



## Hitler, Stalin, and the Trotskyist split of 1939-40

# Reclaiming our history

By Sean Matgamna

**George Santanyana's aphorism, "Those who do not learn from history are likely to repeat it", is not less true for having become a cliché. And those who do not know their own history cannot learn from it.**

The history of the Trotskyist movement — that is, of organised revolutionary Marxism for most of the 20th century — is a case in point. To an enormous extent the received history of that movement is not "history" but the all-too-often mendacious, and always tendentious, folklore generated by competing sects over many decades.

The folklore infects much of what academic history there is on the movement, for instance, Robert Alexander's enormous volume on "International Trotskyism". His accounts of Trotskyism in the two countries I know something about, because I have been a participant in the Trotskyist movements there, the UK and Ireland, are full of errors. His account of early Irish Trotskyism is downright nonsensical, a mere rehash of a short document written from very selective memory and factional fantasy by a Mandelite.

All history is, as someone said, "a tale agreed upon". The "tale" may be constructed from documents, archaeological digging, memoirs, personal memory. It may be very "solid", built on "facts" as hard as such facts can be.

It is nonetheless a "story", a construction, a narrative, agreed upon. The angle, the perspective, varies from period to period, time to time. And of course from class to class.

The unfolding of history itself creates a perpetual shifting of perspective, and produces a "permanent revolution" in historiography. On one level history is an ever-changing palimpsest.

The history of the revolutionary socialist — Trotskyist — movement involves all the difficulties of any history, and then some of its own. "The documents" are all tendentious, selective, designed to prove or sustain a political point, justify a political position, or damn, discredit, and disqualify an opponent or competing organisation. Examination of one's own mistakes, including previous ignorance, is regarded as an organisational weakness.

This is true of smaller things, and also of the whole history of organisations, or of socialism and communism across the 20th century.

The level of scrupulousness and of aspiration to truthfulness varies enormously from document to document. In the passions generated by controversy, by the strong emotional desire for something to be so, or to have been so, something not far off the intellectual morality of medieval monks can develop — for whom it was doing God's work for the scribe to invent appropriate incidents, interpolate into old texts whatever would strengthen a dogma or to enhance a saint.

Lying and wilful and tendentious misconstruction are commonplace, not only in the once voluminous literature of a very degenerate organisation like the old Workers' Revolutionary Party of Gerry Healy, and not only in the crudest form.

### SELECTIVE

**There are a myriad forms of selectiveness, each tendency making its own, and remaking it, eliminating and emphasising, glorifying and ignoring.**

Bigger than all those things, however, is the radical shifts and transformations in the Trotskyist organisations which are then glossed over with hindsight. In the 1930s the Trotskyists saw Russia as a degenerating, ever degenerating, product of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky believe it could not survive. He wrote at the end that its nationalised property was only "potentially" progressive — on condition that the working class overthrow the bureaucracy in a new revolution.

By contrast with Trotsky, there was a political current known by the name "Brandlerite" who advocated reforms in the USSR but not a new revolution.

Stalinist Russia survived the war, and took over many European countries. Stalinists made revolutions in a sizeable number of other countries, most momentarily China. A decade after Trotsky's death, the reconstructed "Fourth International" had adopted something more like the reformist views of the Brandlerites for Stalinist states like China and

Yugoslavia, and looked to the USSR, under the Stalinist bureaucracy, to lead a great world-wide revolution against capitalism in the course of the World War 3 which they saw as inevitable. The Trotskyists had become "Brandlerites".

In the 1960s the British SWP prided itself on not being Leninist, which it explained as not being like the Healy organisation. In the 1970s it was transformed into a "Leninist" organisation and into an organisation more like the Healyites of the 1960s than its old self.

Take the following as an example of how much of the history of the Trotskyist movement has been shaped and misshaped.

In 1944 some leaders of the British Trotskyist organisation, the RCP, were jailed for their involvement in helping a strike by engineering workers. There was a big outcry against the jailing, and they served a mere few days in prison. This incident has been enshrined in the folklorist histories because a number of different tendencies (SP, SWP, the Healy organisation...) trace their roots to the RCP.

