
Letter to Glen Trimble from Gus Tyler in New York, circa July 15, 1937

Carbon copy in James P. Cannon Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 44, Folder 15.

Systematic Falsification — The Trotskyite Contribution to Revolutionary Socialism

Dear Trimble:

Immediately following the last convention of the Party at Chicago ["Special National Convention," March 26-29, 1937], you spoke to me about organizing a caucus of "honest men." Although I did not believe that "honesty" alone could be a basis for a caucus or group in any movement (a political line is the real basis), I felt strongly with you that honest dealing could at least be the basis for maintaining a unified party, despite frank political disagreements.

I think that both you and I see in Stalinism not only a reformist political line but also a jesuitical method of dealing with other working class groups which can only give rise to a murderous civil war within the ranks of labor. Perhaps because some of us see the logic of this method leading to such savage behavior as the Moscow trials, we place such a high value on simple truth.

It is in the light of this, Glen, that I am so sadly disappointed at your letter of July 8th [1937], dealing with the internal party situation. That letter is dishonest. Either that or your memory is very poor and your source of information worse.

You open with the notion that at the National Convention of the Party, you warned the Party of the split danger arising from the campaign but that the "mislead Clarity group" ignored this danger.

This is scarcely an honest evaluation of the role of Clarity before or at the Convention. You must know this, since the charge against Clarity both before and at the Convention was that we were overestimating the split danger and that we were placing unity above com-

pletely correct political resolutions. This criticism came from your ranks.

In Local New York, where there was a three-cornered fight for delegates to the National Convention, Clarity took the position that the immediate issue in the Party was that of unity. Surely you must be acquainted with this fact. We even issued a magazine, *Clarity*, wherein we made this issue the central question. Isn't that so?

Before the convention, at an "all-inclusive" meeting of group leaders in New York, I proposed a formula (with which James P. Cannon was in full agreement) to unite the Party politically against the splitters. I argued that the war resolution was in this period of American development the test question before the Party. Around a revolutionary struggle against imperialist war we could unite the bulk of the Party and, by the same act, liquidate the influence and force of the right wing.

Cannon heartily endorsed this formula. And throughout the days of the Convention Cannon fought for this line. He fought for it because he knew, as we knew, that if for any reason the right wing came into control of the Party machinery — the Trotskyites could not live a day in the Party.

But even before the echoes of the convention had died down, James Cannon switched his line, roundly cursed Clarity for pursuing a line which Cannon himself enthusiastically proposed, and then gave the Party a lesson prepared for the "Trotsky School of Falsification."

It may be, Glen, that you, too, believe some of the fabrications that have been pouring out of New York in one continuous stream. We are at a disadvantage, you know. "A lie can still travel half way around the earth before the truth can put on its shoes." This is especially true when a lie travels on a well-oiled machine like the Trotsky caucus and when the truth must still be confined to the homely way of travel among Socialist comrades who have not had the benefit of 10 years of continuous practice in factional warfare.

You accuse Clarity with participating in the campaign to drive out the Trotskyites. Of course, you give no evidence of this.

You do not mention the fact that in Local New York the Clarity comrades voted against the [Jack] Altman motions to expel [James] Burnham, [Maurice] Spector, and [Joel] Seidman. Why don't you mention this, Glen? It is a test question. It is a test in action.

Is it possible that you believe that we voted for the Altman motions? According to your caucus comrades in other parts of the coun-

try, to quote George Clark for one, Clarity did vote to expel. Already the rumor has spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific before the truth could even write one letter.

You even go so far as to state that the NEC [National Executive Committee] “unanimously” endorsed the expulsion formula which Altman demanded.”

I do not know how you got that impression since even the minutes of the Party record that [Max] Raskin voted against the NEC decision. Altman did not vote against it, because he is not on the NEC. [Murray] Baron was out of the room. But Altman gave his evaluation of the NEC decision. He said: “This decision of the NEC is a slap in the face of Local New York.” And Altman was right, because these decisions were the answer to the Altman-Thomas demand for mass expulsions — an answer and a rejection.

Did you know that? And now that you know it, will you circulate the truth with the same zeal that you have circulated lies?

In the supplementary statement issued by the NAC [National Action Committee] explaining the NEC decision you might have notice that one of the campaigns in the Party, which was outlawed by the NEC decision, was a campaign of mass expulsions. You must have read this, since you seem to be well up on all matters of politics and gossip. How do you happen to overlook it in your very self-righteous document? Was it an accident? Then you will right the wrong, now?

