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## SOME QUESTIONS ON AMERICAN PROBLEMS by Leon Trotsky

QUESTION 1: *What should be the role of a draftable revolutionist in the United States now?*

- (a) *Should he try to avoid the draft?*
- (b) *To what extent should the party try to conserve its cadres?*
- (c) *Should the party concentrate most of its strength in the military or industrial sections of the country?*
- (d) *What are the alternative roles of a woman revolutionist in this war?*

TROTSKY: If he is draftable, then let him be drafted. I don't think he should try to avoid the draft—he must go with his generation and participate in its life. Should the party try to conserve its cadres by saving them from the army? This means conserving them in a very bad sense. When the best part of the population is mobilized, then our cadres

must be among them.

Should the party concentrate most of its strength in the military or industrial organizations? This depends upon the size of the militarization and mobilization. If the greater part of the population is militarized then the greater part of our party would also be in the army.

About the women—inasmuch as the women will replace men in many branches of industry and social work, our comrades will also play the role of their generation.

We should understand that the life of this society, politics, everything, will be based upon war, therefore the revolutionary program must also be based on war. We cannot oppose the fact of the war with wishful thinking; with pious pacifism. We must place ourselves upon the arena created by this society. The arena is terrible—it is war—but inasmuch as we are weak and incapable of taking the fate of society into our hands; inasmuch as the ruling class is strong enough to impose upon us this war, we are obliged to accept this basis for our activity.

### "PROGRAM FOR PEACE" IS NOT SERIOUS

I read a short report of a discussion that Shachtman had with a professor in Michigan, and Shachtman formulated this idea: "Let us have a program for peace, not war; for the masses, not for murder," etc. What does this mean? If we do not have peace, we cannot have a program for peace. If we have war, we must have a program for war, and the bourgeoisie cannot help but organize the war. Neither Roosevelt nor Willkie are free to decide; they *must* prepare the war, and when they have prepared it they will conduct it. They will say they cannot do otherwise, because of the danger from Hitler, etc., of the danger from Japan, etc. There is only one way of avoiding the war—that is the overthrow of this society. However, as we are too weak for this task, the war is inevitable. The question then, for us, is not the same as in the bourgeois salon—"let us write an article on peace, etc.", which is suitable for publications like *The Nation*. Our people must consider it seriously; we must say: the war is inevitable, so let us have an organized workers' program for the war. The draft of the youth is a part of the war and becomes part of our program.

It is questionable whether the United States will send an expeditionary force at this time. I have the impression that they are not disposed to send an army to Europe or anywhere else for a couple of years, because you cannot create such an army over-night in a country where you do not have a military tradition, as, for instance, in Germany, where for centuries they have had a tradition of Prussian militarism.

Now the capitalists wish to create this tremendous army of millions, to create officers, to create a new military spirit, and they have begun with full success to change the public opinion of the nation toward militarism. At the time that Roosevelt made his campaign speech, there was an outburst of public opinion for isolationism, but now all this sentiment belongs to the past—to the childhood of the nation—in spite of the fact that it took place only a few months ago.

Now the national feeling is for a tremendous army, navy and air force. This is the psychological atmosphere for the creation of a military machine, and you will see it become stronger and stronger every day and every week. You will have military schools, etc., and a Prussianization of the United States will take place. The sons of the bourgeois families will become imbued with Prussian feelings and ideals, and their parents will be proud that their sons look like Prussian lieutenants. To some extent this will be also true of the workers.

### SEPARATING THE WORKERS FROM THE BOSSES

That is why we must try to separate the workers from the others by a program of education, of workers' schools, of workers' officers, devoted to the welfare of the worker army, etc. We cannot escape from the militarization but inside the machine we can observe the class line. The American workers do not want to be conquered by Hitler, and to those who say "Let us have a peace program", the worker will reply, "But Hitler does not want a peace program." Therefore *we* say: We will defend the United States with a workers' army, with workers' officers, with a workers' government, etc. If we are not pacifists, who wait for a better future, and if we are active revolutionists, our job is to penetrate into the whole military machine. Of course, out of this army, tomorrow they might select a corps to send to some battlefield, and no doubt this corps will be annihilated, but war is a risky business and we cannot invent any medicine against these risks.

Of course the party can make certain exceptions of those men who are necessary for a certain job, but this concerns only individual exceptions, and here we are discussing the rule. Furthermore, our comrades should be the best soldiers and the best officers and at the same time the best class militants. They should provoke in the workers a mistrust of the old tradition, the military plans of the bourgeois class and officers, and should insist upon the necessity of educating workers' officers, who will be absolutely loyal to the proletariat. In this epoch every great question, national or international, will be resolved with arms—not by peaceful means. It doesn't depend upon my will or your will, but is caused by the contradictions of the society which has put this problem before us, and from which we cannot escape. That is why it is the duty of every worker and revolutionist to learn how to manipulate arms skillfully.