In 1959 Brian Behan, a leading militant building worker in London, and at that time "chairman" of the Healy organisation, the SLL, was given six weeks in jail for his activities in the building industry. Who remembers that? Where is it recorded outside the files of old newspapers? It isn't.

Why? Shortly after his jailing, Behan was expelled by the SLL and thereafter demonised. He became an anarcho-syndicalist, and soon after that dropped out of politics. (I don't know if he ever "returned"). He became a historical "un-person".

The "Shachtmanites", in the handed-down history of the revolutionary movement after the death of Trotsky, have in my opinion suffered worst from these processes. That is very important because in the 1940s and 50s they continued and elaborated an alternative strain of Trotskyism from that of the Cannon tendency, to which most Trotskyists today owe their essential politics on many things.

### ROOTS

**The task of understanding and learning the history of the revolutionary movement is a necessary and enormously important part of politically regenerating and reorganising a revolutionary movement for our own time.**

As with Lenin's work on *State and Revolution*, the refurbishing of revolutionary Marxism requires that we dig down into our own roots.

The 50% of Trotskyists in the USA who in 1940 split with Trotsky — four months before his assassination — rejected Trotsky's position that "unconditional defence" of the USSR against imperialism required siding with Russia in the Finnish-Russian war of November 1939 to March 1940.

In the polemics of the time, Trotsky conceded that Russia was "imperialist", one of the different sorts of imperialism in history (*Again and Once More*). The first big political shift in the Trotskyist movement towards that view had been Trotsky's mid-1939 shift to advocating independence for Ukraine, and implicitly for the other oppressed nations who formed a majority of the USSR's population, oppressed by the Great Russians. There were Trotskyists at the time — the Oehlerites — who denounced Trotsky for thereby abandoning "defence of the USSR".

Trotsky in September 1939, in *The USSR in War*, accepted for the first time the theoretical possibility that the USSR, exactly as it was, might be re-conceptualised as a new form of exploitative society. He said it was too soon, on the eve of the decisive test of the viability or otherwise of the USSR. In the world war that had then started, the Stalinist bureaucracy could not survive, and it would be overthrown either by capitalism or by a new working-class revolution.

When voices in his own factional camp accused him of "revisionism", he responded that a theory of Stalinist Russia as "bureaucratic collectivist" (neither bourgeois nor proletarian) was not, per se, "revisionist". (*Again and Once More*).

Two basic currents emerged from the multi-faceted and influx politics of Trotsky at the time of his death — the SWP-USA (Cannon) and the Workers' Party/ ISL (Shachtman).

The literature and the politics of the Cannon tendency are what is today, and has been for more than half a century, "Trotskyism". The Cannonites' account of the Shachtmanites constituted much of their historical reputation, though Pete-

**From 1935: the official Communist Parties across the world, and Stalin's Russian government, agitate for an alliance of "the democracies" (taken to include Russia)**

**23 August 1939: "Hitler-Stalin pact" signed between Nazi Germany and Russia.**

**1 September 1939: Germany invades Poland. Russia will invade from the east on 17 September. Hitler and Stalin agree to partition Poland**

**3 September 1939: Britain and France declare war against Germany: World War 2 begins**

**From 18 September: sharp debate in the US Trotskyist group (SWP: no relation to today's British SWP) over attitudes to the Russian invasion of Poland. Majority says that the attitude to the invasions of Poland and Finland should be shaped by the old slogan "defence of the USSR". Minority denounce the invasions unequivocally but at this stage do not reject the ideas that the USSR is a "degenerated workers' state", and that socialists should side with it if it is attacked by a major power. The debate resonates internationally importance because the US Trotskyist group is the world's biggest and most experienced**

**30 November 1939: Russia invades Finland. Unlike in Poland, this invasion meets strong resistance. The dispute among the Trotskyists sharpens**

**April 1940: The US Trotskyists hold a conference.**

**Late 1940: The expelled minority, now called the Workers' Party, shift to the conclusion that the USSR has become a new form of class society ("bureaucratic collectivism") — no sort of workers' state.**

**22 June 1941: Germany invades the USSR. Stalin will side with Britain and its allies for the rest of the war.**

Drucker's biography of Shachtman, and our own collection of Workers' Party text have shifted this quite a bit in the last two decades.

