THE NEW INTERNATIONAL
A Monthly Organ of Revolutionary Marxism

March 1940

LEON TROTSKY

Two Articles:

2. From a Scratch—To the Danger of Gangrene.

MAX SHACHTMAN

The Crisis in the American Party
(An Open Letter in Reply to Comrade Leon Trotsky)

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At Home

Again this month we have reason to be deeply grateful to the loyal Fourth Internationals of South Africa. Their more than generous contributions tipped the scales favorably and assured publication of a 32-page magazine for the month of March. The bulk of these remittances came from Capetown. While we do not feel it wise to mention the names of the comrades concerned, we want to assure them through this column of our heartfelt thanks.

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We regret the totally unintentional slight to Philadelphia, last month, which should have been commended for performing the all too rare feat of clearing up a large outstanding bill. Thank you, comrades. You help vindicate the American Section of the charge of failure to give full support to our theoretical organ. To Lois Lowell, Philadelphia's conscientious literature agent, who is now undergoing an operation, our appreciation for a job well done and our hopes for a speedy recovery.

• • •

W. P., Syracuse, of the February issue: “Glad to see 32 pages again”. G. C., of St. Paul: “I don't believe we ever got out a better issue. We have sent out our entire order to local Stalinists and neo-Stalinists”. John Boulds, of Plentywood, Montana: “The whole N. I. is good”. Joe B., Baltimore, Maryland: “The popularity of the New International seems to be increasing here. Please send us more copies!”

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The February issue, as G. C. indicated, is of particular interest to Stalinist workers, as irrefutable evidence of the unswerving loyalty of Trotskyists to the Soviet Union. There is still a limited supply of the February issue on hand, and we shall be glad to mail sample copies out free to all your Stalinist contacts, if you send us their names and addresses.

There has been an increase of reader interest in the magazine, and yet subscription orders have dropped sharply, because of obvious slackening of branch work in this direction.

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116 University Pl.
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A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party

IT IS NECESSARY to call things by their right names. Now that the positions of both factions in the struggle have become determined with complete clearness, it must be said that the minority of the National Committee are leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency. Like any petty-bourgeois group inside the socialist movement, the present opposition is characterized by the following features: a disdainful attitude towards theory and an inclination towards eclecticism; disrespect for the tradition of their own organization; anxiety for personal "independence" at the expense of anxiety for objective truth; nervousness instead of consistency; readiness to jump from one position to another: lack of understanding of revolutionary centralism and hostility toward it; and finally, inclination to substitute clique ties and personal relationships for party discipline. Not all the members of the opposition of course manifest these features with identical strength. Nevertheless, as always in a variegated bloc the tinge is given by those who are most distant from Marxism and proletarian policy. A prolonged and serious struggle is obviously before us. I make no attempt to exhaust the problem in this article, but I will endeavor to outline its general features.

Theoretical Skepticism and Eclecticism

In the January 1939 issue of the New International a long article was published by Comrades Burnham and Shachtman, "Intellectuals in Retreat." The article, while containing many correct ideas and apt political characterizations, was marred by a fundamental defect if not flaw. While polemising against opponents who consider themselves—without sufficient reason—above all as proponents of "theory," the article deliberately did not elevate the problem to a theoretical height. It was absolutely necessary to explain why the American "radical" intellectuals accept Marxism without the dialectic (a clock without a spring). The secret is simple. In no other country has there been such rejection of the class struggle as in the land of "unlimited opportunity." The denial of social contradictions as the moving force of development led to the denial of the dialectic as the logic of contradictions in the domain of theoretical thought. Just as in the sphere of politics it was thought possible everybody could be convinced of the correctness of a "just" program by means of clever syllogisms and society could be reconstructed through "rational" measures, so in the sphere of theory it was accepted as proved that Aristotelian logic, lowered to the level of "common sense" was sufficient for the solution of all questions.

Pragmatism, a mixture of rationalism and empiricism, became the national philosophy of the United States. The theoretical methodology of Max Eastman is not fundamentally different from the methodology of Henry Ford—both regard living society from the point of view of an "engineer" (Eastman—Platonically). Historically the present disdainful attitude toward the dialectic is explained simply by the fact that the grandparents and great-grandmothers of Max Eastman and others did not need the dialectic in order to conquer territory and enrich themselves. But times have changed and the philosophy of pragmatism has entered a period of bankruptcy just as has American capitalism.

The authors of the article did not show, could not and did not care to show, this internal connection between philosophy and the material development of society, and they frankly explained why.

"The two authors of the present article," they wrote of themselves, "differ thoroughly on their estimate of the general theory of dialectical materialism, one of them accepting it and the other rejecting it... There is nothing anomalous in such a situation. Though theory is doubtless always in one way or another related to practise, the relation is not invariably direct or immediate; and as we have before had occasion to remark, human beings often act inconsistently. From the point of view of each of the authors there is in the other a certain such inconsistency between 'philosophical theory' and political practise, which might on some occasion lead to decisive concrete political disagreement. But it does not now, nor has anyone yet demonstrated that agreement or disagreement on the more abstract doctrines of dialectical materialism necessarily affects today's and tomorrow's concrete political issues—and political parties, programs and struggles are based on such concrete issues. We all may hope that as we go along or when there is more leisure, agreement may also be reached on the more abstract questions. Meanwhile there is fascism and war and unemployment."

What is the meaning of this thoroughly astonishing reasoning? Inasmuch as some people through a bad method sometimes reach correct conclusions, and inasmuch as some people through a correct method not infrequently reach incorrect conclusions, therefore... the method is not of great importance. We shall meditate upon methods sometimes when we have more leisure, but now we have other things...
to do. Imagine how a worker would react upon complaining to his foreman that his tools were bad and receiving the reply: with bad tools it is possible to turn out a good job, and with good tools many people only waste material. I am afraid that such a worker, particularly if he is on piece-work, would respond to the foreman with an un-academic phrase. A worker is faced with refractory materials which show resistance and which because of that compel him to appreciate fine tools, whereas a petty-bourgeois intellectual — alas! — utilizes as his "tools" fugitive observations and superficial generalizations — until major events club him on the head.

To demand that every party member occupy himself with the philosophy of dialectics naturally would be lifeless pedantry. But a worker who has gone through the school of the class struggle gains from his own experience an inclination towards dialectical thinking. Even if unaware of this term, he readily accepts the method itself and its conclusions. With a petty-bourgeois it is worse. There are of course petty-bourgeois elements organically linked with the workers, who go over to the proletarian point of view without an internal revolution. But these constitute an insignificant minority. The matter is quite different with the academically trained petty-bourgeoisie. Their theoretical prejudices have already been given finished form at the school bench. Inasmuch as they succeeded in gaining a great deal of knowledge both useful and useless without the aid of the dialectic, they believe that they can continue excellently through life without it. In reality they dispense with the dialectic only to the extent they fail to check, to polish, and to sharpen theoretically their tools of thought, and to the extent that they fail to break practically from the narrow circle of their daily relationships. When thrown against great events they are easily lost and relapse again into petty-bourgeois ways of thinking.

Appealing to "inconsistency" as justification for an unprincipled theoretical bloc, signifies giving oneself bad credentials as a Marxist. Inconsistency is not accidental, and in politics it does not appear solely as an individual symptom. Inconsistency usually serves a social function. There are social groupings which cannot be consistent. Petty-bourgeois elements who have not rid themselves of hoary petty-bourgeois tendencies are systematically compelled within a workers’ party to make theoretical compromises with their own conscience.

Comrade Shachtman’s attitude toward the dialectic method, as manifested in the above-quoted argumentation, cannot be called anything but eclectical skepticism. It is clear that Shachtman became infected with this attitude not in the school of Marx but among the petty-bourgeois intellectuals to whom all forms of skepticism are proper.

**Warning and Verification**

The article astonished me to such an extent that I immediately wrote to Comrade Shachtman: "I have just read the article you and Burnham wrote on the intellectuals. Many parts are excellent. However, the section on the dialectic is the greatest blow that you, personally, as the editor of the *New International*, could have delivered to Marxist theory. Comrade Burnham says: 'I don't recognize the dialectic.' It is clear and everybody has to acknowledge it. But you say: 'I recognize the dialectic, but no matter; it does not have the slightest importance.' Re-read what you wrote. This section is terribly misleading for the readers of the *New International* and the best of gifts to the Eastmans of all kinds. Good! We will speak about it publicly."

My letter was written January 20, some months before the present discussion. Shachtman did not reply until March 5, when he answered in effect that he couldn't understand why I was making such a stir about the matter. On March 9 I answered Shachtman in the following words: "I did not reject in the slightest degree the possibility of collaboration with the anti-dialecticians, but only the advisability of writing an article together where the question of the dialectic plays, or should play, a very important role. The polemic develops on two planes: political and theoretical. Your political criticism is OK. Your theoretical criticism is insufficient; it stops at the point at which it should just become aggressive. Namely, the task consists of showing that their mistakes (insofar as they are *theoretical* mistakes) are products of their incapacity and unwillingness to think the things through dialectically. This task could be accomplished with a very serious pedagogical success. Instead of this you declare that dialectics is a private matter and that one can be a very good fellow without dialectic thinking." By allying himself in this question with the anti-dialectician Burnham, Shachtman deprived himself of the possibility of showing why Eastman, Hook and many others began with a philosophical struggle against the dialectic but finished with a political struggle against the socialist revolution. That is, however, the essence of the question.

The present political discussion in the party has confirmed my apprehensions and warning in an incomparably sharper form than I could have expected, or, more correctly, feared. Shachtman’s methodological skepticism bore its deplorable fruits in the question of the nature of the Soviet state. Burnham began some time ago by constructing purely empirically, on the basis of his immediate impressions, a non-proletarian and non-bourgeois state, liquidating in passing the Marxist theory of the state as the organ of class rule. Shachtman unexpectedly took an evasive position: "The question, you see, is subject to further consideration;" moreover, the sociological definition of the U.S.S.R. does not possess any direct and immediate significance for our "political tasks" in which Shachtman agrees completely with Burnham. Let the reader again refer to what these comrades wrote concerning the dialectic. Burnham rejects the dialectic. Shachtman seems to accept, but . . . the divine gift of "inconsistency" permits them to meet on common political conclusions. The attitude of each of them towards the nature of the Soviet state reproduces point for point their attitude towards the dialectic.

In both cases Burnham takes the leading role. This is not surprising: he possesses a method — pragmatism. Shachtman has no method. He adapts himself to Burnham. Without assuming complete responsibility for the anti-Marxian conceptions of Burnham, he defends his bloc of aggression against the Marxian conceptions with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy as well as in the sphere of sociology. In both cases Burnham appears as a pragmatist and Shachtman as an eclectical.
able advantage that the complete parallelism between Burnham’s and Shachtman’s positions upon two different planes of thought and upon two questions of primary importance, will strike the eyes even of comrades who have had no experience in purely theoretical thinking. The method of thought can be dialectic or vulgar, conscious or unconscious, but it exists and makes itself known.

Last January we heard from our authors: “But it does not now, nor has anyone yet demonstrated that agreement on the more abstract doctrines of dialectical materialism necessarily affects today’s and tomorrow’s concrete political issues. . .” Nor has anyone yet demonstrated! Not more than a few months passed before Burnham and Shachtman themselves demonstrated that their attitude toward such an “abstraction” as dialectical materialism found its precise manifestation in their attitude toward the Soviet state.

To be sure it is necessary to mention that the difference between the two instances is rather important, but it is of a political and not a theoretical character. In both cases Burnham and Shachtman formed a bloc on the basis of rejection and semi-rejection of the dialectic. But in the first instance that bloc was directed against the opponents of the proletarian party. In the second instance the bloc was concluded against the Marxist wing of their own party. The front of military operations, so to speak, has changed but the weapon remains the same.

True enough, people are often inconsistent. Human consciousness nevertheless tends toward a certain homogeneity. Philosophy and logic are compelled to rely upon this homogeneity of human consciousness and not upon what this homogeneity lacks, that is, inconsistency. Burnham does not recognize the dialectic, but the dialectic recognizes Burnham, that is, extends its sway over him. Shachtman thinks that the dialectic has no importance in political conclusions, but in the political conclusions of Shachtman himself we see the deplorable fruits of his disdainful attitude toward the dialectic. We should include this example in the textbooks on dialectical materialism.

Last year I was visited by a young British professor of political economy, a sympathizer of the Fourth International. During our conversation on the ways and means of realizing socialism, he suddenly expressed the tendencies of British utilitarianism in the spirit of Keynes and others: “It is necessary to determine a clear economic end, to choose the most reasonable means for its realization,” etc. I remarked: “I see that you are an adversary of dialectics.” He replied, somewhat astonished: “Yes, I don’t see any use in it.” “However,” I replied to him, “the dialectic enabled me on the basis of a few of your observations upon economic problems to determine what category of philosophical thought you belong to—this alone shows that there is an appreciable value in the dialectic.” Although I have received no word about my visitor since then, I have no doubt that this anti-dialectic professor maintains the opinion that the U.S.S.R. is not a workers’ state, that unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R. is an “out-moded” opinion, that our organizational methods are bad, etc. If it is possible to place a given person’s general type of thought on the basis of his relation to concrete practical problems, it is also possible to predict approximately, knowing his general type of thought, how a given individual will approach one or another practical question. That is the incomparable educational value of the dialectical method of thought.

The ABC of Materialist Dialectics

Gangrenous skeptics like Souvarine believe that “nobody knows” what the dialectic is. And there are “Marxists” who kowtow reverently before Souvarine and hope to learn something from him. And these Marxists hide not only in the Modern Monthly. Unfortunately a current of Souvarism exists in the present opposition of the S.W.P. And here it is necessary to warn young comrades: beware of this malignant infection!

The dialectic is neither fiction nor mysticism, but a science of the forms of our thinking insofar as it is not limited to the daily problems of life but attempts to arrive at an understanding of more complicated and drawn-out processes. The dialectic and formal logic bear a relationship similar to that between higher and lower mathematics.

I will here attempt to sketch the substance of the problem in a very concise form. The Aristotelian logic of the simple syllogism starts from the proposition that “A” is equal to “A.” This postulate is accepted as an axiom for a multitude of practical human actions and elementary generalizations. But in reality “A” is not equal to “A.” This is easy to prove if we observe these two letters under a lens—they are quite different from each other. But, one can object, the question is not of the size or the form of the letters, since they are only symbols for equal quantities, for instance a pound of sugar. The objection is beside the point; in reality a pound of sugar is equal to a pound of sugar—a more delicate scale always discloses a difference. Again one can object: but a pound of sugar is equal to itself. Neither is this true—all bodies change uninterruptedly in size, weight, color, etc. They are never equal to themselves. A sophist will respond that a pound of sugar is equal to itself “at any given moment.” Aside from the extremely dubious practical value of this “axiom,” it does not withstand theoretical criticism either. How should we really conceive the word “moment”? If it is an infinitesimal interval of time, then a pound of sugar is subjected during the course of that “moment” to inevitable changes. Or is the “moment” a purely mathematical abstraction, that is, a zero of time? But everything exists in time; and existence itself is an uninterrupted process of transformation; time is consequently a fundamental element of existence. Thus the axiom that “A” is equal to “A” signifies that a thing is equal to itself if it does not change, that is, if it does not exist.

At first glance it could seem that these “subtleties” are useless. In reality they are of decisive significance. The axiom “A” is equal to “A,” appears on one hand to be the point of departure for all our knowledge, on the other hand the point of departure for all the errors in our knowledge. To make use of the axiom, “A” is equal to “A” with impunity is possible only within certain limits. When quantitative changes in “A” are negligible for the task at hand then we can presume that “A” is equal to “A.” This is, for example, the manner in which a buyer and a seller consider a pound of sugar. We consider the temperature of the sun likewise. Until recently we considered the buying power of the dollar in the same way. But quantitative changes beyond certain limits
become converted into qualitative. A pound of sugar subjected to the action of water or kerosene ceases to be a pound of sugar. A dollar in the embrace of a president ceases to be a dollar. To determine at the right moment the critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge including sociology.

Every worker knows that it is impossible to make two completely equal objects. In the elaboration of bearing-brass into cone bearings, a certain deviation is allowed for the cones which should not, however, go beyond certain limits (this is called tolerance). By observing the norms of tolerance, the cones are considered as being equal. ("A" is equal to "A"). When the tolerance is exceeded the quantity goes over into quality; in other words, the cone bearings become inferior or completely worthless.

Our scientific thinking is only a part of our general practice including techniques. For concepts there also exists "tolerance" which is established not by formal logic issuing from the axiom, "A" is equal to "A," but by dialectical logic issuing from the axiom that everything is always changing. "Common sense" is characterized by the fact that it systematically exceeds dialectical "tolerance."

Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers' state, etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals, etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which "A" ceases to be "A," a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state.

The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectic thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretizations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers' state in general but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc.

Dialectic thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism, but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality. Hegel in his Logic established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality, development through contradictions, conflict of content and form, interruption of continuity, change of possibility into inevitability, etc., which are just as important for theoretical thought as is the simple syllogism for more elementary tasks.

Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of science. But because it was only an anticipation, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies.

We call our dialectic materialist, since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depths of our "free will," but in objective reality, in nature. Consciousness grew out of the unconscious, psychology out of physiology, the organic world out of the inorganic, the solar system out of nebulae. On all the rungs of this ladder of development, the quantitative changes were transformed into qualitative. Our thought, including dialectical thought, is only one of the forms of the expression of changing matter. There is place within this system for neither God, nor Devil, nor immortal soul, nor eternal norms of laws and morals. The dialectic of thinking, having grown out of the dialectic of nature, possesses consequently a thoroughly materialist character.

Darwinism, which explained the evolution of species through quantitative transformations passing into qualitative, was the highest triumph of the dialectic in the whole field of organic matter. Another great triumph was the discovery of the table of atomic weights of chemical elements and further the transformation of one element into another.

With these transformations (species, elements, etc.) is closely linked the question of classification, equally important in the natural as in the social sciences. Linnaeus' system (18th century) utilizing as its starting point the immutability of species, was limited to the description and classification of plants according to their external characteristics. The infantile period of botany is analogous to the infantile period of logic, since the forms of our thought develop like everything that lives. Only decisive repudiation of the idea of fixed species, only the study of the history of the evolution of plants and their anatomy prepared the basis for a really scientific classification.

Marx, who in distinction from Darwin was a conscious dialectician, discovered a basis for the scientific classification of human societies in the development of their productive forces and the structure of the relations of ownership which constitute the anatomy of society. Marxism substituted for the vulgar descriptive classification of societies and states, which even up to now still flourishes in the universities, a materialistic dialectical classification. Only through using the method of Marx is it possible correctly to determine both the concept of a workers' state and the moment of its downfall.

All this as we see, contains nothing "metaphysical" or "scholastic," as conceived ignorance affirms. Dialectic logic expresses the laws of motion in contemporary scientific thought. The struggle against materialist dialectics on the contrary expresses a distant past, conservatism of the petty-bourgeoisie, the self-conceit of university routinists and... a spark of hope for an after-life.

**The Nature of the U.S.S.R.**

The definition of the U.S.S.R. given by Comrade Burnham, "not a workers' and not a bourgeois state," is purely negative, wrenched from the chain of historical development, left dangling in mid-air, void of a single particle of sociology and represents simply a theoretical capitulation of pragmatism before a contradictory historical phenomenon.

If Burnham were a dialectical materialist, he would have
probed the following three questions: (1) What is the historical origin of the U.S.S.R.? (2) What changes has this state suffered during its existence? (3) Did these changes pass from the quantitative stage to the qualitative? That is, did they create an historically necessary domination by a new exploiting class? Answering these questions would have forced Burnham to draw the only possible conclusion—the U.S.S.R. is still a degenerated workers’ state.

The dialectic is not a magic master key for all questions. It does not replace concrete scientific analysis. But it directs this analysis along the correct road, securing it against sterile wanderings in the desert of subjectivism and scholasticism.