About the losses in the trade unions, if we have a large mobilization, then the unions will immediately lose the best elements and only the older people will remain. These people are not as likely to be persistent. On the other hand, the younger generations for the first time in history will feel themselves armed—by the State itself! It is absolutely correct that in the first period we will have an explosion of chauvinistic patriotism, and that we will be isolated even more than now, and that this period of activity will inevitably be limited by repressions, but we must adapt ourselves to the situation. That is why it would be doubly

stupid to present a purely abstract pacifist position today; the feeling the masses have is that it is necessary to defend themselves. We must say: "Roosevelt (or Willkie) says it is necessary to defend the country; good! only it must be *our* country, not that of the 60 families and their Wall Street. The army must be under our own command; we must have our own officers, who will be loyal to us." In this way we can find an approach to the masses that will not push them away from us, and thus to prepare for the second step—a more revolutionary one.

#### PROFOUND IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH EVENTS

We must use the example of France to the very end. We must say, "I warn you, workers, that they (the bourgeoisie) will betray you! Look at Petain, who is a friend of Hitler. Shall we have the same thing happen in this country. We must create our own machine, under workers' control." We must be careful not to identify ourselves with the chauvinists, nor with the confused sentiments of self-preservation, but we must understand their feelings and adapt ourselves to these feelings critically, and prepare the masses for a better understanding of the situation, otherwise we will remain a sect, of which the pacifist variety is the most miserable.

We must also say that the war has a tendency toward totalitarian dictatorship. War develops a centralization, and during war the bourgeois class cannot allow the workers any new concessions. The trade unions will therefore become a kind of Red Cross for the workers, a sort of philanthropic institution. The bosses themselves will be under control by the State, everything will be sacrificed to the army, and the trade union influence will become zero. And we must say of this now: "If you don't place yourselves on a workers' military basis, with workers' schools, workers' officers, etc., and go to war on the old style military basis, you will be doomed." And this, in its own way, will preserve the trade unions themselves.

Even if the United States sends armies abroad, to Europe or Asia, and the mortality rate will be expectedly high, we cannot make exceptions for our comrades, because on the other hand we cannot foresee the tempo of revolutionary development in Europe or Asia, and perhaps the American army will enter such a country during a revolutionary beginning. In that case even two or three of our men can play a tremendous role during such a period. They might try to use this American army against such a revolution, and in that case even one

courageous man can turn the regiment into another direction. This cannot be foreseen—there are too many unknowns; but that is why we say we must all go with our class.

#### WE CANNOT STAND ASIDE FROM OUR CLASS!

I do not believe that a revolutionary can remain aside for the first critical period—say, a year or so—and then come with his stick and hat and say, "Now, comrades, we will begin the revolution!" Excuse me for making a caricature of this. But if he is in the army and tells the others about the dangers in the bourgeois institutions and advises them to create a workers' program for war, in spite of all the chauvinistic attacks upon him, and even if they turn him away, they will later say, "Remember, he told us so." And then he becomes an authority. This is repeated in every war, and not only in wars but in strikes and trade union movements. All they have to remember is: "This man warned us and we rejected him." Then he becomes their leader, a hero.

If the leaders seek only to preserve themselves, that is what they become; preserves—dried preserves. If they enter the movement, they give the impulse to five, ten, twenty others. It is more important to multiply our cadres than to preserve them, and they can be multiplied by the hundreds. Our cadres need education and experience in mass movements, and how can they get this outside the life of the masses? No, it is not possible to jump out of your epoch. Moreover, we would have to make arrangements with the General Staff, and I am sure they would not agree with the idea of escape!

#### THE COMING CHANGE IN THE AMERICAN WORKERS

QUESTION 2: *How will the backwardness of the United States working class advance or retard the growth of fascism?*

(a) *What are the possibilities of the war time dictatorship becoming a full fledged fascist dictatorship?*

TROTSKY: The backwardness of the United States working class is only a relative term. In many very important respects it is the most progressive working class of the world; technically, and in its standard of living.

We can look forward now to a change in the economic situation of the United States—a very brusque change, and then when the war comes, to the misery which will follow. Even now,

under the program of militarization with millions upon millions thrown into the war machine, the rapid lowering of the standard of living for the working class will produce a very rapid change of mind in the American workers.

The American worker is very combative—as we have seen during the strikes. They have had the most rebellious strikes in the world. What the American worker misses is a spirit of generalization, or analysis, of his class position in society as a whole. This lack of social thinking has its origin in the country's whole history—the Far West with the perspective of unlimited possibilities for everyone to become rich, etc. Now all that is gone, but the mind remains in the past. Idealists think the human mentality is progressive, but in reality it is the most conservative element of society. Your technique is progressive but the mentality of the worker lags far behind. Their backwardness consists of their inability to generalize their problem; they consider everything on a personal basis.

Now, the war will teach the American workers social thinking. The economic crisis has already begun and in the C.I.O. we see the first reaction of the workers—confused but important. They begin to feel themselves as a class; they see 10 to 14 millions of unemployed, etc. Now the war will continue to teach them social thinking, and this means revolutionary thinking.

#### FASCISM WILL COME ONLY IF WE FAIL

About fascism. In all the countries where fascism became victorious, we had before the growth of fascism and its victory, a wave of radicalism of the masses; of the workers and the poorer peasants and farmers, and of the petty bourgeois class. In Italy, after the war and before 1922, we had a revolutionary wave of tremendous dimensions; the state was paralyzed, the police did not exist, the trade unions could do anything they wanted—but there was no party capable of taking the power. As a reaction came fascism.

