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Guide to the Max Shachtman Correspondence with Leon Trotsky

GEN MSS 297



by Robert Bird and Nicole Bouche

July 1997

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 297

CREATOR: Shachtman, Max, 1903-1972

TITLE: Max Shachtman correspondence with Leon Trotsky

DATES: 1930-[1953]

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1 linear foot (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Materials in English, French, and German.

SUMMARY: 46 TLS and 1 ALS from Leon Trotsky to Max Shachtman. 17 carbons of letters from Shachtman to Trotsky, including 1 ALS and 16 TLS from Trotsky to third parties, and third party correspondence. Concerns the Communist opposition in the 1930s, especially in the United States.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.shacht>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.shacht>.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hans P. Kraus.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 2: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Max Shachtman Correspondence with Leon Trotsky. General Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Max Shachtman was born in Warsaw on September 10, 1904 and emigrated to the United States with his family in early childhood. At a quite young age Shachtman was attracted to communism and became a prominent American Marxist and labor activist. He was the author and editor of many books, including *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1927), *Ten Years: The History and Principles of the Left Opposition* (1933), and *Behind the Moscow Trials* (1936). He also co-translated some works by Leon Trotsky and was general editor of the latter's *Selected Works* (1936). Shachtman's activities dropped off after 1940. He died in 1972.

Along with James P. Cannon and Martin Abern, Max Shachtman split from the Communist Party in late 1928 to found the Communist League of America (Left Opposition), a pro-Trotsky group opposed to the dominant, Stalinist orientation of the Third International. Shachtman, Cannon and Abern immediately founded the newspaper *The Militant*. After Trotsky's expulsion from the USSR in January 1929, this core group of American Trotskyites entered into direct correspondence with him in an attempt to coordinate the international struggle against Stalinism, which they understood as a bourgeois-nationalist distortion of the internationalist communism of Lenin.

The American Trotskyite movement gained momentum throughout the 1930s through participation in labor disputes and the increasingly unattractive behavior of Stalin. Trotsky's move to Mexico in 1936, after spending 1933-1936 in France and Oslo, Norway, was a powerful stimulus for his American followers. In 1933, they founded the journal *The New Internationalist*. In the late 1930s it engaged in a short-lived merger with the Socialist Party, an experience that left it with the new name of Socialist Workers Party. It was allied with the Trotskyite Fourth International, convened at Paris in 1938. By 1940, Shachtman, along with James Burnham, had soured on the USSR to such a degree that they left the Socialist Workers Party in order to move towards non-Marxist socialism. It was at this point that Trotskyism was struck with the murder of its leader, Leon Trotsky, in his Mexican exile, on August 20 1940.

Scope and Contents

Shachtman's correspondence with Trotsky in [Series I: Trotsky to Shachtman](#) and [Series II: Shachtman to Trotsky](#) chronicles many of the organizational developments of the American Trotskyite movement. Trotsky often advises Shachtman on the correct position to take in the Trotskyite organs *The Militant* and *The New Internationalist*. Many letters reflect Shachtman's efforts to publish Trotsky's works, both in these journals and in book form, through publishers such as Boni, and later with the Trotskyite Pioneer Publishers. Trotsky followed the development of an American Opposition movement with great satisfaction and concern, and his letters often contain instructions addressed to individual party leaders. Other topics of discussion include the activities of various communist figures in Germany, England, Spain, and France.

[Series III: Letters from Trotsky](#) and [Series IV: Other Correspondence and Papers](#) provide a wider perspective on the same fractional combat. Most of the letters from Trotsky in *Series III* are addressed to the collective of Trotskyite leaders in the US and deal with events of movement-wide significance. The final

letter, addressed to the Executive Committee of the Fourth International and dated just six months before his assassination, is a call for party unity in the face of deepening schism. *Series IV* comprises related correspondence among leading members of the American Trotskyite movement, such as Shachtman, Cannon, and Joseph Hansen.