Bruno R. places both the Soviet and fascist regimes under the category of “bureaucratic collectivism,” because the U.S.S.R., Italy, and Germany are all ruled by bureaucracies; here and there are the principles of planning; in one case private property is liquidated, in another limited, etc. Thus on the basis of the relative similarity of certain external characteristics of different origin, of different specific weight, of different class significance, a fundamental identity of social regimes is constructed, completely in the spirit of bourgeois professors who construct categories of “controlled economy,” “centralized state,” without taking into consideration whatsoever the class nature of one or the other. Bruno R. and his followers, or semi-followers like Burnham, at best remain in the sphere of social classification on the level of Linneaus in whose justification it should be remarked however that he lived before Hegel, Darwin, and Marx.

Even worse and more dangerous, perhaps, are those eclectics who express the idea that the class character of the Soviet state “does not matter,” and that the direction of our policy is determined by “the character of the war.” As if the war were an independent super-social substance; as if the character of the war were not determined by the character of the ruling class, that is, by the same social factor that also determines the character of the state. Astonishing how easily some comrades forget the ABC’s of Marxism under the blows of events!

It is not surprising that the theoreticians of the opposition who reject dialectic thought capitulate lamentably before the contradictory nature of the U.S.S.R. However the contradiction between the social basis laid down by the revolution, and the character of the caste which arose out of the degeneration of the revolution is not only an irreparable historical fact but also a motor force. In our struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucracy we base ourselves on this contradiction. Meanwhile some ultra-lefts have already reached the ultimate absurdity by affirming that it is necessary to sacrifice the social structure of the U.S.S.R. in order to overthrow the Bonapartist oligarchy! They have no suspicion that the U.S.S.R. minus the social structure founded by the October revolution would be a fascist regime.

Evolution and Dialectics

Comrade Burnham will probably protest that as an evolutionist he is interested in the development of society and state forms not less than we dialecticians. We will not dispute this. Every educated person since Darwin has labeled himself an “evolutionist.” But a real evolutionist must apply the idea of evolution to his own forms of thinking. Elementary logic, founded in the period when the idea of evolution itself did not yet exist, is evidently insufficient for the analysis of evolutionary processes. Hegel’s logic is the logic of evolution. Only one must not forget that the concept of “evolution” itself has been completely corrupted and emasculated by university professors and liberal writers to mean peaceful “progress.” Whoever has come to understand that evolution proceeds through the struggle of antagonistic forces; that a slow accumulation of changes at a certain moment explodes the old shell and brings about a catastrophe, revolution; whoever has learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself, he is a dialectician, as distinguished from vulgar evolutionists. Dialectic training of the mind, as necessary to a revolutionary fighter as finger exercises to a pianist, demands approaching all problems as processes and not as motionless categories. Whereas vulgar evolutionists, who limit themselves generally to recognizing evolution in only certain spheres, content themselves in all other questions with the banalities of “common sense.”

The American liberal, who has reconciled himself to the existence of the U.S.S.R., more precisely to the Moscow bureaucracy, believes, or at least believed until the Soviet-German pact, that the Soviet regime on the whole is a “progressive thing,” that the repugnant features of the bureaucracy (“well naturally they exist!”) will progressively slough away and that peaceful and painless “progress” is thus assured.

A vulgar petty-bourgeois radical is similar to a liberal “progressive” in that he takes the U.S.S.R. as a whole, failing to understand its internal contradictions and dynamics. When Stalin concluded an alliance with Hitler, invaded Poland, and now Finland, the vulgar radicals triumphed; the identity of the methods of Stalinism and fascism was proved! They found themselves in difficulties however when the new authorities invited the population to expropriate the landowners and capitalists—they had not foreseen this possibility at all! Meanwhile the social revolutionary measures, carried out via bureaucratic military means, not only did not disturb our, dialectic, definition of the U.S.S.R. as a degenerated workers’ state, but gave it the most incontrovertible corroboration. Instead of utilizing this triumph of Marxist analysis for persevering agitation, the petty-bourgeois oppositionists began to shout with criminal light-mindedness that the events have refuted our prognosis, that our old formulas are no longer applicable, that new words are necessary. What words? They haven’t decided yet themselves.

Defense of the U.S.S.R.

We began with philosophy and then went to sociology. It became clear that in both spheres, of the two leading personalities of the opposition, one had taken an anti-Marxian, the other an eclectic position. If we now consider politics, particularly the question of the defense of the U.S.S.R., we will find that just as great surprises await us.

The opposition discovered that our formula of “unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R.” the formula of our program, is “vague, abstract, and outmoded (!?).” Unfortunately they do not explain under what future “condi-
tions” they are ready to defend the conquests of the revolution. In order to give at least an ounce of sense to their new formula, the opposition attempts to represent the matter as if up to now we had “unconditionally” defended the international policy of the Kremlin government with its Red Army and G.P.U. Everything is turned upside down! In reality for a long time we have not defended the Kremlin’s international policy, not even conditionally, particularly since the time that we openly proclaimed the necessity of crushing the Kremlin oligarchy through insurrection! A wrong policy not only mutilates the current tasks but also compels one to represent his own past in a false light.

In the above-quoted article in the New International, Burnham and Shachtman cleverly labeled the group of disillusioned intellectuals “The League of Abandoned Hopes,” and persistently asked what would be the position of this deplorable League in case of military conflict between a capitalist country and the Soviet Union. “We take this occasion, therefore,” they wrote, “to demand from Hook, Eastman and Lyons unambiguous declarations on the question of defense of the Soviet Union from attack by Hitler or Japan—or for that matter by England. . . .” Burnham and Shachtman did not lay down any “conditions,” they did not specify any “concrete” circumstances, and at the same time they demanded an “unambiguous” reply. “. . . Would the League (of Abandoned Hopes) also refrain from taking a position or would it declare itself neutral?” they continued; “In a word, is it for the defense of the Soviet Union from imperialist attack, regardless and in spite of the Stalinist regime?” (My emphasis). A quotation to marvel at! And this is exactly what our program declares. Burnham and Shachtman in January 1939 stood in favor of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and defined the significance of unconditional defense entirely correctly as “regardless and in spite of the Stalinist regime.” And yet this article was written when the experience of the Spanish revolution had already been drained to completion. Comrade Cannon is absolutely right when he says that the role of Stalinism in Spain was incomparably more criminal than in Poland or Finland. In the first case the bureaucracy through hangman’s methods strangled a socialist revolution. In the second case it gives an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods. Why did Burnham and Shachtman themselves so unexpectedly shift to the position of the “League of Abandoned Hopes”? Why? We cannot consider Shachtman’s super-abstract references to the “concreteness of events” as an explanation. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find an explanation. The Kremlin’s participation in the Republican camp in Spain was supported by the bourgeois democrats all over the world. Stalin’s work in Poland and Finland is met with frantic condemnation from the same democrats. In spite of all its noisy formulas the opposition happens to be a reflection inside the Socialist Workers Party of the moods of the “left” petty-bourgeoisie. This fact unfortunately is incontrovertible.

“Our subjects,” wrote Burnham and Shachtman about the League of Abandoned Hopes, “take great pride in believing that they are contributing something ‘fresh’, that they are ‘re-evaluating in the light of new experiences’, that they are ‘not dogmatists’ (‘conservatives’?—L.T.) who refuse to re-examine their ‘basic assumption’, etc. What a pathetic self-deception! None of them has brought to light any new facts, given any new understanding of the present or future.” Astonishing quotation! Should we not add a new chapter to their article, “Intellectuals in Retreat”? I offer Comrade Shachtman my collaboration. . . .

How is it possible that outstanding individuals like Burnham and Shachtman, unconditionally devoted to the cause of the proletariat, could become so frightened of the not so frightening gentlemen of the League of Abandoned Hopes? On the purely theoretical plane the explanation in respect to Burnham rests in his incorrect method, in respect to Shachtman in his disregard for method. Correct method not only facilitates the attainment of a correct conclusion, but, connecting every new conclusion with the preceding conclusions in a consecutive chain, fixes the conclusions in one’s memory. If political conclusions are made empirically, if inconsistency is proclaimed as a kind of advantage, then the Marxist system of politics is invariably replaced by impressionism—in so many ways characteristic of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Every new turn of events catches the empiricist-impressionist unawares, compels him to forget what he himself wrote yesterday, and produces a consuming desire for new formulas before new ideas have appeared in his head.

**The Soviet-Finnish War**

The resolution of the opposition upon the question of the Soviet-Finnish war is a document which could be signed, perhaps with slight changes, by the Bordigists, Vereecken, Sneevliet, Fenner Brockway, Marcoux Pivert and the like, but in no case by Bolshevik-Leninists. Based exclusively on features of the Soviet bureaucracy and on the mere fact of the “invasion” the resolution is void of the slightest social content. It places Finland and the U.S.S.R. on the same level and unequivocally “condemns, rejects and opposes both governments and their armies.” Having noticed, however, that something was not in order, the resolution unexpectedly and without any connection with the text adds: “In the application (!) of this perspective, the Fourth International will, of course, (how marvelous is this “of course”) take into account (!) the differing economic relations in Finland and Russia.” Every word is a pearl. By “concrete” circumstances our lovers of the “concrete” mean the military situation, the moods of the masses and in the third place the opposed economic regimes. As to just how these three “concrete” circumstances will be “taken into account,” the resolution doesn’t give the slightest inkling. If the opposition opposes equally “both governments and their armies” in relation to this war, how will it “take into account” the differences in the military situation and the social regimes? Definitely nothing of this is comprehensible.

In order to punish the Stalinists for their unquestionable crimes, the resolution, following the petty-bourgeois democrats of all shadings, does not mention by so much as a word that the Red Army in Finland expropriates large landowners and introduces workers’ control while preparing for the expropriation of the capitalists.

Tomorrow the Stalinists will strangle the Finnish workers. But now they are giving—they are compelled to give—a tremendous impulse to the class struggle in its sharpest form. The leaders of the opposition construct their policy
not upon the “concrete” process that is taking place in Finland, but upon democratic abstractions and noble sentiments.

The Soviet-Finnish war is apparently beginning to be supplemented by a civil war in which the Red Army finds itself at the given stage in the same camp as the Finnish petty peasants and the workers, while the Finnish army enjoys the support of the owning classes, the conservative labor bureaucracy and the Anglo-Saxon imperialists. The hopes which the Red Army awakens among the Finnish poor will, unless international revolution intervenes, prove to be an illusion; the collaboration of the Red Army with the poor will only be temporary; the Kremlin will soon turn its weapons against the Finnish workers and peasants. We know all this now and we say it openly as a warning. But in this “concrete” civil war that is taking place on Finnish territory, what “concrete” position must the “concrete” partisans of the Fourth International take? If they fought in Spain in the Republican camp in spite of the fact that the Stalinists were strangling the socialist revolution, all the more must they participate in Finland in that camp where the Stalinists are compelled to support the expropriation of the capitalists.

Our innovators cover the holes in their position with violent phrases. They label the policy of the U.S.S.R. “imperialist.” Vast enrichment of the sciences! Beginning from now on both the foreign policy of finance-capital and the policy of exterminating finance-capital will be called imperialism. This will help significantly in the clarification and class education of the workers! But simultaneously—will shout the, let us say, very hasty Stanley—the Kremlin supports the policy of finance-capital in Germany! This objection is based on the substitution of one problem for another, in the dissolving of the concrete into the abstract (the usual mistake of vulgar thought).

If Hitler tomorrow were forced to send arms to the insurrectionary Indians, must the revolutionary German workers oppose this concrete action by strikes or sabotage? On the contrary they must make sure that the insurrectionists receive the arms as soon as possible. We hope that this is clear to Stanley. But this example is purely hypothetical. We used it in order to show that even a fascist government of finance-capital can under certain conditions be forced to support a national revolutionary movement (in order to attempt to strangle it the next day). Hitler would never under any circumstances support a proletarian revolution for instance in France. As for the Kremlin it is at the present time forced—and this is not a hypothetical but a real situation—to provoke a social revolutionary movement in Finland (in order to attempt to strangle it politically tomorrow). To cover a given social revolutionary movement with the all-embracing term of imperialism only because it is provoked, mutilated, and at the same time strangled by the Kremlin merely testifies to one’s theoretical and political poverty.

It is necessary to add that the stretching of the concept of “imperialism” lacks even the attraction of novelty. At present not only the “democrats” but also the bourgeoisie of the democratic countries describe Soviet policy as imperialist. The aim of the bourgeoisie is transparent—to erase the social contradictions between capitalistic and soviet expansion, to hide the problem of property, and in this way to help genuine imperialism. What is the aim of Shachtman and the others? They don’t know themselves. Their terminological novelty objectively leads them away from the Marxian terminology of the Fourth International and brings them close to the terminology of the “democrats.” This circumstance, alas, again testifies to the opposition’s extreme sensitivity to the pressure of petty-bourgeois public opinion.

“The Organizational Question”

From the ranks of the opposition one begins to hear more frequently: “The Russian question isn’t of any decisive importance in and of itself; the most important task is to change the party regime.” Change in regime, it is necessary to understand, means a change in leadership, or more precisely, the elimination of Cannon and his close collaborators from directing posts. These clamorous voices demonstrate that the tendency towards a struggle against “Cannon’s faction” preceded that “concreteness of events” to which Shachtman and others refer in explaining their change of position. At the same time these voices remind us of a whole series of past oppositional groups who took up a struggle on different occasions; and who, when the principled basis began to crumble under their feet, shifted to the so-called “organizational question”—the case was identical with Molinier, Sneevliet, Vereecken, and many others. As disagreeable as these precedents may appear, it is impossible to pass over them.

It would be incorrect, however, to believe that the shifting of the struggle to the “organizational question” represents a simple “maneuver” in the factional struggle. No, the inner feelings of the opposition tell them, in truth, however confusedly, that the issue concerns not only the “Russian problem” but rather the entire approach to political problems in general, including also the methods of building the party. And this is in a certain sense correct.

We too have attempted above to prove that the issue concerns not only the Russian problem but even more the opposition’s method of thought, which has its social roots. The opposition is under the sway of petty-bourgeois moods and tendencies. This is the essence of the whole matter.

We saw quite clearly the ideological influence of another class in the instances of Burnham (pragmatism) and Shachtman (eclecticism). We did not take into consideration other leaders such as Comrade Abern because he generally does not participate in principled discussions, limiting himself to the plane of the “organizational question.” This does not mean, however, that Abern has no importance. On the contrary, it is possible to say that Burnham and Shachtman are the amateurs of the opposition, while Abern is the unquestionable professional. Abern, and only he, has his own traditional group which grew out of the old Communist Party and became bound together during the first period of the independent existence of the “Left Opposition.” All the others who hold various reasons for criticism and discontent cling to this group.

Any serious factional fight in a party is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle. The Majority faction established from the beginning the ideological dependence of the opposition upon petty-bourgeois democracy. The opposition, on the contrary, precisely because of
its petty-bourgeois character, does not even attempt to look for the social roots of the hostile camp.

The opposition opened up a severe factional fight which is now paralyzing the party at a very critical moment. That such a fight could be justified and not pitilessly condemned, very serious and deep foundations would be necessary. For a Marxist such foundations can have only a class character. Before they began their bitter struggle, the leaders of the opposition were obligated to ask themselves this question: What non-proletarian class influence is reflected in the Majority of the National Committee? Nevertheless, the opposition have not made the slightest attempt at such a class evaluation of the divergences. They see only “conservatism,” “errors,” “bad methods,” and similar psychological, intellectual, and technical deficiencies. The opposition are not interested in the class nature of the opposition faction; just as they are not interested in the class nature of the U.S.S.R. This fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate the petty-bourgeois character of the opposition, with its tinge of academic pedantry and journalistic impressionism.

In order to understand what class or strata are reflected in the factional fight, it is necessary to study the fight of both factions historically. Those members of the opposition who affirm that the present fight has “nothing in common” with the old factional struggles, demonstrate once again their superficial attitude toward the life of their own party. The fundamental core of the opposition is the same which three years ago grouped itself around Muste and Spector. The fundamental core of the Majority is the same which grouped itself around Cannon. Of the leading figures only Shachtman and Burnham have shifted from one camp to the other. But these personal shifts, important though they might be, do not change the general character of the two groups. I will not go into the historical sequence of the faction fight, referring the reader to the excellent article by Joseph Hansen, “Organizational Methods and Political Principles.”

If we subtract everything accidental, personal, and episodical, if we reduce the present groupings in struggle to their fundamental political types, then indubitably the struggle of Comrade Abern against Comrade Cannon has been the most consistent. In this struggle Abern represents a propagandistic group, petty-bourgeois in its social composition, united by old personal ties and having almost the character of a family. Cannon represents the proletarian party in process of formation. The historical right in this struggle—indeed of what errors and mistakes might have been made—rests wholly on the side of Cannon.

When the representatives of the opposition raised the hue and cry that the “leadership is bankrupt,” “the prognoses did not turn out to be correct,” “the events caught us unawares,” “it is necessary to change our slogans,” all this without the slightest effort to think the questions through seriously, they appeared fundamentally as party defeatists. This deplorable attitude is explained by the irritation and fright of the old propagandistic circle before the new tasks and the new party relations. The sentimentality of personal ties does not want to yield to the sense of duty and discipline. The task that stands before the party is to break up the old clique ties and to dissolve the best elements of the propagandistic past in the proletarian party. It is necessary to develop such a spirit of party patriotism that nobody dare say: “The reality of the matter is not the Russian question but that we feel more easy and comfortable under Abern's leadership than under Cannon's.”

I personally did not arrive at this conclusion yesterday. I happened to have expressed it tens and hundreds of times in conversations with members of Abern's group. I invariably emphasized the petty-bourgeois composition of this group. I insistently and repeatedly proposed to transfer from membership to candidacy such petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers as proved incapable of recruiting workers for the party. Private letters, conversations, and admonitions as has been shown by subsequent events have not led to anything—people rarely learn from someone else's experience. The antagonism between the two party layers and the two periods of its development rose to the surface and took on the character of bitter factional struggle. Nothing remains but to give an opinion, clearly and definitely, to the American section and the whole International. “Friendship is friendship but duty is duty”—says a Russian proverb.

The following question can be posed: if the opposition is a petty-bourgeois tendency does that signify further unity is impossible? Then how reconcile the petty-bourgeois tendency with the proletarian? To pose the question like this means to judge one-sidedly, undialectically, and thus falsely. In the present discussion the opposition has clearly manifested its petty-bourgeois features. But this does not mean that the opposition has no other features. The majority of the members of the opposition are deeply devoted to the cause of the proletariat and are capable of learning. Tied today to a petty-bourgeois milieu they can tomorrow tie themselves to the proletariat. The inconsistent ones, under the influence of experience, can become more consistent. When the party embraces thousands of workers even the professional factionalists can re-educate themselves in the spirit of proletarian discipline. It is necessary to give them time for this. That is why Comrade Cannon's proposal to keep the discussion free from any threats of split, expulsions, etc., was absolutely correct and in place.

Nevertheless, it remains not less indubitable that if the party as a whole should take the road of the opposition it could suffer complete destruction. The present opposition is incapable of giving the party Marxian leadership. The Majority of the present National Committee expresses more consistently, seriously, and profoundly the proletarian tasks of the party than the Minority. Precisely because of this the Majority can have no interest in directing the struggle toward split—correct ideas will win. Nor can the healthy elements of the opposition wish a split—the experience of the past demonstrates very clearly that all the different kinds of improvised groups who split from the Fourth International condemned themselves to sterility and decomposition. That is why it is possible to envisage the next party convention without any fear. It will reject the anti-Marxian novelties of the opposition and guarantee party unity.

L. TROTSKY

December 15, 1939
Dear Comrade Trotsky:

Your article of December 15, 1939 ("A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers' Party") raises a number of questions which enable me, in my reply, to present and elaborate the standpoint of the Minority, in general, and of myself personally. The nature of the questions raised, and the manner in which you deal with them, imposes a polemical form upon the present reply, not so much because an article was directly addressed to the party but primarily because I am compelled to disagree radically and uncompromisingly with the attacks you make upon the Minority and its political position, and with the solution you advance for resolving the party crisis.

