

Trotsky and the Far East Crisis

by Herbert Zam

The feature in the current issue of *Liberty* is an article by Leon Trotsky (reading time: 11 min. 5 sec.) in which, in discussing the Japanese seizure of Manchuria and its relation to the Soviet Union, he comes to the conclusion that the danger of war upon the Soviet Union comes from Germany! In characteristic Trotsky fashion, this article contains a few undisputable truths and a good many serious errors. The fact that Trotsky is wrong in his analysis and prophecies regarding important events is of course nothing new, but the article deserves consideration in view of the extreme importance of the questions discussed, and in view of the danger of permitting any errors in analyzing them and drawing practical conclusions.

The Analysis of Japanese Imperialism
Trotsky's first serious error deals with the analysis of the condition of Japanese imperialism. He compares it, on the one hand, with the internal situation in Russia in 1905 and, on the other, with the internal situation in Spain during the Moroccan adventure. Nothing can be further from the truth! Japanese imperialism is in an extremely unstable position, but this instability is not due to the struggle between the feudal and the capitalist forces. It is due primarily to the fact that the material base for imperialism within Japan is extremely narrow. Japan is compelled to develop a base for its imperialism outside its own boundaries. Korea, Formosa and other territories having proved inadequate for this purpose,

new adventures must be embarked on, of which Manchuria is the present center.

One phase of Moroccan analogy holds—namely the possible development of revolutionary sentiment at home. But here again, the analogy is limited. In Spain, the result of this revolutionary sentiment was the break with the feudal remnants and the setting up of a bourgeois republican regime. This cannot be repeated in Japan. Japan is a bourgeois democracy with strong feudal forces. Revolutionary developments can take place, but only on a proletarian basis. Trotsky's belief that "as a contemporary nation Japan can only ultimately take form on a new and democratic basis" as well as his belief that "Manchuria may well become for the Japanese monarchy what Morocco was for the Spanish monarchy" indicate that he conceives the bourgeois-democratic revolution as the next phase of development in Japan, and that therefore the present Japanese government is the "government of a pre-revolutionary epoch"—all that is missing is the "constituent assembly" to complete the picture! And this is the picture of "left", "revolutionary" internationalism. In India—a proletarian revolution; in Japan—a bourgeois-democratic one! Many are the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, particularly the agrarian revolution, to be solved but this will be done by the proletarian revolution. In this respect the Japanese situation is more analogous to the Russia of 1917 than to the Russia of 1905—of course, as far as the stage

of development is concerned and not the degree of ripeness of the revolutionary situation.

The Anti-Soviet War Danger

The second serious error consists in the complete underestimation of the danger of a war against the Soviet Union as a result of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Trotsky sees no serious danger of such an eventuality, not only because the Soviet Union is opposed to a war and will do everything to avoid it (of that there can be no doubt and there is no dispute) but also because there is very little likelihood of Japan attacking the Soviet Union. Trotsky declares:

"Japan will only weaken herself with her Manchurian undertaking. The conditions in the Far East are such that there is no reason to fear from that direction an immediate, or even a somewhat remote, danger to the vital centers of the Soviet Union, including of course, her Asiatic centers." (Emphasis mine—H.Z.)

What sublime faith in the peacefulness of Japanese imperialism disguised with flowery analysis. Even if Trotsky had not read General Honjo's circular to his officers in which he outlined the plans for an attack on the Soviet Union (General Honjo is still commander of the Japanese troops in Manchuria, in spite of Comrade Trotsky), Japan's plans and intentions are clear even to a child. Here for example is a dispatch from Shanghai printed in the *New York Times* of February 23, 1932:

"The unexpected opposition which Japan has met at Shanghai is believed to have hampered seriously her plans for a further expansion to the north on the Asiatic mainland and Sakhalin Island. Well-informed foreign diplomatic circles take at its face value the recent Japanese admission that the Manchurian move was not aimed against China but was rather the first step in a 'defensive expansion' against the dreaded Russo-Japanese conflict.

"In many quarters it was expected that early Spring would witness a forcible Japanese occupation of the Russian half of Sakhalin, as well as an attempt to occupy Primorsk. It is now revealed that the Russians apprehended such a move, for there has been a steady, unostentatious movement of Russian women and children from Vladivostok toward the Siberian interior." (Emphasis mine—H.Z.)

Of course it is only a bourgeois journalist writing, but if he errs it is certainly not on the side of the Soviet Union.

Practical Conclusions

The practical conclusions of Trotsky are very interesting. There is no need for the Soviet Union to prepare for a possible attack by Japan! "It," he says, "has not the slightest reason for haste." With this no revolutionist, no worker sympathetic to the Soviet Union, can agree. It is absolutely essential for the Soviet Union to make all necessary preparations to defend itself in case of an attack, even if such an attack does not come immediately. For the developments in the camp of imperialism are pointing more and more in that direction.

And the Other Imperialist Powers?

The third serious error of Comrade Trotsky lies in his complete failure to see any other imperialist power involved in the present events in China. How can any one fail to see that the present events in China are a further chapter in the partition of China among the imperialist powers, which means fiercer flaming of the imperialist antagonisms. It is true that Trotsky wrote his article before the Shanghai events, but this would hold true nonetheless, even if the Shanghai events had not taken place. As early as November, the writer of this article pointed out in a lecture at the New Workers School Forum that the Japanese invasion of Manchuria indicated a sharpening of the imperialist rivalries. Japan no longer felt satisfied with a "sphere of influence" in which it might have to make concessions to rivals. It preferred to make of Manchuria a second Korea. The events in Shanghai have absolutely confirmed this. For precisely this reason the Manchurian invasion was a swift triumph, while the Shanghai occupation has become a fiasco for Japanese imperialism. The longer this situation lasts, the sharper will the antagonisms among the imperialists become, with a war in the Pacific (outside of the attack on the Soviet Union) as a not unlikely outcome. Already the powers are maneuvering for position and casting about for allies. Important realignments are taking place. That these specific realignments are only temporary is true, but that they are important cannot be denied, nor that they are replete with the danger of further wars.

