

**The New** \_\_\_\_\_  
**INTERNATIONAL**

***The Fear of Depression  
In the United States***

*By T. N. Vance*

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***The Myth of Lenin's  
'Revolutionary Defeatism'—II***

*By Hal Draper*

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***Bevanism During the War***

*By Donald Slaiman*

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# THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

A Marxist Review

Vol. XIX, No. 6 Whole No. 162  
November-December 1953

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# THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

A Marxist Review

Vol. XIX, No. 6 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1953 Whole No. 162

## Notes of the Month

# Fear of Depression in the U.S.

"Depression is a real fear for many of us. It has already touched the farmers. It may touch others in the months ahead." Thus spoke Adlai E. Stevenson, leader of the "loyal opposition," in his Philadelphia speech of December 12th. The atmosphere of anxiety appears to reach far beyond the farmers, extending from Main Street to Wall Street. Most people, including those in government, are worried about the economic outlook.

That there is some basis for these fears can be seen in the most recent report of the President's Council of Economic Advisers. The report for December receives the headline in the *New York Times* of December 15th. "November Business Activity Shows First Dip From 1952." Factory output and earnings were off. The average work-week dipped below forty hours, with the 39.9-hour average being the lowest for any November in the last four years. While there were some favorable factors, unemployment increased by 266,000.

If one examines the basic national income data, as published by the Department of Commerce in the November issue of the *Survey of Current Business*, it becomes apparent that a mild recession started in the third quarter of 1953. Gross national product declined from a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$372.4 billion in

the second quarter of 1953 to \$369 billion in the third quarter. Since personal consumption expenditures and government purchases of goods and services increased, although almost imperceptibly, gross private domestic investment accounts for the decline. For all practical purposes, the entire story is told by the reduction in the change in business inventories from an annual rate of \$8.8 billion in the second quarter to one of \$4.5 billion in the third quarter.

In some quarters, it is fashionable to attribute the present recession to a mere "inventory adjustment"—presumably of no consequence. The November, 1953 *Survey of Current Business* has this to say about the subject: "The bulk of the advance in inventories since the strike-affected third quarter of last year has been in durable goods. Additions to durable goods inventories have reflected substantial replenishments that followed the widespread imbalances caused by the steel shortages as well as the subsequent buildup in many hard good lines, such as automobiles, which were carrying unusually low inventories in the earlier period of production controls. More recently, some backing up of stocks because of lower than expected sales also have been a contributing factor, affecting particularly third quarter inventories in retail trade." (Italics mine—T. N. V.)

This is a most curious attempt to evade facing reality—and in a publication that is hardly read by the general public. The statement regarding inventories of automobiles is sheer fiction, as retail sales of automobiles have been declining. It has been obvious for several months that production of automobiles has been exceeding sales. The increase in inventories has nothing to do with production restrictions that existed last year or the year before. Not only have retail sales in general been lower than expected, but they are currently running five to ten per cent under last year.

The decline in retail sales naturally begins to have an impact at the factory level. Factory sales of all motor vehicles, for example, reached a 1953 peak of 723,532 in April. After declines of eighty and sixty thousand vehicles in May and June, factory sales of motor vehicles still totalled 705,132 in July. In August, the figure was down to 615,382 and in September to 573,688. It is estimated that production of motor vehicles for 1953 may exceed retail sales by several hundred thousand units.

New orders are, of course, one of the most sensitive barometers of business conditions. In view of the softening throughout the economy, it is not surprising that net orders declined from a peak of \$25.7 billion in April, 1953 to \$22.4 billion in September, the latest month available. This is a decline of twelve per cent, and must be regarded as significant in any appraisal of the economy.

Ninety per cent of the decline in recent months in new orders is to be found in the durable goods industries—total net new orders for all durable goods industries declining from \$12.6 billion in April, 1953 to \$9.6 billion in September. Since the bulk of this decline occurs in transportation equip-

ment, including motor vehicles and parts, the crisis in consumer durables, centering in the automobile industry, is evident.

At the same time, there has been some increase in the number of industrial and commercial failures, although not as yet of an alarming nature. More significant has been a pronounced decline in the number of new business incorporations. From a 1953 peak of 9,659 in March, the number of new incorporations throughout the country declined to 7,433 in September—a drop of almost 25 per cent. As the hucksters on Madison Avenue put it, "The economy has become more competitive."

AN INTERESTING APPRAISAL of the economic outlook is contained in the *New York Times* of December 20th, in the column, "The Merchant's Point of View," by William M. Freeman:

The population is just over 160,000,000 and is continuing to go up. While the baby crop is dropping, there are more toddlers and more elderly persons, which means a heavier load on the more or less static middle group. The number of marriages is decreasing. Demand for new homes is easing, a dip that is accentuated by higher prices. Materials prices also are weaker, so that prices of homes and major appliances should turn downward in due course.

Sales of furniture, major appliances and a host of other items are closely linked to the housing trend. The television receiver, which increases living room usage, traffic, wear, destruction and replacement, is helping a bit in furniture volume, as is the continuing trend to outdoor living, sparked by the flight from the cities to a semi-suburban way of life.

Employment is dipping steadily, with business activity showing its first minus signs for the year in November. Some 1,428,000 persons were jobless in November, 2.3 per cent of the labor force; this was the sharpest rise recorded in the year.

All of these factors add up to a downward readjustment, now accelerating.

with industrial production off 6 per cent from the peak in March. The Federal Reserve Board's index stood at the close of November at 228, based on the 1935-39 average taken as 100, against the March figure of 243.

Inventories are heavy in most lines. Retail sales are trailing 1952 volume, but the year as a whole, with attractive prices on desired items rather than on 'lemons,' aided by special promotions backed by heavy advertising, should finish between 1 and 2 per cent ahead of last year. . . .

In a word, there is a marked softening evident throughout most of the economy. In almost every market, supply now exceeds demand. The term, "buyers' market," is used more and more frequently, and is an apt description of the situation in the economy as a whole. While there is reason to fear depression, there is no reason for panic to prevail. Many new products, and improvements in old products, are being put on the market. Business volume is still at a very high level. Freeman concludes his column, quoted above, as follows:

It is factors such as this, the product of the engineer, the artist, the production man and the planner, that distort computations. There is no question of a read-

justment coming up, aside from anything we scare ourselves into, as a result of the rapid post-Korea expansion and the existence of surpluses in many lines that must be worked off before production rates can be resumed.

The outlook, therefore, is for sharply intensified competition, with a marked increase in competitive selling in every aspect of the economy. But, and here's something that's been ignored: The slide-off, in the works since mid-year, is from record levels. It seems very likely, therefore, that the year ahead will come close to the 1952 figure, which was very near the record. And the country's inventive genius can effect this outlook only one way—upward.

Ignoring the propaganda content in the phrase, "inventive genius," there has been as we pointed out in "The Permanent War Economy Under Eisenhower" (cf. March-April 1953 issue of *The New International*, p. 97) an enormous amount of capital accumulation since the end of World War II. Productive capacity, therefore, is still increasing at a goodly rate and there is, as yet, no sign of any significant downturn in the accumulation of capital, as can be seen from the following tabulation covering the last seven quarters.

NET PRIVATE CAPITAL FORMATION, 1952-1953, by Quarters  
(Billions of Dollars, Seasonally Adjusted at Annual Rates)

Year and Quarter	Gross Investment	Capital Consumption Allowances	Net Investment
1952, I Quarter	\$50.4	\$25.7	\$24.7
1952, II Quarter	49.6	26.9	22.7
1952, III Quarter	52.3	27.0	25.3
1952, IV Quarter	57.9	28.2	29.7
1953, I Quarter	54.0	28.2	25.8
1953, II Quarter	61.0	29.2	31.8
1953, III Quarter	56.5	29.6	26.9

Source: *Survey of Current Business*, November, 1953.

It is true that the second quarter of 1953 represents the peak in capital accumulation, both gross and net. It is much too early, however, to draw conclusions as to whether the downturn

in the third quarter will turn out to be mainly an inventory adjustment, or whether it presages a characteristic decline in the traditional cycle of capital accumulation. At the moment, of

course, the figures for gross private investment in producers' durable equipment (new plant and equipment) do not show any recession characteristics. At seasonally adjusted annual rates, the estimates for producers' durable equipment for the last seven quarters are:

Year and Quarter	Billions of Dollars
1952, I Quarter	\$25.6
1952, II Quarter	25.6
1952, III Quarter	24.9
1952, IV Quarter	25.5
1953, I Quarter	26.2
1953, II Quarter	26.9
1953, III Quarter	27.1

Obviously, a sizable portion of the gross investment in plant and equipment represents a net increase in productive capacity. Contained in these figures are the seeds of a typical capitalist crisis of overproduction. *But the seeds have not yet germinated.* For the time being, the accumulation of real capital keeps pace with the increase in total output. Any drastic curtailment in capital formation would herald the approach of deep-seated capitalist crisis. Under the Permanent War Economy, however, such a development is virtually excluded.

And yet, the signs of atrophy, alluded to in "The Permanent War Economy Under Eisenhower," multiply. The investment figures cited above are not without interest. They show that capital is apparently being consumed at a faster rate than gross investment increases. Consequently, the increase in net investment is not keeping pace with the increase in gross investment. What seems to be happening is that the increasingly high organic composition of capital results in a larger proportion of output going toward the replacement of

constant capital. As we pointed out in the original series of articles, such a trend must necessarily have an adverse impact on the rate of surplus value, and therefore ultimately on the rate of profit. All the evidence points to a reduced rate of profit in 1954. From this, it does not follow, however, that a capitalist crisis is at hand.

Parenthetically, it should be observed that as the figures for capital consumption allowances rise, the use of gross national product data is fraught with increasing danger and a larger margin of error. Increasing rates of depreciation and obsolescence may well be symptomatic of rising rates of productivity. They can also give rise to new types of capitalist contradictions and new problems which capitalist state intervention, far from solving, actually accentuates. When estimates of capital consumption reach eight per cent of gross output, as they currently do, it is no longer a problem solely for accountants. Such figures have an economic and political impact. Once five-year amortization of "defense" plants and the excess profits tax are eliminated, it remains to be seen whether "normal" capitalist incentives will be sufficient to maintain the required high rate of investment that a high level equilibrium in the economy apparently requires.

Again, it is too early to tell, but the fact remains that between the second and third quarter of 1953, personal savings, as estimated by the Department of Commerce, increased from an annual rate of \$17.2 billion to an annual rate of \$18.8 billion. An increase of nine per cent in the amount of personal savings would appear to be a very sizable figure, but in view of the dubious residual method by which Commerce derives these estimates too much importance should not be attached to this change. Much larger

quarterly changes have been recorded in the recent past, without any undue economic significance. But it is possible that the apparent increase in the amount of personal savings *could* reflect growing caution on the part of the average consumer as the fear of depression grows.

THE MAJOR FACTOR in tempering any unduly pessimistic forecast of the economic outlook necessarily remains the size, composition and trend of war outlays. In analyzing these data, it will be helpful to have the quarterly figures as presented in the following tabulation.

WAR OUTLAYS, 1952-1953, by Quarters  
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TOTAL OUTPUT  
(Dollar Figures in Billions, Seasonally Adjusted at Annual Rates)

Year and Quarter	Net National Product (1)	WAR OUTLAYS			Col. (4)
		Direct (2)	Indirect (3)	Total (4)	As % of Col. (1) (5)
1952, I Quarter	\$314.7	\$43.9	\$8.8	\$52.7	16.7%
1952, II Quarter	316.4	47.1	9.3	56.4	17.8
1952, III Quarter	319.7	46.4	9.2	55.6	17.4
1952, IV Quarter	331.3	48.6	8.0	56.6	17.1
1953, I Quarter	336.9	49.4	8.6	58.0	17.2
1953, II Quarter	341.5	51.3	9.0	60.3	17.7
1953, III Quarter	339.0	50.4	7.9	58.3	17.2

The net national product figures are derived from Commerce estimates of gross national product and national income. The concepts of war outlays, direct and indirect, remain as heretofore, with the derivation of the figures following the explanation on pages 94-95 of the March-April 1953 issue of *The New Internationalist*. The margin of error in these quarterly estimates cannot be significantly greater than in the annual figures presented in prior articles.

The ratio of war outlays to total output, the prime mover in this period of capitalism, has reached a fairly even plateau. During the entire period under review, the extreme variation is to be found between the 16.7 per cent of the first quarter of 1952 and the 17.8 per cent of the second quarter of the same year. This represents a variation of but six per cent at the peak, which is well within the margin of error in the underlying data. A war outlays ratio of 17 per

cent is significant, but as it continues at the same level over a period of months, and then of years, it begins to lose some of its impact. The same ratio can no longer sustain the same high level of employment, production and profits.

Of course, changes of one-half of one per cent in the ratio, in either direction, may well have a noticeable impact on the equilibrium level, but in their totality such changes are more than offset by the atrophy that begins to set in. The weakening of the impact of war outlays tends to create all sorts of illusions. At one extreme is the notion that war outlays never had anything to do with the high level of activity; hence, it makes little difference if they do decline in the future, as there will be many offsets and "prosperity" will continue. At the other extreme is the fear that the bottom will drop out of the economy, as if Washington had a completely free hand in determining the level

and ratio of war outlays; this point of view, of course, fails to realize that American imperialism had and *still* has valid *political*, as well as economic, motives for the adoption of the Permanent War Economy.

What has happened, of course, aside from the stretchout in the "Defense" program begun under Truman, and the truce in the Korean war, is that direct war outlays have kept pace with, and been responsible in large measure for, the rise in total output. Indirect war outlays, however, have leveled off and now tend to decline. The reduction in foreign economic aid, a notable difference in Republican policy as contrasted with that of the Democrats, is chiefly responsible for the falling off in indirect war outlays. If, on top of this, direct war outlays are reduced by \$5 billion, as the Republicans now threaten, the consequences could be serious. How much the Eisenhower Administration will reduce direct war outlays, remains to be seen.

They may find that it is easier to eliminate agricultural price supports and such "un-American" controls than to reduce the manpower of the armed forces and to convince the American bourgeoisie as a whole that military reliance can be placed on atomic weapons to achieve the necessary degree of safety, as well as to provide the necessary implementation for foreign policy. To be sure, if the plan is to abandon Western Europe to Stalinism, then *temporarily* a sharp reduction in direct military outlays may be achieved. Granted that the bulk of isolationist tendencies are concentrated within Republican ranks, it is still inconceivable that the Eisenhower Administration is planning to abandon Europe to the tender mercies of Stalinist imperialism. Without such a major change in policy, or the work-

ing out of a basic agreement with Stalinist imperialism, the political basis for any sharp reduction in war outlays remains absent. And as long as war outlays remain at 17 per cent of total output, there cannot be a serious depression.

ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING exponents of the view that war outlays have had nothing to do with sustaining a high level of economic activity is W. S. Woytinsky. Writing in the *New Leader* of December 7, 1953, Woytinsky states: "My forecast here is based on the belief that the prosperity enjoyed by this country in recent years has *not* been a Korean War prosperity. It has been rather a period of healthy growth of a vigorous and dynamic economic system, with the benefits of growth widely though unevenly distributed among broad groups of the population." To label the post-World War II expansion of American capitalism "a period of healthy growth" betrays a singularly acute lack of understanding of the world in which we live.

The main prop in Woytinsky's unique approach to the economic outlook is contained in a paragraph from his prognosis of a year ago (cf. the *New Leader*, December 8, 1952): "The liquidation of the defense program would mean reorientation of economic activities and a brief spell of hesitation, but by no means a contraction in the total volume of employment and production. *The problem will be of the same nature as the demobilization after World War II, but on a much smaller scale.* The last demobilization—in the sense of complete reorientation of our economy and readjustment of men released from the armed forces—took two years, and at no time did unemployment rise to 3 million in the period of readjustment.

The liquidation of the present defense and rearmament program would take much less time and cause much less frictional unemployment." (Italics mine—T. N. V.)

Of course, there will be no liquidation of the defense program, although some slight reduction in the magnitude of war outlays is not excluded. The adjustment problem, however, in the event of a reduction in war outlays is not only not the same. It is entirely different. At the end of World War II, the ratio of war outlays to total output exceeded 40 per cent. A swift decline took place to the ten per cent level, but the reduction in the production of means of production and consumption during the war meant that there was room for increase in these traditional goals of economic output once the sharp decline began in the production of means of destruction. Hence, there could be no serious depression immediately following the end of World War II. It is obvious that the present situation differs markedly from that which prevailed eight years ago. The current increase (from 1950-1953) in the output of means of destruction has not only not been accompanied by a decrease in the output of means of production and means of consumption, but has actually witnessed an increase in the production of both capital and consumers' goods.

Woytinsky possesses a remarkably simplistic and mechanical view of the economy, where a drop in one sector *must* be offset by increases in other sectors. In his 1952 article, quoted above, he asserts: "Whatever goes to the military sector is taken from civilian consumption and capital formation. Whatever is released from the military sector returns to the civilian." Here we have a modern version of Adam Smith's "unseen hand" that

automatically takes care of the economy and all supporters of capitalism, but somehow fails to eliminate the "unemployment" sector.

An effective reply to Woytinsky was given by Seymour E. Harris in the *New Leader* of December 22, 1952, when he wrote: "I find serious gaps in Dr. Woytinsky's crystal-gazing. He says not a word about the tremendous investment since 1945. Our capital plant has expanded by 50-60 per cent (in real terms) since 1945. These gains are far beyond what prevailed in the inflationary Twenties. Yet Dr. Woytinsky writes as though, when the Government cuts its spending on armament by 20 billion dollars or so, part of the slack will be taken up by business. A more realistic view would be that the decline of Government spending would aggravate a decline in investment."

Harris has put his finger on one of the central problems when he focuses on investment. He would also appear to be more realistic than Woytinsky in appraising the possibilities of government investments as offsets to declining war outlays. He states: "It is this failure to suggest the alternatives that leaves me cool to Dr. Woytinsky's astrology. His assumption of gains in investment seems unrealistic. His suggestion that Government will substitute investments of various kinds for military outlays also is unsupportable. A Democratic regime, supported by an ideology favorable to deficit financing, was not prepared after twenty years of rule to present a catalogue of investment adequate to do this job; and even if it had, it was confronted with strong opposition. Does Dr. Woytinsky mean to imply that the Republican Administration will be more disposed to plan for Government intervention when military expenditures fall and thus to fill the gap? It is pos-

sible, but certainly not likely."

After pointing out that tax reduction is the more likely response to a cut in military outlays, and that tax reduction can have only a limited stimulus on demand, Harris concludes his refutation of Woytinsky: "In summary, the signs point to a business recession in 1953 or 1954—unless the war is extended. Dr. Woytinsky does not seem concerned over the possibility of adequate demand even if the whole military program is scrapped. He seems to believe that tax reduction and pent-up demand (compared by Dr. Woytinsky with the 1946 situation, and wrongly so) will solve our problem."

Woytinsky returns to the economic hustings in his "Economic Forecast for 1954," the title of his current article, quoted above, with a modification of his "changing sector" theory of the previous year. This might be called the "excess fat" theory, for he states: "Our economy has accumulated such an amount of fat and muscle that it is hard to visualize its temporary contraction to a level that would spell out a 'mild recession' such as contemplated a year ago. This is said even while giving full weight to at least four problems which have often been mentioned as presaging a downturn. These are the position of the farmer, possible cuts in defense expenditures, a new economic philosophy in Washington, and possible reorientation of foreign-trade policy."

Apparently, Woytinsky is not up on the latest dietary theories, for the "excess fat" represents as much of a danger as it does a cushion. Moreover, the extra weight would seem to consist mainly of "fat" rather than of "muscle." Unemployment caused by declines in production from peak levels is just as real to those who are placed in the category of surplus labor as un-

employment that develops from a lower production base. An increase of unemployment from one million to five million may not be as catastrophic in its impact as an increase from five million to nine million, but it is still serious and would certainly constitute at least a "mild" recession.

"The cut in defense expenditures as a source of contraction of purchasing power is, to a large extent," according to Woytinsky, "a bogey man in the modern folklore of business forecasting. The cut of \$5 billion in the requested appropriation does not imply that Government purchases in 1954 will be substantially reduced in comparison with 1953. The real volume of purchases will depend partly on changes in prices, partly on political developments which may call for new appropriations. As things look now, total Government expenditures may decline by \$2 billion or \$3 billion or increase by a similar or larger amount." In other words, Woytinsky is not especially concerned with a projected cut in war outlays—not because "prosperity is independent of the level of war outlays" as was his position a year ago, but because there won't be a real cut in 1954. Besides, if there is a real cut, there is plenty of fat, so it won't be serious. And, if the "excess fat" theory doesn't work, then there may be "political developments which may call for new appropriations." If war expenditures are not present in sufficient volume to prevent a recession, then there will be other types of government expenditures. Woytinsky is convinced that the economy will continue to expand in 1954, and he will find a theory to support that point of view, even if he has to alter or repudiate his earlier theories.

MEANWHILE, THE EISENHOWER Admin-

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istration is displaying signs of worry about the economic outlook. Some months ago, apparently fearful that official indexes would be too slow in heralding a downswing, it was announced that economic "watchdogs" were being appointed in various areas. Apparently, certain officials in large corporations, and perhaps even in trade unions, were to be deputized with titles which gave them the responsibility of notifying Washington immediately upon learning that a factory planned to curtail or cease production, or that overtime was being reduced. What, if anything, has been done to implement this rather novel idea is not known to us, but the new line of the Administration is presumably authoritatively revealed in a front-page article in the *New York Times* of December 21, 1953. Under the headline, "U. S. Acting to Meet Any Slide in Business," Washington reporter Joseph A. Loftus writes:

The Administration is facing up to the possibility of a 1954 slide in business and employment. At the same time, Administration sources express confidence that the outlook now is good.