Here is my reply, supplementing the main documents already published by the Minority, will speak with the same welcome candor and even bluntness which you employ in your article, and will try to deal with all the essential points you raise, answering all and evading none.

Dialectics, Politics, Blocs

You have discovered the class struggle, or rather its reflection, in the ranks of the party. The Cannon faction represents the proletarian wing of the party; the Minority is "incapable of giving the party Marxian leadership" because it is "leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency." As to whether it is permissible to speak of class tendencies and class struggle in the party, and the extent to which it is permissible—these questions will be dealt with further on in this document. Here let us examine the basis for your characterization of the Minority faction.

What is involved, of course, is not the pride or prestige or subjective feelings of this or that comrade in the Minority, or of the group as a whole, but the objective validity of the characterization. At the beginning of the crisis in the party, the Cannonites characterized the Minority in various ways. Of them all, however, as is pointed out in our document on "War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," only one even pretended to be a political characterization, namely, the Minority is yielding to the pressure of bourgeois materialism, that is, the minority is succumbing to the pressures of bourgeois democrats everywhere. Stalin's work in Poland and Finland is met with frantic condemnation from the same democrats. In spite of all its noisy formulations the opposition appears to be a reflection inside the SWP of the mind of the 'left' petty-bourgeoisie. This fact unfortunately is incontrovertible.

In face of what "appears to be" an "incontrovertible fact," how are we to account for the fact that the pressure of the bourgeois democrats throughout the Spanish civil war was not reflected among us in a tendency to yield to People's Frontism and the imperialist前夕 of the minority? The Minority, it is true, presented one article out of that record calculated to establish a connection between our present position and our past, and thereby to warrant your political justification. It is the article "Intellectuals in Retreat" by Burnham and Shachtman, about which we exchanged some correspondence earlier in 1939. Quoting sections of what the two authors wrote about dialectical materialism, you declare that my allegedly unprincipled bloc with Burnham in the sphere of sociology (the question of the class nature of the Soviet state) and then in the sphere of politics ('unconditional defense of the Soviet Union') followed logically and paralleled my unprincipled "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy"—all of which adds up, in your view, to the characteristics of a typical petty-bourgeois tendency.

Dialectics, Politics, Blocs

Comrade Trotsky, I am, as I wrote you many months ago in reply to your letter of January 20, 1939, only a student in the field of Marxist philosophy. The exigencies of party work do not always permit one to extend his knowledge and understanding of dialectical materialism to the degree really demanded of a revolutionary Marxist. I have always been greatly impressed by the fact that a generation ago the Marxists, to use the word "politically," so to speak, in order to devote himself to special studies and a separate volume in defense of Marxian philosophy from its bourgeois and revisionist critics. Lack of time, and a more extensive knowledge which it would make possible, have prevented me and others from venturing, however modestly, into a systematic, rounded-out and
thoroughgoing defense of dialectical materialism from its modern (above all, American) critics in the public press. Whenever I can read and study what you and our great teachers have written on the subject, I do so with the greatest attention. Yet I must say: Your accusations are entirely unwarranted and baseless. They form an arbitrary construction calculated to buttress a political conclusion with a philosophical gloss. Let me indicate the grounds for this statement. You quote from our article (New International, Jan. 1939) a section which explains how the authors, having different opinions on dialectical materialism, nevertheless write a joint article against the petty-bourgeois opponents of Bolshevism. You conclude that in the opinion of the two authors, "the method is not of great importance, we shall meditate upon methods sometime when we have more leisure, but now we have other things to do."

Excuse me! Nowhere in the article is there a word that could justify such a conclusion. In your article, you quote one paragraph of our explanation for the joint authorship. You omit from the paragraph a key sentence which I underline here. We wrote:

"The two authors of the present article differ thoroughly on their estimate of the general theory of dialectical materialism, one of them accepting it and the other rejecting it. This has not prevented them from working for years within a single political organization toward mutually accepted objectives, nor has this required on the part of either of them any suppression of his theoretical opinions, in private or public."

But that is the point. The following paragraphs from our article are not less important:

"During 1907-08, Lenin was, as is well known, carrying on a philosophical dispute with the Machists and also a sharp political fight against the Mensheviks. Gorky inclined, on the philosophical question, towards materialism. But it does not seem to me that this might prevent him from making common political cause with Lenin against the Mensheviks on the concrete questions then at issue. On February 25, 1908, Lenin wrote to Gorky as follows:

"I believe I must tell you my view quite openly. A certain scrap among the Machists and in the philosophical question of the revolution is now considered quite unavoidable. But to split up on that account would be stupid, in my opinion. We have formed a bloc for the carrying through of a certain tactic in the Social Democratic Labor Party. This tactic we have been and are continuing to carry through without differences of opinion (the only difference of opinion occurred in connection with the boycott of the Third Duma), but firstly it never reached such a sharp point among us even to hint at a split; secondly, it did not correspond to the opinion of the materialists and the Machists, for the Machist Bazarov, for example, was, like myself, against the boycott and wrote about it (a large feuilleton in the Proletarii [the journal then under Bolshevik direction])."

"To obstruct the cause of the carrying through of the tactic of the revolutionary social democracy in the Labor Party because of disputes among us who accept the revolution in philosophy, is nothing less than an inexcusable stupidity. We must be at loggerheads over philosophy in such a way that the Proletarii and the Bolsheviks, as a faction of the party, are not affected by it. And that is entirely possible."

"These wise, responsible and humane words are those, of course, of the real Lenin, not the sanctimonious Pope of the Stalinist fairy tales nor the one-party tyrant who is now being imaginatively constructed by Eastman, Hook and Harrison."

"Shortly after the time of the above letter, interestingly enough, one of the Mensheviks declared in the Neue Zeit that the philosophical question must be put down with the political dispute. Proletarii made the following editorial statement:

"In connection, the editorial board of Proletarii, as the ideological representative of the Bolshevik tendency, deems it necessary to present the following declaration: "In reality the philosophical dispute is not a factional dispute and, in the opinion of the editorial board, it should not be one; any attempt to represent these differences of opinion as factional is thoroughly erroneous. Among the members of both factions there are supporters of both philosophical tendencies."

In that, they not only remarked and quotations from Lenin, I still fail to see, as I wrote you months ago, weren't I was wrong in writing this, joint article with Burnham and in taking, with him, the position, on the dialectic quoted above. Quite the contrary. Under the same circumstances, I would do it again and again tomorrow.

You speak of my "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy." But that is precisely the sphere in which we did not make a bloc! The sub-title of our article was: "A Political Analysis of Some of the Recent Critics of Bolshevism: Sidney Hook, Max Eastman, Eugene Lyons, Ben Stolberg, and Others." The article pursed exclusively political aims: the defense of Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, the Fourth International, from the petty-bourgeois attacks of the Machists. It was a political pamphlet. I still consider that defense and that attack good—at least no one in our ranks has yet disagreed with it, not even Cannon (then or now)."

You say: "By aligning himself in this question with the anti-dialectician Burnham, Shachtman deprived himself of the possibility of showing why Eastman, Hook, and many others began with a philosophical struggle against dialectics but finished with a political struggle against the socialist revolution." I agree with this, more or less. On my part, it was a conscious and deliberately selfish tactic. But it was more than compensated for, in my opinion, by the fact that I was able to defend our fundamental political principles and program from revisionist attack, and to defend it jointly with a comrade whose views on philosophy differ from mine in such a way that Eastman, Hook, and Co. might be able to exploit it politically (should I attack Burnham at the same time). Burnham's opposition to dialectics is not consistent, in my view (as mine is not in his view), with his support of the revolutionary program of the Fourth International. I say about his philosophical views (as he does about mine) that, in the long run, they will or must be replaced by political ones. This might prevent him from making common political cause with us to the greatest extent possible, let us unite to defend that political position, which we hold in common with the rest of the Fourth International, against all its critics. If, in that connection, we have occasion to speak of philosophical questions, let us make it perfectly clear that only the political question, that is, not philosophical, is the dividing line."

You consider that an unprincipled bloc. If it is a bloc at all, I think it is a good one. IfBurnham and Shachtman were to write a joint article on philosophy, or specifically on Marxist dialectics, that would be unprincipled. To declare a temporary truce on philosophical questions, I am prepared, but only—

"If Burnham will forgive me for the comparison, let me quote what I have said about priests in the party or even one of his preoccupations or contradictions at the same time. Burnham's opposition to dialectics is not consistent, in my view (as mine is not in his view), with his support of the revolutionary philosophy which we hold in common with the rest of the Fourth International, against all its critics. If, in that connection, we have occasion to speak of philosophical questions, let us make it perfectly clear that only the political question, that is, not philosophical, is the dividing line."

"If Burnham will forgive me for the comparison, let me quote what I have said about priests in the party or even one of his preoccupations or contradictions at the same time. Burnham's opposition to dialectics is not consistent, in my view (as mine is not in his view), with his support of the revolutionary philosophy which we hold in common with the rest of the Fourth International, against all its critics. If, in that connection, we have occasion to speak of philosophical questions, let us make it perfectly clear that only the political question, that is, not philosophical, is the dividing line."
Wherein does what you call my "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy" differ from Lenin's bloc with Bogdanov? Why was the latter principled and ours unprincipled? I should be very much interested to know the outcome of the question that has already been stated in the document on the Russian question presented by the Minority of the Political Committee. Let me elaborate some aspects of it here so that we may see how the different viewpoints are manifested in theory and in practice.

In spite of my recently-acquired bad philosophical reputation, I cannot accept the notion of 'the character of the war'—the property forms, in this case, the nationalized property, that also determines the character of the ruling class, which in turn determines the character of the wars carried on by it. And what holds true of the capitalist state, holds true, with the necessary changes, of the workers' state.

In the first place, to speak of "capitalist state" and of "workers' state" is to speak in terms of abstractions which do not, by themselves, answer the question of the character of a given war. The Germany of 1870 was not a feudal but a capitalist state, in which private property relations were predominant; this capitalist state conducted an historically progressive war (even under Bismarck, and Wilhelm I) against Bonapartist France, its oppressor. The Germany of 1914, also a capitalist state in which private property relations were predominant, conducted a reactionary (imperialist) war against France. The same social class, based on the same property relations, was in power in the two countries both in 1870 and in 1914. If these factors alone, considered abstractly, determined the character of the war, it would be impossible for us to distinguish the progressive from the reactionary war.

The Italy of 1859 conducted a war against Austria and the Italy of 1915 conducted a war against Austria. The first war of these two wars was conducted as a continuation of the old conflict of the Italian bourgeoisie in their struggle against the national reaction of the Savoy holding down the feudal barriers to the development of the productive forces, but because it created the most favorable arena for the development of Italy as a great economic power, it was considered a progressive war. The second war was no less a continuation of the old conflict of the Italian bourgeoisie against the national reaction of the Savoy, but because it created the most favorable arena for the development of Italy as an economic power, it was considered a reactionary war against the national reaction of the Savoy. Where it was once permissible for the Italian proletariat to support even King Victor-Emmanuel of the House of Savoy and the Italian bourgeoisie in their war for the national state (for freedom from Austrian oppression), it became impermissible for the proletariat to support King Victor-Emmanuel of the House of Savoy and the Italian bourgeoisie in their war "for the national state" against Austria in 1914. Moreover, it is impermissible for the proletariat to support the Italian ruling class today even in a war against a feudal state—Ethiopia.

If we go by abstractions alone, we cannot explain why the war of 1859 was a war against the Savoy (a semifeudal) monarchy like Austria was progressive in 1859 and a war of a capitalist state like Italy against a feudal monarchy like Spain was reactionary in 1855.
The ultra-leftists, you will remember, also proceeded from such abstract deductions—"capitalist state—capitalist war"—in the case of the Spanish civil war, and therefore denied the admissibility of defending the Loyalist forces against the Fascist forces.

The character of the war fought by Bismarck in 1870 could not be determined exclusively or immanently from the character of the ruling class and its property basis, but from the social and political aims of the political superstructure, i.e., of the bourgeois state apparatus. From above, by bureaucratic-military (as against Jacobin-) methods, it is true, Bismarck and the Junkers had as their aim the national liberation and unification of Germany from French and Russian oppression. That was historically progressive. When, at the end of this war, they aimed at expansion and annexation (the seizure of Alsace and Lorraine), the war was transformed into a reactionary war which was mercilessly condemned by Marx and Engels. But war is not an "independent, super-social substance," you say; war and the aims of war are not divorced from the social (social-economic) basis on which it is fought.

It may be replied that this charge is groundless and a distortion of the position held by you and by the Cannon group. It may be pointed out that we have all spoken for years of a degenerated workers' state; that we have advocated for some time a political revolutionary vanguard, revolt, that those contrary to our thesis have defended the social basis and the political regime; and that in your latest article you write directly that "in our struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucracy we base ourselves on this contradiction."

This reply is obviously based on fact. I do not for a moment intend to make a different impression. All I contend, in this connection, is that this all-important contradiction is not consistently considered and applied in the case of the wars conducted by the Stalinist regime.

Just as it was possible 20 years ago to speak of the term "workers' state" as an abstraction, so it is possible today to speak of the term "degenerated workers' state" as an abstraction. Just as it was once necessary, in connection with the trade union problem, to speak concretely of what kind of workers' state exists in the Soviet Union, so it is necessary to establish, in connection with the Stalinist regime, the degeneration of the workers' state.

A most instructive (and timely) exposition of the inter-relationship between the economic base and the political superstructure is contained in Lenin's famous polemical speech on the trade union question on December 29, 1920:

"Comrade Trotsky speaks of the 'workers' state.' Permit me, that is an abstraction. When we wrote on the workers' state in 1917, that was understandable; but when one says today: 'Why defend the working class, defend it against whom, there is no longer a bourgeoisie, we have a workers' state,' one commits an obvious mistake. The joke of it is precisely this, that it is not quite a workers' state. Therein lies one of the basic mistakes of Comrade Trotsky! . . . Our state is in reality not a workers' state, but a workers' and peasants' state. From that follows a great deal . . . But still more from our standpoint comes out a document which is quite familiar to the author of the ABC of Communism—from this program it comes out that our state is a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations. We had to paste this—how shall we put it?—sorry label on it. That is the result of a contradiction, is that this all-important contradiction is not consistently considered and applied in the case of the wars conducted by the Stalinist regime.

The Fourth International established, years ago, the fact that the Stalinist regime (even though based upon nationalized property) had degenerated to the point where it was not only capable of conducting reactionary wars against the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard, but also capable of conducting such wars in fact. Now, in our opinion, on the basis of the actual course of Stalinist policy (again, even though based upon nationalized property), the Fourth International must establish the fact that the Soviet Union (i.e., the ruling bureaucracy and the armed forces serving it) has degenerated to the point where it is capable of conducting reactionary wars against workers even on the nationalized property (Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, now Finland, and tomorrow Rumania and elsewhere). This is the point which forms the nub of our difference with you and with the Cannon faction.

It is necessary to emphasize that there is a tremendous difference between the (relative) independence of the political regime in any given capitalist state and in the present Soviet state. Be it the democratic United States, constitutional-monarchical England, republican France or Fascist Germany, the political regime in each instance is the one best able to preserve nationalized property; in any case, that is its essential role. Even in Fascist Germany, where the bourgeoisie has been politically expropriated, we have said that the Stalinist regime (even under capitalism, the state, i.e., the property and the political regime) of the Stalinist bureaucracy does not preserve but constantly undermines the social-economic basis of the Russian Revolution. It is not only, as Engels puts it, "endowed with its own movement" and that to an exceptionally high degree, but this movement conflicts violently with "the movement of production as a whole." Put in more plainly political terms, the interests of the bureaucracy conflict with the interests of maintaining nationalized economy as the basis for the transition to socialism—the nationalized economy which is all we can defend in the Soviet Union.

Now, it is not the nationalized economy that goes to war; it is not the economy that decides when the war should be declared or started, or against whom it should be directed, or how it should be conducted. Nor does the working class make these decisions either; it is the proletariat that is expropriated, and the bureaucracy straitjacketed. The decisions and direction of the war are entirely in the hands of the bureaucracy, which "is endowed with its own movement," that is, with its own social, economic and political interests, which are reactionary through and through.

Here we need not confine ourselves to theoretical speculations and abstractions. The invasion of Poland by the three other Baltic states, the invasion of Finland—these make up in fact
the reactionary war of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They are reactionaries from a number of standpoints. They are reactionaries because they drive the proletariat and peasantry into the arms of imperialist patriotism; that is, they do not accentuate the class struggle but facilitate the submission of the proletariat to its class enemy. They are reactionaries because they are not conducted for the defense of the Soviet Union (i.e., the nationalized property from imperialist conquest and colonization), but are conducted in agreement with Hitlerite imperialism. They are reactionaries because they are not conducted for the defense of the Soviet Union, but are conducted for the greater glory, prestige, and aggrandizement of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy. They are reactionary because they are not defensive wars (I speak not in the military-technical or diplomatic sense, but in the historical-political sense), but wars of annexation—wars of what we call Stalinist-imperialism.

Once More: Defense of the Soviet Union

We advocated and urged support of a war to defend the Soviet Union from imperialism. We did not base upon democratic formalities or even democratic realities as a condition for our defense. We said—the Minority continues to say it—that if the imperialists assail the Soviet Union with the aim of crushing the last conquest of the October Revolution and reducing the All-Union Soviet government to the status of the puppet governments of the Russian administration in the Baltic countries, we shall not defend them unconditionally. That would be a progressive war, even under Stalin's command and despite Stalin's command. We would fight for a democratic All-Soviet Congress to take over the helm, but we would not defend it as a preliminary condition for our support. We did not advocate the invasion of Poland or the Baltic countries or Finland. We did not consider such actions necessary for the defense of the Soviet Union, conceived in a revolutionary-internationalist sense. On the contrary, we condemned the invasions; you even called the invasion of Poland "criminal and shameful." To this day, I do not understand by what right of formal or dialectical logic we should, in the light of this, call upon the workers to give material and military support to the invasion, which has as its clear-cut objective that very annexation which we condemn and oppose.

The Fourth International is now fettered by a dogmatic interpretation of the formula "Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union"—which means in practice (see the resolutions of the Cannon group! see our party press!) that our policies are determined for us by the reactionary interests (and the secret treaties, no doubt!) of the Stalinist bureaucracy. When it decides to launch a war, we say, in effect: We do not agree with the timing of the war, with the aims it pursues; but now that Stalin has launched it, we must give it unconditional support, material and military aid.

You will say that this is a distortion of the views of the Fourth International? Let us see.

In your article, you write: "In order to give at least an ounce of sense to their new formula, the opposition attempts to represent the matter as if up to now we had 'unconditionally' defended the international policy of the Kremlin government with its Red Army and G.P.U. Everything is turned upside down! In reality for a long time we have not defended the Kremlin's international policy, not even conditionally, particularly since the time that we openly proclaimed the necessity of crushing the Kremlin oligarchy through insurrection! A wrong policy not only mutates the current tasks but also compels one to represent his own past in a false light."

And in your letter to me, dated Nov. 6, 1939, you write: "You interpret our past policy as unconditional support of the diplomatic and military activities of Stalin! Permit me to say that this is a horrible deformation of our whole position not only since the creation of the Fourth International but since the very beginning of the Left Opposition. Unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R. signifies, namely, that our policy is not determined by the deeds, maneuvers or crimes of the Kremlin bureaucracy but only by our conception of the interests of the Soviet state and world revolution."

I pass over my "horrible deformation" and my "representation of our own past in a false light," for I am conscious of no such crime. I have never said that our position was unconditional or any other kind of support of Stalin's international policy, and I must therefore set down this charge too as gratuitous and polemical.

Let me accept, then, your characterization of our traditional position. We have never defended, not even conditionally, Stalin's international policy in support to the Kremlin's diplomatic and military activities. Our policy is not determined by the Kremlin's deeds and crimes. Good!