A very tendentious selection of texts by Trotsky, put together by Cannon and his comrades in 1942 under the title *In Defence of Marxism*, has frozen the image of the Shachtmanites as given in those polemical texts. It cut off generations of Trotskyists from the ideas of "the other Trotskyists" — and from many ideas of Trotsky himself, major aspects of whose thinking were continued and developed by the WP/ISL, and jettisoned by the Cannonite "orthodox Trotskyists".

The texts here demonstrate how important that was. Max Shachtman's picture of the USSR and his premonition of the development of the Russian imperialism that would be the second power in the world for the next half-century was soon vindicated by developments.

The document *Where is the petty-bourgeois opposition?* is a refutation of charges against and criticisms of Max Shachtman and his comrades that have been kept in circulation by the factionalism-blinded official historians of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. Part of it has been available for a couple of years on the Marxist Internet Archive. Otherwise it has been buried in archives for 70 years.

The item on the split in the Mensheviks, which paralleled that of the Trotskyists, is interesting because Trotsky, on his own account, took from some Mensheviks a false and fantastic picture of Polish workers rallying to support the "Red" Army invaders. Some of Trotsky's comments at that time would form major pillars of subsequent "orthodox Trotskyism".

**The reclamation of a true picture of our own history is one of the most important tasks of revolutionary Marxists today — an essential element in reconstituting a viable revolutionary socialism.**

**The cartoons are reproductions of the work of "Carlo", published in the SWP's *Socialist Appeal* before the split or in the Workers Party's *Labor Action* after it.**

# March 1939: Stalin offers an olive branch to Hitler

By Max Shachtman

Socialist Appeal, 17 March 1939

The text of Stalin's report to the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is as yet available only in abridged form and there has not, at this writing, been enough time to give the report the detailed and thoroughgoing analysis it merits.

Even the condensed version, however, is important and clear enough for a number of preliminary observations, both with reference to what it omits as well as to what it contains.

1. On the eve of one of the most catastrophic defeats ever suffered by the policy of the Communist International — which is another way of saying the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party — or, for that matter, ever suffered by the working class in Europe, namely, the collapse of the People's Front in Spain, Stalin delivers a report to a Party Congress without so much as a word about the Spanish defeat. So far as his speech is concerned, the Spanish civil war never existed.

2. Moreover, the policy and movement of the People's Front in general, Stalin's main contribution to the labor movement in recent years, goes entirely unmentioned. Its existence and the course it has followed is simply not referred to, much less reviewed and analyzed, so far as a close examination of the rather extensive report summary in the *Daily Worker* reveals.

There are some things it is better to be silent about!

3. About the work of the sister parties — remember, he is speaking, after all, to the Russian section of the Comintern — not one word. About the Jewish refugees from fascist barbarism and the Soviet attitude towards them, not one word. About the collapse of his whole foreign policy, not one word. About the physical extermination of the entire Old Guard of the Bolshevik party, of hundreds of leading officials of the government, the party, the army and navy, the police... passing reference, as to a trifle.

4. At least as significant as the omission of reference to his past foreign policy, is the series of statements concerning the present foreign policy. It would be more accurate to say that Stalin did not state a new foreign policy, except in such tentative and cloudy form as to enable him to make another "strategic retreat" to the old one. But even in its tentative form, it is already a complete condemnation of the policy that has hitherto been considered sacred and inviolate in all official Stalinist circles.

6. The "democratic front" on which all Stalinist foreign policy hinged — the "united front of the democracies against the fascist aggressors and war-mongers" — Stalin has dropped overboard without a splash. In its place, is something so "new" that it must have had a stunning effect upon the Stalinist parrots all over the world.

Stalin holds out the olive branch to the fascist powers, to Germany primarily. The thunderous denunciations of fascism which, up to now, have filled the pages of the Stalinist press, give way in Stalin's report to an extremely soft and restrained comment on the activities of the Axis powers. But his change in front is far more drastic than that. In actuality, he offers an apology for them and their activities.