A realistic view of economic conditions, and some of the available remedies, if any are needed, will be discussed in the annual report of the Council of Economic Advisers and in the President's Economic Message to Congress next month.

While these reports are expected to deal candidly with the situation, they are not expected to blueprint anti-recession plans. *The reason no firm plans can be laid, according to informed official opinion, is that nobody can say in advance what the economic ailment, if any, will be, and therefore none of the economic doctors can prescribe a specific medicine.* [Sic!]

Rather, a line of thinking will be offered, and the standbys that are available, or should be made available, to counter a recession will be discussed.

Stimulation of private capital will be accented, it is understood. One form of business encouragement would be the enactment of lease-purchase legislation un-

der which local money would be used to build needed Federal buildings throughout the country. The Federal Government would pay for the buildings in rent over fifteen to twenty-five year periods and become the eventual owner.

A \$15,000,000,000 Federal public works list, some of it blueprinted, also is available as a business stimulant, if necessary.

Another great source of potential economic activity is state and local works programs. Many state and local projects have been long deferred, although this type of construction has shown a substantial rise lately.

*Consideration of anti-recession plans is dictated by prudence and a recognition that some business men, although perhaps a minority, and some of our Allies, are a bit jittery about business prospects.*

Officials say there is evidence that the country is going through an economic adjustment, possibly because of a reduction being made in business inventories, as in 1949.

None of the economic indicators shows a severe readjustment now, or foreshadows one in the coming year, *except as psychological behavior might make it so*, it is held. The factors militating against a serious slide in business are said to include these: Government spending will continue high . . . spending for new plant and equipment in the first quarter of 1954 reveals a total almost as high as in the current quarter. . . . Employment and personal income are extraordinarily high; so are personal savings. . . .

Dr. Arthur F. Burns, chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, told the American Conference on Economic Security Nov. 7 that the council already had gone 'some distance' in preparing recommendations to cushion an economic decline.

He said that the standbys under study included measures to ease home building and repairs, further changes in the tax program, revisions in the unemployment insurance system and, if necessary, large scale public works. (Italics mine—T. N. V.)

There then follows a list of construction projects that *could* be taken off the shelf. It is impossible, however, to escape the conclusion that the mountain has labored and brought

forth a mouse. The "anti-recession" plans of the Eisenhower Administration are reminiscent of those of the Hoover Administration. They consist chiefly of issuing optimistic statements, reinforced by those of their big business partners, that everything is fine and will so remain in this best of all possible worlds.

As Stevenson put it in his December 12th speech, ". . . I don't know for certain whether we can talk our way into a business recession. But I do know that talk alone won't prevent a depression or cure it either. The Republicans cleared up that question for us some twenty years ago."

THE FEAR OF DEPRESSION is real and tangible. It is not borne solely out of long memories or out of political malice. It has its roots in the softening that is clearly taking place throughout the major sectors of the economy. Expectations, especially those of business men, are grounded in such material things as current and future prospects for sales and profits. Psychological behavior cannot create a depression, although if it becomes evident that Washington is not prepared to do more than talk about "anti-recession plans," existing deflationary forces will undoubtedly be strengthened.

The rather disconcerting economic outlook is producing a sharp conflict within Republican ranks. The busi-

ness men seem to be primarily concerned with looting the public treasury and presumably are not averse to a mild recession and a few millions of unemployment. The politicians, on other hand, have to worry about getting reelected and maintaining their rather tenuous hold on Congress. The latter group must press for increasing state intervention, even if that runs counter to announced Republican policy.

Just as Republican policy toward the farmers had to be radically reversed, with all major campaign pledges to eliminate price supports, etc., repudiated, we may well find that the politicians will prevail and the state will do its best to prevent unemployment from developing on the eve of an election. Eisenhower's balanced budget could well go the way of its eminent predecessor, the Roosevelt balanced budget. Under such conditions, and with a major assist from the new rulers of the Kremlin, the basic economic and political motivations for the existence of the Permanent War Economy continue to operate. So long as the fear of Stalinism and war continue to dominate the political scene, the fear of depression cannot dominate the economic outlook, although it is a factor that politicians will ignore at their peril.

T. N. VANCE

December, 1953

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# The Myth of Lenin's Defeatism

## II—"Defeatism" During the First World War

In the first two chapters (Part I) of this article, we discussed two myths: (1) that some kind of precedent for Lenin's world-war defeat-slogan can be found in Marx, Engels or the tradition of the Second International; and

(2) that Lenin's world-war defeat-slogan was first applied in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. We have seen that there is no precedent whatsoever for a slogan of "defeat" combined with opposition to both sides in a war.

## III. Lenin's Defeat-Slogan 1914-16

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, defeatism had a real past history, and the idea of defeat had a definite meaning in the socialist tradition; but this history and this meaning were quite different from what it later became in the Lenin-myth. First of all, it meant defeat by the enemy government ("pro-war defeatism" we have called it). Secondly, it was not a formula for international application, but the given policy on one side of a given war between a despotic, backward state and a "progressive" capitalist state.

As we raise the curtain on Lenin in August 1914 preparing a document to state the position of the Bolshevik party on the imperialist war, it is *this* tradition and *this* meaning which is in his consciousness. Shocked and appalled by the collapse of the whole Second International all around him, he sees the line of blood which has been drawn between the leaders who are whipping the working class into capitulation to the imperialist chauvinism of their own ruling class, under the slogan of "civil peace" and "defense of the fatherland," and the socialists who maintain the class struggle against the war and for the overthrow of this murderous capital-

ism which is setting worker against worker to cut each other's throats.

He reacts in the fashion which is characteristic of Lenin the man, and not merely Lenin the Marxist.

For example, over a decade before, he had had to raise a great hue and cry in order to bring together the atomized Russian social-democratic groups and circles into a modern centralized party with a central organ; that at the time was the great next step which had to be taken, it was "what is to be done." It was the key; it had to be pounded home into the consciousness of every militant; everything had to be subordinated to emphasizing it. How do you emphasize it? By repeating it a thousand times, in every conceivable way? Yes. By explaining it patiently over and over? Yes. By piling up argument after ar-

### CORRECTION

In the title of this article, as it appeared on the cover of the last issue, quotation marks were incorrectly placed around the word "Revolutionary" alone, instead of around the whole phrase "Revolutionary Defeatism." I regret this typographical error, small though it may be.—H. D.

gument, seizing every fact, every problem, and converting it into, turning it toward, a lesson on centralization? Yes. But that is not all. The problem is greater centralization, as compared with the present looseness. Then put "Centralization!" on a banner, on a pedestal, emphasize it by raising it to a principle. But the opponents of this elementary need cover their political objections demagogically by yelling "Bureaucratism!" "Lenin wants more bureaucratism, while we are for democracy!"—How does Lenin react? Yes, he replies: "*Bureaucratism versus democracy*"<sup>49</sup>—that is what we need now. He makes perfectly clear what he means, but that is how he seeks to underline, with heavy, thick strokes, the task of the day, by exaggerating in every way *that* side of the problem which points in the direction it is necessary to move *now*. Tomorrow he will recapture the balance, but today that is the way he puts the weight on the side which needs it.\*

In 1914 the traitors to international socialism are yelling "Civil peace!" No, says Lenin, *civil war!*

49. Reference notes marked by superior figures are collected at the end of the article; they give source data only. Informational footnotes marked by asterisks are at the bottom of the pages as they occur.

\*It was undoubtedly with relish that Lenin wrote in 1915, using a quotation which obviously had impressed him: "A French philosopher wrote: 'Dead ideas are those that appear in an elegant cloak, without roughness, without daring. They are dead because they enter into general circulation, forming a part of the usual intellectual equipment of the great army of philistines. Strong ideas are those that give impetus and create scandals, that provoke indignation, anger, irritation among one kind of people, enthusiasm among others.'" [CW 18, 327.]—The other side of this virtue is shown by the large number of passages in Lenin in which he resorts to exaggerated one-sided generalizations simply in order to give emphasis, temporarily seeing only the one-sidedness. Whatever benefits there are in this method, his contemporaries got: the same cannot be said for the generation or two that tried to learn from his writings without understanding that, in reading Lenin, it is as important to know what he is polemically concerned about at the moment as it is to understand what he is saying. If there ever was a case where "authority by quotation" is misleading, it is the business of matching texts from Lenin. Both the Stalinist and bourgeois falsifiers have naturally found that this gives them all sorts of opportunities to ply their trade; but more important is the fact that it is a pitfall for honest students too.

In 1914, the traitors are yelling "Defense of the fatherland!" No, says Lenin, *defeat* of your own fatherland!

Defeat? The concept has lain fallow since 1905. Not once in the interval has Lenin recalled it in his writings. What was it we said about it then? It was our policy against *tsarism*, against *tsarism* only. . . .

### 1. FORMULATION NO. 1: THE "LESSER EVIL" FORMULA

In early September 1914 Lenin presents his draft thesis to his comrades in Berne. In it—in a subordinate place, to be sure, but still included—is the statement:

From the point of view of the working class and the laboring masses of all the peoples of Russia, by far the lesser evil would be the defeat of the tsar's armies and the tsar's monarchy, which oppresses Poland, the Ukraine, and a number of other peoples of Russia, and which inflames national hatred in order to increase the pressure of Great-Russia over the other nationalities and in order to strengthen the reaction of the barbarous government of the tsar's monarchy.<sup>50</sup>

What role does this statement play in the thesis? It is *not* in the point (No. 7) which presents the line and slogans on the war. It is in the section (No. 6) which relates the war to the *national question* in the tsarist prison of the peoples, which argues that Russian socialists must "conduct a merciless and ruthless struggle against Great-Russian and tsarist-monarchist chauvinism." In this connection, Lenin argues, *for the oppressed nationalities* under Moscow "the lesser evil is defeat."

Lenin has remembered the idea and stuck it in at this point. It is the starting point of a development which we will now have to follow step by step, as it evolves, changes and shifts. It can be done only step by step because, as

we have indicated, we are not dealing with a clear political idea which can be easily discussed pro and con, through "examples" and "illustrative quotations," but with a theoretical snarl which has to be disentangled.

We get a hint of what was working in Lenin's thinking, as he remembers the concept of defeat, by his rough notes for an unfinished article which he jotted down later the same month (perhaps, as we shall see, after already getting objections to the formulation).

If everywhere [on both sides, there are] the bourgeoisie and the imperialists, everywhere the infamous preparation for war, if Russian tsarism [is] especially infamous and barbarous (more reactionary than any), then [it is likewise true that] German imperialism is also monarchist—feudal-dynastic aims—big bourgeoisie less free than in France. The Russian Social-Democrats were correct in saying that *for them* the lesser evil [is] the defeat of tsarism, that *their* immediate enemy [is] more than anything *Great-Russian* chauvinism; but the socialists (not the opportunists) of all countries should see their main enemy in "their" (own "fatherland's") chauvinism.<sup>51</sup>

It is clear how he is trying to think it through. Note the criteria with which he is comparing Russian tsarism and German kaiserism. Tsarism is the most reactionary regime. But—a shadow of the "progressive" mikado crosses the page—is not the enemy government, Germany, also dominated by *precapitalist* reaction? It is "monarchist," it is dominated by "feudal-dynastic aims." In *this* comparison, it is not the imperialist role of Germany, *capitalist* Germany, which is the criterion. "The big bourgeoisie in Germany is less free than in France"—why is this brought up in this context? It is no mystery because we can understand that in these notes *he is not thinking as the Lenin who*

*wrote Imperialism but as the Lenin who wrote "The Fall of Port Arthur."*

The emphasis limiting the concept to the *Russian* socialists is brought out very sharply in Lenin's next mention of defeat, in his letter to Shlyapnikov of October 17:

In order that the struggle may proceed along a definite and clear line, one must have a slogan that summarizes it. This slogan is: For us *Russians*, from the point of view of the interests of the laboring masses and the working class of *Russia*, there cannot be the slightest doubt, absolutely no doubt whatever, that the *lesser* evil would be, here and now, the defeat of tsarism in the present war. For tsarism is a hundred times worse than kaiserism. We do not sabotage the war, but we struggle against chauvinism. . . . It would also be erroneous both to appeal for *individual* acts of firing at officers, and to allow arguments like the one which says: We do not want to help kaiserism.<sup>52</sup>

It is now a *slogan*. And when Lenin writes that "there cannot be the slightest doubt, absolutely no doubt whatever" about it, it is his way of reacting vigorously to the fact that it has already been attacked in the Bolshevik ranks.

But mainly what the letter makes clear is that by "defeat" Lenin plainly means defeat *by the enemy government*, by the German armies. It is this that is the "lesser evil." (Later reinterpretations sometimes pretended that it meant defeat by the workers' revolution; but in the first place, this is no "evil" at all, and in the second place the whole business about defeat would be totally incomprehensible if that was all it intended to say.)

When Lenin writes "here and now" . . . "in the present war," there can be no doubt about it, even if we did not know that, at this stage, defeatism has no other meaning than military defeat by the enemy camp. In this connection, when Lenin reverted to this

same formulation in November 1916 (quotation given below on page 332), it is again perfectly clear.

This is what gives the "lesser evil" formulation the sense it has: defeat by Germany would be an evil, yes, but the greater evil would be the victory of the tsar's army; and we choose between these two evils.

This is what makes sense of the *reason* given here for the slogan: "For tsarism is a hundred times worse than kaiserism." This slogan of defeat depends for its rationalization not merely on opposition to both camps, but on a "lesser evil" *distinction* between the two camps. Tsarism is the worst. It obviously could not apply in Germany, where kaiserism is a hundred times *better* than tsarism. It can apply only for "us *Russians*."

Moreover, Lenin never did apply this "lesser evil" formulation of the defeat-slogan to any other country. When he tried to "internationalize" the concept, it became something else.

The slogan of defeat begins, therefore, as a *special Russian position* on the war. Like the motivation for it, it has its roots only in the "special Russian policy" of the Marx-Engels-Second International period of development. Without this background, the very idea of a "special Russian position" on the war would be strange. Here is a general world war, where in every other respect Lenin is driven to emphasize the inextricable entangling of all the threads of world imperialism, and yet he proposes that the socialists of one of the belligerents must adopt a position which he does not even propose for the others.

But the question leaps to the eye: If the slogan of defeat means defeat by Germany (whose victory is the lesser evil), doesn't this mean preferring the victory of Germany? Naturally, this conclusion has already been ex-

cluded by Lenin—after all, the bulk of his writing at this time is devoted precisely to marshaling the arguments against the social-patriots, the German social-patriots above all—but then this means that the slogan of defeat cannot have the simple, clear meaning that it did in 1904-5. How shall this contradiction be resolved?

*Out of the attempt to resolve this contradiction came the wavy course of Lenin's defeatism in 1914-16.*

## 2. REJECTION OF DEFEATISM IN THE BOLSHEVIK RANKS

For the defeat-slogan was the one aspect of Lenin's war position which immediately met with the widest opposition in the ranks of the Bolshevik party itself. In his letter to Shlyapnikov, Lenin had asked him to send "more details of Russian voices and reactions." Others reported also.

Shlyapnikov recounted, in memoirs, that the defeat-slogan provoked "perplexity" in Russia. He was apparently being mild. Baevsky's memoirs relate that it raised objections in Russia and that there was a tendency to eliminate the word defeat "as a very odious one." The Moscow organization adopted the later theses of November 1 (quoted below) with the exception of the paragraph on defeat.<sup>53</sup> The Moscow Bolsheviks wrote, via Stockholm for transmission to Lenin, that "notwithstanding all respect to him, his advice to sell the house [code-word for the defeat-slogan] has not struck a responsive chord."<sup>54</sup> Later on in 1915, at the trial of the Bolshevik members of the Duma, the Bolshevik deputies refused to take responsibility for the defeat-slogan although generally they defended an anti-war view. Bukharin and Piatakov criticized it in the emi-

gration.\* In fact—outside of Lenin's immediate co-workers on the Central Organ in Berne, particularly Zinoviev in his own peculiar way—we cannot cite any known Bolshevik who defended it, or any section of the party which came to its defense against its critics; though there must have been such, to various degrees, since at different times different formulations of the idea were approved or compromised on.

The Geneva section of the Bolshevik émigrés wrote in their objection. A letter to Lenin by Karpinsky (September 27) criticized the draft thesis as follows, putting the finger on the bedeviling contradiction:

The text of paragraph 6 should be changed in order not to give rise to a misinterpretation of this passage: that the Russian Social-Democrats wish for the victory of the Germans and the defeat of the Russians. Note here the possible connection: the German Social-Democrats struggle against Russian tsarism and the Russian Social-Democrats greet the victory of German arms. This idea should be formulated so as to explain what would be the meaning of the victory of the Russian troops and what would be the meaning of their defeat objectively.<sup>55</sup>

The passage had meant to the Geneva Bolsheviks exactly what it had meant in the whole past of the socialist movement: wish for the victory of the enemy government. But if we Russian Bolsheviks see reason to wish this, why attack the *German* social democrats for wishing the very same thing? . . . So they propose that the only statement that should be made is about the *objective consequences* of defeat. What they have in mind is merely the idea that "defeat facili-

\*"There is other evidence of reluctance to adopt the defeatist point of view by party workers in Russia and outside, not only at the beginning of the war but even up to the revolution of 1917," says *Bolsheviks and the World War* by Gankin and Fisher (p. 151), citing Russian sources.

tates revolution." They want to strip the passage down to this.

## 3. WHITTLING DOWN THE "LESSER EVIL" FORMULA

But when the Bolshevik Central Committee adopts its thesis on the war for publication as the position of the party on November 1, this change is not made. The "lesser evil" formulation goes in. Only now it is not merely tied up with the nationalities problem but directed more generally. And it is preceded by a sentence (whose idea had already been somewhat indicated in the rough notes of September) which doubly underlines that this is a notion for *Russian* socialists only, which warns that it can *not* be applied for the internationalist socialist movement as a whole:

Under given conditions, it is impossible to determine from the standpoint of the international proletariat which is the lesser evil for socialism: the defeat of one or the defeat of the other group of belligerent nations. . . .

And it continues more or less along the lines of the letter to Shlyapnikov which we have seen:

. . . For us Russian Social-Democrats, however, there cannot exist the least doubt that from the standpoint of the working class and of the laboring masses of all the peoples of Russia, the lesser evil would be the defeat of the tsarist monarchy, the most reactionary and barbarous government oppressing the greatest number of nations and the greatest mass of the populations of Europe and Asia.<sup>56</sup>

This "special Russian position" now becomes the public and open position of the party. Once again there is repeated the tell-tale emphasis that Russia is "the *most* reactionary and barbarous government" in order to justify this special Russian policy as such, echoing the thought that "tsarism is

a hundred times worse than kaiserism."

What follows *politically* from this statement of the "lesser evil"? Surely, it cannot remain simply an interesting thought in a thesis. Obviously, though the thesis does not yet say so in so many words, what follows is that we *wish* for this "lesser evil." Otherwise, why bring up the subject in this way?

We find Lenin putting this down in black and white in his next mention of the defeat-concept, December 12:

... it is impossible for the Great-Russians to "defend the fatherland" otherwise than by wishing defeat for tsarism in every war, this being the lesser evil for nine-tenths of the population of Great-Russia....

So we now "wish defeat"; and this certainly follows from the formula; for if it is so important to emphasize that it is the lesser evil, how can we avoid the conclusion? But the "lesser evil" notion has depended for its political motivation on nothing else than the idea that tsarism is worst, "most reactionary," "most barbarous." This motivation is really inseparable from the formula. But when Lenin *now* states the reason (to continue the quotation where we broke it off) it is watered down to a statement *which could apply to any of the imperialist powers and not only Russian tsarism:*

... since tsarism not only oppresses these nine-tenths of the population economically and politically, but also demoralizes, degrades, defiles and prostitutes them by developing in them the habit of oppressing other peoples, by teaching them to cover up their shame with hypocritical quasi-patriotic phrases.<sup>57</sup>

But this is agitation; it is no longer a motivation for the *special* position; the motivation has disappeared (it will shortly be specifically repudiated, we shall see), leaving only the formula, which will soon be changed too.

#### 4. FORMULATION NO. 2: "DEFEAT FACILITATES ..."

The big contradiction remains: If the Russian socialists can wish the military defeat of tsarism (*everybody understands: by German arms*), what is so terrible about the German socialists wishing for the same outcome?

No doubt Lenin confronted this abundantly in the objections that arose within his own ranks, as from Karpinsky and the Geneva section. But we do not find him taking note of it until February 1915, in a polemic against — the Menshevik Axelrod, whom he accuses of being an apologist for the German social-chauvinists. And, as his critics had tried to warn him, he finds this apologist *utilizing his own methodology:*

Axelrod's assertion [writes Lenin] that "the defeat of Russia, while unable to hamper the organic development of the country, would help liquidate the old regime," is true when taken by itself, but when used to justify the German chauvinists it is nothing but an attempt to *curry favor* with the Südekums. [Südekum was an especially crude representative of German Social-Democratic pro-war fervor—H. D.] To recognize the usefulness of Russian defeat without openly accusing the German and Austrian Social-Democrats of betraying socialism means *in reality* to help them whitewash themselves, extricate themselves from a difficult situation, betray the workers. Axelrod's article is a double bow, one before the German social-chauvinists, another before the French.<sup>58</sup>

No doubt Axelrod is in effect whitewashing the Germans with his arguments, but *what is wrong with this argument* which can be used so? Lenin replies in effect: "No sir, Axelrod, you can't get away with it, because when the *Germans* say what *we* say, it's because *they* merely want to find a pretext for their betrayal of socialism."