The defeat of the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 laid the basis for new inroads by the imperialists into China and the subsequent sharpening of their rivalries. The revival of the Chinese revolution will very likely see a united front of the imperialists against the Chinese revolution, but also, in view of the developments already discussed, against the Soviet Union. In any case it is incumbent upon the Soviet Union to stand on guard, and not be lulled by "calm" advice of the kind our friend Trotsky is handing out thru the columns of *Liberty*. Perhaps a closer investigation will disclose that the Trotsky Thermidor theory (In the present article he declares: "Of course the Soviet revolution is far from being completed!") and the Trotsky theory of Japan's peacefulness are not entirely unrelated.

For A United Front Of Labor

TRUTH ABOUT THE MARINE DEFENSE

Statement Of The Marine Defense Committee

(Continued from last issue)

The Attempt to Disrupt the Legal Defense on Eve of Trial

Rejecting all appeals to help in the organization of the workers solidarity movement, the I. L. D. resorted to an insidious campaign, thru its lawyers, to demoralize the prisoners and induce them to change counsel at the last moment. Taking advantage of statements of the prisoners that they wanted the help of the I.L.D. as well as that of all other organizations—which was likewise the policy of the committee—the I. L. D. lawyers tried by every means to induce the prisoners to sign a statement repudiating their defense committee and the legal counsel employed by it and to turn the case over to them.

When the nature and seriousness of the charges against the marine workers is taken into consideration—charges of having committed specific crimes which carry a penalty on conviction of as much as forty years in prison, with an agent provocator and perjured evidence to combat which requires the most thoro and skillful legal preparation—one must be appalled at such a criminal maneuver. To propose the discharge of able counsel, thoroly familiar with the case and prepared by weeks of patient work to conduct the trial, and substitute new lawyers whose specialty is minor cases in the Magistrates Court—is that not playing with the lives of men? Is it any wonder that the prisoners, who would be glad to have their help if it were given in good faith, recoiled against this infamous proposal with the bitterest indignation and refused to talk with them any further?

It was in answer to these machinations that all three defendants sent their telegram to the mass meeting and declared: "We reaffirm our fullest and unswerving confidence in the committee handling our defense and appeal to all workers everywhere to give the committee its fullest cooperation and assistance." On the basis of that express declaration of the prisoners themselves, which is only a restatement of what they have said on every occasion when the matter was called into question, the defense committee resolves to continue its work and calls on the I. L. D. to cease its disruption.

The Fraudulent Issue of "Class Struggle Defense"

Condemned by their own record in the case from its inception, their dishonest maneuver repulsed by the prisoners, and their own rank and file members protesting against their pol-

icy—the disrupters seek to justify themselves with a final argument. They want "all workers and workers organization to fight this case along class lines, along the lines of mass defense." This argument against the Defense Committee is just as false, just as dishonest, as all they have said and done in the case. The Defense Committee has worked from the beginning to convince the workers that this case is an issue of the class struggle, and by no means an ordinary criminal case. Its chief activity has been to organize the united front of labor to protest against the frame-up and defeat it. It was for this aim that the cooperation of the I. L. D. was requested in written form three different times. But instead of co-operation to build a united mass movement of the workers the I. L. D. offered unqualified lawyers to replace the counsel already retained. At the eleventh hour they promise a workers mass movement, and begin with an attempt to disrupt the movement that has already been organized while they kept silent. Their own statement in the *Daily Worker* testifies to the effectiveness of this movement. When they say in this statement that the "International Labor Defense considers this case as a direct attack upon the workers in the marine industry" they are only repeating what they learned from the publicity material of the Defense Committee. *What they have yet to learn is that all workers have a common interest in repulsing the attack and that they must fight unitedly to that end.*

The Defense Committee appeals to the honest workers of all sections of the labor movement to join and support this united fight and condemn the attempts to disrupt it. If Soderberg, Bunker and Trajer do not stand alone before the court as they stood in the first days of their arrest, this is due to the principle of labor solidarity which called the Defense Committee into existence. Labor solidarity is the best, and—in the final analysis—the only real defense of persecuted workers who fall into the hands of the class enemy. Those who violate this principle, who put narrow factional interests above it, who seek to disrupt the movement organized on that basis, are acting against the interests of the class. A defeat of these disrupters will be a victory for the class and for all class war prisoners, now and in the future.

Build a stronger movement of workers' solidarity for the imprisoned marine workers!

Defend all class war prisoners regardless of their views or affiliations!

Collect funds to help the defense of Soderberg, Bunker and Trajer!
Marine Workers Defense Committee
82 E. 10 St., New York City

FREDERICK DOUGLASS INTERRACIAL FORUM

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bleak. Interest payments will likewise fall because of heavy defaults on foreign issues and bad realty investments. The foreign situation continues complicated with the gold outflow continuing, the Bank of France gold holdings now being only \$37 million less than the Federal Reserve's. Germany's dwindling export surplus is endangering the Mark, especially in light of German industries working at about only 30% capacity today. There is increasing talk of inflation policies in Germany.