For the first time in years, we hear from the lips of a Stalinist a very careful explanation of the reason for the "fascist aggression."

It is all due, we now learn (rather, the Stalinists are instructed to learn) to purely imperialist rivalries between the "democracies" and the Axis powers. These rivalries, we are further enlightened, go back to the unequal distribution of the loot taken in the last World War (in the case of Italy and Japan) and to the iniquitous Treaty of Versailles which was imposed upon Germany.

"Germany, which suffered severely as a result of the first Imperialist war and the Versailles Peace, joined with Japan

## Champions of Peace and Democracy!



and Italy and demanded extension of her territory in Europe and the return of the colonies which were taken from her by the victors in the first imperialist war," Stalin says now.

In other words, the conflicts of the powers have not been based upon the noble idealism of the "democrats" on the one side and the "aggressors" on the other, but upon such classic imperialist considerations as "a new redivision of the world." But was not this idea the sheerest "Trotskyist-Fascist" heresy up to yesterday?

But Stalin goes still further. The real aggressors, the real warmongers, he points out very elaborately, are actually not such powers as Germany, but rather.... the democracies! Unbelievable, yet true.

How? Very simply. Nobody in Russia is thinking of a war with Germany, it goes without saying. But what's more important, nobody in Germany except for a few lunatics, is thinking of war against the Soviet Union. All the talk about Hitler seeking to conquer and annex the Ukraine is so much nonsense. Who invented this myth? The democracies! So says Stalin.

It was the "democrats" who, according to Stalin, began "urging the Germans to march further East, promising them easy pickings and prompting them on: 'Just you start a war against the Bolsheviks and then everything will proceed fine.' It must be admitted that this too looks very much like egging on, like encouraging the aggressor".

If Stalin means to say anything by this, it can only be that it is the "democracies" who are trying to drive the fascist powers into a war! To make this point even clearer and more

emphatic, Stalin points out that the "democracies," the supporters of the "non-intervention" policy, have as their aim "not to prevent, say, Germany from becoming entangled into European affairs, from becoming involved in war which the Soviet Union; [but rather] to allow all the belligerents to sink deeper into the mire of war, to encourage them stealthily to follow this line, to allow them to weaken and exhaust one another, and then, when they have become sufficiently weakened, to appear on the scene with fresh forces, to come out, of course, in the interests of peace and to dictate their terms to the weakened belligerent nations.

"Stalin is saying to the "democracies": Don't think that I intend to pull your chestnuts out of the fire. If you do not string along with me, I can always make a bargain with your rival, Germany.

To Hitler, he says: I am by no means wedded to London, Paris and Washington. There is no reason why we should go to war against each other until we are both worn out and the "democracies" come in and squeeze us both out of the picture. Instead of allowing yourself to be egged on against the Soviet Union, let us get together, so that you can turn your attention to retrieving the colonies "which were taken from her (Germany) by the victors in the first imperialist war."

To his League of Nations allies of yesterday, Stalin offers the threat of a new turn in foreign policy. To Hitler, Stalin offers a hand at least half-way outstretched.

**Which, boiled down to essentials, means that Stalin has turned over the initiative for the next step in world politics to — Hitler!**

# September 1939: Behind the Stalinazi pact

By Max Shachtman

Socialist Appeal, September 1939

### I: 5 SEPTEMBER 1939

The Hitler-Stalin pact is the most sensational news to come out of Moscow in many years. Up to yesterday, it was the general belief that Stalin was moving heaven and earth in an earnest attempt to establish a "peace front" of the "democracies" against the "fascist aggressors", especially against Fascist Germany.

The friends and supporters of the Stalin regime said this repeatedly, and in so many plain words. Suddenly, right in the midst of the Anglo-French-Russian military discussions in Moscow, came the news that Hitler and Stalin had made a very important trade agreement. [Then] came the news that a "non-aggression" pact had been negotiated between the two countries. Forty-eight hours later, the Nazi Minister of Foreign Affairs and author of the Anti-Comintern Pact had flown to Moscow where he was greeted with swastika flags, and the pact was promptly signed.