No doubt. But is it a *cogent* pre-

text? Is the "pretext" justified *politically*? Has not Lenin lent color and strength to this pretext with his insistence, *as an important political concept governing policy on the war*, that "tsarism is a hundred times worse than kaiserism" or at any rate "most reactionary," and with his formula of the lesser evil? He cannot and does not reply to this.

Faced with the other side of his formula as it looks from the German angle, he does not repeat it against Axelrod. Instead, he runs for defense to precisely the line which the Geneva Bolsheviks had recommended in its stead, which he had refused to accept: he writes as if all he had said was that Russian defeat had its "usefulness." ("Objectively," as Karpinsky had written.)

And so we get the first mention of what we may call Formula No. 2—the idea that "defeat facilitates revolution" (objectively). As will typically happen again on this question, it is a shifting of ground in the face of the insoluble contradiction.

Now there is a positive element in this Formula No. 2 which will necessitate discussion and analysis in another article, not under the head of "defeatism," but for our present purposes we must note the following:

(1) At the very least, this new formula, of which we will see several other examples in Lenin's writings of the period, is *different* from the defeat-slogan with which he started out. Different political arguments and concepts would be marshaled in defending the two. They do not enforce the same conclusions.

(2) The tremendous difference between them is shown by a simple consideration. The "lesser-evil" formula (No. 1), we have seen, was sharply, emphatically and repeatedly limited

by Lenin to Russian socialists only. The thesis had gone out of its way to proclaim that it did not hold "from the standpoint of the international proletariat." It was not capable of "internationalization." But the notion about the "usefulness" of defeat, its objective effect in "facilitating revolution," came not from any special Russian consideration or experience but from the experience of all history. It obviously can be applied as much or as little to any and all countries as to Russia. And from this point on, Lenin drops all the previous talk about the special Russian applicability of defeatism and *does* try to arrive at "international" formulas.

(3) If all the defeatist-talk amounts to is an objective recognition of a connection between defeat and revolution, then it is certainly not a *slogan*, not even a "slogan" in quotation marks. There is also a connection between economic crisis and revolution—let us say that economic crisis facilitates revolution—but that will lead no educated Marxist into expressing a "wish" for depressions ("the worse the better"). Wage cuts and massacres have been known to facilitate revolutions too....

As mentioned, an analysis of the relation between defeat and revolution has to be made under another head, but we must point out that even at best, when Lenin tears down "defeatism" to Formula No. 2, which is no kind of "defeatism" by itself, he is emphasizing only *one side* of the relation. When later<sup>59</sup> we find him making this connection absolute, with the statement that revolution is *impossible* without defeat, we must understand that he is driven to this historical absurdity by the polemical need to find a content for something called "the slogan of defeat" or "de-

featism," not by any course of political reasoning.

(4) With these things in mind, it is plain that if the idea "defeat facilitates" had been *all* there was in Lenin's thinking, he could never have launched such a thing as a "slogan of defeat," nor would the polemics on the question have taken the course they did.

### 5. FORMULATION NO. 3: "WISH DEFEAT IN EVERY COUNTRY"

As we have seen, Lenin's formula No. 2 is, in fact, internationally applicable and not special to Russia. So it is that at this same time (February, 1915) Lenin, for the first time, explicitly launches his "defeatism" as an international policy.

Modern democracy [i.e., socialism] will remain faithful to itself only if it does not join one or the other imperialist bourgeoisie, if it says that "both are worst," if it wishes the defeat of the imperialist bourgeoisie in every country. Every other decision will in reality be national-liberal and entirely foreign to true internationalism.<sup>60</sup>

This is the end of the road for the *politics* which gave birth to Lenin's defeatism. Lenin is specifically repudiating in so many words the whole motivation which had brought it on in the first place: "Both are worst." Only a few months before, the basic thought had been that "tsarism is a hundred times worse than kaiserism," he had had to emphasize that tsarism is "the most reactionary barbarous government," "more reactionary than any," etc.\* Not only has the original

\*It is significant that this statement, "Both are worst," which so directly repudiates the previously given motivation for the defeat-slogan, occurs right after a passage in which, arguing against Potresov, Lenin gets into a rigorous analysis of the difference between Marx's approach to war in the previous epoch of progressive capitalism and the approach to be taken by Marxists today. With the difference sharply in mind, his pen follows out the consequences and writes "Both are worst"—that is,

motivation been abandoned, but now the formula itself is changed. The "slogan of defeat" remains as the smile without the Cheshire cat. What remains is a running polemic but not a political line.

The formula that we now have is "wish the defeat of the imperialist bourgeoisie in every country." Superficially it sounds as if he had said it before, and he had indeed used the phrase "wish defeat." But that was only as part of the "special Russian policy," as a conclusion from the lesser-evil formula; it was only Russian socialists who were supposed to "wish defeat" because of the uniquely reactionary character of their own government.

The phrase is the same but the political content is now entirely different. "Wish defeat" was a *consistent* conclusion from the lesser-evil formula. But what does it now mean once it is internationalized? Again, something different at any rate, and it is, in fact, a new Formula No. 3.

Let us now see how the insoluble problem of what it means gave rise to the fourth and last switch in the formulas of defeatism.

"Wish defeat" is, as a matter of fact, the historical and necessary kernel of any defeatism which is properly so called. It was the working meaning of defeatism which we used in the previous historical sections. One may say anything one wants about "defeat," but not every statement about defeat is a "defeatism." Defeatism means *favoring* defeat, *desiring* defeat, *calling for* defeat, *working for* defeat, or something akin, or else one is simply inventing misleading and useless terminology.

Now before 1914 there was no dif-

we cannot base a policy on a choice of which is worst. He sees that defeatism can be retained only in an internationalized form.

ficulty at all in understanding the meaning of "wish defeat." Nobody could misunderstand it either. With Marx and Engels, in the Second International, with Lenin in the Russo-Japanese War, it meant defeat *by the enemy government*, whose victory we support. And when it was reborn in Lenin's thinking in 1914, it still meant defeat by the enemy government. This is what we called (redundantly, it is true) *pro-war* defeatism.

*Entirely unawares of what he is getting into, Lenin is now trying to work out a way of preserving the sharp anti-war flavor of the term defeatism on the basis of a political position which leaves no room for this meaning.* A new one has to be invented from scratch.

### 6. THE BAUGY GROUP'S ATTACK

This—at precisely this point—was raised by a section of the Bolshevik emigration led by Bukharin.

On February 27-March 4, 1915, the Bolsheviks convened a Conference of the Foreign Sections of the party in Berne. The Bolshevik group from Baugy (Switzerland) presented a document with a number of criticisms of the war thesis. Point II of the Baugy resolution dealt with the slogan of defeat. Although stating opposition to any form of the slogan, it balks particularly at the formulation "wish defeat," more than at the "lesser evil" formula:

II. The group denounces positively any advancing of the so-called slogan "the defeat of Russia," particularly in the manner in which it has been advanced in No. 38 of the Central Organ.

In the manifesto of the Central Committee as well as in the reply to Vandervelde, the defeat of Russia is described as being the "lesser evil," after an objective evaluation of the other issues of the war. The editorial of No. 38, on the other hand, says that every revolutionary is

obliged to *desire* "the defeat of Russia."

Such a consideration of the question, in the judgment of the group, is not only devoid of practical sense but also introduces into the question an undesirable confusion. If a revolutionary is obliged merely to "desire" the defeat, then there is no use in writing leading articles about it in the Central Organ of the political party; but if he is obliged to do more than merely "to desire," then this would be not simply an objective evaluation but the preaching of an active participation [i.e., taking of sides—H. D.] in the war, which participation would hardly be approved by the editorial board of the Central Organ.

Still more unsatisfactory, according to the opinion of the group, is the consideration of the same question in the third and concluding paragraph of the article, when the desirability of the defeat is explained by the revolutionary uprisings which may follow. The absolute impossibility of practical agitation in this sense compels the rejection *à limite* of such agitation for the defeat. We record that in the article referred to, the boundary line between the objective, fully admissible, and correct evaluation of the situation and the *agitation for the defeat* has not been traced at all; the group believes that it is an urgent necessity to have all confusion and obscurity in this question removed in a most decisive manner.<sup>61</sup>

The challenge is plain: If you really "desire" it, then you *work* for it. (Especially if it is so important to "desire" it that you write resolutions about it, articles and editorials about it, and polemize about it!)

But what does "*work* for defeat" mean?

It must be borne in mind that, in spite of the tentative "internationalization" of the defeat-slogan in one passing article so far, "wish defeat" still carries the meaning of "wish military defeat by the enemy government." More than once Lenin will have to stress that he does not mean "blowing up bridges," helping the enemy, etc. The reason he has to insist that he does *not* mean this is

simply because the slogan he is using does mean this to the movement.

His comrades know what it means to "work for revolutionary action," but "work for defeat" in this war in which we do not support either camp—what is that? True, say Bukharin and the Baugy comrades, revolutionary action may *objectively* be related to defeat, but what we *work* for is not "defeat" but the socialist aim.

There is no recorded answer by Lenin. Not in connection with this Berne party conference, and not at any other time—not in his collected works for this period and not in any of the manuscripts (down to rough notes) published supplementary to it at a later time. He simply never faced up to it.

#### 7. FORMULATION NO. 4: "DON'T HALT BEFORE THE RISK..."

Even more important: in the face of the Baugy criticism, he *dropped the formulation which they had attacked*. The resolution adopted says absolutely nothing about "wish defeat." Instead—

For the second time, confronting a difficulty with the formulation of the defeat-slogan, Lenin abandons the formulation which is criticized and invents a new one. The Berne resolution, which he wrote, reads on this point:

The struggle against the government that conducts the imperialist war must not halt in any country before the possibility of that country's defeat in consequence of revolutionary propaganda. The defeat of the governmental army weakens the government, aids the liberation of the nationalities oppressed by it, and makes civil war against the ruling classes easier.

This proposition is especially true in relation to Russia. The victory of Russia will bring with it a strengthening of world reaction, a strengthening of the

reaction inside of the country, and will be accompanied by a complete enslavement of the peoples in the regions already seized. In view of this, the defeat of Russia appears to be the lesser evil under all conditions.<sup>62</sup>

It seems to be a compromise. A kind of "lesser evil" formula is still in. To be sure, its "special" motivation is still dead and will never be disinterred; to be sure, it is rather peculiar to read that defeat of Russia "appears to be" the lesser evil, and one wonders how that note of uncertainty got in. But this formula No. 1 is there.

No. 2 is there also: "defeat facilitates."

But instead of No. 3, precisely the one which had been vigorously attacked, we have a totally new formulation of the "internationalized" defeat-slogan: the class struggle must not halt before the possibility of defeat in consequence of revolutionary propaganda. Or, as it will read when we meet it again: do not halt before the *risk* of defeat. (Formula No. 4.)

It is one of the most curious features of the history of the defeat-slogan that this last formula has been so widely accepted as simply the equivalent of, a restatement of, or a variant of, the "wish for defeat" or even of the "special Russian formula" of the lesser evil. Not only is it completely different but its implication is precisely the reverse of a "wish for defeat."

"Do not halt before the risk" implies that we do *not* wish defeat itself, but that what we wish is a continuation of the class struggle to socialist victory, and that we pursue this *in spite of* the fact that it may have an objective effect on the military plane.

This is especially clear when the word "risk" is actually used, as Lenin does more than once. Then it *specifically* repudiates Formula No. 3

Otherwise the thought is only implied, and the repudiation is by implication. Yet it is possible to find in the movement, in one and the same "educational" article, that both are quoted indiscriminately as equally "illustrative" of Lenin's defeatism, plus—more often than not—the special *Russian* formula of the lesser evil thrown in for good measure.

There is surely no other question in Marxist literature where quite such a tangle of confusion reigns. The source of the confusion, however, is in Lenin, not in his confused exegetes.

In this formula too (which is not of itself a form of defeatism) there is a positive element which we shall discuss in another article as already mentioned. But let us apply the comparative test again, taking the formula at face value:

We do not wish to halt the socialist struggle before the risk or possibility of defeat: Very well. But we also will not halt the struggle before the risk or possibility of—say, personal injury or loss; or before the risk or possibility that an intensified class struggle will stimulate fascist elements to organize; or before the risk or possibility that the socialist struggle will lead to persecution by the government; or before a number of other contingencies which we certainly seek to take into account, but which we do not "wish," which we do not turn into a slogan or an "ism" or a new political "principle."

Nor would Lenin ever have done this except for the specific impasse into which he had pushed himself, and from which he refused to extricate himself by dropping the whole business. He was in any case seeking the sharpest ways to demarcate the sheep from the goats, and "defeatism" became a *point d'honneur* of the Bolshevik war line. Some time afterward it became a shibboleth.

#### 8. SUMMARY: THE 4 FORMULAS

By this time, March 1915, we have the four formulas of "defeatism" created out of the attempt to meet the insoluble contradictions without solving them. Before going ahead, let us summarize them:

No. 1: The special Russian position: defeat of *Russia by Germany* is the "lesser evil."

No. 2: The objective statement that "defeat *facilitates* revolution."

No. 3: The slogan: *wish* defeat in every country.

No. 4: Do not halt before the *risk* of defeat.

These are four *different* political ideas. Only three of them are meaningful for the international movement. Only two of them involve any wish for defeat (1 and 3). Only one of them can actually be put forward in the form of a "slogan" (3).

Which is *the* meaning of Lenin's position, even assuming that all of them have some self-consistent meaning of their own? The truth is that from this point on, Lenin juggles all four depending on polemical aim and convenience. Let us see what new aspects are introduced up to the very last gasp of Lenin's defeatism in November 1916.

#### 9. TROTSKY'S ATTACK ON THE DEFEAT-SLOGAN

We now come to the only article written by Lenin solely in exposition of his defeat-slogan (all his other references to it are in passing paragraphs). This article, "Defeat of 'Our' Government in the Imperialist War,"<sup>63</sup> is itself the biggest muddle of all, compared with which the previous passages were models of clarity. Because it is a whole article discussing "defeatism," and therefore appears to

be *the* authoritative statement on the subject for handy reference, it has undoubtedly played a major role in disorienting more than one student of Lenin. It must be said, without the slightest exaggeration, that in it Lenin simply goes hog-wild, throwing clear thinking to the winds.

To understand the reason for that, and to understand the article itself, it is necessary to present the immediate background of the article, which fortunately is known. The background is the clash between Lenin and Trotsky on issues which did *not* involve defeatism.

Trotsky was at this time the leading spirit of *Nashe Slovo*, published in Paris as a Russian daily for the revolutionary emigration. On the paper collaborated also a number of dissident Bolsheviks, a number of internationalist-Mensheviks (including Martov, up to almost the Zimmerwald Conference), and a number of non-affiliated Social-Democrats (this includes Trotsky himself). Its technical spark-plug was Antonov-Ovseyenko; a partial list of its collaborators and contributors would be in part an honor roll of later leaders of the Russian Revolution. It was the leading anti-war organ of the Russian movement.

At the beginning of 1915 there were tentative efforts made between the *Nashe Slovo* group and Lenin to collaborate in anti-war propaganda. One such opportunity seemed to arise with the announcement of the London Conference of Inter-Allied Socialists (i.e., the social-patriots in the Allied war camp). Since Russia was an ally too, the *anti-war* Russian socialists thought to seize the opportunity for a bit of education. *Nashe Slovo* sent invitations to both the Bolsheviks and the centrist Menshevik "Organization Committee" to get together to prepare

a joint statement against the war, for presentation in London. Lenin agreed, and drew up a draft statement. The joint action never took place, with some accompanying hard feeling, but we can note here that it was *not* because of the question of defeatism—for the good and sufficient reason that Lenin's draft did not include a wisp of the idea, not in any of its protean forms.<sup>64</sup>

Yet *Nashe Slovo* had been taking pot-shots at the Bolsheviks' defeat-slogan ever since it had been launched. As Alfred Rosmer writes: "The polemic [on defeatism] developed between Lenin and *Nashe Slovo*, most particularly Trotsky."<sup>65</sup> (Rosmer was himself a *Nashe Slovo* contributor at the time and a collaborator of Trotsky's.)

The rock on which the joint project had foundered was mainly the question of the participation of the Menshevik O. C., but Trotsky himself was more or less recognized as the left wing of the *Nashe Slovo* group. His position on the war was a thoroughgoing internationalism, and the *Nashe Slovo* group as a whole took the attitude that their two main differences on war line with the Bolsheviks—the peace slogan and defeatism—were subordinate questions. The big difference that divided Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, at this time as before, was not on political line at all but on the "organizational question," in which regard Trotsky acted as a "conciliator" for Bolshevik-Menshevik unity.

At the Berne conference, the Bolsheviks had decided to launch a new magazine to be called *Kommunist*. Showing a faith in Trotsky's internationalism which should be kept in mind, Lenin invited Trotsky to become a collaborator on the magazine.

And Trotsky rejected the invitation

with an *Open Letter to the Editorial Board of Kommunist*, printed in *Nashe Slovo* of June 4, 1915, which was a slap in the face.

Trotsky declined, not on grounds of any political differences whatsoever, but on his "organizational" grounds: the Bolsheviks' "factional" methods, etc. His *Open Letter* emphasizes very carefully that whatever political differences exist are *not* any bar to collaboration. In the course of doing so, he mentions these differences and comments on them. The following was his comment in passing on the defeat-slogan, in this context:

... under no conditions can I agree with your opinion, which is emphasized by a resolution, that Russia's defeat would be a "lesser evil." This opinion represents a fundamental concession to the political methodology of social-patriotism, a concession for which there is no reason or justification, and which substitutes an orientation (extremely arbitrary under present conditions) along the lines of a "lesser evil" for the revolutionary struggle against war and the conditions which generate this war.<sup>66</sup>

Trotsky hits the nail on the head. He points to the fundamental identity in methodology between the "lesser evil" formulation of defeatism and that of the social-patriots. *Nashe Slovo* had pointed out that this defeatist concept was simply *defensism turned inside-out* (in somewhat the same sense that in our time we have called the Stalinist line on the Negro question "Jim Crow in reverse"). He pointed precisely to the *social-patriotic potential* which resides in the defeat-slogan, and of which we shall see more evidence later.

Lenin's only public notice of this rebuff was his article in which he assailed, with unparalleled venom and bitterness, the passing comment in the *Open Letter* on defeatism. But it is not defeatism that he is exercised

about! Trotsky has preferred to collaborate with suspect left-Mensheviks and dissident Bolsheviks and not with him. As usual with Lenin's fiercest attacks on Trotsky, it is the "organizational question" which provides the steam. But the broadside which he fires is a political one, on a peripheral political difference. And alas, he fires this broadside with damp powder.

## 10. LENIN'S POLEMIC AGAINST TROTSKY ON DEFEATISM

Following are the most important things to be noted about the article, "Defeat of 'Our' Government in the Imperialist War."

(1) Toward the very beginning, Lenin quotes the criticism of defeatism made by Trotsky in the *Open Letter* as the butt of his attack. But his quotation is not complete, and a very important part is left out. This is how Lenin put it:

To wish Russia defeat, Trotsky says, is "an uncalled-for and unjustifiable political concession to the methodology of social patriotism . . ." [and so on with the rest of the quotation from Trotsky, which is here given in a different translation.]<sup>67</sup>

Now the fact is that Trotsky's criticism had been specifically directed at the "lesser evil" formula. Lenin does not show this in beginning the quotation where he does. Without quote marks, he substitutes "to wish Russian defeat" as the formula which Trotsky is presumably attacking.

And this is important because, although it is the "lesser evil" formula which has been attacked, *nowhere in the whole article does Lenin even mention the existence of this formula, let alone defend it.*

Perhaps because he is through with it himself? This would not excuse such a gambit in his polemic, but as

a matter of fact he is going to recur to it in other writings. But not in this one, where he is replying to a criticism that was made against it and it alone!

(2) Instead of the "lesser evil" formula (No. 1), the version which Lenin uses for the most part in this article is "wish defeat" (No. 3). This is precisely the one formulation of the defeat-slogan that was *not* in the Berne Conference resolution of the Bolsheviks, which had just been held! Of course, the Berne Conference resolution was not the product of a congress, with binding power on the Central Committee, but of a consultative conference; still, as we have seen, the "wish defeat" formulation had not been pressed by Lenin in the face of the opposition of the Baugy group. If it had been dropped at the conference as a compromise, the compromise did not mean very much.

In any case, what is interesting is the pattern: for the third time, Lenin meets an attack on the defeat-slogan *not* by defending the formulation which has been attacked but by substituting one of the other formulations. We saw that, against Axelrod, he resorted to inventing a new formula (the objective "usefulness" of defeat, or "defeat facilitates"), without discussing the difficulty raised by Axelrod's remarks; we saw, secondly, that against Bukharin and Baugy, he again inserted a new formula (No. 4), dropping the one that was under fire; and now again, against Trotsky, he does not meet the criticism that is made but resorts to the very formulation which had been dropped in Berne when it was under attack from Baugy.