Collection Contents

Series I: Trotsky to Shachtman, 1930–1939

b. 1, f. 1	TLS: incl. carbon and TLS dated 1930 Apr 16 to Winitsky	1930 Apr 16
b. 1, f. 2-10	TLS	
b. 1, f. 11	TLS: incl. TL to Boni (publisher) and copy of telegram from Boni dated 1931 Jan 17 with holograph notations	1931 Jan 18
b. 1, f. 12-18	TLS	
b. 1, f. 19	TLS: incl. partial English translation	1931 Dec 29
b. 1, f. 20	TLS	
b. 1, f. 21	TLS: incl. carbon	1932 Feb 10
b. 1, f. 22	TLS	
b. 1, f. 23	TLS: with holograph notation "Harriet Ashbrook"	1932 Aug 19
b. 1, f. 24	TLS	
b. 1, f. 25	TLS: with notations by Shachtman	1933 Mar 8
b. 1, f. 26	TLS	
b. 1, f. 27	TL: incl. copy of TL dated 1933 Aug 22 to James P. Cannon	1933 Aug 22
b. 1, f. 28	TLS: to the Editorial Board of <i>New Internationalist</i> , with notation "Greetings from Trotsky"	1933 Oct 2
b. 1, f. 29	TLS: signed in Russian	1934 Jan 30
b. 1, f. 30-33	TLS	
b. 1, f. 34	ALS: signed "Crux"	1936 Jul 25
b. 1, f. 35	TLS: signed "Crux", addressed to Trent	1936 Jul 26
b. 1, f. 36-37	TLS	
b. 1, f. 38	TLS: signed "Crux."	1937 Sep 20
b. 1, f. 39	TLS: signed "V. T. O'Brien", addressed to Shachtman, James P. Cannon, Martin Abern and James Burnham	1937 Nov 19
b. 1, f. 40-41	TLS	
b. 1, f. 42	TLS: signed V. T. O'Brien, with notation "LDT's letter"	1939 Jan 20
b. 1, f. 43-44	TLS	
b. 1, f. 45	TLS: with TL to Charles Malamuth dated 1939 Sep 1	1939 Sep 1
b. 1, f. 46-47	TLS	

Series II: Shachtman to Trotsky, 1930 Jun 30

b. 1, f. 48	TL: 2 copies	1930 Jun 30
b. 1, f. 49-54	TL	
b. 1, f. 55-59	TL	
b. 1, f. 60	TL	
b. 1, f. 61-63	TL	

Series III: Letters from Trotsky, 1930–1939

b. 1, f. 64	Gerard Rosenthal: TLS	1930 Mar 6
b. 1, f. 65	Frances Gerard: ALS	1930 Mar 13
b. 1, f. 66	Editorial Board of <i>The Militant</i> : TL, English translation	1930 Mar 15
b. 1, f. 67	Editorial Board of <i>The Militant</i> : TL, partial English translation	1930 Mar 26
b. 1, f. 68	Boni (publisher): TL	1931 Feb 2
b. 1, f. 69	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1931 Apr 4
b. 1, f. 70	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1931 Jul 19
b. 1, f. 71	Andrés Nin: TL, excerpts	1931 Sep 1
b. 1, f. 72	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS, incl. holograph note and English translation	1931 Dec 25
b. 1, f. 73	The Central Committee of the Communist League of America: TLS	1932 Jan 5
b. 1, f. 74	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1932 May 19
b. 1, f. 75	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1932 May 27
b. 1, f. 76	Neurath: TL	1932 Jun 14
b. 1, f. 77	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1932 Jul 4
b. 1, f. 78	Albert Glotzer: TL	1932 Jul 18
b. 1, f. 79	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS	1932 Jul 29
b. 1, f. 80	Arne Swabeck: TLS	1932 Sep 4
b. 1, f. 81	Arne Swabeck: TLS	1932 Oct 20
b. 1, f. 82	The Leadership of the Communist League of America: TLS, incl. TL to Albert Weisbord	1932 Oct 22
b. 1, f. 83	Unidentified: TL	1933 Jun 13
b. 1, f. 84	National Committee of the Communist League of America: TLS	1933 Sep 9
b. 1, f. 85	Arne Swabeck: TLS	1934 Mar 29
b. 1, f. 86	Unidentified: TL, "to IS"	1937 May 12
b. 1, f. 87	Unidentified: TL, "in re the magazine"	1937 Jun 12
b. 1, f. 88	Adolf: TL, "Copie pour Shachtman"	1937 Sep 25
b. 1, f. 89	James P. Cannon: TLS, with holograph corrections	1937 Oct 2
b. 1, f. 90	Mr. Warburg: TL	1937 Oct 6
b. 1, f. 91	James Burnham: TL	1937 Dec 15

b. 1, f. 92	"Dear Friends": TL	1939 Apr 18
b. 1, f. 93	"Dear Comrades": TL	1939 Apr 22
b. 1, f. 94	The Executive Committee of the Fourth International: TLS, signed "Crux"	1940 Feb 20
b. 1, f. 95	Address change notice for "Leon Sedoff"	n.d.