The newspapers which reported that the pact had "staggered" and "stunned" and "stupefied" most of the world did not exaggerate in the least. Most bewildered and shocked of all were the members and sympathizers of the Communist Party, whom the news hit over the head like a metal-studded club. One organization, however, was not caught off guard and shocked by the news of the Stalinazi pact — the Socialist Workers Party, and the Fourth International with which it is affiliated, the so-called Trotskyist movement. This is simply a matter of fact and it is not stated in a boastful vein. Our movement foresaw the alliance and predicted it as early as a year ago. In the *Socialist Appeal* of October 8, 1938, Leon Trotsky wrote: "We may now expect with certainty Soviet diplomacy to attempt rapprochement with Hitler at the cost of new retreats and capitulations which in their turn can only bring nearer the collapse of the Stalinist oligarchy". In the same paper of March 17, 1939, the present writer said: "The democratic front on which all Stalinist policy hinged — the 'united front of the democracies against the fascist aggressors and warmongers' — Stalin has dropped overboard without a splash. In its place is something so 'new' that it must have had a stunning effect upon the Stalinist parrots all over the world. Stalin holds out the olive branch to the fascist powers, to Germany primarily".

They denounce as slanderers the Trotskyists, or anybody who even hinted a year, or a month or as little as two weeks ago that Stalin and Hitler would come to terms. "It is a great contribution to the cause of world peace", [US CP leader Earl] Browder says now. It helps the cause of democracy and the Democratic Front! It helps Poland! What happened directly after the Stalin-Hitler pact? Not only vast expansions of the armed forces of all governments, but mobilization of troops and marching orders on a scale unknown since the World War broke out in 1914. The Moscow-Berlin pact is exactly the opposite of a contribution to the cause of peace.

In exchange for a Hitlerite promise not to attack the Soviet Union, Stalin has given Hitler a free hand in Poland! Poland has been ruthlessly sacrificed to the brutal imperialistic ambitions of Nazi Germany in the hope of saving the hides of the Kremlin autocrats.

There cannot be the slightest doubt on this score. Why was the pact signed just at this moment — just when Hitler has declared in the most insolent manner that he demands the absorption of Poland into Nazidom, just when France and England threatened to take armed action against Germany? A non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union has been in existence for 13 years, signed in 1926 by Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann and Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Krestinsky. This pact is still formally in force. Why was it necessary to have another "non-aggression pact" at this particular time?

In order to deliver a demonstrative blow against Poland! In order to explode, as publicly, as sensationally, as thoroughly as possible, any Polish hope that a Hitlerite invasion would encounter not only the Polish army, but the joint armed resistance of England and France on the one side, and the Soviet Union on the other.

### II: 12 SEPTEMBER 1939

Publicly, the Stalinist patriots from Moscow to New York and back again have shouted for a united military front of England, France and the Soviet Union against Germany and the Axis. Not with Germany, we repeat, but against her. They insisted that it was more than ever urgent, following the tragic Czechoslovakian experience, in order to save Poland.

Now we Trotskyists, like revolutionary socialists everywhere, never agreed with the chauvinistic campaign of the Stalinists for the "defense of Poor Little Poland". Their agitation meant, in reality, the commission of two crimes: the recruiting of cannon-fodder for one gang of imperialist bandits (the slave-holding "democracies" of England and France) as against another, and the meek submission of the Polish workers, peasants and national minorities to the rule of the reactionary Polish autocracy. The primary and principal task of the Polish masses was and remains the overturn of the clique of Generals and Colonels who rule the land, who club down the workers, squeeze the peasants to the bone, keep the Ukrainian and other national minorities in an inferno of persecution and discrimination, and practise a vicious anti-Semitism which is second only to Hitler's.

Yet, while we did not join in the Stalinist cattle-herding for war, we were not and are not indifferent to the fate of the Polish people or even of the Polish nation — and we mean the Polish nation, not the Polish Empire in which the old and upstart Polish aristocracy rules by military force over millions of people of other nationalities. The hope for aid which the Polish masses threatened by Nazi subjection could rightfully and not vainly place in a revolutionary workers' government, if that existed in Russia today, was betrayed by the perfidious Bonapartist gang in the Kremlin when it capitulated to Hitler.

