBLE
Member, Nat'l Comm., S.W.P.

On this the tenth anniversary of the organization of our movement in the United States, I have been asked to review the development of one of the tendencies now united in the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International. The tendency toward revolutionary Marxism within the American Socialist Party covered, for some of its members, a span of many years, but in organized form it dates from about 1931.

Throughout the post-war era of "prosperity" the Socialist Party existed only as a social club for a handful of aged social democratic reformists. Stripped of its revolutionary elements and especially of its youth by the 1919 turn to the Communist International, wrecked and demoralized by its own bankruptcy in the face of the Palmer terror, the S.P. played no role whatever in the decade that followed.

New Elements

With the depression the organization took a new lease on life. A new and very different type of recruit began to turn to the Socialist Party. The crisis was forcing a leftward trend. The Communist Party was embarked on its third period adventure and was antagonizing many serious revolutionaries in the process. Many of those who were without contact with the Left Opposition turned to the Socialist Party. For several years the membership steadily increased and in many sections the left wing elements predominated.

The almost total lack of discipline in the S.P., consequent on reformist anxiety to coddle labor-faker "members" who carried party cards and did as they pleased, made it possible for the left wing to maintain itself for a time within the "all-inclusive" boundaries. The Old Guard was by habit, inclination, and senility incapable of aggressive action. The work and a considerable part of the local leadership fell into the hands of the younger members.

The "Militant" Group

But this left wing or "Militant" group was itself very nearly all inclusive. It embraced everyone 'agin' the Old Guard and, since the Old Guard simply proposed that the party be preserved as an inanimate memorial to Kautsky, that left a wide field for unprincipled "outs" that wanted to be "in," non-Marxist and openly anti-Marxist liberals who thought Norman Thomas a fine man, reformers and crackpots of every conceivable stripe, plants for the Stalinists and Lovestoneites, half-baked collegiate romanticists. Yet there was a core of serious, though inexperienced and sometimes muddled, revolutionists. The healthiest of these were the young worker elements repelled by the frenzied futility of the Stalinites, yet seeking a genuine class solution to their problems.

Left Wing Development

As the crisis and the leftward trend within the S.P. continued more and more of such comrades joined. Their lives were a daily part of the class struggle and they brought into the conferences of the left wing a constant insistence on disciplined mass work. With this, inevitably, came a growing demand for a clear cut revolutionary program.

Unfortunately, all of us had to learn the hard way. We were almost totally cut off from the main streams of revolutionary experience. The greater part of Marxist literature was for most of us an unopened book. We had no "Old Bolsheviks" to provide living channels for class understanding and revolutionary foresight. We learned slowly and painfully by trial and error in the struggle itself. We shed illusions and acquired principled positions piece-meal along the road.

At first we were all too likely to value power above principles, and to rate "strategic maneuvers" ahead of a head-on attack on the

reformist position. Milwaukee, Detroit and Cleveland conventions wound up in shameful horse trading for National committee posts. Yet each time the results proved the emptiness of power without principle and more of us learned the lesson. The steady hammering of Al Goldman's Socialist Appeal had a very large share in the education of a revolutionary core in this period. The year 1936 saw this work culminate in the creation of a widespread organized group determined to fight for revolutionary principles.

The Cleveland Convention

But following the Cleveland convention in the spring of that year, many of the "Militants" and their allies decided quite differently. The Old Guard was out. Thomas, who had spurred on the Militants and even broadcast a call to all "unattached radicals" to come in and help rid him of the Waldmanites, now hoped that they would "quietly disperse" and leave him in charge. The Wisconsin municipal "socialists" had reluctantly voted for the expulsion of their discredited political brothers on the assurance of Thomas, Altman and Co., that no "revolutionary embarrassments" would result for Wisconsin or the national party. The Cleveland resolutions bore them out on every important question, they marked a retreat from positions previously held. The Old Guard was dead, long live reformism!