This is not the picture of a Lenin who knows what he believes and is ready to stand up and slug for it; this

is the picture of a Lenin who is confused and muddled on this question and cannot really defend it—although he "feels" that there is something terribly fundamental about it as a shield against defensism, as a sharp way of separating the sheep from the goats.

(3) In spite of this fact, we find Lenin appealing to the Berne Conference resolution! This he does as a substitute for taking up the question which he has avoided—the meaning of the "lesser evil" formulation with regard to *Germany's* victory. This is what he actually writes:

In using phrases to avoid the issue, Trotsky has lost his way amidst very simple surroundings. It seems to him that to wish Russia's defeat *means* to wish Germany's victory. . . . In this Trotsky also repeats the "methodology of social-patriotism"! To help people that do not know how to think, the Berne resolution (*Sotsial-Demokrat*, No. 40) made it clear that in *all* imperialist countries the proletariat must now wish the defeat of its government.<sup>68</sup>

This is precisely what the Berne resolution did *not* "make clear"; in fact, this is the formulation which the resolution abandoned!

Besides: suppose the Berne resolution had included it: this is no answer to Trotsky's criticism. Lenin writes that "it seems to him [Trotsky]" that to wish defeat for Russia means defeat by German arms, as if this were a deviation or misunderstanding of Trotsky's. But we have seen that this is what it had always meant to the whole movement. This is what it had meant to Lenin himself in 1904-5, and this is what it had meant to Lenin only a few months before in September. Moreover this is what it had meant to his own closest comrades who criticized it within the ranks of the Bolshevik party (like Karpinsky). And Bukharin-Baugy too,

only a couple of months before, had based their objection to "wish defeat" on the ground that it meant taking sides in the war. Because of this very objection, the formula had not been included in the Berne resolution.

When Lenin merely replies that he applies the defeat-slogan to *all* warring countries, he is only asserting that he refuses to apply the "lesser evil" formula in its consistent and established sense. Surely Trotsky knew that Lenin did not actually "wish Germany's victory." He had shown that the methodology of the defeat-slogan *pointed in that direction*. Lenin's feeble "you too" retort is peculiarly out of place.

(4) In this unhappy article, Lenin does not even limit himself to the formulation "wish defeat." At Berne, the Baugy group had indeed raised the question whether the "wish" could remain a mere wish. In this article—and *only* in this wild article—Lenin writes down "working toward military defeat" as a variant on the formula. His slogan, he says, is one "calling for" defeat. He exults that "the tsarist government was perfectly right in asserting" that the propaganda of the Bolshevik Duma deputies "aided its defeat." To deal blows against one's own war government, he writes, "means helping to defeat one's own country." *Helping* whom? What wide-open writing, at the best! (Note also that on this occasion Lenin slips into "defeat one's own *country*," instead of "government.")

Three times he repeats that we cannot fight the war "without contributing to the defeat" of the government. And at one point even the word "defeat" is not sharp enough, not "hard" enough, for him: a worker, he says, cannot unite with the proletarians on

the other side of the lines "without contributing to the defeat, the dismemberment of 'his' imperialist 'great' power." We are now for *dismemberment*? No doubt Lenin used the word with the idea in mind of the breaking up of a colonial empire, or the liberation of Russia's oppressed nationalities, but it is written down in no such context.

And he writes: "we indisputably mean not only the wish for its defeat, but practical actions leading toward such defeat."—*Practical actions toward defeat*? What does this mean? It is at this point that Lenin adds in parentheses:

For the "penetrating reader": This does not at all mean to "blow up bridges," organize unsuccessful military strikes, and, in general, to help the government to defeat the revolutionaries.

So we are assured of what the phrase does *not* mean. What *does* it mean? The Baugy group and other comrades had asked the same question. We can understand "practical actions" leading toward an anti-war fight and revolution, which may or may not entail military defeat on the front as a by-product, but even this idea (Formula No. 4, more or less) does not appear in this wild polemic.

Fortunately the slogan "*work* for defeat through practical actions," or something of the sort, never took root even in the later myth, and we can understand why.

(5) On none of the questions that we have raised, or that his critics have raised, does Lenin's article present any reasoned political discussion. Instead hollow categorical assertions substitute for arguments. The first three sentences are, for example:

A revolutionary class in a reactionary war cannot but "wish the defeat of its own government." This is an axiom. It is disputed only by the conscious partisans

or the helpless satellites of the social-chauvinists.

This is simple bluster. Even if the defeat-slogan were correct, the last thing in the world it was, was an "axiom" of the socialist movement or anybody else, at any other time or place. And in view of the widespread rejection of the slogan by Bolsheviks, including leading Bolsheviks, the third sentence merely registers uncontrolled fury.

The article is full of such assertive bluster: "we indisputably mean . . ." when the point is far from indisputable and, in fact, it is precisely disputation that is called for; "this slogan *alone* means a consistent appeal to revolutionary action . . ." where the italicization of *alone* carries the burden that should have been shouldered by a political demonstration; and it is here that we are virtually told that revolution is "impossible" without defeat.

Under this head should also come the "amalgam" that Lenin makes throughout this article between Trotsky's views and those of everyone else in the political spectrum down to the rabid social-chauvinists of the German Social-Democracy (like David). By the time the article gets through in a crescendo of rage, Trotsky and others are "in fact on the side of the bourgeoisie and the opportunists, since they 'do not believe' in the possibility of international revolutionary action of the working class against its governments, and since *they do not wish* to help the development of such actions. . . ."

It is in this article, also, that we get the most extreme statements about the role of the defeat-slogan in an anti-war position. For example: "To repudiate the defeat slogan means to reduce one's revolutionary actions to an empty phrase or sheer hypocrisy."

(6) The only passage which even sounds as if Lenin is trying to present an argument is the following:

He who wishes earnestly to dispute the "slogan" calling for the defeat of one's own government in the imperialist war would have to prove one of three things: either (1) that the war of 1914-15 is not reactionary; or (2) that a revolution in connection with it is impossible, or (3) that coordination and mutual aid of the revolutionary movement in *all* belligerent countries is impossible.

He then proceeds to argue that the war *is* reactionary, that a revolution *is* possible, and that international action *is* possible also. But this is a begging of the question. The three conditions add up to revolutionary anti-war opposition, to be sure, but do not even begin to bear upon the objections to the defeat-slogan which have been so abundantly made *within the framework* of revolutionary anti-war policy. He makes the connection after a while only with a final assertion: "It is impossible, however," unless . . . "Such growth is *impossible* without. . . ."

His comment on the third of the three conditions is interesting:

The last reason is particularly important for Russia, because this is the most backward country, where an immediate socialist revolution is impossible. This is why the Russian Social-Democrats had to be the first to advance the theory and the practice of the defeat "slogan."

This is a weak echo of the political motivation which had led Lenin to introduce the defeat slogan in 1914 in the first place—as a special policy *limited* to Russia. Now he is using it gingerly only to explain why the Russian Bolshevik group alone has seen fit to raise it, among all the anti-war internationalists.

(7) In this article we also get Lenin's polemic against the slogan "Neither victory nor defeat." We will later take up the views of Trotsky and Lux-

emburg on this question. At this point it is enough to note the following:

No such slogan was raised by Trotsky (or by Luxemburg). Although Lenin never quite *says* that Trotsky did so, there are perhaps few readers who have not gotten the contrary impression from his polemic.\* As a matter of fact, it is the Menshevik Semkovsky who alone is actually quoted to this effect by Lenin. The Menshevik leadership did in fact raise this as a *slogan*, at least in the form "Neither victory nor vanquished!" as recorded by T. Dan.<sup>69</sup> It is against *them*, dragged into this amalgam, that Lenin is right in pointing out that such a conception presupposes a return to the *status quo ante bellum* as against a revolutionary outcome of the imperialist war. We saw the same thing happen in the Russo-Japanese War with the Mensheviks: they did not avoid, but merely straddled, the dilemma of victory-or-defeat *within the framework of the existing governments*. This had nothing in common with Trotsky's approach to the question of victory-or-defeat.

## 11. THE REST OF THE RECORD: AUG. 1915 TO NOV. 1916

From this point on, let us complete the record by noting Lenin's subsequent references to the defeat-slogan, pausing only at new points of special interest. All four formulations are used indiscriminately, now one, now another.

(1) In the pamphlet *Socialism and War* (written August 1915) by Lenin

\*Including a scholar like Boris Souvarine, who wrote in his biography of Stalin: "Between the two extremes, defeatism and defeatism, there were numerous intermediate opinions. Trotsky and Martov, with the majority of the outstanding personalities of revolutionary internationalism, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Rakovsky, Riazanov, etc. came out against national defense but for a peace without victors or vanquished and did not intend to break with socialists like Kautsky. . . ." (p. 135, French ed.).

and Zinoviev, Lenin wrote the passage on defeatism<sup>70</sup>: we must "wish defeat" of our government, we must "see the connection between the government's military reverses and the increased opportunity for overthrowing it . . . the socialists of *all* the belligerent countries should express their wish that *all* 'their' governments be defeated." This would "coincide with the hidden thoughts of every class-conscious worker," he says. The last remark should be kept in mind when we come to see Lenin in 1917, on his return to Russia, finding out what were the "hidden thoughts" of the class-conscious workers.

(2) In the long article "The Collapse of the Second International" written about the same time (summer 1915), there is a passing reference to "wishing defeat."<sup>71</sup>

(3) In a private letter to Shlyapnikov of August 23, 1915, Lenin writes:

The events in Russia have completely confirmed our position which the blockheads, social-patriots (from Alexinsky to Chkheidze) have christened defeatism. Facts have proved that we were right!! Military failures are helping to shake tsarism and are facilitating the union of revolutionary workers of Russia and the other countries. They say, what will "you" do, if "you" revolutionaries defeat tsarism? I reply: (1) our victory will cause the movement of the "Lefts" in Germany to flare up a hundred times more strongly; (2) should we overcome tsarism completely, then we would propose a peace on democratic conditions to all the belligerents, and in case of a refusal would wage a *revolutionary war*.<sup>72</sup>

The most interesting thing about this is the shift that takes place between one sentence and the next. At the beginning of the paragraph, the position that has been "completely confirmed" is the easy Formulation No. 2, "defeat facilitates. . . ." Naturally this means, and can only mean,

defeats inflicted by Germany. Without transition, Lenin swings into the question of the defeat of tsarism by the revolutionaries, that is, the victory of the revolution. Naturally there is a connection between the two, but in the defeat-slogan itself, the "wish for defeat" refers to defeat by the enemy government, which in turn is necessary to facilitate the victory of the revolution. (It was only in the post-Lenin period of reinterpretation that the slogan of "wishing defeat" was made out to mean only "wishing for defeat by the revolution alone" and not by victories of the enemy camp.)

Also: it seems that only blockheads and social-patriots have "christened" the position defeatism. This will not prevent Lenin (and even more often Zinoviev) from subsequently calling it "defeatism" himself, usually in quotation marks but not always. In the later Comintern, the term defeatism became standard in spite of this passage.

(4) In October 1915, Lenin wrote an article (which was not published and remained among his papers) entitled "The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis."<sup>73</sup> In it he notes that the defeats being suffered by the tsar's armies are leading to revolutionary ferment. Here we get his only reference in this connection to the Russo-Japanese War, but not to his position on it. He merely notes that "Again there is military defeat and the acceleration of the revolutionary crisis caused by it." In fact, there is the following curious passage referring to the present war (1915):

Equally clear is the position of the liberal bourgeoisie: to take advantage of the defeat and the growing revolution in order to wrest compromises from a frightened monarchy and to compel it to share power with the bourgeoisie. Equally clear, too, is the position of the revolu-

tionary proletariat, which is striving to consummate the revolution by taking advantage of the vacillations and embarrassments of the government and the bourgeoisie.

Here it is the liberal bourgeoisie (in 1915!) which is painted as recognizing the principle that "defeat facilitates"—which would make them "defeatists" if we took seriously some of Lenin's previous formulations!—whereas, counterposed, the revolutionaries are not pictured as striving for "defeat." Make of it what you will. As a matter of fact, the article goes on to crow over the fact that the Mensheviks have issued a call for "revolt" in the rear of the German army—"this after a whole year of fighting the slogan of civil war!" he exclaims. The muddle is really breath-taking since, obviously, a call for revolt in the rear of the enemy government is hardly in contradiction with opposition to civil war (or any other fight) against one's own government.

But somehow, Lenin concludes out of this muddle that the defeat-slogan is once more confirmed, because of the Mensheviks' call and the liberal bourgeoisie's sentiment:

... in face of the revolutionary crisis in Russia, which is being accelerated precisely by defeat—and this what the motley opponents of "defeatism" are afraid to admit. ... The lessons of the war are compelling even our opponents really to recognize both the position of "defeatism" and the necessity of issuing ... the slogan of "a revolt in the rear" of the German militarists, in other words, the slogan of civil war. The lessons of the war, it appears, are driving into their heads what we have preached from the very beginning. The defeat of Russia has turned out to be the lesser evil, for it has advanced the revolutionary crisis on a vast scale and has aroused millions, tens and hundreds of millions.

(5) In a polemical article entitled (and against) "Wilhelm Kolb and

George Plekhanov," in February 1916, Lenin mentions that "both accuse the revolutionary Social-Democrats of 'defeatism,' using the favorite expression of the Plekhanovists. . . ."<sup>74</sup>

In this article the *social-chauvinists'* fear of defeat of their own government is counterposed to the slogan of *wishing* defeat: Kolb "is right when he says that they [the tactics of the German Left] mean the 'military weakening' of Germany, i.e., desiring and aiding its defeat, defeatism."

(6) For the first time Lenin put the defeat-slogan forward for a vote before the internationalist Left in his theses presented at the Kienthal Conference (the second Zimmerwald conference). It had not been presented at Zimmerwald itself.

In an extant first draft of these theses, Lenin wrote the following, apparently referring approvingly to a statement made in Bulletin No. 3 of the Zimmerwald commission, though it is not contained in the Zimmerwald Manifesto or resolution:

... if we call the masses to struggle against their governments "independently of the military situation of a given country," we thereby not only deny in principle the admissibility of "defense of the fatherland" in the given war, but we admit the desirability of the defeat of every bourgeois government, for the transformation of the defeat into a revolution. And this must be said openly: the revolutionary mass struggle cannot become an international one unless its conscious representatives unite openly in the name of defeat and overthrow of all bourgeois governments.<sup>75</sup>

To struggle against the government "independently of the military situation"—that is, regardless of the consequences of the class struggle on the military situation—is a version of Formulation No. 4. It does not involve a wish for defeat, of course. It most certainly does not involve carrying on

the anti-war fight "in the name of defeat."

But whereas this first draft seemed to hail it, the theses as they were finally presented referred to this very same idea as "not sufficient":

It is not sufficient to say, as the Zimmerwald Manifesto does [this is a mistake—H. D.], that . . . the workers in their revolutionary struggle must not take into account the military situation of their country; it is necessary to say clearly what is here merely hinted at, namely . . . that revolutionary action during the war is impossible without creating the risk of defeat for "one's own" government; and that every defeat of the government in a reactionary war facilitates revolution. . . .<sup>76</sup>

In our own day, this formula of "continuing the class struggle regardless of its effect on the military situation" was to become a most frequent watered-down version of the defeat-slogan as reinterpreted, being embodied in these words in the founding program of the Socialist Workers Party. "It is not sufficient," says Lenin, and he is right from his point of view, though he fails to say that what is really missing is the "wish for defeat." This he does not put forward himself, in spite of his bluster in the anti-Trotsky polemic.

(7) In his criticism (August 1916) of Rosa Luxemburg's "Junius" pamphlet on the war, Lenin relegates the question of the defeat-slogan to a footnote. It is obvious to the naked eye that the approach taken by "Junius" is quite incompatible with the defeat-slogan of Lenin's, but Lenin does not make a great fuss about it. In his footnote he says that the questions must be raised—

(1) Is "revolutionary intervention" possible without the risk of defeat? (2) Is it possible to scourge the bourgeoisie and the government of one's own country without taking the risk? (3) Have we not always asserted, and does not the

historical experience of reactionary wars prove, that defeats help the cause of the revolutionary class?<sup>77</sup>

These are his two most watered-down versions. Luxemburg's pamphlet, incidentally, does have some comments on the connection between defeat and revolution, though these comments do not at all commit Lenin's error in viewing this connection from a starkly one-sided view; and though she does not take up the "risk" question in the same form, there could not be any slightest doubt in the mind of a reader what her reply would be: we do not hold back because of the *risk* of defeat of the German armies.

(8) In an article written August 1916 for the *Jugend-Internationale*, Lenin mentions "wish for the defeat of 'its own' government" in passing.<sup>78</sup>

(9) The last gasp of the defeat-slogan comes in November 1916 with an article "On Separate Peace" in tones that we have already heard:

Whatever the outcome of the present war may be, it will prove that those who said that the only possible way out of it is proletarian civil war for socialism were right. It will prove that the Russian Social-Democrats who said that the defeat of tsarism, the complete military defeat of tsarism, is "at any rate" a lesser evil were right. . . . [Even] if the proletariat of Europe is unable to advance to socialism at the present time. . . . Eastern Europe and Asia can march with seven-league strides towards democracy only if tsarism meets with utter military defeat and is deprived of all opportunity of practicing its semi-feudal imperialist policy.<sup>79</sup>

Here, as always in Lenin, the "lesser evil" formula occurs *only* in connection with tsarism and the perspective of the *Russian* socialists. Here also, as clearly as ever before, it is made plain without the shadow of a doubt that Lenin is talking about the *military*

defeat of Russia *by Germany*, and not its defeat by the socialist revolution. With this return to the very first formulation of 1914, the circles closes. and the defeat-slogan will not be put forward again while Lenin is still alive.

## 12. WHEN DEFEATISM WAS NOT PUT FORWARD

A certain interest can also be attached to another aspect of Lenin's writings during 1914-16: the occasions on which he did *not* put forward the defeat-slogan. Naturally this could be pressed to an absurd point, and there is no reason to expect him to put forward the defeat-slogan in every discussion on the war question. (As a matter of fact, in only 11 articles published during the years 1914-16 did Lenin mention the idea; to which we can add only seven other documents of the period that figure in his collected writings: unpublished articles, letters, notes, etc.)

Obviously it would be easy to draw up a long list of articles in which the nature of the questions discussed might lead us to ask: Why didn't Lenin bring up defeatism *here*?—especially if we take seriously some of his statements about the crucial importance of the slogan. But we shall mention here only a few special cases, where the presentation of the defeat-slogan would seem to have been most clearly called for.

(1) We have already mentioned that, in February 1915, Lenin drew up a draft of a joint statement<sup>80</sup> against the war to be presented to the London Inter-Allied Socialist Conference, in response to the proposal for common action made by *Nashe Slovo*. In this draft he systematically set out to list the ideas which were essential to a complete, consistent internation-

alist war policy. It was by no means intended as a "compromise" draft in any sense, but as a complete position.

There is no hint of the defeat-slogan, or of anything like it, in any of its versions.

(2) The projected joint statement fell through, but in March 1915 the Bolsheviks did send their own representative (Litvinov, then living in London) to present a statement to the conference in the name of the Bolsheviks alone.<sup>81</sup> Again, it would be easy to show that this statement was not intended to be "conciliatory." It was, furthermore, written by Lenin himself.

In this statement by the Bolsheviks alone, there is no mention of the defeat-slogan in any form.

(3) Also in March 1915, a Bolshevik delegation attended the International Socialist Women's Conference in Berne. The resolution on war policy<sup>82</sup> which they introduced had no mention of the defeat-slogan in any form.\*

(4) In the October 13, 1915 issue of *Sotsial-Demokrat*, the editors presented a document entitled "A Few Theses" on slogans and attitude on the war.<sup>83</sup> (It was written by Lenin.) We mention this particularly because later, in 1917, these Theses were going to be repeatedly referred to, reprinted and quoted by Lenin as the position of the Bolsheviks. They were not intended as a complete summary of war policy but as statements on a number of especially important points.

\*But later, in 1925 (at the time, we shall see, when Zinoviev was reviving defeatism in the Comintern), Olga Ravich, who had been a delegate to this conference, said that the delegation had declared: "In the struggle against the war the proletariat must persevere to the end and must not fear a defeat of the fatherland. Such a defeat would only facilitate the revolutionary struggle and civil war of the proletariat." (Gankin & Fisher, *Bolsheviks and the World War*, p. 294). If such a statement was made in a speech (embodying Formulations No. 2 and 4 but not the "wish for defeat"), it was not included in the Bolshevik document.

The defeat-slogan was not one of these.

(5) At the Zimmerwald Conference in September 1915, the Bolshevik position was put forward in the documents of the "Zimmerwald Left," which formed in support of Lenin's views on the war as distinct from those of the other anti-war elements at the conference. While Lenin voted for the majority resolution after his own was rejected, the resolution and manifesto of the Zimmerwald Left<sup>84</sup> were intended to put on the record what he considered to be the *complete* anti-war position. In an article in *Sotsial-Demokrat* on the Zimmerwald Conference (October 11), Zinoviev wrote that the Zimmerwald Left "defended, alone, a complete and definite program."<sup>85</sup>

This complete and definite program had no mention of the defeat-slogan in any form. (We have already pointed out that it was not until the Kienthal Conference in April 1916 that the defeat-slogan was put forward in *any* version before an international group.)