Stalin capitulated to Hitler? Exactly! And that brings us to the question of why Stalin felt obliged to sign the shameful pact. The Stalin regime enjoys only the bitter hatred of the Soviet masses. Its basis continues to narrow every day. And the capitalist world, largely thanks to Stalinism's criminal policies, is far more sure of itself as it faces the working class in 1939 than it was in 1919. Scratch beneath the surface of the optimistic fairy tales told in the Stalinist press and you find that, under Stalin's rule, the Soviet Union is in an advanced state of degeneration. Stalin's clique is at once the product and the producer of this degeneration.

Now we are in a position to deal with the question: Which of the two partners in the Stalinazi pact was the stronger, which is in the better position to gain from the pact? It is a bitter truth for us to observe, but we must not refuse to see that in the past six years Hitler has not only consolidated but has vastly expanded his power. He took power in Germany without meeting with the slightest resistance by the Social Democrats or the Stalinists (1933 marked Stalin's first capitulation to Hitler!) He denounced the Versailles Treaty limitations on German armaments in 1935, and nobody stopped him. He reintroduced conscription without opposition. He remilitarized the Rhineland and nobody stopped him. He won the Saar territory in a plebiscite. He succeeded in smashing to bits the whole labor and revolutionary movement. In March 1938 he annexed Austria without firing a shot. Six months later, Czechoslovakia was raked in. Another six months passed, and he took Memel, without a fight. He won his fight in Spain. By the time this appears, he may have Danzig [Gdansk] and the Corridor, if not all of Poland.

Against this indubitable strengthening of the Nazi regime, Stalin has only defeats to record. He lost the German and Czechoslovakian Communist Parties — each with hundreds of thousands of members — in two Hitlerite blows. The Polish Communist Party he himself suppressed while he wooed the Polish Colonels. Ethiopia, despite Litvinov's tearful pleas to the League of Nations, fell to Mussolini, whose airplanes flew with Russian oil and whose soldiers fed on Russian wheat. His whole policy in Spain cracked up. Czechoslovakia, ditto. His policy in the Orient lost him the Chinese Eastern Railway and is ending with "ally" Chiang Kai-shek driven further and further into the interior. His big "Popular Front" in France breathed its last when it produced Daladier and Bonnet, voted into office by the Communist Party. All of Stalin's foreign policies have proved bankrupt; all his foreign enterprises have suffered shipwreck.

At home, his position is no better. The last six years in par-

ticular have seen Stalin's rule in a state of almost uninterrupted crisis, each convulsion more violent than the one before it. The overwhelming majority of the people — the simple people, the small people, the toiling people — hate Stalin as bitterly as Czar Nicholas the Bloody was hated, and with just as good reason. How else explain the continual purges, the imprisonments, the exilings, the executions, the endless mass terror? What truly popular government has ever had to resort to anything like it outside a period of civil war? And that's exactly what Stalin is engaged in: a civil war of the bureaucratic caste against the masses of the people.

Stalin has wiped out the whole Old Guard of the Russian Revolution, except Trotsky who has been sought by more than one GPU assassin's bullet. The prisons, the God-forsaken corners of exile, the vast concentration camps are chock-full of Stalin's victims. There are more political prisoners in some provinces of the country today than there were in the whole empire under the Czar. All the liberties won by labor's blood and rifle in the revolution have been abolished by the bureaucracy. The worker is tied to his job and cannot shift to another job or another city without being granted permission, duly recorded in the internal passport he is compelled to carry. The disparity between the wages of the low-paid worker and the salaries of the upper crust is stupendous and on the rise. So is the disparity between the income and conditions of the poor peasants and the bosses of the "collective" farms. Science, art, and culture are prostituted to the power-interests of the narrowminded gang in power. Conditions in the non-Russian national republics — Ukrainian, Georgian, White Russian, Uzbekistan, etc. — are a replica of the relations that existed between the Czarist imperial Russians in Moscow and the national minorities at the periphery of the empire. The secret police (GPU) and the army machine keep Stalin in power with the aid of jail-keys, pistols and bayonets.