Series IV: Other Correspondence and Papers, 1937-[1953]

b. 1, f. 96	Joseph Hansen to Max Shachtman	1937 Jan 5
b. 1, f. 97	Harold Isaacs to "Dear Comrades"	1937 Jul 3
b. 1, f. 98	Joseph Hansen to James P. Cannon	1937 Oct 20
b. 1, f. 99	Joseph Hansen to Max Shachtman	1938 Aug 10
b. 1, f. 100	Lillian Kurtz to Max Shachtman	1939 Jan 14
b. 1, f. 101	"Natalia Ivanovna Sedoff (Sedova)": typescript in English, with French holograph notations	[1953]

Restricted Fragile Papers

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 2, f. 102	Box 1, folder 8
b. 2, f. 103	Box 1, folder 10
b. 2, f. 104	Box 1, folder 11
b. 2, f. 105	Box 1, folder 14
b. 2, f. 106	Box 1, folder 16
b. 2, f. 107	Box 1, folder 19
b. 2, f. 108	Box 1, folder 20
b. 2, f. 109	Box 1, folder 21
b. 2, f. 110	Box 1, folder 22
b. 2, f. 111	Box 1, folder 23
b. 2, f. 112	Box 1, folder 24
b. 2, f. 113	Box 1, folder 25
b. 2, f. 114	Box 1, folder 26
b. 2, f. 115	Box 1, folder 27
b. 2, f. 116	Box 1, folder 28
b. 2, f. 117	Box 1, folder 30
b. 2, f. 118	Box 1, folder 31
b. 2, f. 119	Box 1, folder 32
b. 2, f. 120	Box 1, folder 33
b. 2, f. 121	Box 1, folder 34
b. 2, f. 122	Box 1, folder 35
b. 2, f. 123	Box 1, folder 36
b. 2, f. 124	Box 1, folder 39
b. 2, f. 125	Box 1, folder 41
b. 2, f. 126	Box 1, folder 46
b. 2, f. 127	Box 1, folder 47
b. 2, f. 128	Box 1, folder 48
b. 2, f. 129	Box 1, folder 49

b. 2, f. 130	Box 1, folder 50
b. 2, f. 131	Box 1, folder 51
b. 2, f. 132	Box 1, folder 52
b. 2, f. 133	Box 1, folder 53
b. 2, f. 134	Box 1, folder 54
b. 2, f. 135	Box 1, folder 56
b. 2, f. 136	Box 1, folder 57
b. 2, f. 137	Box 1, folder 58
b. 2, f. 138	Box 1, folder 58a
b. 2, f. 139	Box 1, folder 69
b. 2, f. 140	Box 1, folder 60
b. 2, f. 141	Box 1, folder 61
b. 2, f. 142	Box 1, folder 62
b. 2, f. 143	Box 1, folder 63
b. 2, f. 144	Box 1, folder 66
b. 2, f. 145	Box 1, folder 67
b. 2, f. 146	Box 1, folder 68
b. 2, f. 147	Box 1, folder 70
b. 2, f. 148	Box 1, folder 71
b. 2, f. 149	Box 1, folder 72
b. 2, f. 150	Box 1, folder 73
b. 2, f. 151	Box 1, folder 74
b. 2, f. 152	Box 1, folder 75
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b. 2, f. 154	Box 1, folder 79
b. 2, f. 155	Box 1, folder 80
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b. 2, f. 157	Box 1, folder 83
b. 2, f. 158	Box 1, folder 84
b. 2, f. 159	Box 1, folder 85

b. 2, f. 160	Box 1, folder 86
b. 2, f. 161	Box 1, folder 87
b. 2, f. 162	Box 1, folder 88
b. 2, f. 163	Box 1, folder 89
b. 2, f. 164	Box 1, folder 91
b. 2, f. 165	Box 1, folder 92
b. 2, f. 166	Box 1, folder 93
b. 2, f. 167	Box 1, folder 94

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Preferred Titles

Militant

New international; a monthly organ of revolutionary Marxism

Subjects

Socialism -- United States -- Societies, etc.

Names

Cannon, James Patrick, 1890-1974

Glotzer, Albert, 1908-1999

Hansen, Joseph

Nin, Andrés, 1892-1937

Shachtman, Max, 1903-1972

Trotsky, Leon, 1879-1940

Corporate Bodies

Communist League of America (Opposition)

Communist Party of America

Workers Party of the United States

Contributors

Shachtman, Max, 1903-1972

Trotsky, Leon, 1879-1940