May I, for your information, Glen, recite a few facts about the background of the NEC aside from those I related in my general circular letter, where I charged that a few Trotsky leaders were preparing to split the Party. These additional facts are as important as the general political factors which I analyzed in my last letter.

At the NEC meeting in New York, I questioned Burnham, who was appearing as Appeal [factional] spokesman, about the nature of our Party. I put one question very specifically to him: Would he consider it a bureaucratic act to decree through the NEC that there shall be a cessation of organized warfare in the Party on basic questions, reserving such organized campaigns to periods preceding conventions? I referred specifically to the practices of the Communist Party in the period of democratic centralism. I pointed out that such a decree need not outlaw educational discussions organized by the Party (as the decision does not) nor shall it exclude sharp conflicts on how to apply the line. But it shall halt all *organized warfare* except in the convention discussion period.

Burnham replied that it would not be a bureaucratic act, that it would be within the realm of democratic action.

(When Burnham isn't trying to be a politician, Glen, he is really extremely honest).

But once the NEC put into writing what Burnham may not have approved but what he considered as democratic action, then Burnham wrote a false and vicious attack upon us.

When I confronted the Trotskyite leadership in New York and Newark with Burnham's statement, they made no reply.

Spector gave the most interesting reply. He maintained that Burnham had in mind a **revolutionary** party. And since the SP is not yet "monolithic and bolshevik" (to quote Spector) then the decision was bureaucratic.

Do you know what that means, Glen, when you put it in simple workers' language? That means that a decision such as we passed would be all right if the Trotskyites had control of the NEC. Then it would be democratic centralism in a revolutionary party, whereas now it is a bureaucratic gagging in a reformist party.

Pretty fancy hypocrisy, isn't it, a variety of dialectical crookedness?

Jack Weber, leader of the Newark Trotskyites, substantiated Spector. He reminded us that even before the last Convention, the *Appeal* pointed out that **discipline** at this time would be **bureaucratism**.

You will recall that the Appeal program made quite a point of this. And even then, we disagreed with you. **We were for a disciplined party, even if we did not win the Convention.**

Your line before the Convention and now after it, is to postpone the building of real socialist discipline until the Trotskyites are in control. Then you will begin to manufacture your own special gag rules. And your crowd is more experienced in this than we are, Glen.

Now and then, Glen, some little phase even of a puny person becomes a great thing in history. The Russian *muzhik* who said, "I know only one thing. There are two classes!" won his nameless place in history. Likewise you, dear Glen, lie our *muzhik* who otherwise would have no right to claim a place in the light of eternity, shall go down as the author of the phrase — "the NEC, handpicked by Wisconsin."

This NEC — "handpicked by Wisconsin" — was approved, you know, by your close collaborator and dear double-crosser, James P. Cannon. While working hand-in-glove with you at the last convention, he double-crossed you to keep you and Al Goldman off the

NEC. He approved the slate for the NEC which was finally elected. And although some of his rank-and-filers, like you and Pemble and Goldman grumbled, because you felt that you were getting a dirty deal, you also finally voted for the agreed-upon NEC.

Now tell me, Glen, did you vote for an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?” How come, you did not vote against such a “right wing” NEC? Do not tell me, Glen, that you, with your political astuteness would not recognize a Wisconsin NEC, and do not tell me that you would cast your vote for it, in any form, shape, or manner.

The truth of the matter is, Glen, that in your less jesuitical moments you will also grant that this is no “Wisconsin” NEC. Isn’t that so?

Just look here, Glen.

This is the NEC which decided to make our revolutionary campaign against the war the main mass work of the Party. Is that the handiwork of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin” at a time when Wisconsin submitted an altogether new resolution on war — which was rejected?

This is the NEC, which as its second most important action reendorsed the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, over the opposition of Altman, Local New York, **Wisconsin**, and all the other right wing elements. Is this the deed of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This is the NEC which elected Frank Trager as National Labor Secretary. Is that the act of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This is the NEC which elected [Herbert] Zam as editor of the *ASM [American Socialist Monthly]* over [Harry] Laidler, an action which Altman offered as proof that the NEC was dominated by Trotskyism. Is that also the work of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This is the NEC which reelected Tyler as editor of the *Call* because it approved his policy, over the opposition of the united right wing, including Wisconsin. Was this also done by an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This was the NEC which wrote a Spanish resolution, called Trotskyite by the Stalinists, called the best “theoretical statement on the road to power ever written by the Socialist Party” by Appealite comrades [Hal] Draper and Carter. This resolution is based upon the concepts of :

1. Workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ councils.

2. A program of immediate Socialist revolutionary demands in the midst of the war against Fascism.

3. The building of the dual power, on the basis of this program, in the course of the struggle against Fascism.

4. The positive role of the revolutionary party in centralizing this movement to convert it into an offensive for Socialist power.