Stalin rules and can only rule by means of terror. As the country moves closer to the monstrosity which he misnames "socialism" the purges and the terror increase in intensity. Everywhere about him, Stalin sees plots and conspiracies, real and alleged, against his domination. The reign of terror during which millions, literally millions, have either been deported, imprisoned or murdered, is Stalin's own confession to immense unpopularity. The rule by terror means that Stalin and the bureaucracy he personifies, are themselves terrified. What do they fear? War! The fear of war, in this case as in so many others, is the fear of mobilization. The fear of mobilization is the fear of arming the masses of people. The fear of arming the masses is the fear of revolution.

The reasons behind the Stalinazi pact cannot be fully understood, however, unless the reader grasps the fundamental standpoint of the Kremlin regime, and grasps, further, the fact that it is in irreconcilable opposition to the fundamental standpoint of the original Lenin-Trotsky regime which Stalin and Co. finally succeeded in overthrowing in the course of a running fight that began as early as 1923.

Lenin, Trotsky and the real Bolshevik party led the masses to victory in 1917 on the basis of the proposition that the Russian Revolution was only one part of an international working-class revolution. The Bolshevik leaders repeated a thousand times to the Russian and world masses that Red Russia could not establish socialism by itself, with its own forces, and unaided by the triumphant workers of other, more advanced countries. This was not only in conformity with Marxian theory, but with modern world realities. Russia might hold out for a time, and even lay the foundations of socialism, but it could not keep going for a long period of time without help from revolutionary states in the other lands. As for achieving a classless socialist society, with security and plenty for all, that was out of the question entirely if revolutionary Russia remained isolated in a capitalist world.

In 1924, however, when the European revolutionary wave subsided for a while, Stalin coined the theory of "socialism in a single country". Russia, he argued, could establish socialism by itself provided only there was no armed intervention from abroad.

Now this theory, while totally unsuited to the interests of the Russian and international revolutions, was ideally suited to the interests of the growing Soviet bureaucracy. The officials — corrupted oldsters and upstart youngsters — had lost

## The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

all faith in the power of the world working class to free itself from capitalist misrule — at least not for another hundred years! Meanwhile, they argued, let's hold on to what we have in Russia.

That sounded plausible to many people, especially those who had grown weary and discouraged and didn't see that new and stormier waves of revolution would break throughout the world in the years to come. Only, the officials really meant: Let's hold on to what we have in Russia — and to what we can get. As for the rest of the world, the task of the working class is confined primarily (later it became exclusively) to preventing foreign intervention. In other words, instead of concentrating on getting rid of their own capitalist despots at home, the workers in other countries were to be limited to acting as border patrols for the Soviet bureaucracy.

Leaving aside for the moment the theoretical aspects of the question, the practical results of this policy were disastrous both for the official Communist International and that section of the labor movement that followed it, and for the Soviet Union itself. All that a labor skate or capitalist political shyster had to do to get the unqualified support of the Communist movement for some shady enterprise or a downright sell-out, was to take a cheap oath in favor of "defending" the Soviet Union. As Stalinism went from bad to worse, and the Kremlin went in for super-clever diplomatic tie-ups with imperialist Powers, the official Communist International, from which every critical, honest revolutionist was expelled, was changed from a militant fighter against world capitalism into an anti-revolutionary instrument, a cheap pawn in the hands of Stalin's Foreign Office.

### III: 19 SEPTEMBER 1939

**In Lenin's time, the Soviet government made more than one diplomatic or commercial agreement with capitalist countries. That was unavoidable then, and remains unavoidable so long as a workers' government is surrounded by a hostile world. But if Lenin made a diplomatic agreement with Germany or France, he did not compel the revolutionary movement in those countries to stop fighting its own capitalist class and government.**

Stalin changed all that. While he was seeking an alliance with England, France and the United States, especially in the past four years, the Communist Parties in those countries tried with might and main to make an alliance with the home capitalist government and urged the labor movement as a whole to follow suit. Where the Communist Parties had once been the champions of labor's independence and militancy, Stalin converted them into the champions of labor's subordination and docility to capitalism. In practise, therefore, especially in recent years, "socialism in one country" meant that Stalin traded off Communist Party support to any government, no matter how reactionary, no matter how many millions of colonial slaves it oppressed, so long as it promised to be an "ally" in protecting the Soviet bureaucracy.

