from the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois public opinion ("socialist", "communist", "anarcho-syndicalist", etc.) and ready to go to the end. Such a vanguard will know how to find the road to the masses. In the last ten or fifteen years we have seen more than once how under the blows of great events great traditional parties and their groupings have fallen in dust, such as the Iron Front (without iron), the Popular Front (without people), etc. What neither breaks nor falls in dust is only what has been welded by clear, precise, intransigent revolutionary ideas.

I do not have the possibility of closely following the activity of your party, I do not know its internal composition, and that is why I abstain from pronouncing an evaluation. But I do know the other parties of the London Bureau, which have existed for well more than a year. I ask myself: your party, can it grapple with vast tasks hand in hand with Fenner Brockway, Walcher, Sneevliet, Brandler and other venerable invalids, who not only have not demonstrated in anything their capacity to orient themselves in revolutionary events, but on the contrary have demonstrated many times over their absolute incapacity for revolutionary action and in the following years, their not less absolute incapacity for learning what were their own errors. The best group among them was the P.O.U.M. But is it not now clear that the P.O.U.M.'s fear of the petty-bourgeois public opinion of the Second and Third Internationals and above all of the anarchists was one of the principal causes of the collapse of the Spanish revolution?

One of two things. Either the French proletariat, betrayed and enfeebled by Blum, Thorez, Jouhaux, and company, will be taken by surprise and erased without resistance, like the proletariat of Germany, of Austria, and of Czechoslovakia. . . . But it is useless to make calculations on the basis of this variant—servile prostration does not require any strategy. Or in the period which remains the vanguard of the French proletariat will again lift its head, gathering around it the masses and finding itself as capable of resisting as of attacking. But this variant supposes such an invigoration of the hopes of the masses, of their confidence in themselves, of their ardor, of their hate against the enemy, that all that is mean, mediocre, misshapen will be cast aside and dissipated in the gale. Only revolutionaries willing to go to the end are capable of directing a genuine insurrection of the masses, for the masses discern surpassingly well wavering from the spirit of resolute decision. For the insurrection of the masses firm leadership is necessary. And without insurrection catastrophe is inevitable, and that with but short delay.

I do not see any other road to the immediate formation of a revolutionary vanguard in France than the unification of your party and the section of the Fourth International. I understand that the two organizations are conducting negotiations over the fusion and the idea is far from me of interfering with the negotiations or of giving concrete advice from here. I approach the question from a more general point of view. The fact that the negotiations are lasting a long time and dragging out seems to me to be an extremely alarming circumstance, the symptom of discordance between the objective situation and the state of feeling even among the most advanced ranks of the working class. I should be happy to learn that I am mistaken.

You carry a great responsibility, Comrade Pivert, strongly similar to the responsibility which weighed on Andres Nin in the first years of the Spanish revolution. You can give events a great impulse forward. But you can also play the fatal rôle of brake. In moments of acute political crisis personal initiative is capable of exercising a great influence upon the course of events. It is solely necessary to decide firmly one thing: to go to the end!

I hope that you will appreciate at their true value the motives which have guided me in writing you this letter and I warmly wish you success on the road of the proletarian revolution.

Leon TROTSKY

COYOACAN, D. F., Dec. 22, 1938

Pivert Answers Trotsky

Dear Comrade Trotsky:

I communicated the contents of your letter to my colleagues in the party executive. We are all, like you, agreed in our estimate of the extreme seriousness of the situation for France, and, consequently, for the international proletariat. We find only natural, therefore, an exchange of correspondence which, in spite of our differences of opinion, permits us to establish major analogies in our perspectives. We are, moreover, sufficiently free from nationalistic prejudices not to find in any way "out of order" a letter from a Marxist militant so experienced as yourself. It is up to us to force ourselves to see things as they are, and to determine honestly wherein the results of our observations coincide with your political conclusions or wherein they noticeably diverge. The only difference which seems to us to result from a comparison of your letter with our estimate pertains, perhaps, as in 1935, to the more or less rapid rhythm of predictable events: we know that the crisis approaches; but it can be advanced or retarded in accordance with the unfolding of international events upon which directly depend the situation in our own sector. And we should have been gratified if your letter had taken into account the feverish preparation of the general conflict between the imperialist camps and had made some approximation of delays in the light of that perspective.