In Germany the same. We had a revolutionary situation in 1918; the bourgeois class did not even ask to participate in the power. The Social Democrats paralyzed the revolution. Then the workers tried again in 1922-23-24. This was the time of the bankruptcy of the Communist party—all of which we have gone into before. Then in 1929-30-31 the German workers began again a new revolutionary wave.

There was a tremendous power in the Communists and in the trade unions, but then came the famous policy of Social Fascism, a policy invented to paralyze the working class. Only after these three tremendous waves, did fascism become a big movement. There are no exceptions to this rule—fascism comes only when the working class shows complete incapacity to take into its own hands the fate of society.

In the United States you will have the same thing. Already there are fascist elements, and they have of course the examples of Italy and Germany. They will therefore work in a more rapid tempo. But you also have the examples of other countries. The next historic waves in the United States will be waves of radicalism of the masses; not fascism. Of course the war can hinder the radicalization for some time but then it will give to the radicalization a more tremendous tempo and swing. The war cannot organically change developments but only retard them for some time—and then give them a push. War, as we have said before, is only the continuation of politics by other means. In this sense, I am sure you will have many possibilities to win the power in the United States before the fascists can become a dominant force.

We must not identify war dictatorship—the dictatorship of the military machine, of the staff, of finance capital—with fascist dictatorship. For the latter there is first necessary a feeling of desperation of large masses of the people. When the revolutionary parties betray them, when the vanguard of workers shows its incapacity to lead the people to victory—then the farmers, the small business men, the unemployed, the soldiers, etc. become capable of supporting a fascist movement, but only then.

A military dictatorship is purely a bureaucratic institution, reinforced by the military machine and based upon the disorientation of the people and their submission to it. After some time their feelings can change, and they can become rebellious against the military dictatorship.

Yes, the feeling against conscription in the United States could possibly become a point of departure for such a rebelliousness. Here is our opportunity to show the workers how the bourgeois class resolves its problems, and we could say: "You see, they now want to impose upon you a Prussian militarism, with its lack of regard for workers' lives." We could demand, possibly, the election of officers—and this can become a very good slogan. "Officers elected by the soldiers themselves."

## AMERICAN ECONOMY DURING THE WAR

QUESTION 3: *What are the possibilities of building a self-sustaining economy in the Western Hemisphere?*

TROTSKY: Not very good, especially during the war. During the war we will have a deepening of self-sustaining misery throughout the whole Western Hemisphere. The war is only the beginning—the results will remain for decades. Even Hitler, who now has Europe, and tomorrow will have Great Britain, has only hungry people. He must have the colonies, and that signifies the oceans—and that means a fight with the United States for the dominions of Great Britain. This would be a long term conflict, and after the German soldiers and sailors have been at war, they will return home to a country of misery, of famine and pestilence. These are Hitler's gains for the next years.

When the United States goes to war they will introduce a war economy. This means sacrificing everything for the army and war purposes—and misery for the population. How can there be a self-sustaining economy for the United States? In times of peace you have 10 million unemployed—and this in a time of relative prosperity; during crises you have 13 to 14 million unemployed. Moreover you must export. To do this you must import. What? Products that will ruin your farmers, who are even now being supported artificially? No, there is no possibility. Instead, it is necessary to organize a kind of fascism—an organized control of the misery, because what is fascism except the organization of misery for the people. The New Deal tried to do it in a better way but did not succeed, because at that period you remained too rich for a fascist misery. However you will become poorer and poorer, and as a result the next New Deal will be in fascist form. The only solution carries the name of Socialism.

The Pan American conference is probably the last spectacular form of convulsion of the Rooseveltian Good Neighbor policy. The United States cannot enter a world war, or even make serious preparation for it without assuring first the full domination of the Latin American countries. Their real assurance is their American fleet and air-craft, so that the iron fist shows beneath the Good Neighbor policy. We saw that Argentina was a bit rebellious, but that was their last convulsion of independence. Washington will not permit such a rebellious atti-

tude. The armies, of course, have a world purpose, but the immediate step is first directed to South America to teach them to obey. For the United States, Latin America is like Austria and Czechoslovakia was to Hitler—a spring-board to the larger things.

As to whether the United States will take direct control over the Latin American countries, Canada, or let them remain under governors—*gauleiters*—we will see both! We will have various combinations in the next period, and Washington will name the terms.

## ON THE "WORKERS" PARTY

QUESTION 4: *In your opinion were there enough political differences between the majority and minority to warrant a split?*

TROTSKY: Here it is also necessary to consider the question dialectically, not mechanically. What does this terrible word "dialectics" mean? It means to consider things in their development, not in their static situation. If we take the political differences as they are, we can say they were not sufficient for a split, but if they developed a tendency to turn away from the proletariat in the direction of petty bourgeois circles, then the same differences can have an absolutely different value; a different weight; if they are connected with a different social group. This is a very important point.

We have the fact that the minority split away from us, in spite of all the measures taken by the majority not to split. This signifies that their inner social feeling was such that it is impossible for them to go together with us. It is a petty bourgeois tendency, not a proletarian. If you wish a new confirmation of this, we have an excellent example in the article of Dwight Macdonald.