Even these five outstanding cases would be very strange if Lenin really did regard the defeat-slogan as a *sine qua non* for anti-war policy. In point of fact, however, they are not strange at all; they stand in contradiction only with the myth. Lenin became a fierce proponent of defeat mainly in counterpunching against an attack, or in factional polemics of his own.

(6) Related to this question are the cases where, in 1917 and later, including during the first years of the Comintern, Lenin *harks back* to the 1914-16 period in order to summarize in retrospect the different tendencies on the war question in the socialist ranks. The three tendencies are described: the social-chauvinist right, the cen-

trists of various shades, and the internationalist left. There are numerous passages of this sort in the writings of Lenin and the documents of the Comintern from 1917 through 1923.\*

The defeat-slogan in any form never figures in this summary, neither its rejection by the "centrists" nor its

#### IV. First World War: Zinoviev, Trotsky, Luxemburg

Special attention to Zinoviev is necessary because, during the period that has been under discussion, it was Zinoviev who was virtually the only close colleague of Lenin in the formulating and propagandizing of the Bolshevik war policy, working with Lenin in Berne. And among the leading Bolsheviks it was Zinoviev alone who, under Lenin's immediate supervision, attempted to defend and expound the defeat-slogan. His role during this period is preserved in the volume *Gegen den Strom* (Against the Current) which was later published by the Bolsheviks as the collection of published writings by both of them during these years of the world war.

Zinoviev played no independent role in the formulation of the defeat-slogan. He tried to follow Lenin's lead. Whereas Lenin never mentioned supposed precedents for his defeatism, it was Zinoviev who specialized particularly in giving it an historical tradition, as we have discussed in the first two chapters. The only article by him which is specifically on defeatism, included in *Gegen den Strom*, is the historical "Defeatism' Then and Now"<sup>86</sup> already referred to. There is a long passage on defeatism in another article,<sup>87</sup> and references in a couple of others.<sup>88</sup>

When, however, Zinoviev himself wrote a big book on the war question

\*For the first of these, see CW 20, I, p. 147-8.

advocacy by the Bolsheviks.

(7) But the biggest case where Lenin did *not* put forward the defeat-slogan, but rather abandoned it completely, is the whole period of 1917 between March and November. This will be the subject of the chapter after next.

in 1915-16 (not published until April 1917), *The War and the Crisis of Socialism*, it did not have a line in it raising the defeat-slogan.\* This was not due to its restricted scope, which included an encyclopedic array of topics!—nor was it due to restricted size, which is no less than 652 pages in the German edition! For Lenin's closest collaborator, this is something of an oversight, in terms of the myth that defeatism was and is the heart of anti-war policy in an imperialist war, or at any rate an essential ingredient.

In his articles, Zinoviev tried to follow Lenin's lead on defeatism, no doubt as best he could. But how could anybody follow successfully when the lead was so confused and shifting? Here is Lenin's right-hand collaborator on the same question, and his staggering course is a picture of confusion worse confounded. The last point under this head that we will discuss was not merely a question of confusion: it was the outstanding evidence, even in this world war period, of the *social-patriotic potential inherent in the defeat-slogan*.

#### 1. ON THE "LESSER EVIL"

Outside of his historical excursions on the subject, Zinoviev's longest discussion of the defeat-slogan is in his

\*This is underlined by the fact that there is a mention of defeatism—in a footnote. Here Zinoviev refers to Jaurès as a "defeatist" in the free-wheeling fashion we saw earlier.

extensive article "The Russian Social-Democracy and Russian Social-Chauvinism," written in the summer of 1915. Like Lenin's anti-Trotsky polemic, it is written under the impress of Trotsky's attack in his Open Letter. Zinoviev does not even quote Trotsky's criticism. His direct reference to Trotsky is a snide sideswipe: On the question of defeatism, he writes—

... the following march against us in a closed phalanx: the direct social-chauvinists . . . the right center . . . and the "left-center" (see the rather unenlightening remarks on this point by Trotsky in his Open Letter to the editors of *Kommunist*). We are firmly convinced that the unity of the center with the social-chauvinists on this point is not at all accidental. Everything has a reason.<sup>89</sup>

Outside of this "amalgam" Zinoviev is not very enlightening himself. He does not discuss the "lesser evil" formulation that Trotsky had criticized. In this he perhaps shows discretion. When, later in the article, he himself presents the "lesser evil" idea, he blunders in where Lenin did not tread.

We have made clear that Lenin never applied the "lesser evil" formulation to any other country but Russia. This fine point, apparently, was never explained to Zinoviev, who says:

... the internationalists can pursue a consistent struggle against their governments and their chauvinists in none of the warring countries if they do not defend in their agitation the principle that the defeat of the imperialists of their "fatherland" would be the lesser evil from the standpoint of the interests of the proletariat.<sup>90</sup>

This is flatly in contradiction with the November 1914 theses of the Central Committee that "Under given conditions it is impossible to determine from the standpoint of the international proletariat which is the lesser

evil for socialism: the defeat of one or the defeat of the other group of belligerent nations. For us Russian Social-Democrats, however. . . ."

It is to be doubted whether Zinoviev knew he was doing anything different than loyally repeating the "line." If the line was too muddled, that was hardly Zinoviev's fault; he couldn't make it out either.

#### 2. THE "METHODOLOGY OF SOCIAL-PATRIOTISM"

Zinoviev's most extended course of argumentation is on the "safest" version: we must not halt the class struggle for *fear* of defeat. In addition to what we have already discussed about this formulation (No. 4), there is an extra point to be made about Zinoviev's use of it.

It bears precisely on the "methodology of social-patriotism" that is embodied in the thinking behind the defeat-slogan. It was the social-patriots who insistently tried to pose the whole question of socialist war policy in terms of "For or against defeat?" This *way of posing the question* was and is properly a hallmark of social-patriotism. And what is interesting is that, in so many words, Zinoviev puts the stamp of approval on this way of posing the question:

[The social-patriots argue, says Zinoviev:] "Shall we continue the class struggle in the country . . . would this not mean weakening the military strength of our government? And this will surely be of benefit to the external enemy. It follows that you are for the defeat of your country? Say, *yes or no*? If no, then you must grant us that temporarily . . . the class struggle must be halted and replaced by a policy of civil peace."<sup>91</sup>

So he paraphrases the social-patriots. And his comment on it?

It is: "Decidedly there is logic in this way of putting the question."

And since the social-patriotic methodology is correct, we must take our stand on the same ground as they, but with the sign reversed: we are for defeat.

Although he had found Trotsky's remarks "unenlightening," could he possibly have more crudely illustrated their validity?

Yet Zinoviev had just been inveighing against predicating socialist policy on the *fear of defeat*. That way lies social-patriotism. Just as invalid is the idea of predicating socialist policy on the *desire for defeat*. That way lies social-patriotism-in-reverse, social-patriotism standing on its head. The Marxist does not take off from the question of defeat in either direction; to the whole dilemma of military victory-or-defeat of the *governments* he counterposes the struggle for socialist victory against the governments. In terms of such a Marxist methodology, it makes sense to add that we do not halt this struggle for socialist victory out of *fear of military defeat of "our own" government*; in terms of the methodology which Zinoviev approves, the methodology represented by the social-patriots' dilemma, this statement does not make sense. For if you have already told the social-patriots that we must *wish for defeat*, it does not make sense to add that we must not halt for *fear of the defeat*, which we wish!

### 3. DEFEAT AND THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE

Zinoviev puts some stress on an argument which is not used by Lenin in connection with defeatism, though Lenin brought it out in other contexts. This is the argument that military defeat by the enemy army does not really affect any true national interest of the people but only the im-

perialist interest of the bourgeoisie:

The bourgeois "fatherlands"—this becomes more and more obvious in the course of the war—are threatened by nothing but the loss of one colony or another, one border area or another, as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned. The bourgeoisie aspires to nothing but a diplomatic regroupment of powers, nothing but new secret treaties and conspiracies.<sup>92</sup>

This too is an echo of the feeling during the Russo-Japanese War, when the war was taking place in the Far East, in the colonial and border area itself, and no one (including the Japanese) even dreamed of an attack on and subjugation of the homeland.

When it is brought forward in connection with a wish for defeat (and not merely in connection with an analysis of the imperialist springs of the war, as Lenin did elsewhere), it raises an implication. Granting for the sake of argument that this was so regarding Russia's participation in the First World War, it certainly is not necessarily so in *every* imperialist war or even with respect to every nation in the First World War. Suppose defeat of one's own government in an imperialist war *does* mean important hardships for the people—as indeed Germany's defeat in the war did mean, under the Treaty of Versailles—do we cease to *wish for defeat*? And if furthermore it is argued that defensism and "defeatism" are the only consistent alternatives, then the door is opened for social-patriotic conclusions—once any doubt is cast on the argument for defeatism.

Now as a matter of fact this argument for defeatism is demonstrably false, in the light of the actual consequences of the First World War. It turned out that it was *not* true that "The bourgeois 'fatherlands' . . . are threatened by nothing but the loss of

one colony or another, one border area or another, as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned." For the defeated bourgeoisies of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, etc., defeat had far more serious consequences, consequences which intimately concerned the lot of the people too.

The revolutionary Marxist can recognize this *fact* without drawing pro-war conclusions. It is precisely the reason why he may speak of continuing the socialist struggle in spite of the *risk* of defeat, because for him the alternative to defeat is not the victory of his own imperialist government but a third alternative which has to be pursued and which alone will have progressive consequences.

Not so for one who raises the slogan of "*wish defeat*." The proof of this comes further along in Zinoviev's article (unrelated by him to the quotation just given), when he admits:

The chauvinists paint the horrors which await the workers in the event of a defeat of their fatherland. For the masses of people, the horrors, deprivations and sufferings of a defeat are in fact monstrous, unimaginable, colossal.

How does he reply? As follows:

Well, but how about in case of victory? Do not the same masses pay for it—to the benefit of the imperialists? And if they stand on the basis of internationalism, can the workers of one country wish for themselves victory and for the workers of the other country defeat, when defeat would have even more suffering connected with it?<sup>93</sup>

Zinoviev does not notice that, from the point of view of the defeat-slogan, he has refuted himself. As internationalists (he argues) we cannot wish victory for our own government because this means we are wishing defeat and the colossal sufferings of defeat for the workers on the other side of the lines. Very well, but then why *wish defeat*

for the workers on *our* side of the lines, as Lenin's slogan does?

He is entrapped in the vicious circle of victory-or-defeat, just as the social-patriots are, and he cannot extricate himself, except by implicitly shifting to a viewpoint which is not that of defeatism.

### 4. PSEUDONYM FOR REVOLUTION

It must be said that Zinoviev's attempt to work up a refutation of the critics is more conscientious than any made by Lenin, who never faced up to the problems posed. This is also the reason why Zinoviev is forced to set down in black and white ideas which are not met with in Lenin.

Thus Zinoviev tries to meet the question: "If you are talking about the defeat of *all* the warring governments, what does this mean? Who then will be the victor?"

It is a perfectly legitimate question *given the fact* that Lenin's formulations on defeatism made clear time and again, if not always consistently, that he was thinking of defeats *inflicted by the enemy camp*. The question had not been any embarrassment in the Russo-Japanese War, because there Lenin was *openly in favor* of the victory of the enemy camp.

In his anti-Trotsky polemic,<sup>94</sup> Lenin had quoted this embarrassing question from the pen of the Menshevik Semkovsky, and had indignantly replied that this showed that Semkovsky was thinking of the military outcome solely in terms of the imperialist governments. (A curious example of a "You too" reply since the question could be asked in the first place only because Lenin's use of the defeat-slogan was itself obviously based on this kind of thinking.) But in hitting back at Semkovsky, Lenin did not draw the explicit conclusion from his retort.

Zinoviev does. The latter replies, in effect: the defeat of *all* the governments makes good sense if it is understood to mean the defeat of all of them *by the revolution*.<sup>95</sup> Here, quite clearly, defeat is equated with the European revolution.

But if all the slogan of defeat meant was a pseudonym for the revolution, then the obvious question is: Why on earth should we christen this revolution by the name of "defeat"? It would be an incomprehensible choice of slogan formulation if such were really the case.

But of course, Lenin's defeat-slogan did not at all mean "we wish defeat of our own government by our own proletariat only." Zinoviev is pushed into this interpretation only because he has pushed himself into a corner.

## 5. THE SOCIAL-PATRIOTIC VERSION OF DEFEATISM

We have been pointing out the relationship between the defeat-slogan and the methodology of social-patriotism. We have pointed out how easily the former can turn into the latter. Now, finally, we can show how it *does* turn into a clearly social-patriotic idea—in the hands of Zinoviev.

This we can show, not by some single quotation from Zinoviev which might have been a passing slip of the pen, but by an idea which he repeats a number of times and in three different articles. In its own way, it is the most amazing facet of the defeat-slogan as put forward by the Bolshevik spokesmen during the war.

It is simply the fact that, in these multiple cases, Zinoviev slips a single word into the formulations on defeat—a single word whose effect on the political meaning is as devastating as the insertion of a "not" in a clause.

It is his repeated limitation of his

argumentation to *despotic* governments.

For example, in his historical article on "Defeatism' Then and Now," Zinoviev writes the following when he finally gets to formulate the principle:

All other things being equal,\* the defeat of a despotic government in foreign war always helps the people to overthrow the government. It is absolutely impossible to seriously deny this principle.... The whole modern history of Russia admirably illustrates this truth that the defeats abroad of reactionary governments redound to the benefit of the democratic movement inside the country.<sup>96</sup>

Is it possible for a politically-educated polemist to write this without understanding that it means the principle does *not* apply to a democratic capitalism?

Similarly in another article:

Yes, we are for the defeat of "Russia" [i.e., tsarism], for this would further the victory of Russia [i.e., the Russian people], its breakaway from slavery, its liberation from the chains of tsarism. Where are the cases in the recent history of Europe where the victory abroad of a reactionary government led to democratic freedom within the country?<sup>97</sup>

The counterposition is clear: "reactionary" versus "democratic." In immediate illustration of it, Zinoviev gives the quotation from Wilhelm Liebknecht which we will cite below.

In his long article "The Russian Social-Democracy and Russian Social-Chauvinism," where he gives his most

\*Note this qualification, incidentally; it covers a tremendous amount of territory. It mainly plays the role of a hedge on the statement which Lenin made so categorically. A moment's thought about it serves to show that it tends to turn the thesis "defeat facilitates revolution" from a "principle" into a historically conditioned possibility, operative or not operative in a given context. Zinoviev seems to be sensitive to this point (he does it more than once) whereas Lenin never wavers in the unqualified assertion. This qualification alone automatically disbars the "facilitate" formula per se as a formulation of any kind of defeatism. Actually, we would suggest, for Lenin the formula "defeat facilitates revolution" is a truncated form of "wish defeat in order to facilitate revolution."

elaborate polemic in favor of defeatism, the same thought abounds in the course of his argumentation.<sup>98</sup> The first occasion comes when he attacks Plekhanov:

Plekhanov maintains that only the liberals were given to desiring a defeat of their despotic government, in the hope that this would broaden the possibility of political freedom, while they themselves had neither the strength nor the inclination to fight for it.

And Zinoviev replies:

Of course, Plekhanov is completely wrong. That the defeat of a despotic government in war can further a democratic transformation in the country, this idea is not in the least peculiar to the liberals.

In proof of this, he brings a couple of "defeatists" onto the witness stand, citing their words triumphantly. One is Wilhelm Liebknecht, who had written:

Has anyone ever heard of a despotic government that became liberal after it won a victory? With defeated governments this has happened on occasion for a short period.

He hails forth August Bebel as a "defeatist," quoting him:

It is my opinion that for a nation which lives in an unfree condition, a military defeat is more a help than a hindrance for its internal development.

Bebel was referring to Prussia as distinct from bourgeois democracies like France or England.

We are now quite a distance beyond the mere "methodology" of social-patriotism. If the formulas of defeatism are to be limited to "despotic" governments, to "reactionary" governments which need a democratic transformation, to nations "in an unfree condition," then defeatism cannot be internationalized, it cannot be the policy of socialists in all the belligerent countries. And if, simultane-

ously, it is insisted that defeatism is the only consistent anti-war policy, that the only consistent alternative is defensism, then it is scarcely a step to draw social-patriotic conclusions for the socialists of *non-despotic* governments. "Democracy versus despotism," "progress versus reaction," become the governing criteria. And this is too familiar.

Furthermore, we must note that Zinoviev (as well as his "authorities" W. Liebknecht and Bebel) applies the "despotic" limitation *not* even to the formulation "wish defeat" but to the idea "defeat facilitates revolution." The muddle is raised to the second power. Whatever qualifications we might ourselves make to the formulation "defeat facilitates," it is clear that there is no reason for limiting its application to "despotic" governments only.

Now historically speaking, there is no mystery as to *why* Zinoviev falls into this formulation, even if it remains amazing that he does not catch himself. His thinking is a reflection of Lenin's in the Russo-Japanese War; he is reproducing it *in toto*. He is transplanting it to the First World War. For Lenin in 1904-5, it was a question of "despotism versus progress," and defeatism was the other side of a wish for Japan's victory. *But Lenin's defeatist position of 1904-5, transplanted to the world war, is—social-patriotism.*

What is the significance of Zinoviev's "mistake"? He finds himself, perhaps unawares, playing with a "defeatism" which would apply to only one side of an imperialist war. It is not thought out, it cannot be thought out, it teeters on the edge of political debacle. It is not a "position" in reality except insofar as a man can be said to be in a certain "position" when he has retreated to the edge of a

cliff and is swinging his arms wildly to recover his balance.

Needless to say, neither Lenin nor Zinoviev was in actuality "teetering on the brink" subjectively. Their anti-war position was too solidly tied to a quite different analysis which kept them firmly on the ground even in the course of occasional gyrations on the defeat-slogan. It was not fatal, for them. It is a warning for others.

## 6. TROTSKY ON "NEITHER VICTORY NOR DEFEAT"

The defeat-slogan led Lenin and Zinoviev into a swamp. In positive contrast is the analysis of the victory-or defeat dilemma which was made by the two outstanding leaders of anti-war socialist opinion outside the Bolshevik ranks. These were Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, whose views on the question we have already referred to.

In his anti-Trotsky polemic of July 1915, Lenin had seemed to ascribe to Trotsky the slogan "Neither victory nor defeat." It was the Mensheviks who had actually raised as their slogan "Neither victors nor vanquished," which they coupled with "Peace without annexations." As put forward by the Mensheviks, the perspective was one of a return to the pre-war status quo as the outcome of the war crisis.

Far from being an advocate of this perspective of "Neither victory nor defeat" in the sense which Lenin had attacked, Trotsky leveled powerful attacks on it, from his own point of view. *And he was able to do it in a thoroughly Marxist fashion without in any way falling into the "defeatist" trap.*

He did this through a consistent attack on the whole notion of posing the question in terms of victory-or-defeat by the belligerent governments, and, breaking out of that vicious cir-

cle, counterposing the socialist victory to both as a third alternative. Thus he simultaneously undercut the "defeatist" approach as well as the Mensheviks. The difference in "methodology" goes to the root of the whole war question, and not in the First World War alone.

This type of analysis can be seen in a work of Trotsky's during the 1915-16 period which specifically takes up the question of victory-or-defeat. It was published as a series of articles in *Nashe Slovo*, directed against the Mensheviks. Under the title of "What Is a Peace Program?" it was later republished in pamphlet form after the November revolution.<sup>99</sup>

He shows in detail how the total consequences of the victory of either side (and that means also the defeat of either side!) would be reactionary from the viewpoint of the socialist aims. He devotes special attention to the slogan "Peace without annexations" in order to show that this aim can be realized neither through the victory (or defeat) of one side nor the victory (or defeat) of the other side of the war camps.

He poses "three typical possibilities" for the outcome of the war:

(1) A decisive victory by one of the camps. (2) A general exhaustion of the opponents without the decisive dominance of one over the other. (3) The intervention of the revolutionary proletariat, which forcibly interrupts the development of military events.

On the first: "Only charlatans or hopeless fools can believe that the freedom of the small nations can be secured by the victory of one side or the other," he summarizes. "A like result," he argues, would follow if the war ends in something like a draw, as envisioned by the Menshevik slogan "Neither victors nor vanquished."

The absence of a pronounced prepon-

derance by one of the combatants over the other will only set off, all the more clearly, both the dominance of the strong over the weak within either one of the camps, and the preponderance of both over the "neutral" victims of imperialism. The outcome of the war without victors or vanquished is no guarantee for anybody....

The second possible outcome of the war, which is mainly depended upon by those who try to promote the narrow program of "peace without annexations and nothing more," presupposes that the war, exhausting as it does all the resources of the warring nations, will end in general lassitude, without victors or vanquished, without being interrupted by the third power, the revolutionary power. To this very condition where militarism is too weak to effect conquests and the proletariat is too weak to make a revolution, the passive internationalists of the Kautsky type adapt their abbreviated program of "peace without annexations," which not infrequently they present as a return to the *status quo ante bellum*.

But, he continues, this is only "apparent realism," for under the conditions of imperialism, for the reasons given in the first paragraph quoted, this outcome "does not at all exclude annexations but on the contrary presupposes them."

To the negative peace perspective of "Neither victory nor defeat," he counterposes the only way out which we call for and *wish*: the intervention of the proletarian revolution, in this war crisis itself, against the alternatives of victory or defeat for either war camp.