Entry of the W.P.

But the top leaders reckoned without the party. The "home grown" revolutionists were now strengthened, not only by their own experience, but by strong reinforcements from the Workers Party who brought with them the whole arsenal of Marxism. While the "Call" beat a retreat to the right, the Appeal and Labor Action rallied all the best worker elements to the revolutionary banner. Hoan and Altman joined, or rather, tail-ended, a well-financed Stalinist hue and cry for the expulsion of the "Trotskyites," that is to say, of course, of all revolutionary socialists.

By the 1937 Chicago convention, Norman Thomas had decided that "all-inclusiveness" was all right so long as it was to the right and not the left. Zam and Tyler who had never figured as national leaders in the left wing, had appointed themselves spokesmen for a "Clarity" caucus which preached peace while operating to separate the "native" sheep from the former W.P. goats. The

latter were to be slaughtered at once, the former in due time.

"Clarity" Delivers

Again the party gave its answer. The convention delegates were so overwhelmingly against expulsion that the expulsionists from Tyler to Porter indignantly denied that they had ever thought of such a thing. The existence for the first time in a national convention of a large, clear cut and uncompromising revolutionary delegation forced the passage of resolutions which more than recovered the losses of Cleveland. But "Clarity" had fulfilled its role—the left wing was split. The center, as always in a crisis, combined with the right to elect a National Executive Committee for which Zam took "full responsibility" and of which Thomas and Hoan took full control.

Their task was the expulsion of the party in the name of the party. Convention resolutions were discarded for endorsements of Spanish Negrins and American LaGuardias. Protests were answered with "warnings," and appeals to democratic procedure by discarding the constitution along with the decisions of the convention. Since this swelled and broadened the protest, the infamous gag rule was passed in closed session. It ordered a moratorium on socialism within the Socialist Party on penalty of expulsion. That moratorium is still in force—as a tombstone on the grave of the "Socialist" party. But it buries only the dead. The revolutionary membership refused to be gagged and continued its fight for socialism. There followed a series of "charges," "trials" and expulsions worthy of a Vishinsky. The Appeal group maintained unshakable solidarity and rallied hundreds of new supporters from the ranks of "Clarity," which had gone clearly and irrevocably reformist. The amalgam of "native" revolutionary socialists and of their comrades from the Workers Party was forged and solidified in joint battles for principle and in shoulder-to-shoulder cooperation in the field of mass action. It was given organizational expression in the founding convention of the Socialist Workers Party.

Now on this tenth anniversary and with the tremendous impetus of the first World Congress of the Fourth International we march forward as a single, united movement dedicated to the revolutionary tasks that loom at the top of our world's agenda.

A Life-or-Death Appeal!

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For the past two months the American Fund for Political Prisoners and Refugees has been making arrangements to rescue three men and one woman, all anti-fascist militants, who have been under the surveillance of the Gestapo for their work in the labor movement in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Three are Germans, one a young Austrian worker. All have devoted their lives to the labor movement and have continued their work in emigration, under the most difficult and dangerous conditions. Their homes had been broken into and their belongings searched several times by agents of the German police.

While arrangements were being concluded for their transportation to another country, Hitler's troops marched into the Sudeten area and the Czech government, under Nazi influence, clamped down its dictatorship upon the rest of Czechoslovakia, proceeding to persecute all suspected foreigners within their realm. Newspapers report that the Czech police are holding all anti-Nazi refugees within the Sudeten region and handing many of them over to the Gestapo from their own territory.

Despite the enormous difficulties in reaching people in the Sudeten area, the American Fund has unexpectedly been presented with a mass of extricating these refugees from the clutches of the terror.

Every hour makes it increasingly difficult to do this. Every day the iron ring of reaction tightens around them. The avenues now open from us to them will probably be closed within the next few weeks, or even days. Not a moment must be lost. Any delay sentences these people to death. They can expect aid from no other quarter than from us in the United States.

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