First of all, what characterizes a proletarian revolutionary? No one is obliged to participate in a revolutionary party, but if he does participate, he considers the party seriously. If we dare to call the people for a revolutionary change of society, we carry a tremendous responsibility, which we must consider very seriously. And what is our theory, but merely the tools of our action? These tools are our Marxist theory because up to today we have not found better tools. A worker is not fantastic about tools—If they are the best tools he can get he is careful with them; he does not abandon them or demand fantastic non-existent tools.

Burnham is an intellectual snob. He picks

up one party, abandons it, takes up another. A worker cannot do this. If he enters a revolutionary party, addresses the people, calls them for action, it is the same as a general during a war—he must know where he is leading them. What would you think of a general who said he thought the guns were bad—that it would be better to wait for 10 years until they had invented better guns, so everybody had better go home. That is the way Burnham reasons. So he abandoned the party. But the unemployed remain, and the war remains. These things cannot be postponed. Therefore it is only Burnham who has postponed his action.

#### PETTY BOURGEOIS SCEPTICISM

Dwight Macdonald is not a snob, but a bit stupid. I quote: "The intellectual, if he is to serve any useful function in society, must not deceive either himself or others, must not accept as good coin what he knows is counterfeit, must not forget in a moment of crisis what he has learned over a period of years and decades." Good. Absolutely correct. I quote again: "Only if we meet the stormy and terrible years ahead with both *scepticism* and devotion—scepticism towards *all* theories, governments and social systems; devotion to the revolutionary fight of the masses—only then can we justify ourselves as intellectuals."

Here is one of the leaders of the so-called "Workers" Party, who considers himself not a proletarian but an "intellectual". He speaks of scepticism toward all theories.

We have prepared ourselves for this crisis by studying, by building a scientific method, and our method is Marxism. Then the crisis comes and Mr. Macdonald says "be sceptical of all theories", and then talks about devotion to the revolution without replacing it with any new theory. Unless it is this sceptical theory of his own. How can we work without a theory? What is the fight of the masses and what is a revolutionary? The whole article is scandalous and a party which can tolerate such a man as one of its leaders is not serious.

I quote again: "What is the nature of the beast (fascism), then? Trotsky insists it is no more nor less than the familiar phenomenon of Bonapartism, in which a clique maintains itself in power by playing one class off against another, thus giving the State power a temporary autonomous character. But these modern totalitarian regimes are not temporary affairs; they have already changed the underlying economic and social structure, not only manipulating the old forms but also destroying their inner vitality. Is the Nazi bureaucracy a new ruling class, then, and fascism a new form of

society, comparable to capitalism? That doesn't seem to be true either.

Here he creates a new theory, a new definition of fascism, but he wishes, nevertheless, that we should be sceptical toward all theories. So also to the workers he would say that the instruments and tools they work with are not important but they must have devotion to their work! I think the workers would find a very sharp expression for such a statement.

It is very characteristic of the disappointed intellectual. He sees the war, the terrible epoch ahead; with losses, with sacrifices, and he is afraid. He begins to propagate scepticism and still he believes it is possible to unify scepticism with revolutionary devotion. We can only develop a revolutionary devotion if we are sure it is rational and possible, and we cannot have such assurances without a working theory. He who propagates theoretical scepticism is a traitor.

#### OUR OWN ACTUAL ANALYSIS OF FASCISM

We analyzed in fascism different elements.

1. The element which fascism has in common with the old Bonapartism, is that it used the antagonisms of classes in order to give to the State power the greatest independence. But we have always underlined that the old Bonapartism was in a time of an ascending bourgeois society, while fascism is a State power of the declining bourgeois society.

2. That fascism is an attempt of the bourgeois class to overcome—to overstep, the contradiction between the new technique and private property without eliminating the private property. It is the "planned economy" of fascism. It is an attempt to save private property and at the same time to check private property.

3. To overstep the contradiction between the new, modern technique of productive forces within the limited borders of the national state. This new technique cannot be limited by the borders of the old national state and fascism attempts to overcome this contradiction. The result is the war. We have already analyzed all these elements.

#### WE MUST MAKE USE OF EVERY INTELLECTUAL

Dwight Macdonald will abandon the party just as Burnham did, but possibly because he is a little lazier, it will come later.

Burnham was considered "good stuff" at one time? Yes, the proletarian party in our epoch must make use of every intellectual who

can contribute to the party. I spent many months on Diego Rivera, to have him for our movement, but did not succeed. But every International has had an experience of this kind. The First International had troubles with the poet, Freiligrath, who was also very capricious. The Second and Third Internationals had trouble with Maxim Gorki. The Fourth International with Rivera. In every case they separated from us.

Burnham was, of course, closer to the move-

ment, but Cannon had his doubts about him. He can write, and has some formal skill in thinking, not deep, but adroit. He can accept your idea, develop it, write a fine article about it—and then forget it. The author can forget—but the worker cannot. However, so long as we can use such people, well and good. Mussolini at one time was also "good stuff"!