A powerful movement of the proletariat is thus a necessary prerequisite for the actual realization of a peace without annexations. But again, while presupposing such a movement, the foregoing program [of the Mensheviks] remains quite inadequate in that it accepts the restoration of the order which prevailed prior to the war and out of which the war broke out. The European *status quo ante bellum*, the resultant of wars, robbery, violations, bureaucratism, diplomatic stupidity and the weakness of peoples, remains as the only positive con-

tent of the slogan "without annexations"....

It is possible to overcome this regime only by means of the proletarian revolution.

What is the guiding line?

We say that . . . the line of direction to be followed by the international proletariat and its national fighting corps [the socialist parties] must not be determined by secondary political and national features nor by problematical advantages in military preponderance by one side over the other (whereby these problematical advantages must be paid for in advance with the absolute renunciation of the proletariat's independent policy) but by the fundamental antagonism existing between the international proletariat and the capitalist régime generally.

It is easy to see why, from this standpoint, Trotsky rejected Lenin's "lesser evil" formula.

So Trotsky, to be sure, wished "neither victory nor defeat" for either of the war camps, but this was not and could not be his slogan. *He rejected the disjunction that it posed.*

## 7. ROSA LUXEMBURG ON VICTORY AND DEFEAT

Rosa Luxemburg took up the identical approach to the victory-or-defeat dilemma — quite independently, of course. It is worthwhile quoting her at more than our usual length.<sup>100</sup>

Victory or defeat? This is the slogan of all-powerful militarism in every belligerent nation, and, like an echo, the Social-Democratic leaders have adopted it. . . . And yet, what can victory bring the proletariat?

She argues that either alternative, victory or defeat, will mean, for the working class and for the people of the nation, impoverishment, economic ruin, an intensification of militarism, etc. In the course of this argument, some of her polemical points are sometimes exaggerated (in hindsight) but

what we are concerned about here is the line of her analysis. Thus:

... even before any military decision of victory or defeat can be established . . . the result of the war will be: the economic ruin of all participating nations. . . . This, in the last analysis, neither victory nor defeat can alter; on the contrary it makes a purely military decision altogether doubtful and increases the likelihood that the war will finally end through a general and extreme exhaustion.\*

After her examination of the reactionary consequences of either victory or defeat as such, she writes:

Under the circumstances the question of victory or defeat becomes, for the European working class, in its political exactly as in its economic aspects, a choice between two beatings. It is therefore nothing short of a dangerous madness for the French Socialists to believe that they can deal a deathblow to militarism and imperialism, and clear the road for peaceful democracy, by overthrowing Germany. Imperialism and its servant militarism will reappear after every victory and after every defeat in this war. There can be but one exception: if the international proletariat, through its intervention, should overthrow all previous calculations.

The important lesson to be derived by the proletariat from the war is the one unchanging fact, that it cannot and must not become the uncritical echo of the "victory or defeat" slogan, neither in Germany nor in France, neither in England nor in Austria. For it is a slogan that has reality only from the point of view of imperialism, and is identical, in the eyes of every large power, with the

question: gain or loss of world political power, of annexations, of colonies, of military supremacy.

For the European proletariat as a class, victory or defeat of either of the two war groups would be equally disastrous. For war as such, whatever its military outcome may be, is the greatest conceivable defeat of the cause of the European proletariat. The overthrow of war and the speedy forcing of peace by the international revolutionary action of the proletariat alone can bring to it the only possible victory. And this victory alone can truly rescue Belgium, can bring democracy to Europe.

For the class-conscious proletariat to identify its cause with either military camp is an untenable position. Does that mean that the proletarian policies of the present day demand a return to the status quo, that we have no plan of action beyond the fond hope that everything may remain as it was before the war? [No, she answers, that is impossible.] . . . The proletariat knows no going back, can only strive forward and onward, for a goal that lies beyond even the most newly created conditions. In this sense alone is it possible for the proletariat to oppose, with its policy, both camps in the imperialist world war.

Her "methodology" excludes the slogan of wishing defeat. And her methodology is clear: it is, in contemporary terms and almost in her own terms, the methodology of the Third Camp. For this is indeed a *methodology* in the sense which we have been using; and it is equally hostile to both social-patriotism and its bisymmetric opposite, the swamp of "defeatism."

## V. The Abandonment of Defeatism in 1917

In a real sense, this is the payoff on the whole question of the meaning of Lenin's slogan:

*With the March Revolution in Russia and the overthrow of tsarism, Lenin dropped defeatism and the defeat-slogan completely.*

\*During the war, Trotsky also once expressed the opinion that this was the most likely military outcome.

The fact itself speaks volumes. A closer examination will underline the essential points we have already made. This period provides a test.

### I. "WE WERE NOT DEFEATISTS"

The first words preserved from Lenin's pen, after the news of the March

revolution, are a letter to Kollontai, in which he wrote:

We, of course, retain our opposition to the defense of the fatherland, to the imperialist slaughter directed by Shingarev plus the Kerenskys and Co.

All our slogans remain the same. . . .<sup>101</sup>

"All our slogans" did not remain the same. The Bolsheviks remained consistently opposed to the war, even now when it was being conducted by a democratic republic of the capitalists; in fact, they had to re-emphasize their opposition to defensism twice as energetically. But on point after point where the Bolsheviks had differed from the other left-wing Marxist internationalists, Lenin revised his distinctive position: the peace slogan, the slogan "turn imperialist war into civil war," and the defeat-slogan.

Lenin's explicit statement on his abandonment of defeatism in this period did not come until exactly a year later, in March 1918, after the revolution. Let us record it now. The subject came up almost accidentally, at the special Congress of Soviets called to ratify the Brest-Litovsk treaty of peace with Germany. The S-Rs were against peace and for continuation of the war in spite of the complete exhaustion of the country. In reply to a speech by the Left S-R Kamkov about disrupting the army, Lenin remarked in passing:

He [Kamkov] heard that we were defeatists, and he reminded himself of this when we have ceased to be defeatists. . . . We were defeatists under the tsar, but under Tseretelli and Chernov [i.e., under the Kerensky regime] we were not defeatists.<sup>102</sup>

Lenin uses "under Tseretelli and Chernov" (S-R ministers in the cabinet) to denote the period from March to November 1917 because of the context of Kamkov's speech, not for any special reason which need concern us.

But he never explicitly discussed the reasons for this change, any more (for example) than he ever discussed the simultaneous revision of his opinions on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.\*

The abandonment of the defeat-slogan, in any case, is a clear fact even without this categorical statement. It remains to see (a) why, and (b) what took its place. The latter is an especially interesting question. During this period, the Bolsheviks were *what they had denied was possible*: consistently anti-war without being defeatists.

## 2. BATH IN SOCIAL-PATRIOTISM

Insofar as comrades in the movement have thought of this question, it is probable that the change has been viewed as solely an accompaniment of the phenomenon of *dual power*. That opinion does not quite stand up.

First of all, we must not underestimate the fact that Lenin had spent the war years in Switzerland, a neutral country: here there were no war atmosphere, no war hysteria, no climate of patriotism, no clouds of social-patriotism of the sort that swirled about the head of Trotsky in Paris or the German Left.

It was not until he returned to Russia on April 16 that Lenin for the first time got a bath in the atmosphere of the *social-patriotism of the masses*. Read his works from 1914 through 1916 and it is evident that, in his

\*Yet he must have been baited by enemies about the previous defeatist line of the Bolsheviks. In an article published in September, Lenin mentions that a campaign has been started against Chernov, the S-R leader and right-wing Zimmerwaldist, "for his alleged 'defeatist' articles abroad." (CW 21, I, p. 111.) Needless to say, Chernov was not guilty. But if this smear campaign was launched against him, we can conjecture that Lenin's authentic defeatist declarations must have been used too. If so, Lenin never riposted or tried to clear the question up. Unless the above-mentioned article, entitled "Political Blackmail," was a sort of backhanded way of striking back.

thinking, this, the social-patriotism of the rank and file, appears simply as a consequence of betrayal from above. It does not play a conditioning role in his formulation of slogans. Lenin's main emphasis is constantly to draw the hardest, sharpest line against the pro-war leaders and anyone who makes concessions to them. Only rarely does he seem to pay attention to a task which is different: how to bridge the gap between the intransigent line of opposition to the war and *the thinking of the masses of workers* who are under the spell of defensism, how to present his ideas to *them*. One of the big differences in tone between Lenin's writings on the war and those of (say) Luxemburg or Trotsky is conditioned by this fact.

With Lenin back in Petersburg, many Bolshevik memoirs speak of his eagerness to talk to workers, get a feeling of how the people were thinking and talking. He needed it. He was going to find out the "hidden thoughts" about which he had once written so confidently.

What struck him with a fresh and new impact? It was not in the first place the phenomenon of dual power, which looms so much bigger in historical perspective.

The day after his return, he presented theses and made a speech at a caucus meeting of the Bolshevik members of the All-Russian Soviet Congress.<sup>103</sup> Here he began to sound the keynote which ran through his speeches and writings from then on, up to the July days:

What strikes one particularly is that here in Russia the situation in the socialist movement is the same as in other countries: defensism, "saving the fatherland." The difference is that nowhere is there the degree of freedom we have. . . .

And another thing:

The masses approach this question [of

the war] not from a theoretical but from a practical viewpoint. Our mistake lies in our theoretical approach. . . . Before the representatives of the soldiers the matter must be put in a practical way, otherwise nothing will come of it.

What was this new "practical" approach?

In view of the apparent existence of a defensist sentiment among the masses who accept the war only as a necessity and not as an excuse for making conquests, we must explain to them thoroughly, persistently, and patiently [that the war can be ended only by overthrowing capital]. . . . When the worker says he wants to defend his country, it is the instinct of an oppressed man that speaks in him.

A backlight is cast on the approach which he had pursued up to this enlightenment. This was obviously a personal revelation for him. But it was not new or startling for the anti-war socialists in various countries who were immersed in the tidal wave of social-patriotism that had swept over their people. Lenin is "struck" ("hit between the eyes," says another translation) by the fact that there is defensism in Russia too—not just in the writings of Plekhanov or Semkovsky or some other politico who should have known better—deeply among the masses. The "practical" problem is how to *reach* them, not by modifying one's intransigent opposition to the war but making it comprehensible to them, making it march with their own thinking. He criticizes his previously too "theoretical" approach, but that is not just or accurate. He means his previously too *abstract* approach, which is not at all the same thing. It was this abstract insistence on "hard" formulations (not merely on "hard" ideas) which had shown itself in some of his strictures on the slogan of peace, on Luxemburg's "Junius" pamphlet, on the slogan of defeat, in his insistence on counterposing "civil

war" as a slogan to the masses' yearning for peace and an end to war.

Now he emphasizes and scolds his followers:

We Bolsheviks are in the habit of adopting a maximum of revolutionism. But this is not enough. We must study the situation.<sup>104</sup>

### 3. POLITICAL FREEDOM AND "CONSCIENTIOUS DEFENSISM"

In this whole period this is a repeated note sounded by Lenin, ostensibly with regard to a "peculiarity" of the Russian situation in 1917. This peculiarity is not merely the existence of dual power, which, to be sure, is "what has made our revolution so strikingly unique," as he says in one place.<sup>105</sup> It is something else which, in *Russia*, was an accompaniment of the dual power and a consequence of the revolution, but which is not merely dual power.

This, Lenin emphasizes on occasion after occasion, is the political *freedom* which now obtains. Is this any reason for supporting the war of this "free" capitalist country? Of course not. Its impact on Lenin is rather this: it means that if the masses are defensist, they are so *not* because of constraint by the government but, as it were, of their own free will. They cannot be cured of this by "a maximum of revolutionism," or by slogans which are designed merely to demarcate, or by appeals to the Basle and Stuttgart resolutions. Slogans which previously seemed to him to be dangerous concessions to social-patriotism now take on a new color as a necessary *bridge* to the social-patriotism of the masses, as a "practical" approach.

The acquisition of capitalist "freedom" in Russia, then, does not provide any reason to modify views on the war. It is reason to modify how one approaches the masses in seeking

to tear them *away* from their defensist illusions. He comes back to it time and again for months. He tells the Bolshevik caucus on April 17:

Russia at present is the freest, the most advanced country in the world.<sup>106</sup>

He writes in his April 10 theses that the revolution has stalled "not because of outside obstacles, not because the bourgeoisie uses force . . . but simply by the unthinking confidence of the masses."<sup>107</sup> And again on April 27: "Complete political freedom, we have not of course. But nowhere else is there such freedom as exists in Russia."<sup>108</sup>

Now he is emphasizing this in connection with the problem of how to deal with the defensist sentiments of the mass of workers. Because the picture impressed him as unique, this "conscientious" ("sincere") revolutionary-defensism of the masses seemed to him a new phenomenon, peculiar to Russia. Thus he writes in a passage which well represents this course of thought:

When I spoke of the "conscientious" mass of revolutionary defensists, I had in mind not a moral category, but a class definition. The class represented in the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies is not interested in a predatory war. In Europe it is different. . . .

We interrupt the quotation to ask: What! in Europe, then, the working class is interested in a predatory imperialist war? But no: Lenin has just jumped the track to a different line of thought, and goes straight on into the following:

. . . There the people are oppressed, the most opportunistic pacifists are not infrequently baited even more than we, the Pravdists. Here the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies carries its policy of revolutionary defensism into effect, not by violence, but because the masses trust it. Europe is one large military prison. Capital rules cruelly there.

All over Europe the bourgeoisie should be overthrown, and not argued with. In Russia the soldiers are armed; they allowed the bourgeoisie to beguile them peacefully when they agreed ostensibly only to "defend themselves" against Wilhelm. In Europe, there is no "conscientious" revolutionary defensism, of the sort we have in Russia, where the people have handed over the power to the bourgeoisie, because of ignorance, inertia, the habit to suffer the rod, tradition.<sup>109</sup>

Now this portrait of the rest of Europe is a caricature even for the year 1917, when anti-war feeling was already germinating all over the Continent and was held back among other things by "sincere" "conscientious" defensism. Qualitatively, the situation which Lenin thinks is a Russian peculiarity was true of the working class of most of Europe in 1914-15. In Germany, Austria and France most particularly, the governments had put their war policy through not by violence but by deceiving the masses (it goes without saying, with the indispensable help of the social-democratic leaders). There too the masses were "peacefully" beguiled into believing that they had to "defend themselves" against a foreign oppressor or would-be oppressor. There too, "conscientious" defensism was based on misconceived class interests.

What Lenin is unwittingly explaining is what *he* had not really grasped about the problem up to now—the problem, that is, not of whether to support or oppose the war, but the sometimes even more difficult problem of *how* to present an uncompromising anti-war line to the masses.

So again on May 10, in his speech on the war resolution at the "April Conference," he speaks of

...the peculiarity that distinguishes Russia from the other capitalist Western countries, and from all the capitalist democratic republics. For it cannot be said of those countries that it is the con-

fidence of the ignorant masses that chiefly makes it possible to prolong the war. There the masses are in the iron grip of military discipline.<sup>110</sup>

Even in May 1917 this was not true in France and England and not even in the Central Powers, let alone its arrant absurdity as a picture of Europe in 1914-16. *But it serves the role of allowing Lenin to adopt a new policy without having to face up to what was wrong in the old. For it is on the basis of this new line of thinking that Lenin drops the defeatist formulas.*

Clearly this step was not just a matter of reluctance to use "strong" language, that is, it was not just a matter of tactically dropping the *term*. His new approach left no room for it.

#### 4. A NON-DEFENSIST PROGRAM FOR DEFENSE OF THE NATION

Thus, it is impossible to "wish defeat" and at the same time to project the idea of transforming the imperialist war into a *revolutionary* war. At the same time that Lenin was vigorously fighting defensism under this government, he was offering a program of *how to defend the country*:

The example of France tells us one thing and one only: to make Russia capable of defending herself, to achieve "marvels" of mass heroism here, all the old must be swept away with "Jacobin" ruthlessness. Russia must be rejuvenated, regenerated *economically*. And this cannot be done in the 20th century by merely sweeping away tsarism....

It is impossible to render the country capable of defending itself without the greatest heroism on the part of the people in courageously and decisively carrying out great economic transformations. And it is impossible to appeal to the heroism of the masses without breaking with imperialism, without offering to all the peoples a democratic peace, without thus transforming the war from a war of conquest, a predatory, criminal war, into a just, defensive, revolutionary war.

Only a decisively consistent break with

the capitalists both in internal and foreign politics can save our revolution and our country, held in the iron grasp of imperialism.<sup>111</sup>

At this point, we must take a flashback. We have just seen Lenin urging revolution in order to be able really to defend the country. He had also run into this question in 1915, when he denounced "the revolutionary chauvinists, who desire revolution in order to defeat Germany," whereas (he continued) *we* "desire the revolution in Russia for the sake of the proletarian revolution in the West, and simultaneously with that revolution."<sup>112</sup> It was a false dichotomy. Again in a letter of September 1915 he had drawn a line against the "chauvinist revolutionaries" (among whom he names Kerensky and some Mensheviks) or "revolutionary-patriots," who "want to overthrow tsarism so as to defeat Germany," whereas "we are working for the international revolution of the proletariat."<sup>113</sup>

A false dichotomy, indeed. Lenin had missed the point about "revolutionary chauvinism" and understood it only in 1917, when in a sense he too became a "revolutionary-patriot." The point was that the "revolutionary chauvinists" still based themselves on imperialism, that is, their only condition was the overthrow of *tsarism* while the war would still be conducted on a purely capitalist basis and in capitalist-imperialist interests. Lenin's condition in 1917 was "*breaking with imperialism*"—*really* breaking with imperialism, and not only in words but in class terms. And in this difference everything is included.

Without ceasing for a moment to oppose the imperialist war being waged by the new democratic government of the capitalists; without ceasing for a moment to concentrate all fire against any kind of defensism *un-*

*der this government*, Lenin recognized that the working class had a stake in the defense of the nation. His program for the defense of the nation was a thoroughly revolutionary program: the real interests of the people can be defended, not by supporting the war, but only if capitalism is overthrown and a fundamental break with imperialism takes place.

It is superfluous to point out how utterly alien to this viewpoint is the slogan "wish defeat." No wonder it disappeared as thoroughly as an icicle in fire. It can also be understood why, far from "wishing defeat" any longer, Lenin and the Bolsheviks repudiated the related idea of wishing to disintegrate the army. (Fraternization, yes; but fraternization as a means of bringing about peace from below, not as a means of disintegrating the army.)

Lenin's clearest expression on this point, it happens, came (later, after the revolution, in 1918) in the same passage that we have already quoted in the dispute over Brest-Litovsk with the S-R Kamkov.<sup>114</sup> The S-R debater had referred to "disrupting the army" in 1917. Lenin replied:

But how did we disrupt the army? We were defeatists under the tsar, but under Tseretelli and Chernov we were not defeatists. We came out in *Pravda* with a proclamation which Krylenko, then still persecuted, published in the army: "Why I Go to Petersburg." He said: "To revolt we do not call you." This was not the disintegration of the army. The army was disrupted by those who declared this great war [i.e., by the imperialists who had brought the war on]. . . . And I assert here that we—beginning with this proclamation by Krylenko, which was not the first and which I mention because I especially remember it—we did not disrupt the army but said: Hold the front—the sooner you will take the power, the easier you will maintain it....\*

\*A distinction has to be made at this point between two concepts: (1) the program of revolution and break with imperialism in order to defend Russia; and (2) even before that revolution, the slogan of "Hold the front" now.

In May 1917 Lenin, calling on the peasants to take the land, added that they should do so "using every effort to increase the production of grain and meat, for our soldiers at the front are suffering terribly from hunger." He told them to take the land themselves and work it well because: "This is necessary in order to improve the provisioning of the soldiers at the front."<sup>115</sup>

In September 1917 he wrote that the historic significance of the Kornilov revolt was that it showed people

... that the landowners and the bourgeoisie ... are now ready to commit, and are committing, the most outlandish crimes, such as giving up Riga (and afterwards Petrograd) to the Germans, laying the war front open, putting the Bolshevik regiments under fire, starting a mutiny, leading troops against the capital with the "Wild Division" at their head, etc.—all in order to seize all power and put in the hands of the bourgeoisie...<sup>116</sup>

Trotsky in September 1917 (now a leading spokesman for the Bolsheviks) wrote in the same vein in a pamphlet:

The people and the army, if they felt and were convinced that the Revolution was their revolution, that the government was their government, that the latter would stop at nothing in the defense of their interests against the exploiters, that it was pursuing no external aims of oppression or conquest, that it was not curtsying to the "Allied" financiers, that it was openly offering the nations an immediate peace on democratic foundations—the toiling masses and their army would, under these conditions, be found to be inspired with an indissoluble unity; and if the German revolution would not come in time to aid us, the Russian army would fight against the Hohenzollerns with the same enthusiasm that the Russian workers showed in de-

The second aspect is, without any doubt, uniquely a reflection of the dual power, in the sense that Trotsky explains in his *History of the Russian Revolution* apropos of the defense of Petrograd against the Germans. The previous remark we made, above, that the abandonment of defeatism was not conditioned on the dual power, does not apply to this feature of the Bolshevik policy.

fending the gains of the popular movement against the onslaughts of the counter-revolution.