We have never supported the Kremlin's international policy, I repeat with you. Concretely, for example, we did not support the Kremlin's foreign policy in support to the Finnish proletariat in Finland (or Poland, etc.). But if we now ask what is war? War is the continuation of politics by other means. Then why should we support the war which is the continuation of the international policy which we did not and do not support? The Fourth International also told the Russian proletariat not to support the Kremlin's foreign policy. Then why should we now tell the Soviet workers to support a war which is the continuation of that policy? According to the resolution on Finland of the Cannon faction (which you support), the Fourth International tells the Russian workers not only to be Soviet patriots in general, but to give material and military support to Stalin's army in Stalin's war (what attitude the Finnish proletariat should take toward the Red Army—our fearless "unconditional defensists" do not indicate by a single syllable). On what conceivable basis can we advocate such a policy to the Russian working class? How can we defend it before the American working class, or even its vanguard elements?

Perhaps the Red Army should be supported on the grounds that in Poland, for example, "the new authorities invited the population to expropriate the landowners and capitalists," as you put it in your new article. So there were "speakers," as you say, following your line, argue that this demonstrates the essentially progressive character of Stalin's war and that it is a significant reflection of the fundamental fact that the Kremlin is based upon state property, which determines the character of its wars.

The argument, of course, is fallacious and baseless.

In so far as it is calculated to prove that the wars of the bureaucracy are automatically determined by the existence of state property in the Soviet Union, the calculation runs directly counter to our previous political analysis, yours in particular, and to the recently established facts:

1. Two years ago you wrote in a polemic against Burnham and Carter: "Hitler defends the bourgeois forms of property. Stalin adapts the interests of the bureaucracy to the proletarian forms of property. The same Stalin in Spain, i.e., on the soil of a bourgeois regime, executes the function of Hitler (in their political methods they generally differ little from one another). The juxtaposition of the different social roles of the one and the same Stalin in the U.S.S.R. and in Spain equally well demonstrate that the bureaucracy is not an independent class but the tool of some new kind of 'bourgeois-democratic political character, in other words, there is no automatism of state property in the Soviet Union that forces the Kremlin bureaucracy to establish or even seek to establish similar property forms outside the Soviet Union. Quite the contrary, outside the Soviet Union, it follows in most cases the policy of preserving capitalist private property and massacring those who seek to abolish it (Spain)."

2. How account for the fact that in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, capitalist private property has remained intact under the rule of the Red Army? If the automatism of state property is so direct that it not only determines the character of Stalin's wars but also its own extension to the capitalist countries invaded by Stalin (i.e., "social-revolutionary measures, carried out via bureaucratic-military means," as you call it), why hasn't this been the case in the three Baltic countries? Also, why does the program of the Kuushen "government" insist so explicitly not only on its non-Russian bourgeois-democratic political character, but on the fact that it does not propose to expropriate and nationalize property? You wrote in "U.S.S.R. in War" the following words: "Let us for a moment conceive that in accordance with the treaty with Hitler, the Moscow government leaves untouched the rights of private property in the occupied areas and limits itself to 'control' after the fascist pattern. Such a concession would have a deep-going principle character and could become the starting point for a new chapter in the Soviet regime and consequently for a new development of the 'bourgeois state,'" or "bourgeois state of the Soviet state."

The Kuushen program, I repeat, proposes only such a "control" over the banks and industries of Finland. Would you consider this "new chapter in the Soviet regime" a basis for revising our slogan of unconditional defense?

The second count deals with the "progressive aspect" of the Stalinist international policy. "U.S.S.R. in War" states: "The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of
property relations in this or another section of the territory, no matter how important these may be by themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and the organization of the world proletariat, the raising of its capacity for defending the old conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this standpoint the only decisive standpoint the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, preserve completely their reactionary character and remain the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.” (My emphasis -M.S.)

War is a continuation of politics, and if Stalinist policy, even in the occupied territory where property has been statified, preserves completely its reactionary character, then the war it is conducting is reactionary. In that case, the revolutionary proletariat must refuse to give the Kremlin and its army material and military aid. This must mean all-out burning the Stalinist regime. That is not our war! War is against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy at the present time!

In other words, I propose, in the present war, a policy of revolutionary defeatism in the Soviet Union, as explained in the statement of the Minority on the Russian question—and in making this proposal I do not feel myself one whit less a revolutionary class patriot than I have always been.

You find our resolution on Finland ridiculous because it says that in applying the strategy of revolutionary defeatism on both sides in the Fourth International will, of course, take into account concrete circumstances—the military situation, the moods of the masses and also the differing economic relations in Finland and Russia.” Your comment is: “Definitely, nothing of this is comprehensible. Let me try to make it somewhat more comprehensible and less ridiculous.

In any country, whether we are defeatists or defenists, the application in the concrete of our strategic perspectives or slogans must take many things into consideration. For example, even under Kerensky, Lenin stood for the slogan of “transforming the imperialist war into a civil war.” At one time, in the middle of 1917, he proposed the withdrawal of the slogan in that form. Why? Because of the military situation in the country and because of the moods of the masses. Moreover, taking into account precisely these moods—the fact that the masses were tired of the war and of fighting “in general”—the Bolsheviks concretized their perspective of civil war in the slogan of “peace.” Again, taking into account the “military situation” during the Kornilov attack, the Bolsheviks again adapted their “civil war” perspective to the concrete situation. The sentence in our resolution which you ridicule so much was included mainly for the purpose of guarding against the vulgar misinterpretation of our position to mean that from now on, day in and day out, all we propose to do in Finland and in the Soviet Union is to repeat the phrase “revolutionary defeatism.” As for taking into account the “differing economic relations”—this really speaks for itself. In Russia we tell the workers that they must establish their control over already nationalized property. In Finland we tell the workers that they must establish their control over already nationalized property. In the United States the Fourth International must take into account the differing economic relations, even though it is for the proletarian-socialist revolution in both lands. By the same token I will agitation for a political revolution throughout the Soviet Union, but in the Ukraine I will take into account the differing national element and there I will advocate, particularly, separation from the Kremlin.

The whole point seems to me to be quite self-evident.

The Bureaucratic Revolution

I cannot leave unmentioned your references to the “revolutionary” role of Stalinism in its recent invasions. “In the first case (Spain), the bureaucratic through hangman’s methods strangled a socialist revolution. In the second case (Poland) it gave an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods.”

Here again, I find myself compelled to disagree with you. The bureaucratic bourgeois revolution—that I know of. I know of Napoleon’s “revolution from above” in Poland over a hundred years ago. I know of the Kornilov attack, the “revolution from above”—out of fear of peasant uprisings. I know of Kornilov’s “revolution from above.” I know that Hitler and Mussolini play with the idea of an Arab “national revolution” in Palestine out of purely imperialist and military reasons—directed against their rival, England. But the bureaucratic proletarian revolution—that I do not know of and I do not believe in it. I do not believe that it took place in Poland even for a day—or that it is taking place or is about to take place in Finland.

In the case of state property in the conquered territory in Poland, it was not at all because, as you imply elsewhere, he was “compelled” to do so on account of the irresistible force of state property in the Soviet Union. Stalin was perfectly willing to “share the power” with the Polish bourgeoisie, as he is doing it with the bourgeois Lithuania. Let us look at the facts on this basis: I will preserve intact your private property and you will turn over to me your political power, which I will assure with my army. This is what the Kremlin proposed during the negotiations with Anglo-French imperialism. The Polish bourgeoisie and land­lords must concentrate all efforts on overthrowing the Stalinist regime. That at least so far as my knowledge goes, is what the Kremlin proposed during the negotiations with Anglo-French imperialism. The Polish bourgeoisie and landlords were perfectly willing to give the Kremlin the power in order to strangle the Stalinist regime. That is not our war! Our war is against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy at the present time!

When the regime of the Polish Colonels collapsed under the blows of the German army, the bourgeoisie fled in every direction. In the Polish Ukraine and White Russia, where class exploitation was not by much a word (the bourgeoisie of those territories was predominately Polish), the peasants began to take over the land themselves, to drive off the landlords who were already half-in-flight. Even the garbled and censored reports of those days permit us to see that the workers were beginning to act. When I write a resolution not about war but about the world revolutionary defeatism in the Stalinist regime, I am not referring to the change in the consciousness and the organization of the workers that they must first nationalize property after seizing power. For example, I will take into account the differing economic relations, even though on the same token I will agitate for a political revolution throughout the land by the Red Army, is in your article. Where is this taking place in Finland? Where is this taking place in any country?—a tremendous impulse to the class struggle in its sharpest form. The leaders of the opposition construct their policy not upon the ‘concrete’ process that is taking place in Finland, but upon democratic abstractions and noble sentiments.

Where is this “tremendous impulse to the class struggle” in Finland—and “in its sharpest form,” to boot? We base our policy on “abstractions.” Let us grant that. On what do you base your statement about the tremendous impulse to the class struggle? No one—no one, I repeat—in our party has seen the slightest sign of it as yet. Perhaps you have reported it to Congress?—in which case such important news should appear in our press.

Again, you write: “The Soviet-Finnish war is evidently (?) already beginning to be completed with a civil war in which the Red Army finds itself at the given stage in the same camp as the Finnish petty peasants and the workers.” You write a little further that the Stalinist policy is “the policy of exterminating finance-capital.” And finally, you write: “As for the Kremlin it is at the present time forced—and this is not a hypothetical but a real situation—to provoke a social revolutionary movement in Finland in order to attempt to strangle it.”

Where is the civil war in Finland which is “evidently already beginning”? Unless you refer to the government of the idiotic scoundrel Kuusinen, we have not yet seen the first traces of that civil war—regardless of how much we should like to see it, no matter how anxious we are to develop a policy that will promote
it, no matter how firmly we count upon its eventual materialization. Do you deduce this "civil war" from an abstract and false theoretical estimation of the role of the Kremlin bureaucracy, or is there some objective evidence that this "concrete" process is taking place in Finland?"

Where is the "social revolutionary movement in Finland" that the Kremlin is "forced to provoke"? Is it perhaps the program of the Kuusinen "Democratic People's" government that is provoking it? That program is, formally, the program of a bourgeois "democracy." Since the beginning of the war, one of the reasons why we condemned the Finnish invasion as reactionariness was precisely the fact that by it Stalin was driving the Finnish workers and peasants into a bourgeois-patriotic frenzy, into the arms of the Mannerhimes, into the "sacred union" and "national unity." What even more crucially is that by this has changed? We repeat: not one, not a scintilla! It is possible and even likely that, as the Finnish bourgeois regime begins to crumble, the workers and peasants will separate from it and take the first steps on the road to independent class action. But there is every reason to believe that they will not take the road to the Stalinist camp, that they will not, as Cannon tells the Russian workers to do, give "material and military support" to the annexationist invaders. If they did, their tragedy would be no less than that which they are suffering today as the pawns of bourgeois-patriotism.

In 1917 the Stalinists reviled the "policy of exterminating finance-capital." I find it difficult to believe that you mean this literally. No, the role the Stalinists have played, above all outside the borders of the Soviet Union, has been that of conservative prop of the rule of finance-capital. The Kremlin agency of the policy of exterminating finance-capital is not built on the backs of the mass producers. It does not play a revolutionary role—any more than the Chinese national bourgeoisie played a revolutionary role, any more than Gutchkov played a revolutionary role in March, 1917 in Russia; the role of the Stalinist bureaucracy is counter-revolutionary.

Would I tell the Finnish workers to accept arms and ammunition from Stalin? Would I tell the Hindu workers and peasants to accept arms and ammunition from Hitler? That is how you pose the question. My answer is: Of course I would! I would take arms for the revolution from Hitler, or Mussolini, or Stalin, or Daladier, or from a Caucasian mountain bandit! If I get them free of charge, so much the better. But it would not follow for me that just because I welcome arms smuggled in to me in Palestine by Hitler, that I would welcome Hitler if he sent his army to Palestine, or that I would urge anybody to give that army "material and military support." The "character" of Hitler's intervention in Palestine would have changed. By the same token, when Stalin is conducting a reactionary, annexationist war in Finland, I would readily accept arms from him if I were a revolutionary in Finland. However, in that case, he would receive "armed aid" in the form of a bullet in the heart or a bayonet in the throat; and under certain conditions, gives a favorable relationship of forces between his army and the Finnish revolutionary movement, I would even seek a practical military working agreement with him; but it does not follow from this that I call upon anyone now to give him "material and military support" in his reactionary war.

I repeat, I do not believe in the bureaucratic proletarian (socialist) revolution. I do not mean by this merely that I "have no faith" in it—no one in our movement has. I mean that I do not consider it possible. I reject the concept not out of "sentimental" reasons or a Tolstoyan "faith in the people" but because I believe it to be scientifically correct to repeat with Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. The bourgeois revolution, for a series of historical and social reasons, could be made and was made by other classes and social strata; the bourgeoisie could be liberated from feudal rule and establish its social dictatorship under the aegis of other social groups. But the proletarian revolution cannot be made by others than the proletariat acting as a mass; therein, among other things, it differs from all preceding revolutions. No one else can free it—not even for a day.

The Factions in the Party

You support the Cannon faction as the proletarian, Marxist group; you condemn the Minority as the petty-bourgeois group, and propose that it be disposed of accordingly. Reading your arguments, I involuntarily ask myself: How can the theoretical, political and practical leader of the struggle against the "trollia" in Russia and then against Stalinism, come to such conclusions?

Comrade Trotsky, I have always been as close a student of the history of the revolutionary movement as possible. I have never considered such a study to be a substitute for active participation in the making of revolutionary history, but rather as a guide for such participation. My interest in this history is not so much for its own sake, but above all in order to learn how to avoid mistakes made by the past. I believe that the lesson that I must learn from my own experience is that I have tried to keep unforget­ted and to live up to the best traditions of a hundred years of revolutionary Marxism. "I am perhaps somewhat of a "frenzied" revisionist, but the best traditions of the past generations, to establish the idea and spirit of revolutionary continuity. If my comrades sometimes jokingly chide me for my predilection for "short-cut" in revolutionary politics. A "short-cut" in this sense, that I do not believe every single problem must be approached from the very beginning, as something brand new, as something where the Soviet Union and the International.

If, therefore, I refer in this section of my letter to experiences of the past, you will understand that it is not done in a brittle polemical sense, but rather in the sense of helping myself and the movement find the right road with the help of illumination from that past.

Burnham says it is not a workers' state; Abern says it is; Shachtman represents, as Hansen so tellingly puts it, the Doubt­ist faction. Their bloc on the question of "defense" and on the "organizational" question is therefore unprincipled, and typically petty-bourgeois. For the moment that the "bloc" is as described. How many times have you been attacked by the Stalinists on the same grounds?

You made a bloc with the Zinovievist (Leningrad) Opposition in 1936. The Platform of the Opposition Bloc "evaded" the funda­mental question of the theory of the permanent revolution. Why? The Stalinists insisted that the basic principled differences between Leninism (their "Leninism"!) and "Trotskyism" (revolutionary Marxism) revolved around the theory of the permanent revolution. This was the reason for their unconditional support of the Stalinist conceptions of the theory, agreed with you (that is, the Moscow, 1925, Opposition) to say that the theory was not at issue, and this was written into the documents of the Bloc. Was it unprincipled? I do not think so. The Bloc was united on the main political tasks before the Soviet Union and the International.

In the Bloc, at least for a considerable period of time, were not only you and the Zinovievists, who of course considered the Soviet Union a workers' state, but also the Democratic Centralists, who considered that it was not a workers' state. Yet, though you were formally closer to the Stalinist-Bukharin formula, the Democratic Centralists supported the Opposition platform. Was that unprincipled? Again, I do not think so. In reply to one of the D.C. group comrades, Borodai, who asked you why steps should not be taken to reconsolidate the "forces of the Bolshevik guard," you wrote in 1928: "Unfortunately the question is not one were to say: It was not I who separated myself from the D.C. but the D.C. group, which belonged to the general Opposition, separated itself from us…The initiative for the unification (into the Bloc) came from the D.C. The first conferences with the Zinoviev people took place under the chairmanship of Comrade Sapronov (D.C. leader). I say this absolutely not as a reproach. For the Bloc was necessary and was a step forward."

You made a bloc—rather, you were in one faction—with Radek, which characterized your opinion as supporting the "peasants and workers government." The Zinovievists were for the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" in China; you were for the proletarian revolution supported by the peasants. The United Opposition, by the way, adopted the essen­tial notion of "peasants and workers government." I consider these differences to the full. Yet the Bloc there too, except for mistakes that cannot be characterized as fundamental in my opinion, was principled; all its members agreed (more or less) on the basic and immediate political tasks in China. Suppose one were to say: on the fundamental principled question of the class nature of the Chinese revolution, Zinoviev had the Stalinist (i.e., petty-bourgeois) position (democratic dictatorship), while Trotsky said it..."
does not matter." Wherein would such a reproach differ from the one you direct at us today?

We say in our resolution that we, the Minority, are united on the basic and immediate tasks of the Fourth International in the Soviet Union and the other belligerents. To the extent that we differ among ourselves on the "terminological" or "sociological" question—the class nature of the Soviet state—each comrade will vote on this question, if it is put, as he has voted in the past, according to his personal conviction. Do you find that unprincipled? You wrote me that you can not comprehend what the comittes mean with their campaign against Abern. Abern is all right so long as he "comes along." However, the minute Abern expresses a different view from the Cannon leadership on an important question, then the campaign is launched against him not on the basis of any views he now holds, but on the basis of what he held some many years old. Here, too, I must remind you that you too joined with groups or "remnants" of groups against which you had fought vigorously in earlier years, which you and Lenin had even severely condemned—Workers Oppositionists, Democratic Centralists, to say nothing of the Zinovievists. You will surely recall how the bureaucracy sought to concentrate the discussion not on the platform of the Opposition Bloc, but on what Zinoviev had written about Trotsky at one time, and vice versa, and about the "unprincipled mutual amnesty" they had extended each other.

You know that you and the Abern group give a false characterization of the Minority, whereas "the opposition, on the contrary, precisely because of its petty-bourgeois character does not even attempt to look for the social roots of the hostile camp." I could answer this, in the first place, by emphasizing part of the preceding sentence: "Any socialist opposition must be clear about the facts and make clear in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle." Yes, generally and in the final analysis, but not at every given moment or with every factional grouping. I have no doubt of my ability to give many examples from the history of the Russian party after the revolution in which sharp factional fights took place; I think it is doubtful if a clear class characterization could be given of all the factions involved. I could say, in the second and more important place, it is first necessary to prove (a) that the Minority represents a deviation from the proletarian Marxist line, (b) that this deviation is not unimportant, and (c) that it is more than an isolated deviation—it is a tendency. That is precisely what has not been proved.

But is it true that the Minority gives no political characterization of the Cannon faction? It is somewhat surprising to read your article, to see in it reference to the allegedly long-lived Abern group, and to see not a single word about the only permanent faction in the party—the Cannon clique, the group of comrades you refer to euphemistically as "Cannon and his collaborators." When we speak of it as a permanent faction we do not confine ourselves to mere association and mere assembly, but we speak of it as the constitution of the party, and we do prove it in our document on "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism." How do you explain the existence of this faction-in-permanence, in season and out, during political disputes and during peace-times in the party?