*Coyoacan, D. F.*

*August 7, 1940.*

# S.W.P. Resolution on Proletarian Military Policy

*Adopted at Plenum-Conference held in Chicago, September 27 to 29.*

1. Capitalism has plunged the world into a horrible vortex of war and militarism. This testifies not to the vitality of capitalism but to its fatal weakness, its incapacity to regain stability. The epoch of the death agony of capitalism and the beginning of social transformation is an epoch of universal militarism. It can be brought to an end only by the definitive victory of the proletariat. This is the essential feature of the present world situation.

2. The intervention of the United States in the present war, or its clash with a victorious Germany or Japan at a later date, is predetermined by all the circumstances. All the realistic leaders of American capitalism clearly understand this. Only a few pacifist fools have the slightest doubt about it. The two main groups in the camp of U.S. imperialism—interventionist and so-called isolationists—differ only in regard to military strategy. Both are agreed on the policy of preparing to fight and grab. The stupendous arms program adopted by Congress has and can have only one meaning: military aggression in the near future on a world scale.

The question whether German imperialism, having conquered Europe, can or cannot "attack" the United States has nothing to do with the real issue. The very existence of one aggressive and expanding imperialist power in the modern world is an "attack" on the others. The United States, as an imperialist power having its foundations throughout the world,

is "attacked" anywhere a rival power attempts to seize a market, a piece of territory or a sphere of influence.

Whether the United States directly intervenes in the present European war, or defers open military action for another point of attack is only a secondary consideration in evaluating the perspective. The real course is clear: U.S. imperialism is preparing with all possible speed to put its strength and its weakness to the test of war on a colossal scale.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL LESSON

3. In the epoch of militarism great questions can be decided only by military means—this is the fundamental lesson of the developments of the present war.

The agents and apologists of democratic imperialism—the social democrats, the centrists, the trade union reformists and the pacifists—fill the air with lamentations over the smashing military victories of Hitler and spread the sentiments of pessimism and prostration.

We Fourth Internationalists thrust aside these traitors and panic mongers with hatred and contempt. Our task is to ascertain what has been destroyed and what has been proved by the momentous events in Europe and to draw the necessary conclusions for the future struggle.

## REFORMISM CANNOT LIVE TODAY

In the first place the victories of the fascist

war machine of Hitler have destroyed every plausible basis for the illusion that a serious struggle against fascism can be conducted under the leadership of a bourgeois democratic regime. The war in Europe, as previously in the Spanish rehearsal, has shown up the hollowness, the rottenness and the contemptible cowardice and greed of the whole ruling stratum of the bourgeois democrats. They are unwilling to sacrifice anything but the lives of the duped masses. To save their personal lives and their property they were ready in one country after another to capitulate to fascism and seek its protection against the wrath of their own people.

No less complete and devastating has been the destruction of the traditional reformist labor movement. At best, this traditional movement—the parties and the trade unions—was pacifist in character. That is, it was designed for peace, not for war. Parties which confined themselves to protests against the horrors of war, and did not seriously conduct a struggle for power to end the system which causes war—such parties were completely helpless when submitted to the test of war. The same proved true of the outwardly imposing trade unions. All concepts of peaceful, gradual, reformist progress within the framework of capitalism, and all parties and organizations which represented these concepts in any degree, were smashed like a house of cards.

#### BOLSHEVISM ALONE STANDS UP

The war in Europe has once again, and more categorically than ever, posed the fundamental alternative of the epoch of wars and revolutions: either the dictatorship of fascist capitalism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. The attempt of the European workers, under the influence of the reformist labor bureaucracies, to find in democratic capitalism a third alternative, led to catastrophe. The third alternative has been destroyed in blood and fire. But the program of the workers' fight for power has not been destroyed. When the workers of Europe rise again—and rise they will—that program will be their banner. These are the fundamental lessons of the war.

4. Bolshevism alone, which aims to direct the workers' movement to the seizure of political power by revolutionary means, stands up and gains strength under the test of the great new events. War and militarism which crush all other organizations and discredit all other programs, only provide a new verification of the premises of Bolshevism. The military epoch has room only for parties which inspire

the workers to scorn all half measures, to stop at nothing, and to carry their struggle through to the very end. These are parties of a new type having nothing in common with the reformist-pacifist parties of the traditional labor movement. Such a party is the Socialist Workers Party. Its program can be described in one phrase: dictatorship of the proletariat.

#### RIDDING OURSELVES OF PACIFISM

5. The certainty that the United States also will be dominated by militarism confronts the party with the categorical necessity to purge itself of all remnants of liberal, petty bourgeois pacifist tendencies and conceptions carried over from the past, in particular from the left social-democratic movement. Pacifism is a debilitating poison in the workers' movement. Pacifism, in all its forms, is no more than a protest in time of peace against war; in the face of actual war it thrusts the workers like sheep, unarmed and defenseless and without a program, into the slaughter. In our epoch, which is completely dominated by militarism, negative protests against war are of no avail whatever. The proletariat requires a positive program which takes the facts of war and militarism, the characteristic features of decaying capitalism, as the starting point for practical actions.