Is this the resolution of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This is an NEC that voted down a resolution submitted by the right wing calling for the expulsion of all those who believe in a Fourth International. And a resolution saying just the opposite was carried. Is this also the accomplish of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

This is the NEC that sent a resolution to Spain protesting the suppression of the POUM, and elected a Spanish committee which is responsible for the fighting articles in the *Call*, attacking the reformist suppressive line in Spain. Is this, also, dear comrade, the work of an NEC “handpicked by Wisconsin?”

But you are not satisfied with having characterized the NEC as having been handpicked by Wisconsin! You go on to say that the resolutions adopted by the Convention were “dictated by Thomas.” Assuming for a moment that this is true: What was your attitude toward these same resolutions? Did you not vote for *every one* of them except the one on a Labor Party? Of the other resolutions adopted, only on Peoples Front did you introduce a separate one, and that differed from the adopted one only on the interpretation of the Spanish events. The resolutions on war, trade union policy, unemployment policy — all other resolutions, were not only adopted with your votes, *but had no competitive resolutions*. So if the adoption of these resolutions was a crime, if they were really dictated by Thomas, and thus by authorship, reformist, then you were an accessory before and after the crime.

But you know that your statement that Thomas dictated the resolutions is a lie, don't you? You know that Thomas wrote and introduced only one resolution — the public statement on Labor Party policy, which was not different in any essential from ours. We voted for it, because we saw no purpose in a struggle over authorship. We expected you to vote against the Thomas resolution, as well as against outs, because you and your group *are against working for a Labor Party*. But all the other resolutions were written by members of the Clarity group at the convention, with the exception of the one on

unemployment, which was written by Sexton and supported by us *and* by you *against* Lasser.

But that is also secondary. The important thing is the nature of the resolutions, not who wrote them or dictated them. Do you object to the line of the convention resolutions. [Max] Shachtman, in his post convention article approved the line of all of them. The Appeal caucus throughout the country still claims that the convention resolutions are good, but that the NEC is misinterpreting them. Which is which — your statements or the Shachtman analysis? Your charges or the Appeal claims? Do you object to the Peoples Front resolution because it categorically rejects the concept of class collaboration in all forms? Do you object to the war resolution because it calls for revolutionary struggle against *all wars* conducted by capitalist governments? Do you object to the trade union and unemployed resolutions because they call for an independent Socialist policy and activity in the mass organizations? Or do you tell lies about these resolutions because the truth goes counter to the factional, anti-party interests of your caucus?

Glen, let me revert to the theme which I began — to add another variation to it. Falsehood is bad as a basis for building a revolutionary movement. Then why do you indulge in it so liberally?

I think I know, Glen.

The sectarianism of the Trotskyites arises not so much from their program of action as it does from their belief that unless one is a Trotskyite one is not a consistent revolutionist. Trotskyites attempt very foolishly to make social science even more exact than mathematical science.

Even in mathematics, when one gets a complicated quadratic equation, there can be two possible answers for “X.” Of course, the *principles* of algebra remain constant.

But the Trotskyites, who claim to be realist Marxists, refuse to recognize the possibility of a multiplicity of equally correct answers flowing from the same basis system of thought.

This philosophic error leads to a multiplicity of practical errors, the most important of which is the constant urge to organize a new party, and then more new parties, and every more new parties. With Trotskyites virtually every tactical difference becomes a principled difference; every momentary slip becomes a calculated conspiracy against eternal verity; every non-Trotskyite becomes a reformist,

therefore an agent of the bourgeoisie, therefore a counter-revolutionary.

People with this sectarian philosophy must become liars. And a very strange set of liars, too. They become very righteous, supercritical liars.

They are like the too-self-righteous town gossip, who maintains her own sense of purity by whispering filth about everybody else.

I say that the lie becomes an essential part of the sectarian method, because the truth would wipe out the basis for sectarianism. The truth would quickly reveal that the Trotskyites are **not** the only revolutionists; that there are other possible revolutionary solutions to a problem than just that one proposed by Trotsky and his followers. And once this truth is known, the Trotskyite notion that there must be a separate party composed of or dominated by Trotskyites only would appear a great historical myth.