The imperialists feared this path as they feared death...<sup>117</sup>

## 5. NEW ATTITUDE TO DEFEAT

All this is highlighted from another angle by the attitude of the Bolsheviks on the "July offensive." We have seen how Lenin had begun by emphasizing the democratic freedom that obtained in Russia after March. But his line on the war was not *directly* produced by this factor, even though this was what had "struck" him. What motivated his new line on the war, directly, was rather the accompanying phenomenon of "conscientious" defensism—that is, the necessity of shaping a policy of revolutionary anti-war opposition which would mesh with the thinking of the masses.

Proof: After the "July days," when the Kerensky government began to persecute the Bolsheviks and drive them underground, Lenin openly proclaimed that the freedom he had spoken about was now no more:

The counter-revolution ... has actually taken state power into its hands. ... Fundamentally, state power in Russia is at present actually a military dictatorship. ... All hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian revolution have definitely vanished...<sup>118</sup>

The dual power was no more, also. So the slogan "All power to the Soviets" temporarily went too.<sup>119</sup>

Now this analysis may have been an exaggeration, but the point is that *with this analysis, Lenin's new line on the war did not change back*, with respect to defeatism. It was not decisively based on the phenomenon of dual power.

The fact that the new line continued as before is best shown by the Bolsheviks' reaction when the Kerensky government carried through its

new offensive on the front beginning July 1 and met with a resounding—*defeat*.

The Bolsheviks said the defeat was a catastrophe for the country and that the offensive had been a crime. In the pamphlet of September 1917 by Trotsky, quoted above, he refers to it strongly as "a fierce catastrophe at the front." The offensive, he wrote, had set new goals for the army and

... in the name of these goals it was demanded that the army, exhausted, hungry and unshod as it was, should put forward superhuman efforts. Can there be any doubt of the result when we remember, in addition, that certain generals of the staff were consciously working for a Russian defeat?<sup>120</sup>

The Bolsheviks had declared warningly in the Congress of Soviets (Trotsky recalled) "that in the present state of the army an offensive was a military adventure, which threatened the very existence of the army itself. It transpired that we had seen only too clearly."

It is consequently quite clear that the "glorious page" of the offensive of the 1st of July has no relation whatever to national defense, for the military efficiency of Russia, as the consequence of the offensive, had simply been made worse. If the bourgeoisie nevertheless speaks of the offensive in terms of approbation, it is for the simple reason that the cruel blow inflicted on our army as a result of Kerensky's policy created favorable conditions for the spread of panic and for counter-revolutionary schemes.<sup>121</sup>

Yes indeed, "defeat facilitates" ... many things. Lenin, during this period, had to make the point that military defeat at the front was dangerously facilitating ... Bonapartism. He made this point precisely in the situation created by the "July Days" at the same time that he was announcing the end of dual power, democratic freedom, etc. In his article "The Beginning of Bonapartism," he showed

how a state of balanced equilibrium in the class struggle produces the classic soil of Bonapartism, and went on:

Add to this the fact of military defeat brought about by a foolhardy offensive, when phrases about saving the fatherland are bandied about (concealing the desires of the bourgeoisie to save its imperialist program), and you have before you a perfect picture of the social and political setting for Bonapartism.<sup>122</sup>

It turns out, naturally, that the formula "defeat facilitates revolution"—quite apart from the fact that it is not even any version of a real *defeatism*—is not the suprahistorical principle that Lenin's polemics had made it out to be. *What* defeat facilitates is various, and is conditioned by the "social and political setting" in which it occurs.

As a matter of fact, while we are at it, let us get another view of how, in 1917, Lenin was using formulas of the type "defeat facilitates revolution." In September Lenin wrote, for example:

Needless to say, the approaching famine, economic ruin, military defeat, are capable of extraordinarily hastening this turn towards the transition of power to the proletariat supported by the poorest peasantry.<sup>123</sup>

At first blush, this sounds as if it is in contradiction with the previously quoted remark about defeat facilitating Bonapartism. But there is no necessary contradiction at all. *Military defeat, by itself, facilitates breakdown of the status quo, and that is all*, but what will replace the status quo depends on other factors. Together with famine and economic ruin, it can quicken the pace of a revolutionary development which is taking place—just as it can quicken other things.\*

\*CF. also: "... war and economic ruin will hasten the process [of revolutionization] tremendously. These are such 'hasteners' that a month or even a week with them is equal to a year otherwise. [CW 21, I, p. 48.] And: "That the present imperialist war, by its reactionary character and the

But the most biting comment that this makes on Lenin's old Formula No. 2 of "defeatism" in 1914-16 is this: Previously, Lenin had deduced from the fact that "defeat facilitates revolution" the conclusion that we therefore "wish defeat." It was an "axiom." He could not see how anyone could fail to see the unanswerable logic. Now—as was just as clear before—"famine" and "economic ruin" are also acting as "facilitators" of revolution. It was an objective fact, put by Lenin with rigorous correctness. And it would plainly be mad to conclude from this objective fact that we therefore "wish" famine and ruin! On the contrary, Lenin was fighting for the only program to avert the "threatening catastrophe."

There was only one little catch in this program as far as concerns the defensists — "revolutionary" defensists, "conscientious" defensists or any other kind of defensists: *Lenin's* program to defend Russia, to avert the catastrophe, etc. was not any rationalization why workers should be defensists in the present under the imperialist government, but was a revolutionary program for the *overthrow* of imperialism and capitalism.

And this program was incompatible with any variety of defeatism.

## 6. SUMMARY

To sum up:

It is not enough merely to point out that Lenin dropped defeatism after the March Revolution. Why he did so, and the program that took its place, is even more illuminating about the mistake of 1914-16.

Lenin dropped defeatism, first of all, in the face of the realization, made vivid to him for the first time, that the

defeat-slogan broke all links between the sentiments and interests of the masses and the program of the consistent revolutionaries. In this sense, it was *sectarian*; and in our opinion the defeat-slogan deserves to be recorded as a classic example of a sectarian shell built around an opportunistic (i.e., in this case social-patriotic) theoretical core, in line with the oft-repeated Marxist truism of the dialectic relationship between the sectarian-opportunist opposites.

Secondly, Lenin discovered in practice that the defeat-slogan was incompatible with a living Marxist approach to the problem of the *defense of the nation*, conceived not in the social-patriotic sense of the "defense of the fatherland" but in the light of a Marxist *class* understanding of, and a dynamically revolutionary program for, the *nation*.

Thirdly: Lenin's change of line after the *democratic* (but not socialist) revolution in March reflects the fact—which we have already seen—that the defeat-slogan had a meaning only in terms of a war by the tsarist feudal despotism against a progressive capitalist revolutionary force. This was the situation which Lenin *thought* obtained in 1904-5, and though he was wrong even then, the defeat-slogan had a clear meaning for him, at least. It was this same *arrière pensée* which had led Zinoviev to write the qualification "despotic" into his defeatist formulations. The March democratic revolution erased the rock-bottom motive which had led to the defeat-slogan in the first place—the "special-Russian" consideration of tsarism as the unique menace, the greatest evil. Naturally, this does not bear on conscious motivation but only on the real theoretical underpinnings, which have their effect despite consciousness.

Fourthly: Lenin's course proved

that defeatism is not any necessary element in a consistent revolutionary anti-war position.

Hal DRAPER

(Next issue—Part III, "Revolutionary Defeatism" After Lenin: Its Revival and Reinterpretation)

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56. CW 18, 81, "The War and Russian Social-Democracy," theses signed by the Central Committee; pub. Nov. 1, 1914 (written October).
57. CW 18, 101, "On the National Pride of the Great-Russians"; pub. Dec. 12, 1914.
58. CW 18, 117, "Russian Südekums"; pub. Feb. 1, 1915.
59. CW 18, 199-200.
60. CW 18, 124, "Under a Stolen Flag"; not published (until 1917).
61. Gankin and Fisher (note 53), p. 190-1.
62. CW 18, 149-150, "Conference of the Foreign Sections of the RSDLP"; pub. March 29, 1915. (The conference itself took place Feb. 27-March 4.)
63. CW 18, pp. 197-202, "Defeat of 'Our' Government in the Imperialist War"; pub. July 26, 1915.
64. Gankin and Fisher (note 53), pp. 164-167.
65. Alfred Rosmer, *Le Mouvement Ouvrier Pendant la Guerre* (Paris, 1936), p. 478.
66. Gankin and Fisher (note 53), p. 170.
67. CW 18, 197.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-8.
69. Martov and Dan: *Geschichte der Russische Sozialdemokratie*, p. 276. This section was written by Dan.
70. CW 18, 234, "Socialism and War"; pub. as pamphlet in 1915 (written in August).
71. CW 18, 304, "The Collapse of the Second International"; pub. in *Kommunist*, Nos. 1-2, 1915 (written during summer).
72. Gankin and Fisher (note 53), p. 206. Another translation in *Letters of Lenin*, ed. Hill and Mudie, p. 373. Not published; private letter.
73. Lenin, *Selected Works*, v. 5, pp. 149-153. Not published.
74. CW 19, 45-6, "Wilhelm Kolb and George Plekhanov"; pub. Feb. 29, 1916.
75. CW 30 (Russ.), 247. Discarded draft of theses for Kienthal Conference; not published; written beginning of April 1916.
76. CW 19, 74, "Theses for Kienthal Conference"; pub. June 10, 1916. (The conference itself took place April 24-30.)
77. CW 19, 212, "The Pamphlet by Junius"; pub. Oct. 1916 (written August).
78. CW 19, 370, "The Military Program of the Proletarian Revolution"; written August 1916 but not published till Sept.-Oct. 1917 in the *Jugend-Internationale*.
79. CW 19, 321, "On Separate Peace"; pub. Nov. 6, 1916.

80. See note 64.
81. CW 18, 142-144.
82. Text of resolution in appendix to CW 18, 472-3.
83. CW 18, 356-8.
84. Text in CW 18, 447-80, appendix.
85. Article on the Zimmerwald Conference, Oct. 11, 1915, collected in *Gegen den Strom*.
86. See note 3.
87. See note 4.
88. See note 2 and note 97.
89. Zinoviev, *op. cit.* (note 4); in *Gegen den Strom*, p. 243.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
94. See note 63.
95. *Op. cit.* (note 4); in *Gegen den Strom*, p. 248.
96. *Op. cit.* (note 3); in *Gegen den Strom*, p. 438.
97. Article "The War and the Fate of Our Liberation," pub. Feb. 12, 1915; in *Gegen den Strom*, p. 56.
98. *Op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 243-4.
99. L. Trotsky, *What is a Peace Program?* Petrograd, February 1918; pamphlet, in English translation, of a series of articles which had been originally published in *Nashe Slovo* during 1915-16. The English is very awkward and foreign; I have taken the liberty of polishing it a bit.
100. *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy* (the "Junius" pamphlet), 1915.
101. CW 20, I, 19, "Two Letters to A. M. Kollontai." Not published; private letter.
102. CW 22 (Russ.), 404-5, "Concluding Speech on the Report on the Ratification of the Peace Agreement of March 15, at the 4th Extraordinary All-Russian Congress of Soviets"; pub. March 19, 1918.
103. CW 20, I, 95-7, "Speech at Caucus of Bolshevik Members of the All-Russian Conference of Soviets, April 17, 1917." Not published (till 1924); notes by a participant.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
105. CW 20, I, 115.
106. CW 20, I, 98.
107. CW 20, I, 135, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution."
108. CW 20, I, 203, "Report on the Political Situation."
109. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
110. CW 20, I, 296-7, "Speech on the War Resolution."
111. CW 21, I, 214-6, "The Threatening Catastrophe and How to Fight It"; pub. Oct. 1917 (written September 23-7).
112. Lenin, *Selected Works*, v. 5, p. 150.
113. Letter to Shlyapnikov of September 19, 1915, in *Letters of Lenin* (see note 72), p. 376-7.
114. See note 102.
115. CW 20, II, 56-7, "Open Letter to the Delegates of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasant Delegates"; pub. May 24, 1917.
116. CW 21, I, 160, "Draft Resolution on the Political Situation." Not published (till 1926); written September 16, 1917.
117. L. Trotsky, *What Next?*, a pamphlet published in Petrograd in September 1917. Included in L. Fraina, ed.: *The Proletarian Revolution in Russia*, by Lenin and Trotsky (a collection), p. 257.
118. CW 21, I, 36-37, "The Political Situation." Not published (till 1926); written July 23, 1917.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
120. In L. Fraina (see note 117), p. 258.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
122. CW 21, I, 77, "The Beginning of Bonapartism." Pub. Aug. 11, 1917.
123. CW 21, I, 147, "From a Publicist's Diary"; pub. September 14, 1917.

hardships it entails, revolutionizes the masses and accelerates the revolution, is true and should be emphasized." [CW 21, II, p. 82.]

# Bevanism During the War

## II (Concluding)—Disintegration of National Unity

Although support of the war in Britain was almost unanimous, there was a great deal of discontent. This was only natural as the first days of the war found Britain in the role of the loser and the British people undergoing a great deal of suffering. Bevan was in a good position to capitalize on this discontent. He was in a uniquely fortunate spot to gain attention for his views in the House of Commons and therefore in the country. At the same time, his ideas did not receive much competition in the political world.

This program was projected into the political arena as a rallying ground for the disoriented and atomized left. As the war dragged on and the immediate danger of the first days had passed, discontent increased and the opposition of Bevan and the *Tribune* became more concrete. From criticism of the Government on specific issues or in a general but propagandistic manner, it passed on to criticism of the Government's personnel.

At this time, Churchill's popularity was too great to allow of the acceptance by the electorate of direct criticism of his person, but criticism of his subordinates could accomplish a number of things. First it was a form of pressure on Churchill and the Government, and second it gave Bevan's opposition a greater semblance of reality. General criticism without the goal of some change in the Government is bound to become meaningless after awhile. Criticism must have an objective as well as logic and reason. The overturn of the Government in 1940 or 1941 was not even a possibility in the realm of political daydream-

ing. However, the ability to force changes in the cabinet was not beyond Bevan's capability.

As early as the end of 1940, Bevan began to concretize his opposition role in the House by demands for changes in the War Cabinet. He said in the House at that time:

The Lord President [Anderson] has many great executive qualities, but I submit that, on the facts, he is the last person to be a member of the War Cabinet charged with the framing of general policies. Look at the position we have been in since the beginning of the war. The right hon. Gentleman has been saved from major disaster by the House of Commons on four separate occasions.<sup>16</sup>

He followed this tack of concentrating on Churchill's subordinates when he said, "I know what I have said is unpleasant, but it needs to be said. In many respects the Prime Minister is not being well advised."<sup>17</sup> As 1941 wore on his attacks on members of the cabinet sharpened as did his criticisms of the policies of the Government. The scope of his barbs extended to the military and thus to Churchill although still in an indirect manner. His general theme was that Churchill was so involved in problems of a higher order that he could not adequately deal with day-to-day affairs and had to rely on subordinates who advised him poorly. In a speech on the problems of coal production and the drafting of miners, he was particularly sharp. The following excerpts indicate his manner of attack on the Government:

Unfortunately, and I hope my words are going to be repeated to him—unfor-

16 365 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 348.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 350.

tunately we have a Prime Minister who listens to the generals more than he listens to the people inside the Government. In fact, the Government are the only enemy up to now that the generals have been able to defeat...<sup>18</sup>

Are we going to tell the Prime Minister and the members of the War Cabinet, "Please come to the House of Commons and listen to us a little more," and not to listen to those whose history in the war has been one of uninterrupted disaster.<sup>19</sup>

What is stopping them is a Prime Minister who thinks about these things romantically and not realistically and the "brass hats" who advise him stupidly.<sup>20</sup>

His most bitter attack, however, was reserved for Lord Halifax, who was then ambassador to the United States. Lord Halifax had made a public statement to the effect that there would be no invasion of Europe in the near future. Bevan had raised a question on this in the House of Commons. During the question and answer period, he had gotten into a rather sharp exchange with Churchill. At the end of the exchange he requested a chance to debate his charges against Lord Halifax.<sup>21</sup> Later on in the session he delivered the following attack:

I was angry when I was rebuked by the Prime Minister when I said this man was an irresponsible man with a bad record. I thought it was a masterpiece of Parliamentary understatement...

The Prime Minister reserved his anger for me and not this man. The Prime Minister lost his temper not over a piece of gratuitous and vital information to the enemy but with the poor simple back bench Member of Parliament who called attention to the treachery.

The Prime Minister should realize that unless he gets rid of some of these people, they will drag him down.<sup>22</sup>

This attack on Lord Halifax was made in October, 1941. It was not to be long before Churchill, himself, be-

18 373 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 1842.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 1844.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 1843.

21 374 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 1240.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 1980.

came the target of Bevan's onslaughts. From the birth of the Coalition Cabinet in May 1940, until the summer of 1941, Bevan's program and criticisms were limited to the lack of war aims on the international scene. The attack on Russia by Hitler soon found him to be attracted by the "Second Front" agitation.

By this early time, Bevan had already achieved a new position and a new stature. Churchill himself found him to be a worthy opponent. In November 1940, speaking on a motion made by Bevan, the Prime Minister said:

My hon. Friend who so ably represents the constituency of Ebow Vale was speaking in his most dulcet tones today and expressed to the utmost the seductive arts in which he is efficient, and it is not without regret that I find myself compelled to disappoint his hopes and reject his proposal.<sup>23</sup>

Bevan spoke so often during this period that a Conservative M.P. remarked that, "the hon. Gentleman has been getting up like a jumping jack."<sup>24</sup> At this time Bevan not only spoke often but took on all comers. A humorous example of this is the way he handled the Communist M. P. Gallacher. Gallacher had been interrupting Bevan on some point of disagreement, when Bevan countered as follows:

*Bevan:* My hon. Friend has no experience in the matter. For years he has been engaged in political propaganda and his experience in industrial matters is negligible.

*Gallacher:* *Rose.*

*Bevan:* I will not give way again.

*Gallacher:* The hon. Member said that I have no experience in trade union problems.<sup>25</sup>

*Chair:* Order.

For Gallacher, the old Communist

23 367 H.C. Deb., p. 104.

24 365 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 345.

25 364 H.C., 5s, pp. 655-6.

"proletarian," to be told that he had no trade union experience was a crowning insult. It must have left him sputtering. On other occasions, Bevan spoke in a fashion that bordered on the arrogant. After some strong comment on the Labor Party by a Tory Minister, he adopted the following threatening manner, a manner which would be patently ridiculous unless he had a reputation and a capability to give it meaning:

When I decided to speak today, I was going to address myself in a most temperate fashion to the amendment, but I am bound to warn my right hon. Friend and his Friends that I have some capacity for invective, and that if they are going to use language of that sort, I shall begin to examine their speeches with a microscope.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of 1941, Bevan's attack on Churchill's subordinates reached a climax. They culminated in a demand for an extensive purge of the cabinet. He poured forth the following challenge in October, 1941:

I believe it is time to throw out of office all those jaded tired Ministers who have been associated with disastrous policies. I am convinced this is the desire of the country. . . . I am convinced that the last few weeks have shown that there exists in this country inexhaustible reservoirs of talent and energy if the Government could only tap them, but the Government cannot do it. It is suffering from nostalgia, inertia, and self-pity. If you cannot do the job, get out. The country demands the change, and it is the duty of the House to see that the will of the country is made known to the Government.

This attack on the Conservative members of the War Cabinet under Churchill was a prelude to attacks on the Prime Minister himself. Just as Bevan proceeded from general criticisms to attacks on the personnel of the cabinet, so he proceeded from the

subordinates to the leader. The *Tribune* had by this time already begun to make the same type of criticisms of the Churchill regime as had been made of the Chamberlain Government earlier.

In a signed article in the *Tribune*, Bevan wrote, "Mr. Churchill may say we have not the tanks, we have not the guns, we have not the equipment which would enable us to equip a great continental army. The British people will reply, 'Why not? You have been in power a year and a half.'"<sup>28</sup> An unsigned editorial in the previous issue had said, "Many people are beginning to feel that the Government is as much out of touch with the real feeling in the country as was the administration of Mr. Chamberlain."<sup>29</sup>

BY THE BEGINNING of 1942, the line of the *Tribune* had changed. A purge of the cabinet of the old "Munich" elements was no longer the answer. These "evil" subordinates were no longer the main source of trouble, they were only symptomatic of a more fundamental infection. The problem was the Tory Party itself and even its leader Churchill. The Coalition is almost called into question. An editorial in the *Tribune* of January 30, 1942, opens by saying, "It would be an excellent thing for Mr. Churchill to make certain changes in his team, but it would be a profound mistake to suppose that from this alone any fundamental improvement would result."<sup>30</sup> The article then asks the question, "Why does he refuse to throw out the members of his Government who were associated with the bad old policy of Munich days?"<sup>31</sup> The an-

<sup>28</sup> Aneurin Bevan, "Russia and Ourselves," *Tribune*, August 19, 1941, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Tribune*, "Complacency Will Not Win The War," August 5, 1941, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Tribune*, "What Churchill Stands For," January 30, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

swer supplied by the *Tribune* is that it would offend the Tory Party. It then goes on to say:

But when Mr. Churchill was made Leader of the Conservative Party, he entered into a pact to preserve the Conservative Party, and to rescue it from the morass to which it had been plunged by the policies of Mr. Chamberlain.