The first impact of the war in Europe revealed a petty-bourgeois centrist tendency in the Socialist Workers Party which took shape as a faction. Under the leadership of Burnham and Shachtman this minority faction waged a disruptive struggle in the party and attempted to overthrow the Marxist doctrines in favor of journalistic improvisations. The disruptive struggle of the Burnham-Shachtman faction culminated in their desertion of the party in a typical petty bourgeois recoil against the discipline of the proletarian majority of the party. The open repudiation of socialism by Burnham within less than two months after he had deserted the party was only the logical sequel to the course he followed in the party struggle. Burnham's betrayal of socialism confirmed to the hilt the party's characterization of this pretentious mountebank and the petty bourgeois faction he organized and maneuvered into a split.

Since the party convention the seceding faction has evolved consistently in the direction of traditional left socialist anti-militarism which at bottom is only a form of pacifism. The resolute struggle of the party majority against the Burnham-Shachtman faction, and its decisive victory in the struggle, were the necessary



conditions for the survival of the party. An unrelenting antagonism to the deserters on every point is no less necessary. The party cannot have the slightest reason for conciliation on any point with the faction of deserters inspired by petty bourgeois fright before the stern realities and complexities of the developing war.

#### ADAPTING OUR TACTICS TO WAR

6. The imperialist war is not our war and the militarism of the capitalist state is not our militarism. We do not support the war and militarism of the imperialists any more than we support the capitalist exploitation of workers in the factories. We are against the war as a whole just as we are against the rule of the class which conducts it, and never under any circumstances vote to give them any confidence in their conduct of the war or preparation for it—not a man, not a cent, not a gun with our support. Our war is the war of the working class against the capitalist order.

But only with the masses is it possible to conquer power and establish socialism; and in these times the masses in the military organizations are destined to play the most decisive role of all. Consequently, it is impossible to affect the course of events by a policy of abstention. It is necessary to take capitalist militarism as an established reality which we are not yet strong enough to abolish, and adapt our practical tactics to it. Our task is to protect the class interests of the workers in the army no less than in the factory. That means to participate in the military machine for socialist ends. The proletarian revolutionists are obliged to take their place beside the workers in the military training camps and on the battlefields in the same way as in the factory. They stand side by side with the masses of worker-soldiers, advance at all times and under all circumstances the independent class point of view, and strive to win over the majority to the idea of transforming the war into a struggle for their socialist emancipation.

#### WE GO WHERE THE WORKERS GO

Under conditions of mass militarization the revolutionary workers cannot evade military exploitation any more than he can evade exploitation in the factory. He does not seek a personal solution of the problem of war by evading military service. That is nothing but a desertion of class duty. The proletarian revolutionist goes with the masses. He becomes a soldier when they become soldiers, and goes to war when they go to war. The proletarian revolutionist strives to become the most skilled

among the worker-soldiers, and demonstrates in action that he is most concerned for the general welfare and protection of his comrades. Only in this way, as in the factory, can the proletarian revolutionist gain the confidence of his comrades in arms and become an influential leader among them.

The total wars waged by the modern imperialists, and likewise the preparations for such wars, require compulsory military training no less than the appropriation of enormous funds and the subordination of industry to the manufacture of armaments. As long as the masses accept the war preparations, as is indubitably the case in the United States, mere negative agitation against the military budget and conscription cannot, by itself, yield serious results. Moreover, after Congress had already appropriated billions for armaments and was certain to pass a conscription bill without serious opposition, such negative agitation against conscription was somewhat belated and easily degenerated into mealy-mouthed pacifism. This proved to be the case with the organizations (Thomasite Socialists, Lovestoneites, etc.) affiliated with the progrosterous conglomeration which calls itself the "Keep America Out of War Committee"—a vile and treacherous tool of the "democratic" imperialists. The hypocrisy of their pacifism is indicated by the fact that, simultaneously, they declare themselves in favor of the victory of Britain. Equally treacherous is the purely pacifist agitation of the Stalinists, employed today on behalf of Stalin's foreign policy under the Hitler-Stalin pact; and certain to be abandoned tomorrow when Stalin so orders, if he finds it necessary to switch partners. The pacifism of Browder and the pacifism of Thomas stem from different roots but are identical in their betrayal of the interests of the working class. Under the rule of a modern imperialism which is already arming to the teeth, an abstract fight against militarism is at best Quixotic.

#### OUR PROGRAM FOR THIS PERIOD

The revolutionary strategy can only be to take this militarism as a reality and counterpose a class program of the proletariat to the program of the imperialists at every point. We fight against sending the worker-soldiers into battle without proper training and equipment. We oppose the military direction of worker-soldiers by bourgeois officers who have no regard for their treatment, their protection and their lives. We demand federal funds for the military training of workers and worker-officers under the control of the trade unions.

Military appropriations? Yes—but only for the establishment and equipment of worker training camps! Compulsory military training of workers? Yes—but only under the control of the trade unions!

Such are the necessary concrete slogans for the present stage of the preparation of U.S. imperialism for war in the near future. They constitute a military transitional program supplementing the general political transitional program of the party.

7. U.S. imperialism prepares for war, materially and ideologically, without waiting to decide in advance the date when actual hostilities shall begin or the precise point of attack. The workers' vanguard must likewise prepare for war without dependence on speculative answers to these secondary questions. The militarization of the country in preparation for war is taking place before our eyes. All our work and plans for the future must be based on this reality.

#### THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US

The first stages of militarization and war present enormous difficulties to our party because

we have to swim against the stream. The party will be tested in a preliminary way by its capacity to recognize these difficulties and hold firm when the struggle is hard and the progress slow. Only a party fortified by the great principles and world associations of the Fourth International will be able to do this.

We are not a party like other parties. We alone are equipped with a scientific program of Marxism. We alone retain an unshakable confidence in the socialist future of humanity. We alone are ready to meet the universal militarism of decaying capitalism on its own terms and lead the proletarian struggle for power accordingly.

The war in its course will utterly destroy all other workers' parties, all half-and-half movements. But it will only harden the bona fide party of the Fourth International and open the way for its growth and eventual victory.

The future belongs to the party of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the party of the Fourth International. It needs only to be true to itself, hold firm, dig in and prepare the future.

# Our Military Policy

## James P. Cannon's Summary

### THE MAIN QUESTION: MILITARY POLICY.

Now I come to the decisive and basic question with which our party occupies itself, the question of military policy. During the discussion some comrades have asked: Was our old line wrong? Does the resolution represent a completely new departure and a reversal of the policy of the past? It is not quite correct to say that the old line was wrong. It was a program devised for the fight against war in time of peace. Our fight against war under conditions of peace was correct as far as it went. But it was not adequate. It must be extended. The old principles, which remain unchanged, must be applied concretely to the new conditions of permanent war and universal militarism. We didn't visualize, nobody visualized, a world situation in which whole countries would be conquered by fascist armies. The workers don't want to be conquered by foreign invaders, above all by fascists. They require a program of military struggle against foreign invaders which assures their class independence. That is the gist of the problem.

Many times in the past we were put at a

certain disadvantage; the demagogy of the Social Democrats against us was effective to a certain extent. They said, "You have no answer to the question of how to fight against Hitler, how to prevent Hitler from conquering France, Belgium, etc." (Of course their program was very simple—the suspension of the class struggle and complete subordination of the workers to the bourgeoisie. We have seen the results of this treacherous policy.) Well, we answered in a general way, the workers will first overthrow the bourgeoisie at home and then they will take care of invaders. That was a good program, but the workers did not make the revolution in time. Now the two tasks must be telescoped and carried out simultaneously.

The main thing is that we must operate not under the old conditions of peace, but under the new conditions of universal militarism and war. We cannot avoid the new circumstances; we must adapt our tactics to them. In times of strike, we urge the workers to stay out of a plant. But when the majority decides to go back, we have to go back with them and accept with them, for the time being, the exploitation of the bosses. Sometimes the defeat of a strike goes so far as not only to smash a legitimate

union but to drive the workers into the bosses' company union. We are against company unions; but if the workers are driven into them we go along and try to work there in the interests of the proletariat. Analogous tactics must be applied also in questions of war and militarism.

We had a great Marxist for a teacher, and a part of his genius was his never failing application of Marxist tactics. He always took the existing situation, in its totality, as the point of departure. The Bolsheviks set out in 1917 to overthrow the whole capitalist world. They did overthrow the Russian bourgeoisie, but the other countries remained under the domination of the international capitalist class. So, at a certain point, the Bolsheviks drew the balance and said: "Here is the situation as it exists in reality. We cannot overthrow the other imperialist bandits at present. The workers are not yet ready. Therefore, let us open trade relations with the imperialist countries, gain a little breathing space and overthrow them tomorrow." Comrade Trotsky was prompted to elaborate and extend our tactics by the new situation in the world. A party which fails to adapt itself to this situation, to existing war, can play no role whatsoever.

#### WE ARE PROLETARIAN MILITARISTS

One comrade here tried to justify a policy of anti-militarism. His remarks were, to my opinion, a reminiscence of departed days. Anti-militarism was all right when we were fighting against war in times of peace. But here you have a new situation of universal militarism. It is obvious that all over the world, everything is going to be settled not by mass meetings, not by petitions, not by strikes, not even by mass demonstrations in the streets. Everything is going to be settled by military means, with arms in hand. So, can we now be anti-militarists? By no means! Just the contrary. We must say: "All right, the situation, not of our making, is that military force decides. There is only one thing left for the workers to do. That is to learn how to be good fighters with modern weapons." So we anti-militarists of yesterday become positive militarists today. The comrade who tries to represent our position today as still anti-militarist is, in my opinion, decidedly wrong.

I raised this question in our conversations with comrade Trotsky. After he had elaborated his ideas, I put the question to him and asked him to make his answer as sharp and categorical as possible. I asked: "Can we call ourselves militarists?" And he said, "Yes.

It might not be tactically advisable to begin with such a proclamation, but if the pacifists accuse you of it, if you are accused of being a militarist, you take the platform and say, 'Yes, I am a proletarian revolutionary militarist.'" This doesn't contradict the somewhat different attitude we took in somewhat different times—when the possibility of preventing war by revolution could not be excluded.