However, in any case, the necessary task remains the same: to forge a revolutionary vanguard ready to pose the question of the conquest of power and to lead the working masses along the road of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The militants gathered around the P.S.O.P. have this formidable ambition. They have already gone through two selective tests: the September crisis proved their loyalty to proletarian internationalism; the November 30th general strike proved their capacity for direct action. These comrades do not have, certainly, the same rigorous and definitive judgment as yourself on the militants whom you mention with an underestimation of their political capacity, perhaps as a result of similarities or differences in tendency which today seem to us secondary. We have, in effect, constituted with them an International Workers' Front against the war, and it is the platform and aim of this united front that should be submitted to the Marxist critique rather than the signature of this or that personality.
But your sharp estimate of our comrades of the P.O.U.M. will surely arouse unanimous protests among our militants, for to us, who have lived close enough to the events since July 1936, it is not "the fright of the P.O.U.M. before the petty-bourgeois public opinion of the Second or the Third Internationals or of the anarchists" which is the source of the collapse of the revolutionary vanguard; but the concentration of the efforts of British-French imperialism, of Italian-German imperialism, and also those of the Stalinists. The results of a vanguard policy do not, alas, have the same fullness in a period of the retreat and depression of the labor movement as in a period of advance. But, for ourselves, we have drawn from this tragic experience the following lesson: a bold and decisive working-class strategy can, under favorable circumstances, have an incalculable range. There are indeed times when one must go "to the bottom and to the end". We lived through them in June-July, 1936; we will not forget them.

Another question is posed in your letter: that of the "fusion" of our party with the French section of the Fourth International. The "negotiations" were stopped with fusion proposals which we could not have considered without violating the firm feeling of our militants, to whom the question of our affiliation to the Fourth International was put during our founding convention (July 16-17, 1938) and who almost unanimously rejected it. This decision and this attitude should not, moreover, take on the alarming character which you imagine. We defined the programmatic basis and charter of a revolutionary, internationalist socialist party, and a democratic constitution. All militants in agreement with our principles and the democratic guarantees which we offer belong in the P.S.O.P., where they will themselves forge the instrument of liberation which was missing in June, 1936. This is entirely understood by the communist and socialist militants who are joining us, and moreover by the minority of the P.O.I. which has just taken its place in our ranks.

But we want to speak frankly to you, comrade Trotsky, about the sectarian methods which we have observed around us and which have contributed to the setbacks and enfeebling of the vanguard. I refer to those methods which consist in violating and brutalizing the revolutionary intelligence of those militants—numerous in France—who are accustomed to making up their own minds and who put themselves loyally to the school of hard facts. These are the methods which consist in interpreting with no indulgence whatever the inevitable fumblings in the search for revolutionary truth. Finally, these are the methods which attempt, by a colonization directed from without, to dictate to the labor movement attitudes, tactics or responses which do not come from the depths of its collective intelligence. It is in large part because of this that the French section of the Fourth International has shown itself absolutely incapable not merely of reaching the masses but indeed even of forming tried and serious cadres.

If the question of fusion with the P.O.I. (majority) had been posed, it would have involved as a pre-condition a discussion relative to these methods from which the labor movement has too much suffered. Since serious differences exist between the P.O.I. (majority) and the P.S.O.P., why propose fusion? If the proposal is sincere, do you think that we will abandon our preference for a revolutionary party, with a democratic constitution, which is capable of directing its own affairs? And if the proposal is not sincere, it would be better not to insist on it: confronted with the mighty political organizations of the working class and the bourgeois repression we have something else to do besides spending our time in this deceptive game.

Believe me that we much prefer—with no concern for personal or factional preconception (he who had such preconceptions at the present moment would be very mediocre)—the organization of a united front between the revolutionary groups which are separated by ideological differences (directed, for example, against the threatening imperialist war), rather than an illusory organic fusion carrying in its breast the germs of disorientation and speedy disintegration. To sum up, we attach very great worth to the fraternal collaboration of all revolutionary militants who are trying to subordinate their personal preferences to the exigencies of collective action. The process of the constitution of the revolutionary vanguard cannot be of the character of a mechanical operation.

In the measure to which we carry on our shoulders our share of responsibility before the working class, we are determined, comrade Trotsky, to prove ourselves not too inferior to the grave tasks which await us.

With our thanks, dear comrade Trotsky, we send our revolutionary greetings.

Marceau PIVERT

Paris, Jan. 26, 1939

Letter to a Friend in France

Dear friend,

I hasten to reply to your letter of January 24, which gave me important information about the situation in the P.S.O.P. I find it necessary to comment upon the points which Marceau Pivert brought up in his conversation with you.

He proclaimed his "complete solidarity" with me in his estimate of the general situation in France. Needless to say, I greet such a declaration warmly. But it is nevertheless insufficient. In order that there may be the possibility of subsequent collaboration, there must be not only a unity in estimate; it is also necessary that the practical conclusion, at least the most essential ones, be identical. In connection with the days of June, 1936, Marceau Pivert wrote: "Now everything is possible." That was a magnificent formula. It meant: with this proletariat, we can go to the end, that is to say, orient directly toward the conquest of power. During those same days, or soon after, I wrote: "The French revolution has begun." We thus had a common premise with Marceau Pivert. But that is exactly why I could not understand how Marceau Pivert could keep confidence in Blum, even though that confidence was conditional and limited—a semi-confidence, when it was absolutely clear that that bourgeois guardian and dolt, a deserter from head to foot, was capable of leading the proletariat only to defeats and humiliations.

But we will not go back to the past. Let us take up the present situation. The question of Freemasonry has, in my opinion, an enormous political and symptomatic im-