And so the Trotskyites *must* prove that everyone who has strayed from the straight and narrow path laid down by Trotsky is a sinner, a creature of the devil. The Trotskyites must do this just as they are trying to do it with Clarity in the party today.

But there is only one way to prove that Clarity is not a revolutionary tendency, by use of falsehood. In fact, falsification is a *necessity* for those who are intent upon creating distinctions in their own minds which do not exist in reality.

I warn you though, Glen, that you will never liberate the working class by these lies.

First of all, you will find yourself the victim of these lies. Once all the Trotskyite sectarians get together in their own little party they will carry their own methods of warfare with them. Their miniature group becomes a fairyland of intrigue. Their minds become so enmeshed in the method of maneuver that they reach the point — which I am convinced Cannon has reached — where they cannot distinguish truth from falsehood. They convince themselves of their own fabrications and become hysterically angry when they are challenged.

This can only lead to split upon split, conceived in slander and born in slime.

Second, your organization can not gain any influence by basing itself upon the lie that *it alone* is revolutionary. Other revolutionists won't believe you, and will despise you for your pious hypocrisy. The workers won't believe you and will laugh at your splits when they find the time to pay any attention to you at all.

I do not deny, Glen, that at certain periods in history there is power behind a lie. In periods of extreme human despair, individuals begin to believe in miracles and miracle men; they lose all sense of reality; fiction becomes as great a force as fact. Then groups are tempted to employ the myth as a weapon of struggle.

I warn you against it, Glen.

Those whom you win by falsehood, you can only hold by falsehood. And as time goes on, with reality dispelling your untruths, you will have to resort to ever greater and greater falsehoods. You will have to weave a tissue of lies which will become ever more weakened, finally to fall apart through the first touch of reality.

Then, Glen, there is only one way to hold power. You, like Stalin, will have to resort to force, force and violence exerted against the masses. You will have to use the bureaucratic machine in a vain endeavor to distort lies into seeming truth, or at least to wring confessions from the masses acclaiming a lie as the truth.

There is your fate, Glen, roughly sketched before you, if you choose the present path you are traveling. It is not too late to turn back. You can do it and by doing it you can take others with you.

I am not trying to moralize to you, Glen. I don't give a damn about what your personal morals are. I am trying to point out to you that in your political life you will either have to abandon your method of unscrupulous falsehood, flowing from your sectarian line, or end up — another Stalin, only, of course, on a much lower level.

You will recall that before the convention Zam objected to Goldman's characterization of other working class parties as "enemy" parties. Zam warned against this making factional and intra-working class struggles take on the character of class struggles.

Some of your comrades smiled at Zam for his squeamishness. It wasn't squeamishness, Glen. We believe that a revolutionary party dare never act toward another working class party as it would toward the bourgeoisie. We believe that all revolutionists (not according to your narrow definition) must learn to live together in one party.

Once we depart from that line of thought the road is clear! First use state power to exterminate all other working class parties; then, use state power to eliminate all other factions inside the revolutionary party. This has been the Stalinist path.

And if you do not have state power, wage a civil war against party and non-party members; while the working class, divided in civil war, goes from defeat to defeat.

Some place in Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, he indicates that the suppression of other working class parties by the Bolsheviks may have been a mistake. He says, moreover, that he believes it possible to have more than one workers' party on the basis of the proletarian dictatorship.

Trotsky does not explain what meaning this has today — outside of Russia, where he is suppressed. I think it has great meaning, Glen. I think it is an admission by Trotsky that his whole concept of the monolithic Trotskyite party is wrong. I think he is admitting, reluctantly, and unfortunately only for Russia, that there can be **more than one line of thought which is revolutionary**.

For you must grant, Glen, that parties which can operate faithfully within the proletarian dictatorship, which can be props of that regime, are revolutionary parties.

To me, this means the possibility, however, of bringing together various revolutionary tendencies — all of whom are honestly and genuinely revolutionary — in one party, before the revolution, because they agree on the fundamental propositions of the proletarian revolution.

It will be difficult, of course, to do this while the Trotskyites cling to their sectarianism. We will have to fight them and their line in this matter. But we did not conceive this line yesterday. We have been fighting for it some time now and shall continue to do so even after the Trotskyites have bid us farewell.

And we have faith in our line because we know enough about history to have learned that a lie cannot forever vanquish the truth. A lie travels faster, but it doesn't live as long.

Fraternally,

Gus Tyler.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · January 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.