Was the fight of the social-pacifist elements against conscription right in this last period? No, it was not right. It overlooked realities and sowed illusions. The workers were for conscription. The conscription bill was carried without any serious opposition whatsoever. The fight as we conducted it, for workers' control, was 100% correct. We are positively for conscription, but we do not want conscription of the workers by the bosses. We want conscription of the workers by a workers' organization. If some horrified muddle-head of a pacifist asks: "Do you really mean it? Do you want to compel every worker to take up arms and learn how to use arms?" We answer, "Yes, that is exactly what we mean." How do we justify such compulsion? By the necessities of the class struggle which justify everything. There is nothing new in such an attitude. A certain amount of compulsion has always been invoked by the labor movement against the backward, the slackers.

For example, trade unions always strive to make membership compulsory. The intelligent, loyal and serious workers join the union voluntarily. Then they say to the backward, to the ignorant and to the scab-hearted: Join if you will, peacefully, but join this union or else stay out of that factory. That's compulsion for you, my boy. We cannot allow your ignorance or mistaken conception of individual interest to interfere with the class interests as a whole. What is a picket line? Well, some that I have seen at least, had aspects of extraordinary persuasion. I have seen picket lines of such a nature that if anyone wanted to argue about it, he didn't even get a chance to argue. He either stayed out or got knocked out. Compulsion in the class war is a class necessity. We didn't invent it. It must be applied also to military training.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF THIS STRUGGLE.

An interesting question, asked by some workers, was reported here: "How can you tell the workers to put themselves under the control of the unions for military training when the unions are controlled by people like Lewis and Green and Hillman?" Well, if we wait until

the unions are led by the Fourth International, we lose all sense of the dynamics of their development. Green and Lewis and their similars—the whole upper bureaucracy of the labor movement at present—are agents of the capitalists in the labor movement, but they are not the same thing as the bosses. Their sole base of existence is the labor movement; and in spite of all the bureaucratism of the unions, they are subject to certain pressures, certain controls from below. When the worsening of conditions, supplemented by our agitation, raises a wave of radicalization in the masses, the workers will solve the problem of leadership in the workers' regiments as well as in the unions.

We always take the workers' organizations as they are. We join them as they are, support them as they are, try to remodel them from within. Of course, the very idea of a Lewis or a Green heading the military instruction of workers is far-fetched. Correctly understood, our fight for military training under trade union control is a mortal struggle against the reformist, non-fighting bureaucracy. The adoption of our policy, or even a strong movement in favor of it, would spell the doom of the present leaders. Nobody would believe these scoundrels are fit for such a serious enterprise as the instruction of workers for military action.

In 1917, following February, the Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow were in control of the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries, that is, men of the stripe of Lewis and Green, Hillman and Dubinsky; no better and no worse. In spite of that, because the Soviets embraced the workers, Lenin raised the slogan: "All power to the Soviets." In the course of that fight for all power to the Soviets, the Bolsheviks won to their side the majority of the workers. And almost coincidentally with the uprising, the workers threw out the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries and placed the Bolsheviks at their head. That's the way things have to be conceived in this question also.

The question of the referendum on war in connection with compulsory military training was raised by one of the comrades. This question was propounded to the Old Man in a letter from Goldman, and answered by him. The Old Man said: "I don't see why we should drop the demand for a referendum on war. Before they actually enter the war, an agitation for a people's referendum is an excellent means of showing up their fake democracy." It is a means of agitation against them. It is not so simple and automatic; one does not exclude the other.

Comrade Trotsky also answered the question whether our slogan of Workers' Defense Guards

is superseded by our military policy. He said he did not see why. He thought they were interrelated. Of course, at the present time, the emphasis is entirely on the question of penetrating the military organizations. But, as the crisis develops, all kinds of reactionary attacks will be made on the unions. Gangs will be organized to break them up. The union members will be under the constant necessity to protect themselves. The workers must be on guard to protect their unions. The slogan of Workers' Defense Guards can be raised at an appropriate time, not in contradiction to our military policy, but in correlation with it.

#### METHODS OF WORK IN THE ARMY

How do we work in a conscript army? someone asked. We work the same way as in a shop. Indeed, the main purpose of industry now is supplying the army. Where would you draw the line? There is hardly an industry that won't be mobilized either for the manufacture or transportation of materials for the army. The masses are in the army, or working to supply the army. The workers are subjected to military exploitation. We go in and defend the interests of the slaves of military exploitation, just as we go into the factory and fight against capitalist exploitation there. Our basic line everywhere is the class line.

The second point is to be careful, cautious. Make no *putsches*, make no premature moves that expose us and separate us from the masses. Go with the masses. Be with the masses, just as the Bolsheviks were in Kerensky's army.

Why can't we do that here? And how otherwise can we do it? How otherwise, in a world dominated by militarism, can we see our way to world salvation except through military means? And how can we get these military means except by penetrating the army as it exists?

We have one great assurance. I repeat what I said at the mass meeting. We have our opportunity before us in this country. Even if war is declared and a military dictatorship is instituted, even if all kinds of repressive measures are decreed—we must always remember that a dictatorship of the police and military forces, instituted by fiat, cannot be the same thing as a fascist dictatorship based on a mass movement mobilized over years of time after the workers have muffed their chance to take power. Before fascism can come in this country on a mass basis, according to the historical law elucidated by Comrade Trotsky, the great mass radicalization of the workers will take place. The workers here, as everywhere, will have the first chance to take power. That is all we need. We will have our chance, and we will not miss it.