We characterize this faction with the political designation: "permanent bureaucratic conservative faction." This is the faction that "we see only 'conservatism', 'errors', 'bad methods' and similar psychological, intellectual and technical deficiencies." You consider our characterization of the Cannon faction to be "psychological." Excuse me, but I fail to understand. Let me quote from your polemics against the bureaucracy in the Russian party in 1923: "The heterogeneous political ideology that now rises against bureaucracy can be controlled all the better, and it can be cleansed of all alien and harmful elements, if we take more seriously the road of the 'new course'. But that is impossible without a serious turn-about in the mentality and the intentions of the party apparatus. But on the contrary, we are now witnessing a new offensive of the latter, which eliminates all criticism of the 'old course', formally condemned but not yet liquidated, by treating it as a manifestation of factional spirit. If factions are dangerous—and they are—it is moral to close one's eyes to the danger represented by the bureaucratic conservative faction." (The New Course, p. 43.) Was that characterization of the then leadership of the party "psychological," "technical," "intellectual" and devoid of political or class significance? No more so than our present characterization of the Cannon faction which asks us to support this faction, or at least to subordinate ourselves to it. You declare that this is necessary because we are the petty-bourgeois revisionist tendency—Cannon the proletarian Marxist tendency. If your class characterizations of the two
Every party member should and must consider himself an honest individual, but this does not mean by cadres the members of the Comintern or the trade unions, and into the workers' milieu in general that the party must bring its ideas and arguments with gossip and slander. They must be kept a sharp eye on the role played by Stalinist provocateurs who are unquestionably in the party and who are under orders to interfere with the working class movement. But the principled struggle must be carried through to the end, that is, to serious clarification of the more important questions that have been posed. It is necessary to utilize the discussion that it raises the theoretical level of the party.

A considerable proportion of the membership of the American section as well as our entire young International, came to us either from the Comintern in its period of decline or from the Second International. These are bad schools. The discussion has revealed that wide circles of the party lack a sound theoretical education.

The discussion is developing in accordance with its own internal logic. Each camp, corresponding to its social character and political position, seeks to strike at those points where its opponent is weakest and most vulnerable. It is precisely this that determines the course of the discussion and not a priori plans of the leaders of the opposition. It is only and solely to the extent that we or our associates fail to support the Cannon faction and its position, is to expect what we cannot and will not give. Several years ago, you stood insistently, even against widespread opposition, in support of the Molinier group in France. It, too, you represented as the revolutionary proletarian Marxist tendency. Then also you held that the errors of Molinier—of those or all questions—the best elements in the French or European movement. But in the end you declared openly that Molinier had nothing in common with the Fourth International or with the working class movement.

It goes without saying that Cannon is not Molinier, and it would be useless to try to make me appear to say so. But I believe that just as you were mistaken in your judgment of Molinier, so you are mistaken in our present dispute in your judgment of Cannon and his clique. Just as you later acknowledged your wrong estimate of Molinier, I am firmly convinced that you will be obliged to make a similar acknowledgement about the Cannon faction in time to come. Some six years ago, if my memory serves me rightly, you wrote a comment on the factional fight in the American section between the Cannon and Shachtman groups. In it you said that the party leadership (Cannon faction) represented a tendency toward Stalinist bureaucracy. You will be obliged, I am convinced, to reiterate that characterization in more elaborate, up-to-date form in the future.

In your personal letter to me, dated Dec. 20, 1938, which I permit myself to quote from, you write: "I believe that you are on the wrong side of the barricade in the present faction struggle." It would be easy to believe that this is a polemical metaphor. You add: "I don't hope to convince you with these lines, but I do express the prognosis that if you refuse now to find a way towards collaboration with the Marxist wing against the petty-bourgeois revisionists, you will inevitably deplore for years and years the greatest error of your life."

From all that I have said in this document you will understand why I find it impossible to accept your recommendation. For my part, I can only hope that your prognosis is wrong. In return, I can only say that I am convinced that you do not understand the objective interests of the cause and with a due sense of proportion: The support you are now giving to the Cannon faction leadership and its political position, you will have occasion in the not distant future to consider as one of the most serious mistakes in the history of the Bolshevik-Leninist movement.

With revolutionary greetings,

Max Shachtman
January 1, 1940.

From a Scratch—To the Danger of Gangrene
The Meaning of the Present Discussion

"Since when have you become specialists in the question of philosophy?" the oppositionists now ironically ask the majority representatives. Irony here is completely out of place. Scientific socialism is the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process; namely, the instinctive and elemental drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist beginnings. These organic tendencies in the psychology of workers spring to life with utmost rapidity today in the epoch of crises and wars. The discussion has revealed beyond all question a clash in the party between a petty-bourgeois tendency and a proletarian tendency. The petty-bourgeois concedes to Stalinism, reduces the program of the party to the small coin of concrete questions. The proletarian tendency on the contrary strives to correlate all the partial questions into theoretical unity. At stake at the present time is not the extent to which individual members of the majority consciously apply the dialectic method. What is important is the fact that the majority as a whole pushes toward the proletarian poising of the questions and by very reason of this tends to assimilate the dialectic which is the "algebra of the revolution." The oppositionists, I am informed, greet with bursts of laughter the very mention of "dialectic." In vain. This all-powerful method will not help. The dialectic of the historic process has more than once cruelly punished those who tried to jeer at it.

Comrade Shachtman's latest article, "An Open Letter to Leon Trotsky," is an alarming symptom. It reveals that Shachtman reverts to his stand from the discussion and persists instead in deepening his mistakes, exploiting thereby not only the inadequate theoretical level of the party, but also the specific prejudices of its petty-bourgeois wing. Everybody is aware of the facility with which Shachtman is able to weave various historical episodes around one or another axis. This ability makes Shachtman a talented journalist. Unfortunately, this by itself is not enough. The main question is what axis to select. Shachtman is absorbed always by the reflection of politics in literature and in the press. He lacks interest in the actual processes of the class struggle, the life of the masses, the inter-relationships between the different spheres within the working class, etc. I have read not a few excellent and even brilliant articles by Shachtman but I have never seen a single com-
A qualification must be made to this extent—that not only Shachtman's personal failing is embodied therein, but the fate of a whole revolutionary generation which because of a special conjuncture of historical conditions grew up outside the labor movement. More than once in the past I have had occasion to speak and write of the degeneration of these elements, despite their devotion to the revolution. What was an inescapable characteristic of adolescence in its day has become a weakness. Weakness invites disease. If neglected, the disease can become fatal. To escape this danger it is necessary to open a new chapter consciously in the development of the party. The propagandists and journalists of the Fourth International must begin a new chapter in their own consciousness. It is necessary to re-arm. It is necessary to make an about-face on one's own axis: to turn one's back to the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and to face towards the workers.

To view as the cause of the present party crisis—the conservatism of its worker section; to seek a solution to the crisis through the victory of the petty-bourgeois bloc—it would be difficult to conceive a mistake more dangerous to the party. As a matter of fact, the gist of the present attitude of the American Socialist Party consists in formal operations of the petty-bourgeois elements who have passed through a purely propagandistic school and who have not yet found a pathway to the road of the class struggle. The present crisis is the final battle of these elements. The Russian Opposition, for example, the re-opposition and the cp, can, if he firmly desires, find a worthy place for himself in the revolutionary movement. As a faction they are doomed. In any event Shachtman discovered my tendency to replace revolutionary Marxism and the history of his own party with Shachtman's invitation, I shall reply with a few exact documents. His "Open Letter" represents, so to speak, a crystallization of his weak traits.

Shachtman has left out a trifle: his class position. Hence his extraordinary zigzags, his improvisations and leaps. He replaces class analysis with disconnected historical anecdotes for the sole purpose of covering up his own shift, for camouflage the contradiction between his yesterday and today. This is Shachtman's procedure with the history of Marxism, the history of his own party, and the history of the Russian Opposition. In carrying this out, he heaps mistakes upon mistakes. All the historical analogies to which he resorts, speak, as we shall see, against him.

It is much more difficult to correct mistakes than to commit them. I must ask patience from the reader in following with me step by step all the zigzags of Shachtman in formal operations of my part I promise not to confine myself merely to exposing mistakes and contradictions, but to counterpose from beginning to end the proletarian position against the petty-bourgeois, the Marxist position against the eclectic. In this way all of us perhaps may learn something from the discussion.

"Precedents"

"How did we, irreconcilable revolutionists, so suddenly become a petty-bourgeois tendency?" Shachtman demands indignantly. Where are the proofs? "Wherein (has) this tendency manifested itself in the last year (?) or two among the representative spokesmen of the Minority?" (Internal Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 7, Jan. 1940, p. 11.) Why didn't we yield in the past to the influence of the petty-bourgeois democracy? Why doesn't the Spanish Civil War did we . . . and so forth and so on. This is Shachtman's trump argument in beginning his polemic against me and the one on which he plays variations in all keys, apparently investing it with exceptional importance. It does not so much as enter Shachtman's mind that I can turn this very argument against him.

The opposition document, "War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," concedes that Trotsky is right nine times out of ten, perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred. I understand only too well the qualified and extremely magnanimous character of this concession. The proportion of my mistakes is in reality considerably greater. However, I may turn the tables on that point as an after this document was written, Shachtman suddenly decided that Trotsky:

(a) Is incapable of a critical attitude towards information supplied him although one of his informants for ten years has been Shachtman himself.

(b) Is incapable of distinguishing a proletarian tendency from a petty-bourgeois tendency—a Bolshevist tendency from a Menshevik tendency.

c) Is champion of the absurd conception of "bureaucratic revolution" in place of revolution by the masses.

d) Is incapable of working out a correct answer to concrete questions in Poland, Finland, etc.

e) Is manifesting a tendency to capitulate to Stalinism.

Shachtman's inability to find the meaning of democratic centralism—and so on ad infinitum.

In a word, during the space of two or three weeks Shachtman has discovered that I make mistakes ninety-nine times out of a hundred, especially where Shachtman himself happens to become involved. It occurs to me that the latest percentage also suffers from slight exaggeration—but this time in the opposite direction. In any event Shachtman discovered my tendency to replace revolution by the masses with "bureaucratic revolution" far more abruptly than I discovered his petty-bourgeois deviation.

Comrade Shachtman invites me to present proof of the existence of a "petty-bourgeois tendency" in the party during the past year; or even two-three years. Shachtman is completely justified in not wishing to refer to the more distant past. But in accordance with Shachtman's invitation, I shall confine myself to the last three years. Please pay attention. To the rhetorical questions of my unsparing critic I shall reply with a few exact documents.

I.

On May 25, 1937, I wrote to New York concerning the policy of the Bolshevist-Leninist faction in the Socialist Party:

...I must cite two recent documents: (a) the private letter of 'Max' about the convention, and (b) Shachtman's article, 'Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party.' The title of this article alone characterizes a false perspective. It seems to me established by the developments, including the last convention, that the party is evolving, not into a 'revolutionary' party, but into a kind of I.L.P., that is, a miserable centrist political abortion without any perspective.

"The affirmation that the American Socialist Party is now 'closer to the position of revolutionary Marxism than any party of the Second or Third Internationals' is an absolutely unmerited compliment. The American Socialist Party is now more alien to the analogous formations in Europe—the F.O.U.M., I.L.P., S.A.P., etc., ... Our duty is to unmask this negative advantage of Norman Thomas and Co., and not to speak about the 'superiority (of the war resolution) over any resolution ever adopted before by the party ...' This is a purely literary appreciation, because every resolution must be taken in connection with historical events, with the political situation and its imperative needs ..."

In both of the documents mentioned in the above letter, Shachtman revealed excessive adaptability towards the left wing of the petty-bourgeois democrats—political mimicry—a very dangerous symptom in a revolutionary politician! It is extremely important to take note of his high appraisal of the "radical" position of Norman Thomas in relation to war ... in Europe. Opportunists, as is well known, tend to all the greater radicalism the further removed they are from the background of petty-bourgeois democracy. It is particularly difficult to appraise at its true value the fact that Shachtman and his allies accuse us of a tendency to "capitulate to Stalinism." Alas, sitting in the Bronx, it is much easier to display irreconcilability towards the Kremlin than towards the American petty-bourgeoisie.

To believe Comrade Shachtman, I dragged the question of the class composition of the factions into the dispute by the hair. Here too, let us refer to the recent past.

On October 3, 1937, I wrote to New York:

"I have remarked hundreds of times that the worker who remains unnoticeable in the 'petty-bourgeois conditions of party life reveals remarkable qualities in a change of the situation when general formulas and fluent pens are not sufficient, where acquaintance with the life of workers and practical capacities are necessary. Under such conditions a gifted worker reveals a sureness of himself and reveals also his general political capabilities.

"Predominance in the organization of intellectuals is inevitable in the first period of the development of the organization. It is at the same time a big handicap to the political education of the more gifted workers; yet it is absolutely necessary at the next phase in order to introduce in the local and central committees as many workers as possible. To a worker, activity in the leading party body is at the same time a high political school ..."

"The difficulty is that in every organization there are traditional committee members and that different secondary, factional, and
personal considerations play a too great role in the composition of the list of candidates."

I have never met either attention or interest from Comrade Shachtman in questions of this kind.

III.

To believe Comrade Shachtman, I injected the question of Comrade Abern's faction as a concentration of petty-bourgeois individuals artificially and without any basis in fact. Yet on Octo-
ber 14, 1937, at a time when Shachtman marched shoulder to shoulder with Cannon and it was considered officially that Abern had no faction, I wrote to Cannon:

"The party has only a minority of genuine factory workers . . . . The non-proletarian elements represent a very necessary yeast, and hence we can be proud of the good quality of these elements . . . . But . . . . Our party will not be inundated by pro-
etariat elements and can even lose its revolutionary character. The task is naturally not to prevent the influx of intellectuals by artificial methods, . . . but to orientate practically all the organization towards the factories, the strikes, the unions . . . ."

"A concrete example: we can not devote enough or usual forces to all the factories. Our local organization can choose for its activity in the next period one, two, or three factories in its area and concentrate all its forces upon these factories. If we have in one of them two or three workers we can create a special help commission of five non-workers with the purpose of enlarging our influence in these factories.

"The same can be done among the trade unions. We cannot introduce non-worker members in workers' unions. But we can with success make commissions for oral and literary action in connection with our comrades in the union. The unbreakable conditions should be: not to command the workers but only to help them, to give them suggestions, to arm them with the facts, ideas, factory papers, special leaflets, and so on.

"Such collaboration would have a tremendous educational importance from one side for the worker comrades, from the other side for the non-workers who need a solid re-education.

"You have for example an important number of Jewish non-
worker elements in your ranks. They can be a very valuable yeast if the party succeeds by and by in extracting them from a chauvinistic milieu and tying them to the factory workers by daily activity. I believe such an orientation would also assure a more healthy atmosphere inside the party . . . ."

"One general rule we can establish immediately: a party member who does not win during three or six months a new worker for the party is not a good party member.

"If we established seriously such a general orientation and if we verified every week the practical results, we will avoid a great danger; namely, that the intellectuals and white collar workers might take over the worker minority, condemn it to silence, trans-
form the party into a very intelligent discussion club but absolutely not habitable for workers.

"The same rules should be in a corresponding form elaborated for the working and recruiting of the youth organization, otherwise we run the danger of introducing into revolutionary dilettantes and not revolutionary fighters."

From this letter it is obvious I trust that I did not mention the danger of a petty-bourgeois deviation the day following the Stalin-Hilter pact or the day following the dismemberment of Poland, but brought it forward persistently two years ago and more. Furthermore, as I then pointed out, bearing in mind primarily the "non-existent" Abern faction, it was absolutely requisite in order to cleanse the atmosphere of the party, that the Jewish petty-bourgeois side of the New York local be cut off from its habitual conservative milieu and dissolved in the real labor movement. It is precisely because of this that the above letter (not the first of its kind), written more than two years before the present discussion began is of far greater weight as evidence than all the writings of the opposition leaders on this motive which impelled me to come out in defense of the "Cannon clique."

IV.

Shachtman's inclination to yield to petty-bourgeois influence, especially the academic and literary, has never been a secret to me. During the time of the Dewey Commission I wrote, on October 14, 1937, to Cannon, Shachtman, and Novack:

"Firstly, I am build up upon the necessity to surround the Committee by delegates of workers' groups in order to create channels from the Committee in the masses . . . . Comrades Novack, Shachtman and others declared themselves in agreement with me on this point. Together we analyzed the practical possibilities to realize this plan . . . . But later, in spite of repeated questions from me, I never could have information about the matter and only acci-
dently I heard that Comrade Shachtman was opposed to it. Why? I don't know.

Shachtman never did divulge his reasons to me. In my letter I expressed myself with the utmost diplomacy but I did not have the slightest doubt that while agreeing with me in words Shachtman in reality was afraid of wounding the excessive political sens-
sibilities of our temporary allies; in this direction Shachtman demonstrates exceptional "delicacy."

V.

On April 15, 1938, I wrote to New York:

"I am a bit astonished about the kind of publicity given to Eastman's letter in the New International. The publication of the letter is all right, but the prominence given it on the cover, combined with the silence about Eastman's article in Harpers seems to me a bit compromising for the New International. Many people will interpret this fact as our willingness to close our eyes on principles when friendship is concerned."

VI.

On June 1, 1938 I wrote Comrade Shachtman:

"It is difficult to understand here why you are so tolerant and even friendly towards Mr. Eugene Lyons. He speaks it seems at your banquets; at the same time he speaks at the banquets of the White Guards."

This letter continued the struggle for a more independent and resolute policy towards the so-called "liberals," who, while waging a struggle against the revolution, wish to maintain "friendly rela-
tions" with the proletariat, for this doubles their market value in the eyes of bourgeois public opinion.

VII.

On October 6, 1938, almost a year before the discussion began I wrote about the necessity of our party press turning its face deservingly toward the writer:

"Very important in this respect is the attitude of the Socialist Appeal. It is undoubtedly a very good Marxist paper, but it is not a genuine instrument of political action . . . . I tried to interest the editorial board of the Socialist Appeal in this question, but without success."

A note of complaint is evident in these words. And it is not accidental. Comrade Shachtman as has been mentioned already displays far more interest in isolated literary episodes of long ago-concluded struggles than in the social composition of his own party or the readers of his own paper.

VIII.

On January 20, 1939, in a letter which I have already cited in connection with dialectic materialism, I once again touched on the question of Comrade Shachtman's gravitation towards the milieu of the petty-bourgeois literary fraternity.

"I cannot understand why the Socialist Appeal is almost neglecting the Stalinist Party. This party now represents a mass of contradictions into which splits are inevitable. The next important acqui-
sitions which will come from the Stalinist Party. Our political attention should be concentrated on it. We should follow the development of its contradictions day by day and hour by hour. Someone on the staff ought to devote the bulk of his time to the Stalinists' ideas and actions. We could provoke a discussion, and if possible, publish the letters of hesitating Stalinists.

"It would be a thousand times more important than inviting Eastman, Lyons and the others to present their individual sweatings, I was wondering a bit at why you gave place to Eastman's last injurious and arrogant article . . . . But I am absolutely perplexed that, you, personally, invite these people to besmirch the not so numerous pages of the New International. The perpetuation of this polemic can interest some petty bourgeois intellectual, but not the revolutionary elements.

"It is my firm conviction that a certain reorganization of the New International and the Socialist Appeal is necessary: more distance from Eastman, Lyons and so on; and nearer the workers, and in this sense, to the Stalinist Party."

Recent events have demonstrated, sad to say, that Shachtman did not turn away from Eastman and Co. but on the contrary drew closer to them.

IX.

On May 27, 1939, I again wrote concerning the character of the Socialist Appeal in connection with the social composition of the party:
"From the minutes I see that you are having difficulty with the Socialist Appeal. The paper is very well done from the journalistic point of view; but it is a paper for the workers and not a workers' paper..."

"As it is, the paper is divided among various writers, each of whom is very good, but collectively they do not permit the workers to penetrate to the pages of the Appeal. Each of them speaks for the workers (and speaks very well) but nobody will hear the paper. In spite of its literary brilliance, to a certain degree the paper becomes a victim of journalistic routine. You do not hear at all how the workers live, fight, clash with the police or drink whiskey. It is very dangerous for the paper as a revolutionary instrument of the party. The task is not to make a paper through the joint forces of a skilled editorial board but to encourage the workers to speak for themselves.

"A radical and courageous change is necessary as a condition of success..."