Here is the heart of the trouble. This is no national Government and Churchill is no national leader. He struts in that guise, but in fact he insists that the war should be conducted in accordance with the principles of the Tory Party.<sup>32</sup>

This is not all for, according to the *Tribune*, dire consequences follow: "The plain fact is that the Tory Party and Churchill its Leader would prefer to risk losing the war than relax the grip of private profits on the life of the nation."<sup>33</sup> On the international arena, the *Tribune* finds the same situation in existence. Here, too, successful prosecution of the war is impeded by the fact that the country is under Conservative leadership.

The British Empire is finished. Nothing can save it. . . . If we based our central struggle on the recognition of this fact . . . we could shorten the war . . . but to do that we shall need a different spirit than the one which breathed through the speech of the last Imperial spokesman—Winston Churchill.<sup>34</sup>

The *Tribune* did not draw the seemingly obvious conclusion from this that "Churchill Must Go." On the contrary, this extreme attack was only the background for a much more "reasonable" proposal.

It is not suggested that the reconstruction of the Government necessarily involves the resignation of Mr. Churchill although that well might become necessary if reconstruction is delayed too long. The *Tribune* has never expressed confidence in the ability of a Tory Prime Minister to lead us to the kind of a victory

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

we believe in. But we are here concerned with the immediate future and the possibility of survival.

We, therefore, visualize a Government in which Mr. Churchill is still Prime Minister but not Minister of Defense at the same time.<sup>35</sup>

This was far from the end of the line, however. A few weeks later, the *Tribune* directed a full broadside against Churchill. In the March 6, 1942, issue, there appeared an article entitled "Why Churchill" with the following introductory explanation: "This is the first of a series of articles especially written for the *Tribune* by a brilliant and unusually informed writer."<sup>36</sup> The writer was Aneurin Bevan under the pseudonym of Thomas Rainsboro.<sup>37</sup> Many years later, another editor of the *Tribune* revealed that these articles were only published after a carefully thought out discussion in the editorial board.<sup>38</sup> In other words, they were a planned part of a political campaign.

The first article of the series is one of the most savage attacks on a major political figure ever penned in a responsible political journal. It is surely one of the most cruel written on Winston Churchill. Bevan opens by saying that there was something to be said favorably for Churchill's record, but that was more than amply repeated on the radio and in the press. He then proceeds to what was bad in Churchill's record. The analysis begins not with the date of Churchill's becoming Prime Minister but from the time that he joined the Chamberlain Cabinet as First Lord

<sup>35</sup> *Tribune*, "What Churchill Must Do," February 20, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Rainsboro, "Why Churchill," *Tribune*, March 6, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Colonel Rainsboro, the leveller leader during the Cromwellian Revolution was quoted by Bevan in one of his speeches in the House of Commons as a precursor of modern democratic ideas.

<sup>38</sup> *Tribune*, "And Now We Are Ten," January 31, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> 368 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 1599.

<sup>27</sup> 374 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 1981.

of the Admiralty on August 3, 1939.<sup>39</sup> Bevan was particularly brutal concerning the period that Churchill was in the Chamberlain Government. He wrote:

I make these charges: (1) That it was Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who by his wireless orders sent the British warships on a fool's errand to the north while the German warships forced the South Norway fjords. (2) It was Churchill who held back the British Army from breaking into Trondheim while there was still time to get at the newly landed Germans. No wonder that Churchill, on the dramatic Norway debate which killed Chamberlain and made himself king, defended the British Government with all his fire and skill. . . . This chief constable does not want too many investigations for he is conscious of whose finger prints might be discovered. . . . Mr. Churchill, as well as the rest of us, learned a lesson from Gallipoli, no inquiries!<sup>40</sup>

He then proceeded to implicate Churchill in the military blunders in Flanders and continued, "Am I making plain why Churchill on succeeding Chamberlain said magnanimously 'No recriminations' against the guilty men and included so many in his cabinet?"<sup>41</sup> He points out, moreover, that the French generals and politicians who were implicated in those military blunders were court-martialed. One could infer that he was calling Churchill criminally negligent and a victim of blackmail by his colleagues.

Bevan finally gives Churchill some credit as he concludes but only in order to question his value further:

The man was great in our hour of defeat. If none of his present lackeys will write that on his tomb, I will take time off to do it.

I say now that we cannot fight a war for a world on grateful memories . . . but I concede him his ancient glories. I am concerned here, with millions of my fel-

low citizens, with the man's capacity to carry the war forward.<sup>42</sup>

That much of this article was not in good taste and invited criticism on that score goes without saying. If we contrast it with Bevan's earlier criticisms of Churchill, we find a remarkable change from careful respect to brutal assault. Only six months before the article with which we have been dealing, he made his criticisms in the following fashion:

I yield to no one in my personal admiration of the Prime Minister's qualities, and I came to the House today under a greater sense of anticipation than was satisfied by the speech that the Prime Minister made. He made a speech which was on his customary level of oratory and the end of the speech was undoubtedly an inspiration to flagging spirits everywhere, but if one examines the content, it was profoundly disappointing.<sup>43</sup>

The explanation for this shift in approach does not lie in the fact that one quotation was from a speech in the House of Commons and the others from the pages of a weekly newspaper with a left-wing subscription list. It lies rather in a shift in political opinion in the country during the passage of six months. The Churchill articles were written on the eve of the 1942 Labor Party Annual Conference. They were in a sense a weather balloon. According to the *Tribune*, they made up a very successful experiment. In discussing the series by Rainsboro five years later the *Tribune* editor wrote, "The lonely voice of the *Tribune* found a supreme echo. The Labour Movement had been silenced by the truce. It looked as though Labour would need years to regain its position after the war. Here, suddenly, came a voice that spoke in the accent of millions who had no spokesman."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> 365 H.C. Deb., 5s, p. 345.

<sup>44</sup> *Tribune*, "And Now We Are Ten," January 31, 1947, p. 2.

THE ANTI-CHURCHILL ARTICLES were a planned and calculated risk which the editorial board of the *Tribune* embarked upon as a means of taking a leading place in a political movement but vaguely organized against the political *status quo* in Britain during the war. It is in this context only that the character of these articles can be understood. By the spring of 1942, feelings of national unity had worn so thin and the demands for an end to the truce had grown so strong within the Labor Party, that Bevan was able to lead a fight not against the Coalition or for a change in the Government, but one with a more limited objective, the end of the electoral truce. Bevan was able to take the leading role in the fight because he had become the outstanding back bench critic of the Government in the House of Commons and because he had a group of other vocal and active people in the Labor Party grouped around him in one of two places. He had a group around him in Parliament and he had a group around the *Tribune* who were all leaders of one rank or another in local or regional Labor Parties.

The movement did not need a political party or even a nation-wide caucus to organize it. It was spontaneous in nature, but it did need leadership to express itself. Bevan and the *Tribune* supplied it. At the 1942 Party Conference in May of that year, Bevan led a long debate against the resolution of the Labor Party Executive asking for continuation of the electoral truce and was defeated by the very narrow margin of 1,275,000 to 1,209,000.<sup>45</sup> This means that Bevan carried the support of the majority of the Labor Party delegates and at least a good section of trade union support as well.

<sup>45</sup> Cole, *Labour Party*, p. 400.

However, the size of the vote against the resolution of the Executive must not lead to the impression that the opposition was so strong that the end of the truce was on the immediate horizon. The emphasis in the dispute had been put on the support of Liberal and Tory candidates by the Labor Party and it was to this that so large an opposition could be mustered.

The large numbers of insurgents at the 1942 Labor Party Conference did demonstrate that there was great discontent within the Labor Party and that there was opportunity and would be further opportunity for Bevan and his followers to intervene in the role of leaders. Early in 1943 a new situation arose which created a ground swell of opposition to the policies of the Government and to those of the Labor Party's leadership as well. The *Tribune* again intervened.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE HAD brought in a report on social services. The Conservative Party was against instituting any major section of the report, while the Labor Party was overwhelmingly for doing so. The leadership of the Labor Party feared that a fight to accomplish what their followers desired would endanger the coalition. Therefore they acquiesced and did not openly oppose the Government's action in by-passing the report. In January of 1943, the *Tribune* appraised the situation as follows:

The Parliamentary Labor Party seems to have seen the danger and is ready to do battle. But there is a division in their ranks for many owe their offices to the goodwill of the Leader of the Tories. In this way to some extent the Tories have a fifth column in the very center of the Labor Party.

The main hope for saving the Beveridge Report is to rouse the country. Meetings and conferences should be convened at once. The men and women in the

services should be allowed to take part in the agitation.<sup>46</sup>

From the above paragraph and others on this question one can deduce the attitude of the *Tribune* towards the coalition, the Labor Party leadership and the British political scene. It must be noted first that the *Tribune* opposes the idea that support to the war means a political truce is necessary. On the contrary, it feels that the differences between the Conservatives and Labor must be fought out not only in the House of Commons but in the country. The attitude that Labor's views must be suppressed for the interests of maintaining the coalition is denounced as capitulation to the Tories. The *Tribune* goes further and imputes baser motives such as love of office and not just incorrect policies to the Party leadership. In fact, a month later, Jennie Lee compared Herbert Morrison to Ramsay MacDonald.<sup>47</sup> In the same article she attacked the electoral truce. It must not be thought that the supporters of the *Tribune* proposed, therefore, the end of the coalition. On the contrary, they cautioned others in the Labor Movement against demanding such a course:

The dilemma for Labor is a painful one, for it involves the question of whether Labor should leave the National Government and go into political opposition. This I believe would be a mistake. . . . Nor is it an answer to say that Labor could do more good to the nation in opposition than in the Government. That may well be true, but we must face the fact that if the Labor Party left the Government at this juncture, it would have the appearance of disunity for the services with bad demoralizing effects.<sup>48</sup>

The lines were beginning to be

<sup>46</sup> *Tribune*, "Tories Kill Beveridge Bill," January 29, 1943, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Jennie Lee, "Labour, Guerilla or Mass Army," *Tribune*, February 26,

<sup>48</sup> *Tribune* "Labour Must Stay In The Government," March 3, 1943, p. 6.

drawn between the advocates of the coalition and the opponents. Bevan and the *Tribune* walked a tight rope between the two. They recognized with the opponents of the coalition that:

. . . if Labor is to collaborate in the National Government only on the condition that it drops its own program of social regeneration and helps to put across the plans of the vested interests, that not only spells death for the Labor Movement but reaction for the next decade. That is why I say that the crisis in the Labor Party continues, and it will persist as long as the fundamental question remains unresolved.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, Bevan agreed basically with the Party leadership that the coalition must be maintained. He offered to the opponents of the coalition a form of opposition but he also offered to the majority of the rank and file, who had no advanced political ideas but vague discontent, loyalty to national unity. He wrote that it was possible to continue the fight for Labor's needs and remain in the Government:

What has happened. We are told that the Labor Ministers fought inside the cabinet for the whole plan, but that the Tory Ministers insisted on the statement that was eventually made in the House of Commons. The Labor Ministers yielded. Suppose they had taken the other course.

Would the Tory Ministers have taken the responsibility for breaking the unity of the National Government over a plan which commands such universal support?<sup>50</sup>

The ground swell produced by the Government's action on the Beveridge Report led to a rank and file revolt in the Parliamentary Labor Party. The backbench members went solidly into the lobby against the Government and their own Ministers.<sup>51</sup> In this situa-

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Cole, *Labour Party*, p. 428.

tion, Bevan had need of a policy to counterpose to that of the leadership short of ending the coalition. The *Tribune* supplied one. In this same article under the sub-title, "What Can Be Done," the following course of action was offered:

In the first place, the Electoral Truce must be abandoned. Some way must be found to allow political opinion to register itself.

In the second place, the rank and file of the trade unions should make their voices heard in the ears of their leaders. Every branch meeting in the country should send in resolutions to their head officers demanding support to the Beveridge Plan.

Thirdly, the leaders of opinion in the Labor, Liberal and Communist Parties should begin to consider how best they can concert their forces so as to prevent the triumph of reactionary elements in the country.

If all these things are done, they will not win the victory now, but they will serve to hold the domestic enemy at bay until we have dealt with Hitler and we can then turn and give him our full and united attention.<sup>52</sup>

Thus the ideas of the "Popular Front" are again introduced, but in a different form and in a different context. The purpose here is not the formation of a "progressive Coalition Government," but rather a holding operation by "progressive forces" until the war is won.

In spite of the *Tribune's* attempts to limit the nature of the controversy within the confines of how to act in the coalition, the dispute was broadened. For the leadership, opposition to the electoral truce was identified with opposition to the coalition. For the Bevanites, the target became the continuation of the coalition after the war. Thus while Bevan agreed on the necessity of the coalition to defeat Hitler, he was concerned to a greater degree than the Party leadership with

<sup>52</sup> *Tribune*, *loc. cit.* p. 7.

the opportunities for Labor to return to power at the earliest possible time. The arguments for the coalition were augmented with one that it was necessary not only to participate in winning the war but in laying the plans and the program of the peace. This argument seemed to the *Tribune* to reinforce its stand for opposition to the Electoral Truce. Just prior to the Party Conference of 1943, an article in the *Tribune* said:

One thing Labor people should be clear about. If the coalition is necessary for the preparation of these plans, it will be necessary equally for carrying them out. Therefore the Labor conference in supporting the Electoral Truce will be tying itself to a post-war coalition.<sup>53</sup>

This was followed by an open letter to the delegates to the 1943 Conference by Aneurin Bevan which laid down the gauntlet and committed the Bevanites to a continuous fight against the leadership which was to last until the end of the war. At this Conference, it had become clear to everyone that opposition to the Truce had far-reaching implications. The delegates were not ready for these implications and therefore voted to sustain the Truce, by a far greater vote than the previous year. The open letter shows an awareness of this on Bevan's part. He says, "It is the deadly conviction that nothing I say will alter your conduct."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Bevan wrote his "Open Letter," the main point of which was that Labor must prepare at once for an inevitable split with the Tories and a struggle to assume power after the war. He said that he was in basic agreement with the bureaucracy's programmatic document, "The Labor Party And The Future,"

<sup>53</sup> *Tribune*, "The Way Out of Labour's Dilemma," May 5, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Aneurin Bevan, "To Any Labour Delegate," *Tribune*, June 11, 1943, p. 6.

but he maintained that the Party leadership offered no means of carrying out the program. This he attributed to the fact that the leadership was "mouthing Socialist phrases in which they no longer believe because it is necessary to do so in order to persuade you into continuing to give them confidence."<sup>55</sup>

He criticized the delegates too for believing that they could wait until the end of the war to renew political opposition to the Tories. He proposed the following course of action as a means of solving Labor's dilemma.

What should we do now? Leave the Government? Of course not. That would be open to the gravest misunderstanding in the country. What we should do is to make it clear that after the war, we are going to regain our independence. In the meantime, we should recover our liberty to fight by-elections.

Having made our position clear, we should take our stand on some principle of fundamental importance and if necessary leave the Government on it. Anything less vigorous will not give us back the initiative we have lost.<sup>56</sup>

The vote against the Electoral Truce in 1942 was over a million. In 1943 it was reduced to 347,000,<sup>57</sup> but the opposition to a post-war coalition was so strong that the speakers for the majority position were forced to disclaim the possibility of a coupon election at the end of the war. One of the speakers said, "There is not the slightest truth in the rumor that any leader has said that the Electoral Truce will continue after the war." Thus while Bevan failed to extend his success in leading a movement against the Electoral Truce, he propelled himself into the leadership of a far more important project. This new project reflected the

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Cole, *Labour Party*, p. 402.

desires and fears of the rank and file more than had any group of insurgents in the history of the Party. It consisted of the pressure exerted to insure Labor's independence from the Tories as soon as the war was over. It was the demand for preparation for a post-war election and a victorious Labor campaign.

The *Tribune* kept up the campaign against the Truce. Bevan himself signed an article outlining a plan to beat the Tories which included a plank to break the Truce, but the emphasis now was put more and more on post war plans.<sup>58</sup> Even after the Party leadership insisted that they were against a post-war coalition, the *Tribune* continued to attack them.

We make progress. The leaders of Labor have now decided that the Labor Party is to leave the coalition immediately the war is over in Europe. Only a short time ago, the more prominent of the Labor Ministers were openly declaring for a post-war Coalition Government. If they have abandoned their position, it is a greater tribute to their prudence now than to their sagacity then. . . .

They have been educated by those they reviled. . . .

We welcome this decision to have done with the coalition. We now want to know what they propose in its place.<sup>59</sup>

It must be understood that Bevan was always speaking of ending the coalition after the defeat of Hitler and not before. When the Government was beaten on an issue early in 1943 by one vote, he wrote that they would be irresponsible to go to the country.<sup>60</sup> What the Bevanites did call for was a more aggressive policy by the Labor leadership within the coalition.

Although the new insurgent movement did not hold impressive mass meetings all over the country in the

<sup>58</sup> *Tribune*, "A Labor Plan to Beat the Tories," February 11, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Tribune*, March 3, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Tribune*, "Limits of Coalition," March 3, 1944.

manner of the earlier "Popular Front" campaign, the left-wing had by this time been reestablished, and in many respects it was much stronger than the earlier insurgency. Bevan had moved into Cripps' place as the outstanding figure of the amorphous left. If he did not have Cripps' national reputation and standing, he was at the head of a movement that was more representative of the desires and aspirations of the Labor rank and file and of large masses of people in Great Britain. It is because of this proximity to the political feelings of the masses that Bevan was able to withstand an attempt to expel him from the Labor Party. Bevan withstood this attempt whereas a similar move against not only him but Cripps as well had succeeded in 1939.

IN THE SPRING OF 1944, there occurred the greatest manifestation of class struggle eruption in Great Britain during the war, a major coal strike. The reaction of the Government was to pass an anti-strike bill. The particular target of the legislation was a number of people identified with the small Trotskyist organization. The face of the Government, in this case, was not the Tories but the Laborites, particularly Ernest Bevin. The *Tribune* entered the fray and attacked Bevin and defended the strikers and the indicted "Trotskyites" in an article entitled "Bogy-Man Politics."<sup>61</sup> This was followed by articles attacking the anti-strike legislation and the trade union bureaucracy.<sup>62</sup> Although Bevan had enraged the trade union leaders before with general political criticisms, this attack on a particular piece of legislation in seeming violation of the discipline of the Parliamentary

<sup>61</sup> *Tribune*, "Bogy-Man Politics," April 7, 1944, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> *Tribune*, "Five Years Jail," April 21, 1944, p. 1;

"Transport House in the Jungle," April 28, 1944, p. 9.

Party was the last straw. On the recommendation of the National Council of Labor, Bevan was brought up on charges for expulsion from the Labor Party. The *Tribune* presented the following motivation for the expulsion attempt:

Behind the attempt to expel Aneurin Bevan from the Labor Party lies a greater motive than personal Ministerial pique . . . the real issue is more profound. . . . It is the issue of whether the Labor Movement is to . . . reorganize itself as the chief army in the march toward Socialism or whether it is to see its role in the political field as the subordinate in the coalition and in the industrial field as a secondary partner to the employers.<sup>63</sup>

According to the *Tribune*, in addition to the above, the issues were the strike regulations and a "move to demoralize the thrust to a left coalition to replace the right coalition."<sup>64</sup> The vote on the expulsion recommendation was taken in the Parliamentary Party. It was lost on a count of 71 to 60.<sup>65</sup> The setback to the bureaucracy was an indication of the strength of the new insurgency. Many MPs had voted against the leadership who had never been associated with the insurgents except on the issue of the Beveridge Report. It is true that the sentiment against the anti-strike regulations was very powerful,<sup>69</sup> but there was another barometer to measure the rising strength of "Bevanism." In May 1944, the *Tribune* already predicted the election of Bevan to the Executive of the Labor Party; "Aneurin Bevan it was said was certain to be elected to the National Executive of

<sup>63</sup> *Tribune*, May 5, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Tribune*, "Tories Fail to Split Labor," May 12, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> The *Tribune*, March 12, 1944, p. 3, carried an excerpt from the Eighth Army newspaper in Italy which showed that even among the soldiers there was strong opposition to the anti-strike regulations. The army paper is reported as saying, "The right to strike is one of the freedoms we are fighting for." and it further reports a rejection of a resolution in support of making strikes illegal.

the Labor Party. Others might also be carried in on the incoming tide of the left."<sup>67</sup>

Thus by the middle of 1944, Bevan and the *Tribune* had arrived. The left-wing had made its comeback, and it maintained the initiative within the Labor Party until the end of the war. Although the amorphous left was still not an organized force, it was no longer atomized. It was, moreover, no longer demoralized although it remained confused on a number of important questions. Among these were the nature of the Soviet Union, what vehicle was to be used to bring Labor to power, and foreign affairs.

This chapter has dealt with the development of a new insurgency in the Labor Party during the war and that of Aneurin Bevan in becoming its leading figure. This insurgency arose in part out of the ashes of an earlier defunct movement, but more fundamentally out of the disintegration of

a national unity which could not stand the strains of the different interests of Labor and the Tories. A corollary to this was the aspirations of a large segment of the British people for a "new world" after the war.

Bevan and the *Tribune* group had stepped into a vacuum on the national political scene by performing the functions of an opposition in the House of Commons. This function was denied to the major parties because they were tied to the Government. Yet such a function was not only traditional but necessary for the kind of political system that exists in Great Britain. The Bevanites not only played the role of the opposition in the House of Commons but performed this task while remaining a loyal part of the Labor Party whose leadership was in the cabinet. In this way they became the rallying center for most elements in the Party who looked for a new role for the Party.

Donald SLAIMAN

<sup>67</sup> *Tribune*, March 14, 1944, p. 3.

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