"Of course it is not only a question of the paper, but of the whole course of policy. I am of the opinion that you have too many petty-bourgeois boys and girls who are very good and devoted to the party, but who do not fully realize that their duty is not to discuss among themselves, but to penetrate into the fresh milieu of workers. I repeat my proposition: Every petty-bourgeois member of the party and his paper is a petty-bourgeois rag patchers. Its task characterizes the level of certain individuals in the opposition, and is precisely this spoonful of tar that is involved. The section devoted to dialectic materialism was introduced by me only because the preparation of a social revolution is necessary to speed the elevation of the movement to a proper theoretical level. On January 20, 1939, I wrote to Comrade Shachtman concerning his joint article with Comrade Burnham, "Intellecuals in Retreat":"

"The section on the dialectic is the greatest blow that you, personally, as the editor of The New International could have delivered to Marxist theory... Good! We will speak about it publicly!"

Thus a year ago I gave open notice in advance to Shachtman that I intended to wage a public struggle against his eclectic tendencies. At that time there was no talk whatever of the coming opposition; in any case furthest from my mind was the possibility that the philosopher would set up an independent program and the ground for a political bloc against the program of the Fourth International.

In his "Open Letter," Shachtman refers particularly to the fact that Comrade Vincent Dunne expressed satisfaction over the article on the intellectuals. But I too praised it: "Many parts are excellent." However, as the Russian proverb puts it, a spoonful of tar can spoil a barrel of honey. It is precisely this spoonful of tar that is involved. The section devoted to dialectic materialism expresses a number of conceptions monstrous from the Marxist standpoint, whose aim, it is now clear, was to prepare the ground for a political bloc against the program of the Fourth International! In my "Open Letter," I demanded that I furnish "precedents" of petty-bourgeois tendencies among the leaders of the opposition during the period. I went so far in answering this demand as to single out from the leaders of the opposition Comrade Shachtman himself. I am far from having exhausted the material at my disposal. Two letters—one of Shachtman's, the other mine—which are perhaps still more interesting as "precedents," I shall cite presently in another connection. Let Shachtman not object that the lapses and mistakes in which the correspondence concerned likewise can be brought against other comrades, including representatives of the present majority. Possibly. Probably. But Shachtman's name is not repeated in this correspondence accidentally. Where others have committed episodic mistakes, Shachtman has proved a tenacious taxoist. In any event, completely opposite to what Shachtman now claims concerning my alleged "sudden" and "unexpected" appraisals, I am able, documents in hand, to prove—and I believe we have proved—that my article on the "Petty-Bourgeois Opposition" did no more than summarize my correspondence with New York headquarters. In reality the past, I Shachtman has very demonstratively asked for "precedents." I have given him "precedents." They speak entirely against Shachtman.
Shachtman teaches the young revolutionary party that "no one has yet demonstrated" presumably that dialectic materialism affects the political activity of the party. "No one has yet demonstrated" in other words, that Marxism is of any use in the struggle of the proletariat. The party consequently does not have the least motive for acquiring and defending dialectic materialism. This is nothing else than renunciation of Marxism, of scientific method in general, a wretched capitulation to empiricism. Precisely this constitutes the philosophic bloc of Shachtman with Burnham and through Burnham with the priests of bourgeois "Science." It is presented as and only this to which I referred in my January 20 letter of last year.

On March 5, Shachtman replied: "I have reread the January article of Burnham and Shachtman to which you referred, and while in the light of which you have written I might have proposed a different formulation here (!) and there (!) if the article were to be done over again, I cannot agree with the substance of your criticism."

This reply as is always the case with Shachtman in a serious situation, in reality expresses nothing whatsoever; but it still gives me the impression that Shachtman has lost his dialectic materialism. This is nothing like the dialectical materialism, I am speaking about. Everywhere the first principle is that existence is the basis of ideas, and not ideas the basis of existence: as Lenin said many years ago, "Science cannot be deduced not directly and not immediately", the need for the study of phenomenon as the bankruptcy of the New Deal find their explanation in the final analysis in the "abstract" law of value. Roosevelt does not know this, but a Marxist dare not proceed without knowing it. Not immediately but through a whole series of intermediate factors which establish their relationship determine not only politics but also morality. A proletarian politician seeking to ignore the class nature of the state would invariably end up like the policeman who ignores the laws of gravitation; that is, by smashing his nose.

Shachtman obviously does not take into account the distinction between the abstract and the concrete. Striving toward concreteness, our mind operates with abstractions. Even "this," "given," "concrete," "dog" is an abstraction because it proceeds from, for example, by drawing attention to the essence of what is represented. If I thus want to denote an actual concrete animal, a dog, I cannot use the term "concrete." For a given need it is necessary to combine a number of still photographs. The concrete is a combination of abstractions—not an arbitrary or subjective combination but one that corresponds to the laws of the movement of things. The concrete is the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic, and so on "super-structure" of the movement of things. On this point the question that immediately involves us is precisely this, in what conditions can we comprehend the essence of the movement of things? Not only the essence of things, but the economic base determines the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic, and so on "super-structure" there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic, and so on "super-structure" there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics determines the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic, and so on "super-structure" there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the creative activities of a composer or even the verdict of a judge. The works of Engels, Lenin, and T. D. Lebedev, the art of the proletariat, the capitalist state and the workers' state.

Shachtman indeed squanders his own time and that of others in proving that nationalized property does not determine "in and of itself," "automatically," "directly," "immediately" the policies of the state. The question as to how the economic base determines the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic, and so on "super-structure" there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the creative activities of a composer or even the verdict of a judge. The works of Engels, Lenin, and T. D. Lebedev, the art of the proletariat, the capitalist state and the workers' state.

The Abstract and the Concrete; Economics and Politics

The most lamentable section of Shachtman's lamentable opus is the chapter, "The State and the Character of the War:" "What is the state and the character of the war?" "What is the state and the character of the war?" asks the author. "Simply this: It is impossible to deduce directly our policy towards a specific war from an abstract characterization of the class character of the state involved in the war, more particularly, from the property forms of that state. Our policy must always be based on a concrete examination of the character of the war in relation to the interests of the international socialist revolution." (Loc. Cit. p. 13. My emphasis.) What a muddle! What a tangle of sophistry! If it is impossible to deduce our policy directly from the class character of the state, then why can't he do it non-directly? Why must the analysis of the character of the state be abstract whereas the analysis of the character of the war "concrete"? Formally speaking, one can say with equal, if not much more right, that our policy in relation to the U.S.S.R. can be deduced not from the abstract characterization of the state but only from a concrete analysis of the character of the state in the given historical situation. The fundamental sophistry upon which Shachtman constructs everything else is simple enough: Inasmuch as the economic basis determines events in the super-structure not immediately, inasmuch as the mere class characterization of the state is not enough to solve the practical tasks, therefore... therefore we can get along without examining economics and the class nature of the state; for replacing them, as Shachtman phrases it in his journalistic jargon with the "realities of living events" (Loc. Cit. p. 14).

The very same artifice circulated by Shachtman to justify his philosophic bloc with Burnham (dialectic materialism determines our policy not directly and immediately) is, repeated here word for word in relation to Marxist sociology: Inasmuch as property forms determine the policy of a state not immediately it is possible therefore to throw Marxist sociology overboard in general in determining "in and of itself" the state. But why stop there? Since the law of labor value determines prices not "directly" and not "immediately"; since the laws of gravity determine not "directly" and not "immediately"; the birth of a sucking pig; since the laws of gravity determine not "directly" and not "immediately" the tumble of a drunken policeman down a flight of stairs; therefore... therefore let us leave Marx, Darwin, Newton, and all the other lovers of "abstractions" to collect dust on a shelf. This is nothing less than the solemn burial of science, for after all, the entire course of the development of science proceeds from "direct" and "immediate" causes to the more remote and profound ones, from multiple varieties and kaleidoscopic events—to the unity of the driving forces.

The law of labor value determines prices not "immediately," but the fact remains that it is "immediately" the "law of gravity" that determines the tumble of a drunken policeman down a flight of stairs, therefore... therefore let us leave Marx, Darwin, Newton, and all the other lovers of "abstractions" to collect dust on a shelf. This is nothing less than the solemn burial of science, for after all, the entire course of the development of science proceeds from "direct" and "immediate" causes to the more remote and profound ones, from multiple varieties and kaleidoscopic events—to the unity of the driving forces.

"The abstract and the concrete, economics and politics,

*To young comrades I recommend that they study on this question the works of Engels (Anti-Duhring), Plekhanov, and Antonio Labriola.
etariat and the growth of its dependence upon other classes and groups both inside and outside the country. Just what does Shachtman wish to add in this sphere to the analysis already made?

However, although economics determines politics not directly or immediately, but only in the last analysis, nevertheless economics does determine politics. The Marxists affirm precisely this in connection with the defense of the proletariat. By analyzing and exposing the growing political independence of the bureaucracy from the proletariat, we have never lost sight of the objective social boundaries of this "independence"; namely, nationalized property supplemented by the monopoly of foreign trade.

It is obvious, however, that the proletariat would not agree to a revolution against the bureaucracy. Has he ever seriously thought out the meaning of this slogan? If we hold that the social foundations laid down by the October Revolution were "automatically" reflected in the policy of the state, then why would a revolution against the bureaucracy be necessary? If the U.S.S.R., on the other hand, has completely ceased being a workers' state, not a political revolution would be required but a social revolution. Shachtman consequently continues to defend the slogan which follows: (1) from the character of the U.S.S.R. as a workers' state; and (2) from the irreconcilable antagonism between the social foundations of the state and the bureaucracy.

But as he repeats this slogan, he tries to undermine its theoretical foundation. Is it perhaps in order to demonstrate once again the independence of his politics from scientific "abstractions"? After the U.S.S.R., Shachtman continues to support the idea of a political revolution against the Soviet bureaucracy. Has he never looked at the meaning of this slogan? If we hold that the social foundations laid down by the October Revolution were "automatically" reflected in the policy of the state, then why would a revolution against the bureaucracy be necessary? If the U.S.S.R., on the other hand, has completely ceased being a workers' state, not a political revolution would be required but a social revolution.

Moreover, Shachtman consequently continues to defend the slogan which follows: (1) from the character of the U.S.S.R. as a workers' state; and (2) from the irreconcilable antagonism between the social foundations of the state and the bureaucracy. But as he repeats this slogan, he tries to undermine its theoretical foundation. Is it perhaps in order to demonstrate once again the independence of his politics from scientific "abstractions"?

This is an essential point. When speaking in a nursery?

The state is an abstraction. It is possible to make head or tail out of this. As a matter of fact, Shachtman remains true to eclecticism; that is, to himself, dragged in the question of "degree" only in an effort to maintain his equilibrium between Abern and Burnham. What is in dispute actually is not at all the degree determined by "the realities of living events" (what a precise, "scientific," "concrete," "experimental" terminology!) but whether these quantitative changes have been transformed into qualitative changes; i.e., whether the U.S.S.R. is still a workers' state, even though degenerated, or whether it has been transformed into a new type of exploitive state.

To this basic question Shachtman has no answer; feels no need for an answer. His argument is merely verbal mimicry of Lenin's words which were spoken in a different connection, which had a different content and included an outright error. Lenin in his corrected version declares: "The given state is not merely a workers' state but a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations." Shachtman has worked out (where?) the "degree" more precisely than we have. But in what way can purely quantitative differences in the evaluation of the degeneration of the workers' state affect our decision as to the defense of the U.S.S.R.? It is impossible to make a matter fall out of this. As a matter of fact, Shachtman, remaining true to eclecticism, that is, to himself, dragged in the question of "degree" only in an effort to maintain his equilibrium between Abern and Burnham. What is in dispute actually is not at all the degree determined by "the realities of living events" (what a precise, "scientific," "concrete," "experimental" terminology!) but whether these quantitative changes have been transformed into qualitative changes; i.e., whether the U.S.S.R. is still a workers' state, even though degenerated, or whether it has been transformed into a new type of exploitive state.

What does "degenerated workers' state" signify in our program? To this question our program responds with a degree of concreteness which is wholly adequate for solving the question of the defense of the U.S.S.R.; namely: (1) Those traits which in 1920 were a "bureaucratic deformation" of the Soviet system have now become an independent bureaucratic regime which has developed in the Soviet state; (2) this regime is incompatible with the internal and international tasks of socialism, has introduced and continues to introduce profound deformations in the economic life of the country as well; (3) basically, however, the system of planned economy, on the foundation of state ownership of the means of production, has been preserved and continues to remain a colossal conquest of mankind. The defeat of the U.S.S.R. in a war with imperialism would signify not solely the liquidation of the bureaucratic dictatorship, but of the planned state economy; and the dismemberment of the country into spheres of influence; and a new glorification of imperialism; and a new weakening of the world proletariat.

From the circumstance that the "bureaucratic" deformation has grown into a regime of bureaucratic autocracy we draw the conclusion that the defense of the workers through their trade unions (which have undergone the self-same degeneration as the
state) in today in contrast to 1920 completely unrealistic; it is necessary to overthrow the bureaucracy; this task can be carried out only by creating an illegal Bolshevik party.

From the circumstance that the degeneration of the political system has not yet led to the destruction of planned state economy, we draw the conclusion that it is still the duty of the world proletariat to defend the U.S.S.R. against imperialism and to aid that defense by creating an illegal Bolshevik party in the U.S.S.R.

Just what in our definition of the U.S.S.R. does Shachtman find abstract? What concrete amendments does he propose? If the dialectic teaches us that “truth is always concrete” then this law applies with equal force to criticism. It is not enough to label a definition abstract. It is necessary to point out exactly what it lacks. Otherwise criticism itself becomes sterile. Instead of concretizing or changing the definition which he claims is abstract, Shachtman replaces it with a vacuum. That’s not enough. A vacuum, even the most pretentious vacuum, must be recognized as the theory by creating an illegal Bolshevik party in the U.S.S.R.

Small wonder that the theoretical vacuum, in displacing the class analysis has sucked in the politics of impressionism and adventurism.

“Concentrated Economics”

Shachtman goes on to quote Lenin’s words that “politics is concentrated economics” and that in this sense “politics cannot be defined abstract. It is necessary to point out exactly what it lacks. Otherwise criticism itself becomes sterile. Instead of concretizing or changing the definition which he claims is abstract, Shachtman replaces it with a vacuum. That’s not enough. A vacuum, even the most pretentious vacuum, must be recognized as the theory by creating an illegal Bolshevik party in the U.S.S.R.

Small wonder that the theoretical vacuum, in displacing the class analysis has sucked in the politics of impressionism and adventurism.

The correctness of politics from the Marxist standpoint is determined precisely to the extent that it profoundly and all-sidedly “concentrates” economics; that is, expresses the progressive tendencies of its development. That is why we base our politics first and foremost on our analysis of property forms and their combinations. A more detailed and concrete analysis of the factors in the “super-structure” is possible for us only on this theoretical basis. Thus, for example, were we to accuse an opposing faction of “bureaucratic conservatism” we would immediately seek the social, i.e., class roots of this phenomenon. Any other procedure would brand us as “Platonic” Marxists, if not simply noisy mimics.

“Politics is concentrated economics.” This proposition one should think applies to the Kremlin too. Or, in exception to the general law, is the policy of the Moscow government not “concentrated economics” but a manifestation of the foundation of the bureaucratic system? Our attempt to reduce the politics of the Kremlin to nationalized economy, refracted through the interests of the bureaucracy, provokes frantic resistance from Shachtman. He takes his guidance in relation to the U.S.S.R. not from the conscious generalization of economics, but “observing the real living events”; i.e., from rule of thumb, improvisations, sympathies and antipathies. He counterposes this impressionistic policy to our sociologically grounded policy and accuses us at the same time of . . . ignoring politics, incredible but true! To be sure, in the final analysis Shachtman’s weak-kneed and capricious politics is likewise the “concentrated” expression of economics but, alas, it is the economics of the declasse petit-bourgeoisie.

Comparison with Bourgeois Wars

Shachtman reminds us that bourgeois wars were at one time progressive and that in another period they became reactionary and that therefore it is not enough to give the class definition of a war. Lenin managed when economic processes, tactics, and interests question but muddles it. Bourgeois wars could be progressive only at a time when the entire bourgeois regime was progressive; in other words, at a time when bourgeois property in contradistinction to feudal property was a progressive and constructive factor. Bourgeois wars became reactionary when bourgeois property became a brake on development. Does Shachtman wish to say in relation to the U.S.S.R. that the state ownership of the means of production has become a brake upon development and that the extension of this form of property to other countries constitutes economic reaction? Shachtman obviously does not want to say this. He simply does not draw the logical conclusion to his own thesis. He would go so far as to say that the struggle for unification was exploited and distorted by the dynamic parasites.

The example of national bourgeois wars does indeed offer a very instructive lesson, but Shachtman passes it by unconcernedly. Marx and Engels were striving for a unified German republic. In the war of 1870-71 they stood on the side of the Germans despite the fact that the struggle for unification was exploited and distorted by the dynamic parasites.

Shachtman refers to the fact that Marx and Engels immediately turned against Prussia upon the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. But this turn only illustrates our standpoint all the more clearly. The fact that in this sense what was in question was a war between two bourgeois states. Thus both camps had a common class denominator. To decide which of the two sides was the “lesser evil”—insofar as history generally left any room for choice—was possible only on the basis of supplementary factors. On the German side it was a question of creating a national bourgeois state as an economic and cultural arena. The national state during that period was a progressive historical factor. To that extent Marx and Engels sided with Germany. Whenever we are confronted with the necessity of choosing between the defense of reactionary property forms through reactionary measures and the introduction of progressive property forms through bureaucratic measures, we do not at all place both sides on the same plane, but choose the lesser evil. In that case there is no more “capitalization” in Stalinist or capitalism than there was capitalization to Hohenzollern in the policy of Marx and Engels. It is scarcely necessary to add that the role of Hohenzollern in the war of 1870-71 justified neither the general historical role of the dynasty nor so much as its existence.

Conjunctural Defeatism or Columbus and the Egg

Let us now check up on how Shachtman, aided by a theoretical vacuum, operates with the “realities of living events” in an especially vital question. He writes, “We have never supported the Kremlin’s international policy . . . but what is war? War is the continuation of politics by other means. Then why should we support the war which is the continuation of the international policy we do not consider legitimate?” (Loc. Cit. p. 15) The completeness of this argument cannot be denied; in the shape of a naked syllogism we are presented here with a rounded-out theory of defeatism. It is as simple as Columbus and the egg! Since we have never supported the Kremlin’s international policy, we do not support the war. (Loc. Cit. p. 15) The completeness of this argument cannot be denied; in the shape of a naked syllogism we are presented here with a rounded-out theory of defeatism. It is as simple as Columbus and the egg! Since we have never supported the Kremlin’s international policy, we do not support the war.
only recently. From his rejection of the Kremlin's politics flows complete and indivisible defeatism. Then why not say so?

But Shachtman can't bring himself to say so. In a previous passage he writes: "We said—the Minority continues to say it—that if the imperialists assault the Soviet Union with the aim of crushing the last conquest of the October Revolution and reducing Russia to a bunch of colonies we will support the Soviet Union unconditionally. Here we are, certainly! Has the finality of this conclusion—or is it not, as it seems to us, an instance of the sort?—come! The Kremlin's international policy is reactive; the war is the continuation of its reactionary politics; we cannot support a reactionary war. How then does it unexpectedly turn out that if the perfidious imperialists "assault" the U.S.S.R. and if the perfidious imperialists pursue the uncomprehending strategy of turning it into a colony, that under these exceptional "conditions," Shachtman will defend the U.S.S.R. . . . "unconditionally"? How does this make sense? Where is the logic? Or has Shachtman, following Burnham's example, also reaped logic to the sphere of religion and other museum exhibits?

The key to this tangle of confusion rests in the fact that the statement, "We have never supported the Kremlin's international policy" is an abstraction. It must be dissected and concretized. In its present foreign as well as domestic policy, the bureaucracy places first and foremost for defense its own parasitic interests. To that extent we wage mortal struggle against it, but in the final analysis, through the interests of the bureaucracy, in a very distorted form the interests of the workers' state are reflected. These interests we defend—our own methods. Thus we do not at all want to strengthen against the fact that the bureaucracy safeguards (in its own way!) state property, the monopoly of foreign trade, or refuses to pay Czarian debts. Yet in a war between the U.S.S.R. and the capitalist world—indeed, independently of the incidents leading up to that war or the "aims" of this or that government—what is involved in their inflammatory rhetoric, which we defend unconditionally, i.e., despite the reactionary policy of the bureaucracy. The question consequently boils down—in the last and decisive instance—to the class nature of the U.S.S.R.

Lenin deduced the policy of defeatism from the imperialist character of the war; but he did not stop there. He deduced the imperialist character of the war from the development of the capitalist regime and its ruling class. Since the character of the war is determined precisely by the class character of society and the state, Lenin recommended that in determining our policy in regard to imperialist war we abstract ourselves from such concrete circumstances as democracy and monarchy, as aggression and national defense. In opposition to this Shachtman proposes that we deduce defeatism from conjunctural conditions. This defeatism is indifferent to the class character of the U.S.S.R. and of Finland. Enough for it are the reactionary features of the bureaucracy and the "aggression" of the enemy, or the United States sends airplanes and guns to Finland, this has no bearing in the determination of Shachtman's politics. But if British troops land in Finland, then Shachtman will place a thermometer under Chamberlain's tongue and determine Chamberlain's intentions, whether he is "going with" or "going against" Finland's imperialist politics or whether in addition he aims to overthrow the "last conquest of the October Revolution." Strictly in accordance with the readings of the thermometer, Shachtman, the defeatist, is ready to change himself into a defensist. This is what it means to replace abstract principles with the "realities of living events."

Shachtman, as we have already seen, persistently demands the citation of precedents: When and where in the past have the leaders of the opposition manifested petty-bourgeois opportunism? The reply which I have already given him on this score must be supplemented here with two letters. On October 19, 1937, sent to each of the leading members of the Majority, I said:

"You say, 'If we would have a member in the Cortes he would vote against the military budget of Negrín.' Unless this is a typographical error or a slip of the pen, it is a complete and utter substitute for the "element of an Imperialist war" which Lenin deduced at all the points in the Spanish struggle, and if instead the decisive element is still the struggle between the decaying bourgeois democracy, with all that it involves, on the one side, and Fascism on the other, we must make an attempt to act upon the resistance to the struggle against Fascism, we don't see how it would be possible to vote in the Cortes against the military budget. . . . If a Bolshevik-Leninist on the Huesca front were asked by a Socialist comrade why his representative in the Cortes voted against the proposal by Negrín to devote a million pesetas to the purchase of rifles for the front, what would this Bolshevik-Leninist reply? He wouldn't need to tell us that he would have an effective answer. . . ." (My emphasis).

This letter astounded me. Shachtman was willing to express confidence in the pernicious Negrín government on the purely negative basis that the "element of an Imperialist war" was not developed.

On September 20, 1937, I replied to Shachtman:

"To vote the military budget of the Negrín government signifies to vote him political confidence. . . . To do it would be a crime. How we explain our vote to the anarchist workers? Very simply: we have not been slightest confidence in the capacity of this government to conduct the war and assure victory. We accuse this government of protecting the rich and starving the poor. This government must be smashed. So long as we are not strong enough to replace it, we are fighting for its collapse. . . . On occasion we express openly our non-confidence in it: it is the only one possibility to mobilize the masses politically against this government and to prepare its overthrow. Any other politics would be a betrayal of the revolution."

The tone of my reply only feebly reflects the . . . amazement which Shachtman's opportunist position produced in me. Isolated mistakes are of course unavoidable but today, two and a half years later, this correspondence is illuminated with new light. Since we defend bourgeois democracy against fascism—Shachtman reasons, we therefore ought to refuse confidence to the bourgeois government. In applying this very theorem to the U.S.S.R. it is transformed into its converse—since we place no confidence in the Kremlin government, we cannot, therefore defend the workers' state. Pseudo-radicalism in this instance too, is only the obverse side of opportunism.

Renunciation of the Class Criterion

Let us return once more to the ABC's. In Marxist sociology the initial point of analysis is the class definition of a given phenomenon, e.g., state, party, philosophic trend, literary school, etc. In most cases, however, the mere class definition is inadequate, for a class consists of different strata, passes through different stages of development, comes under different conditions, is subjected to the influence of other classes. It becomes necessary to bring up these second and third rate factors in order to round out the analysis, and they are taken either partially or completely, depending upon the specific aim. But for a Marxist analysis is impossible without a class characterization of the phenomenon under consideration.

The skeletal and muscular systems do not exhaust the anatomy of an animal; nevertheless an anatomical treatise which attempted to "abstract" itself from bones and muscles would dangle in midair. War is not an organ but a function of society, i.e., its ruling class. It is impossible to define and study a function without understanding the class, i.e., the general socialistic understanding of the organ without understanding the general structure of the organism, i.e., society. The bones and muscles of society consist of the productive forces and the class (property) relations. Shachtman holds it possible that a function, namely, war, can be studied "concretely" independently of the organ to which it pertains, i.e., the state. Isn't this monstrous?

This fundamental error is supplemented by another equally glaring. After splitting function away from organ, Shachtman in studying the function itself, contrary to all his promises, proceeds not from the abstract to the concrete but on the contrary dissolves the concrete in the abstract. Imperialist war is one of the functions of finance capital, i.e., the bourgeoisie at a certain stage of development resting upon capitalism. It is a specific stage, namely, monopoly capital. This definition is sufficiently concrete for our basic political conclusions. But by extending the term Imperialist war to cover the Soviet state too, Shachtman cuts the ground away from under his own feet. In order to reach even a superficial justification for applying the same designation to the expansion of finance capital and the expansion of the workers' state, Shachtman is compelled to detach himself from the social structure of both states altogether by proclaiming it to be—an abstraction. Thus playing hide and seek with Marxism, Shachtman labels the concrete as abstract and palns off the abstract as concrete!

This outrageous toying with theory is not accidental. Every petty-bourgeois in the United States without exception is ready to call every seizure of territory "imperialist," especially today
when the United States does not happen to be occupied with acquiring territories. But if this very same petty-bourgeois is told that the entire foreign policy of finance capital is imperialist regardless of whether it be occupied at the given moment in time by landlords and capitalists or by the Red Army, he may jump back in pious indignation. Naturally the leaders of the opposition differ considerably from an average petty-bourgeois in their aim and in their political level. But alas they have common roots and they share a common wish or is able to accomplish the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. The leader of the Mensheviks, Dan, wrote on October 19: “According to the unanimous testimony of all observers the appearance of the Soviet army and the Soviet bureaucracy provides not only in the territory occupied by them but beyond its confines— an impulse (!!!) to social turmoil and social transformations.” The “impulse,” it will be observed, was invented not by me but by “the unanimous testimony of all observers” who possessed eyes and ears. Dan goes even further and expresses the supposition that “the waves engendered by this impulse will not only hit Germany powerfully in a comparatively short period of time but also to one degree or another roll on to other states.”

Another Menshevik author writes: “However they may have attempted in the Kremlin to avoid anything which might smack of the great revolution, the very fact of the entry of Soviet troops into the territories of Eastern Poland with its long outlived semi-feudal agrarian relations, had to provoke a stormy agrarian movement. The agrarian revolution in the Byelo-Russian provinces was to be carried out by the workers themselves. . ..”

Failing this, it could not include the peasant committees and the peasant committees sprang up everywhere. The principal organ of revolutionary peasant self-rule . . .

At the elections for the National Assembly of Western Ukraine and Western Byelo-Russia the revolutionary leaders— including both provinces in the Federation of the U.S.S.R.; confiscation of landlords’ estates in favor of the peasants; nationalization of large industry and the banks. The Ukrainian democrats, judging from their conduct, deem it a lesser evil to be unified under the rule of a single state and from the standpoint of the struggle for independent national existence, they are correct. As for the other two points in the program one would think that there could be no doubt in our midst as to their progressiveness. Seeking to get around reality, namely that nothing else but the social foundations of feudal agrarian relations, had the Bolsheviks attempted in the Kremlin to avoid anything which might smack of the bourgeoisie. The leader of the Mensheviks, Dan, wrote on October 19: “According to the unanimous testimony of all observers the appearance of the Soviet army and the Soviet bureaucracy provides not only in the territory occupied by them but beyond its confines—an impulse (!!!) to social turmoil and social transformations.” The “impulse,” it will be observed, was invented not by me but by “the unanimous testimony of all observers” who possessed eyes and ears. Dan goes even further and expresses the supposition that “the waves engendered by this impulse will not only hit Germany powerfully in a comparatively short period of time but also to one degree or another roll on to other states.”

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tious formula did not meet with the approval of my unsparing judge. My evaluation of events in Poland has already taken him off balance. “I find even less (proof) for your—how shall I put it?—astonishing remarks about Finland,” writes Shachtman on page 16 of his “Letter.” I am very sorry that Shachtman chooses to become astonished rather than think things out.

In the Baltic war the Kremlin confined its tactics to making strategical gains with the unquestioned stipulation that in the future these strategic military bases will permit the sovietization of these former sections of the Czarist empire too. These successes in the Baltic, achieved by diplomatic threat, met with resistance, however, from Finland. The conclusion must be drawn that the Finnish workers have meant that the Kremlin placed in jeopardy its “prestige” and thereby its successes in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Thus contrary to its initial plans the Kremlin felt compelled to resort to armed force. From this fact every thinking person posed to himself the following question: Does the Kremlin wish only to frighten the Finnish bourgeoisie and force them to make concessions or must it now go further? To this question naturally there could be no “automatic” answer. It was necessary—in the light of general tendencies—to orient oneself upon concrete symptoms. The leaders of the opposition are incapable of this.

Military operations began on November 30. That very same day the Central Committee of the Finnish Communist Party, undoubt edly located in either Leningrad or Moscow, issued a radio manifesto to the toiling people of Finland. This manifesto proclaimed: “For the second time in the history of Finland the Finnish working class and the Finnish people have come to the decision that the Soviet Army is the only (and the best) solution to the present crisis. The first experience of the workers and peasants in 1918 terminated in the victory of the capitalists and the landlords. But this time . . . the toiling people must win!” This manifesto alone clearly indicated that an attempt to scare the bourgeoisie governments of Finland involved, but a plan to provoke insurrections in the country and to supplement the invasion of the Red Army with civil war.

The declaration of the so-called Peoples’ Government published on December 2 states: “In different parts of the country the people have come out of their homes and have risen and proclaimed the creation of a democratic republic.” This announcement, in isolation, otherwise the manifesto would have mentioned the places where the attempts at insurrection took place. It is possible, however, that isolated attempts, prepared from without, ended in failure and that precisely because of this it was deemed best not to go into details. In any case, the news concerning “insurrections” constituted a call to insurrection. Moreover, the declaration carried information concerning the formation of “the first Finnish corps which in the course of coming battles will be enlarged by volunteers from the ranks of revolutionary workers and peasants.” Whether there were one thousand members or one hundred, the meaning of the “corps” in determining the policies of the Kremlin was incontestable. At the same time cable dispatches reported the expropriation of large landholders in the border regions. There is not the slightest doubt that this is just what took place during the first advance of the Red Army. If these dispatches are considered fabricated, they completely preserve their meaning as a call for an agrarian revolution. Thus I had every justification to declare that “The Soviet-Finnish War is apparently beginning to be supplemented by a civil war.” At the beginning of December, true enough, I had at my disposal only a part of these facts. But against the background of the general situation, and I take the liberty to add, with the aid of an understanding of its internal logic, the isolated symptoms enabled me to draw the necessary conclusions concerning the direction of the entire struggle. Without such semi-apriori conclusions, the meaning of the case can be a misleading observer but in no case an active participant in events. But why did the appeal of the “People’s Government” fail to bring immediate mass response? For three reasons: First, Finland is dominated consistently by reactionary military machinery which is supported not only by the bourgeoisie but by the top layers of the peasantry and the labor bureaucracy; secondly, the policy of the Kremlin succeeded in transforming the Finnish Communist Party into an insignificant factor; thirdly, the regime of the U.S.S.R. is in no way interested in the success of the Finnish uprising masses. Even in the Ukraine from 1918 to 1920 the peasants responded very slowly to appeals to seize the estates of the landlords because the local Soviet power was still weak and every success of the Whites brought about ruthless punitive expeditions. All the less reason there is to be surprised that the Finnish poor peasants delay in responding to an appeal for an agrarian revolution. To set the peasants in motion, serious successes of the Red Army are required. But during the first badly prepared advance the Red Army suffered only failures. Under such conditions there could not even be talk of the peasants rising. It was impossible to expect an independent civil war in Finland at the given stage: My calculations spoke quite precisely of supplementing military operations by means of doing something that is literally killing brother there. What is this if not a episode in a civil war? In any case there can be no doubt that a new advance of the Red Army into Finland will confirm at every step our general appraisal of the war. Shachtman has neither an analysis of the events nor hint of a prognosis. He confines himself to noble independence and for this reason at every step he sinks deeper into the mire.

The appeal of the “Peoples’ Government” calls for workers’ control. What can this mean! exclames Shachtman. There is no workers’ control in the U.S.S.R.; whence will it come in Finland? Sad to say, Shachtman reveals complete lack of understanding of the situation. In the U.S.S.R. workers’ control is a stage long ago completed. From control over the bourgeoisie there they passed to management of nationalized production. From the management of workers—to the command of the bureaucracy. New workers’ control. But the new workers’ control-market cannot be established except as the result of a successful uprising against the bureaucracy. In Finland, workers’ control still signifies nothing more than crowding out the native bourgeoisie, whose place the bourgeoisie proposes to take. Furthermore, one should not think that the Kremlin is at present attempting to impose Eastern Poland or Finland by means of imported Commissars. Of greatest urgency to the Kremlin is the extraction of a new administrative apparatus from among the toiling population of the occupied areas. This task can be solved only in several stages. The first stage is the peasant communes and the new agriculture policy.“

Shachtman clutches eagerly even at the fact that Kuusinen’s program “is, formally, the program of a bourgeoisie ‘democracy’.” Does he mean to say by this that the Kremlin is more interested in establishing bourgeois democracy in Finland than in driving Finland into the framework of the U.S.S.R.? Shachtman himself doesn’t know what he wants to say. In Spain, which Moscow did not prepare for union with the U.S.S.R., it was actually a question of demonstrating the ability of the Kremlin to safeguard bourgeois democracy against proletarian revolution. This task flows from the interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy in that particular international situation. Today the situation is a different one. The Kremlin is not preparing to demonstrate its usefulness to France, England, and the United States. As its actions have proved, it has firmly decided to sovietize Finland—at once or in two stages. The program of the “Peoples’ Government” does not differ from the program of the U.S.S.R. As its actions have proved, it has firmly decided to sovietize Finland—at once or in two stages. The program of the “Peoples’ Government” does not differ from the program of the U.S.S.R., which, under in the framework of the U.S.S.R., the Kuusinen government, according to the Kremlin’s “idiot” point of view does not differ from the program of the Bolsheviks in November 1917. True enough, Shachtman makes much of the fact that I generally place significance on the manifest of the “idiot” Kuusinen. However, I shall take the liberty of reminding him that the Kremlin is not the support of the Red Army with the support of the Red Army represents a far more serious political factor than scores of superficial wise-aces who refuse to think through the internal logic (dialectics) of events.

As a result of his remarkable analysis, Shachtman this time openly proposes a defeatist policy in relation to the U.S.S.R., adding (for emergency use) that he does not at all cease to be a “patriot of his class.” We are happy to get the information. But the trouble is that the Mensheviks, as far back as November 12 wrote that in the event the “prestige of the revolution” would be lost, the Western democracies would lose their prestige against proletarian revolution. As its actions have proved, it has firmly decided to sovietize Finland—at once or in two stages. The program of the “Peoples’ Government” does not differ from the program of the U.S.S.R., which, under in the framework of the U.S.S.R., the Kuusinen government, according to the Kremlin’s “idiot” point of view does not differ from the program of the Bolsheviks in November 1917. True enough, Shachtman makes much of the fact that I generally place significance on the manifest of the “idiot” Kuusinen. However, I shall take the liberty of reminding him that the Kremlin is not the support of the Red Army with the support of the Red Army represents a far more serious political factor than scores of superficial wise-aces who refuse to think through the internal logic (dialectics) of events.

*This article was already written when I read in the New York Times of January 26 of the following news item: “The Moscow Financial Journal reports that in industry, drastic acts of expropriation have not yet been carried out on a large scale. The main centers of the banking system, the railway system, and a number of large industrial undertakings were State-owned for years before the war. Under the new regime, workmen now exercise control over production. Workers’ control, however, does not necessarily retain a full right of ownership in their own establishments, but they are compelled to submit statements of costs of production, and so on, for the consideration of the workers’ delegates. The latter, jointly, with the employers, fix wages, conditions of work, and a “just rate of profit” for the workmen. Thus we see that “the realities of living events” do not at all submit themselves to the pedantic and leisurely pattern of the leaders of the opposition. Meanwhile our “abstractions” are becoming transformed into flesh and blood."
position in relation to this violation." (Sozialisticheskii Vestnik, No. 19-20, p. 43). It is necessary to add that throughout the Kerensky regime, Dan was a rabid defencist; he failed to be a defencist even under the Czar. Only the invasion of Finland by the Red Army has turned him into a defencist. Naturally he does not wish to be "a patriot of his class." What class? This question is not an uninteresting one. So far as the analysis of events is concerned Shachtman disagrees with Dan who is closer to the Theater of Action and cannot replace facts with fiction; by way of compensation, what is the bloc directed? (2) What is the relationship of forces within the bloc? They are directed not against a common enemy: according to his own words—studied especially in order to transmit great traditions to the younger generation. The goal itself is of course excellent. But it demands a scientific method. Meanwhile, Shachtman has begun by sacrificing the clarity of the program of the internationalists, upon which the whole previous content. The result of the bloc would in this case depend upon the clarity of the program of the internationalists, upon their cohesiveness and discipline, for these traits are not infrequently more important in determining the relationship of forces than their numerical strength.

Shachtman as we said before appeals to Lenin's bloc with Bogdanov. I have already stated that Lenin did not make the slightest theoretical concessions to Bogdanov. In one and the same organization which although called a "faction" bore all the traits of a party. If Shachtman does not look upon the opposition as an independent organization then his reference to the Lenin-Bogdanov "bloc" falls to pieces.

But the mistake in the analogy is not restricted to this. The Bolshevik faction-conscious of being against Menshevism which at that time had already revealed itself completely as a petty-bourgeois agency of the liberal bourgeoisie. This was far more serious than the accusation of so-called "bureaucratic conservatism," the class roots of which Shachtman does not even attempt to define. Lenin's collaboration with Bogdanov was the collaboration between a proletarian tendency and a sectarian centrist tendency against petty-bourgeois opportunism. The class lines are clear. The "bloc" (if one uses this term in the given instance) was justified.

The subsequent history of the "bloc" is not lacking in significance. In the letter to Gorky cited by Shachtman, Lenin expressed the hope that it would be possible to separate the political questions from the purely philosophic ones. Shachtman forgets to add that Lenin's hope did not at all materialize. Differences developed from the heights of philosophy down the line of all the other questions, including the most current ones. If the "bloc" did not discredit Bolshevism it was only because Lenin had a finished program, a correct method, a firmly welded faction in which Bogdanov's group composed a small unimportant minority.

Shachtman concluded a bloc with Burnham and Abern against the petty-bourgeois faction of his own party. It is impossible to evade this. The relationship of forces within the bloc is completely against Shachtman. Abern has his own faction. Burnham with Shachtman's assistance can create the semblance of a faction constituting intellectuals disillusioned with Bolshevism. Shachtman has no independent program, no independent method, no independent faction. The eclectic character of the opposition "program" is determined by the contradictory tendencies within the bloc. In the event the bloc collapses—and the collapse is inevitable—Shachtman will emerge from the struggle with nothing but injury to the party to which he devoted himself.

Shachtman further appeals to the fact that in 1917 Lenin and Trotsky united after a long struggle and it would therefore be impossible to correct them of their past differences. This example is slightly compromised by the fact that Shachtman has already utilized it once before to explain his bloc with Cannon against Abern. But aside from this unpleasant circumstance the historical analogy is false to the core. Upon joining the Bolshevik party, Trotsky recognized completely and whole-heartedly the correctness of the Leninist methods of building the party. At the same time he recognized the irreconcilable contradiction of forces upon the Bolshevik party but by the proletarian revolution. This is a solid basis. Furthermore in question here was not a "bloc" but unification in a single party—against the bourgeoisie and its petty-bourgeois agents. Inside the party the October bloc of Lenin and Trotsky was directed against petty-bourgeois factions on the question of insurrection.

Equally superficial is Shachtman's reference to Trotsky's bloc with Zinoviev in 1926. The struggle at that time was conducted not against "bureaucratic conservatism" as the psychological trait of a few unsympathetic individuals but against the mighty bureaucracy in the world, its privileges, its arbitrary rule and its reactionary policy. The question of the bloc was not a bloc of concessions—blocs are determined by the character of the adversary.

The relationship of elements within the bloc was likewise altogether different. The opposition of 1923 had its own program and its own cadres composed not at all of intellectuals as Shachtman asserts, echoing the Stalinists, but primarily workers. The Zinoviev-Kamenev opposition on our demand acknowledged in a special document that the 1923 opposition was correct on all fundamental questions. Nevertheless since we had different traditions and since we were far from agreeing in everything, the merger never did take place; both groups remained independent factions. In the important struggle of March 1917 of the bloc governed by the pattern of the party and to himself.

The circumstance that I did not protest openly against these concessions was rather a mistake. But there was generally not much room for open protests—we were working illegally. In any event, both sides were very well acquainted with my views on the controversial questions. Within the 1923 opposition, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand if not more stood on my point of view and not on the point of view of Zinoviev or Radek. With such a relignment between the two groups in the bloc there might have been these or other partial mistakes but there was not so much as a semblance of adventurism.

With Shachtman the case is completely different. Who was right in the past and just when and where? Why did Shachtman stand first with Abern, then with Cannon and now back again with petty-bourgeois faction of his own party? It is impossible to answer this question or to discern any logic in the sequence of past fractional struggles is worthy not of a responsible political figure but of a nurse-maid — Johnny was a little wrong, Max a little, all were a little wrong, and now we are all a little right. Who was in the wrong and in what, not a word of this. There is no truth in yesterday's statement and what is the reason for all this? Because in the organism of the party Comrade Shachtman plays the role of a floating island.

Seeking historical analogies, Shachtman avoids one example to which his present bloc does actually bear a resemblance. I have in mind the so-called August bloc of 1912. I participated actively in this bloc in a certain sense I created it. Politically I parted with the Mensheviks on all fundamental questions. I also differed with
the ultra-left Bolsheviks, the Vperyodists. In the general tendency of politics I stood far more closely to the Bolsheviks. But I was against the Leninist "regime" because I had not yet learned to understand that in order to realize the revolutionary goal a firmly welded centralized party is indispensable. And so I formed this episodic bloc consisting of heterogeneous elements which was distinctly in contrast to another camp where better than anybody else. The trade union bureaucracy supports precisely because he is the bureaucrat who defends their interests from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist. I was sick with freed myself at that period especially in the organizational sphere aristocracy. But upon what base does "bureaucratic together. The opposition does not point to any objective, i.e., social

In the August bloc the liquidators had their own faction, the Vperyodists also had something resembling a faction. I stood isolated, having co-thinkers but no faction. Most of the documents were written by me and through avoiding principled differences had as their aim the creation of a semblance of unanimity upon "concrete political questions." Not a word about the past! Lenin subjected the August bloc to merciless criticism and the harshest blows fell to my lot. Lenin proved that inasmuch as I did not agree politically with either the Mensheviks or the Vperyodists my policy was adventurous. This was severe but it was true.

As "mitigating circumstances" let me mention the fact that I had set as my task not to support the right or ultra-left faction against the Bolsheviks but to unite the party as a whole. The Bolsheviks too were invited to the August conference. But since Lenin flatly refused to unite with the Mensheviks (in which he was completely correct) I was left in an unnatural bloc with the Mensheviks and the Vperyodists. The second mitigating circumstance is this, that the very phenomenon of Bolshevikism as the genuine revolutionary party was then developing for the first time — at the time of the Second International their gains were no more than a semblance. But I do not thereby seek in the least to absolve myself from guilt. Notwithstanding the conception of permanent revolution which undoubtedly disclosed the correct perspective, I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organizational sphere from the constraints of official organizational bureaucracy. I was never free from the disease of conciliation towards Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude towards Leninist centralism. Immediately after the August conference the bloc began to disintegrate into its component parts. Within a few months I was not only in principle but organizationally separated from the bloc.

I address Shachtman today with the very same rebuke which Lenin addressed to me 27 years ago: "Your bloc is unprincipled." "Your policy is adventurism." With all my heart I express the hope that from these accusations Shachtman will draw the same conclusions which I once drew.

The Factions in the Struggle

Shachtman expresses surprise over the fact that Trotsky "the leader of the 1923 opposition" is capable of supporting the bureaucratic faction of Cannon. In this as in the question of workers' control Shachtman again reveals his lack of feeling for historical perspective. True, in justifying their dictatorship the Soviet bureaucracy exploited the principles of Bolshevik centralism but in the process they generalized their tactics and distorted the basic political factors. But this does not discredit in the least the methods of Bolshevikism. Over a period of many years Lenin educed the party in the spirit of proletarian discipline and severe centralism. In so doing he suffered scores of times the attack of petty-bourgeois factions and cliques. Bolshevik centralism is a fundamentally progressive factor and in the end secured the triumph of the revolution. It is not difficult to understand that the struggle of the present opposition in the Socialist Workers Party has nothing in common with the struggle of the Russian opposition of 1923 against the privileged bureaucratic caste but it does instead bear great resemblance to the struggle of the Mensheviks against Bolshevik centralism.

Cannon and his group are according to the opposition "an expression of a type of politics which can be best described as bureaucratic conservatism." What does this mean? The domination of a conservative labor bureaucracy, share-holder in the profits of the national bourgeoisie, would be unthinkable without direct or indirect support of the capitalist state. The rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy would be unthinkable without the G.P.U., the army, the courts, etc. The Soviet government supports Stalin precisely because of the bureaucrat who defends their interests better than anybody else. The trade union bureaucracy supports Green and Lewis precisely because their vices, as able and dexterous bureaucrats, safeguard the material interests of the labor aristocracy. But upon that base does "bureaucratic conservatism" rest in the S.W.P.? Obviously not on material interests but on a selection of bureaucratic types in contrast to another camp where innovators, initiators and dynamic spirits have been gathered together. The opposition does not point to any objective, i.e., social basis for "bureaucratic conservatism." Everything is reduced to pure psychology. Under such conditions even the thinking worker will say: It is possible that Comrade Cannon actually does sin in the line of bureaucratic tendencies—it is hard for me to judge at a distance—but if the majority of the National Committee and of the entire party who are not at all interested in bureaucratic politics is capable of supporting Stalinist bureaucracies but in spite of them. This means that he has some other virtues which far outweigh his personal failing. That is what a serious party member will say. And in my opinion he would be correct.

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their positive but almost exclusively their negative traits. That is precisely the role today of Abern's faction in which Shachtman plays the role of journalist and Burnham the role of theoretical brain trust. "Cannon knows," persists Shachtman, "how spurious it is to inject in the present discussion the 'Abern question.' He knows that every editorial writer, and many members know, namely, that for the past several years there has been no such thing as an 'Abern Group.'" I take the liberty of remarking that if anybody is here distorting reality it is none other than Shachtman himself. I have been following the development of the internal relations in the American section for about ten years. The specific composition and the special role played by the New York organization became clear to me before anything else. Shachtman will perhaps recall that while I was still in Prinkipo I advised the National Committee to move away from New York and to seek a more propitious place for the American Section to some industrial center in the provinces. Upon arriving in Mexico I gained the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the English language and thanks to many visits from my northern friends, of arriving at a more vivid picture of the social composition and the political psychology of the various groupings. On the basis of my own personal and immediate observations during the past three years I assert that the Abern faction has existed uninterruptedly, statically if not "dynamically."

The members of the Abern faction, given a modicum of political experience, are easily recognizable not only by their social traits but also by their approach to all questions. These comrades have always formally denied the existence of their faction. There was a period when some of them actually did try to dissolve themselves into the party. But they attempted this by doing violence to themselves, and on all critical questions they came out in relation to the party as a group. They were far less interested in principled questions, in particular the question of changing the social composition of the party, than in combinations at the top, personal conflicts, and generally occurrences in the "general staff." This is the Abern school. I persistently warned many of these comrades that the organization at this artificial division of labor will only bring them sooner or later to a new factional explosion.

The leaders of the opposition speak ironically and disparagingly of the proletarian composition of the Cannon faction; in their eyes this incidental "detail" carries no importance. What is this if not petty-bourgeois disdain combined with blindness? At the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democrats in 1903 where the split took place between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks there were only three workers among several scores of delegates. All three of them turned up with the majority. The Mensheviks jeered at Lenin for investing this fact with great symptomatic significance. The Mensheviks themselves explained the position the three workers took by their lack of "maturity." But as is well known it was Lenin who proved correct.

If the proletarian section of our American party is "politically backward," then the first task of those who are "advanced" should have consisted in raising this party to a higher level. But they have done this by attempting to defend Molinier as mistakenly the "Cannon clique" and he harps several times on the fact that in France I supported just as mistakenly the "Molinier clique." Everything is reduced to my supporting isolated individuals or groups entirely independently of their program. The example of Molinier only thickens the fog. I shall attempt to dispel it. Molinier was accused not of retreating from our program but of being undisciplined, arbitrary, and of venturing into all sorts of financial adventures to support the party and his faction. Since Molinier is a very energetic man and has practical capacities I found it necessary—not only in the interests of Molinier but above all in the interests of the organization itself—to exhaust all the possibilities of convincing and reeducating him in the spirit of proletarian discipline. Since many of his adversaries possessed all of his failings but none of his virtues I did everything to convince them not to hasten a split but to test Molinier over and over again. It was this that constituted my "defense" of Molinier in the adolescent period of the existence of our French section.

Considering a patient attitude towards blundering or undisciplined comrades and repeated efforts to reeducate them in the revolutionary spirit as absolutely compulsory I applied these methods by no means solely to Molinier. I made attempts to draw closer into the party and save Kurt Landau, Field, Welsbord, the Austrian, Frey, the Frenchman, Treint, and a number of others. In many cases my attempts proved fruitless; in a few cases it was possible to rescue valuable comrades.

In any case I did not make the slightest concession to Molinier. When he decided to found a paper on the basis of "four slogans" instead of our program, and set out independently to execute this plan, I was among those who insisted upon his immediate expulsion. But I will not hide the fact that at the Founding Congress of the Fourth International I was in favor of once again testing Molinier and his group within the framework of the International to see if they had become convinced of the need for a proletarian policy. To this end I made attempts to reeducate him in the spirit of proletarian discipline. Since many of his adversaries possessed all of his failings but none of his virtues I did everything to convince them not to hasten a split but to test Molinier over and over again. It was this that constituted my "defense" of Molinier in the adolescent period of the existence of our French section.

The mistakes of the opposition on the other hand are easily recognizable not only by their social traits but also by the fact that they are "opportunists."

It is Time to Halt!

To what extent Shachtman's thought from a false starting point has come down to the present time is to be seen not from the fact that he depicts my position as a defense of the "Cannon clique" and he holds up with the majority. The Mensheviks jeered at Lenin when it became clear to me that Shachtman was driving his party, is perfect. The workers are only gradually reaching clear consciousness. The trade unionists but by the petty-bourgeois oppositionists. It is precisely in order to prevent the trade unionists from turning their backs to the party in the future that it is necessary to decisively repulse these petty-bourgeois oppositionists. It is moreover impermissible to forget that the actual or possible mistakes of those comrades working in the trade unions reflect the pressure of the American proletariat as it is today. This is our class. We are not preparing to capitulate to its pressure. But this pressure leads us on our main historic road. The mistakes of the opposition on the other hand reflect the pressure of another and alien class. An ideological break with that class is the elementary condition for our future successes among the workers.

The reasons of the opposition in regard to the youth are false in the extreme. Assuredly, without the conquest of the proletarian youth the revolutionary party cannot develop. But the trouble is that we have almost an entirely petty-bourgeois youth, to whom the social-bourgeois "opportunism" is an ancient past. The leaders of this youth have indubitable virtues and ability but, alas, they have been educated in the spirit of petty-bourgeois combinationism and if they are not wrecked out of their habitual milieu, if they are not sent without high-sounding titles into working class districts for day-to-day dirty work among the proletariat, they can forever perish for the revolutionary movement. In relation to the youth as in all the other questions, Shachtman unfortunately has taken a position that is false to the core.
seventy-two hour stretches at a time. I asked him if he didn't wish to make it possible somehow for us to get together. Shacht­
man replied that it was within his rights. It is quite possible that those comrades who may become acquainted with my archives in the future will say in this case too that my letter to Shachtman was a false step on my part and they will cite this "mistake" of mine in connection with my over-persistent "defense" of Molotov. They will not convince me. It is an extremely difficult task to form an international proletarian vanguard under present conditions. To chase after individuals at the expense of principles would of course be a crime. But to do everything possible to bring back outstanding yet mistaken comrades to our program I have considered and still consider my duty.

From that very Trade Union Discussion which Shachtman utili­
zed with such glaring irrelevance, I quote the words of Lenin which Shachtman should engrave on his mind: "A mistake always begins being small but it will grow and grow; differences always begin with trifles. Everyone has at times suffered a tiny wound but should this tiny wound become infected, a mortal disease may follow." Thus spoke Lenin on January 23, 1921. It is impossible not to make mistakes; some err more frequently, others less fre­quent. The essential point is not to persist in mistakes, not to place ambition above the interests of the cause but to call a halt in time. It is time for Comrade Shachtman to call a halt! Otherwise the scratch which has already developed into an ulcer can lead to gangrene.

January 24, 1940.

L. TROTSKY

Second World War and the Soviet Union

(Submitted March 1, 1940 by the Minority of the Political Committee)

1. The present war, which began with the invasion of Poland by
the German army on September 1st of last year, is a new
struggle among the great powers for a re-division of the earth;
for the hegemony on the European continent, and in particular
for rule over the majority of oppressed mankind, living in the
colonies and semi-colonies of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin Amer­
cica. Thus, in its decisive aspects, the present war is of the same
general character as the war of 1914-18, this time occurring on a
foundation of far more acute and desperate conflict and social
degeneration. All attempts to describe the war, from the point of
view of any of the participants, as being fought for the rights of
national self-determination (Poland), for the sake of "democracy
against fascism" (Britain, France), to "break the hold of capital­ist plutocracy" (Germany), for "socialist liberation" or "defense of
the Russian proletarian revolution" (Soviet Union) are only social-patriotic devices for hiding the true character of the
war: the mass murder and enslavement of the peoples and the mass
for one or another participant or group of participants.

2. From the socially reactionary character of the war there
follows the strategy which revolutionary socialists are obligated
to adopt with respect to it. The revolutionary orientation may be
summed up as THE STRATEGY OF THE THIRD FRONT. This
strategy envisages the struggle on a world scale against the war,
against all the belligerent governments and belligerent armies,
and for the international socialist revolution. The troops of the
potential army of the third camp are to be found in the ranks of
the workers and poor farmers, the women and the youth, in all
countries, in the enslaved populations of the colonies, semi-colonies,
subject-nations, throughout the world, all of whom have only sor­
row, starvation and death in prospect from the war, and for whom
socialist revolt against the war alone can offer solution. The ranks of
the potential army of the third camp would be built up by the revolu­tionaries
any support of any of the warring governments or armies, the
resolute pursuance of the class struggle in all countries, irrespec­
tive of its influence upon the fortunes at the military fronts, and
the fight for liberation by the peoples of the colonies and semi­
colonies. The guiding slogans of the third camp are summarized
by: AGAINST THE WAR! PEACE THROUGH SOCIALISM!
FOR THE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE OPPRESSED
PEOPLES THROUGH THE SOCIALIST UNITED STATES OF
EUROPE! FOR A SOCIALIST UNITED STATES OF THE
AMERICAS! FOR A FREE AFRICA! FOR A FREE
ASIA! FOR A WORLD FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST
REPUBLICS!

3. The Soviet Union is participating integrally in the world
imperialist war for the re-division of the earth. The Russian rev­
olutionists and the Russian masses generally neither desired nor
welcomed Stalin's war. The Soviet workers and peasants and the
nationally oppressed peoples of the U.S.S.R. will express their dis­
content and hatred of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy and
its predatory war as an anti-war opposition movement—the only
real basis for the revolutionary overthrow of Stalin in the present
war. The reactionary character of its participation is demon­
strated equally by: the policy and aims of the Soviet government
and army—bureaucratic expansionism—which in no way advance
or defend the interests of the Russian or the world proletariat,
but on the contrary are solely in the interests of the preservation
and development of the bureaucratic privileges of the bureau­
cracy; the character of the alliance with Germany: and by the
effects of its participation, which are in no way to advance the
prerequisites of the socialist revolution—above all the independ­
ent struggle of the proletariat and the colonial peoples for power,
freedom, and socialism—but on the contrary to wipe out those
prerequisites. Stalin's present war is no more a "defense of
nationalized property" than Daladier's is a "defense of democ­

4. Revolutionary socialists are obligated therefore to revise
the former conception of "unconditional defense of the Soviet
Union," which, under the circumstances of the present war, leads
to a strategy which is in direct opposition to the interests of
the world socialist revolution. The revolutionary strategy applies to
the Soviet government and armies as to the other bel­
ligerent powers. In certain concrete cases, as, for example, in
the invasion of Finland, we raise such slogans as, "Withdraw the Red
Army from Finland!" "Stop the war!" etc. The slogans FOR A FREE
SOVIET UKRAINE! and FOR the freedom of the other non-
Russian nationalities within the Soviet Union who may wish it,
FOR WORKERS' CONTROL OF INDUSTRY! FOR WORKERS'
DEMOCRACY! DOWN WITH PRIVILEGE! FOR THE OVER­
THROW OF THE BUREAUCRACY!, and the struggle for these
and for the other economic and social demands of the workers
and peasants, irrespective of the effect of this struggle upon the
military front, together with the international orientation proposed
in the general slogans applicable to the war, these alone answer
the needs of the Russian masses, including the genuine defense
of nationalized property and its utilization for socialist develop­
ment, and will fuse their struggle with that of the masses of the
entire world for PEACE THROUGH SOCIALISM.

5. It is not possible to give in advance a detailed reply to all
hypothetical variants of future developments of the war. But, for
example, if the present enemies of Germany were to engage the
Red Army on Russian, or non-Russian soil, as an extension of their
opposition to Russian aid to Germany and conflict with Stalinist
bureaucracy expansion—then is, that the character of Russia's par­
ticipation in the war would remain the same (as described in
point 3), our present position would remain unchanged. However,
if the character of the war should change corresponding to the
change in the character of the war. In such a case, the Stalinist
bureaucracy, despite the fact that it continues to defend, in its own way, its power and revenue, would be confronted with a progressive war. The revolutionary working class
would in this case adopt the position of defense of the Soviet
Union. Our position would be dictated by the interests of the
world proletariat which coincide with the struggle to defend
Soviet nationalized property from liquidation by any imperialist
powers. The defense of the Soviet Union would be con­
ducted by us independently, without for a moment abandoning
the political struggle against the counter-revolutionary bureau­
cracy.

6. In the United States, our main enemy remains at home.
The special task of the Socialist Workers Party is resistance to
all attempts of the capitalist bureaucracy and its government, and of the
labour bureaucracy and social-patriots, to exploit the crimes of
Stalinism for the purpose of identifying it with revolution­
ary socialism, and for the purpose of whipping up an imperialist pro­
war spirit among the masses and of dragging the country into war.