In practise, also, Stalin's Russian nationalism meant putting the fate of the Russian Revolution into the hands of cynical imperialist diplomats who pretended for a moment to be friendly, instead of where it belongs — into the hands of the Russian and international working class. In practise, this working class was confused, demoralized, and driven under the yoke of its enemies. Thus, the interests of the ruling bureaucracy in Russia have come into ever sharper and finally irreconcilable conflict with the interests of the Russian masses, of the Soviet Union itself, and of the international working class.

Stalin fears war. But he fears especially such a war as the Soviet Union and its bureaucracy are involved in, for that would in all likelihood spell his doom. It would, however, be wrong to jump to the conclusion that Stalin is a real prop of peace. The same reasons that dictate his yearning for peace for Russia, dictate a policy of war-mongering in all the other important countries of the world! The Soviet Union is immediately and directly threatened on two sides: by Japan on the East and by Germany on the West. The principal Soviet enemy [is] Hitler. It has therefore been Stalin's policy at bottom, since the Nazis came to power in 1933, to "appease" Hitler, to come to terms with him, to make an alliance with him. Russia would then be in a position to deal comparatively easily with Japan in the East.

If this basic point is borne in mind, much that was obscure in Stalinist policy becomes clear. It will be easier, for example, to understand why the Stalinist press in France, instead of solidarizing itself with the despairing young Jew, Herschel Grynzspan, who sought to protest Hitlerite anti-Semitism by shooting Von Rath, denounced him as a Nazi or Trotskyist



spy! To understand the shameful silence from Soviet officialdom on the occasion of Hitler's barbarous pogroms against the Jews. To understand why Jewish refugees could find no haven in the Soviet Union. To understand what Walter Duranty meant when he cabled the *New York Times* that after all Stalin has killed off as many Jews as Hitler did. To understand why Litvinov was purged (how could a sensitive "Aryan" like von Ribbentrop shake hands with a Jewish Foreign Commissar?). The concentration on making a deal with Hitler has frequently been interrupted, so to say, for two reasons: one, by the hope of making an alliance with the "democracies" to squeeze Hitler into a corner and prevent him from assaulting Russia; and two, by the hope that the negotiations with the "democracies" would frighten Hitler into speeding up an agreement with Stalin.

The first hope, illusory and utopian from the beginning, was completely shattered at Munich. The "democratic" imperialists showed that they would much rather give Hitler free rein in his drive to the East, that is, against Russia, than they would make an alliance with Russia to smash Hitler and Mussolini. Especially when they reflected that after fascism cracked up in Germany and Italy, revolutions would break out and spread rapidly to France, England and God knows where else! Stalin therefore had to come to terms with Hitler. And Hitler chose the moment for springing the announcement of the pact which would give him the best position in starting his next conquest, Poland.

But though he capitulated to Hitler, it does not follow that

Stalin would object violently to having another World War explode, with the "democracies" fighting the "fascist aggressors" and the Soviet Union staying out of the war as long as possible. Quite the contrary! Stalin continues to drive in just that direction. Although he has made his peace with Hitler for a short time, as we shall see later on, he continues to instigate a war in which he will not participate. While he is a "pacifist-out-of-fear" at home, he is a warmonger abroad.

Keep ourselves in the saddle, preserve ourselves by hook or crook, and everything else — the labor movement, the Communist International, the colonial peoples, the twaddle about "democracy" and "peace" — can go hang!

Will the bureaucracy succeed in keeping itself in the Soviet saddle? Not the slightest hesitation need be felt in replying categorically: no! The only point to be resolved is this: the abominable Stalinist clique will be crushed at a later stage by Hitlerism, in which case, a new era of reaction will open up from which the world may not emerge for a long, long time; or it will be swept into the discard by a resurrected revolutionary movement of workers and peasants inside the Soviet Union itself. All our hopes and all our energies must be directed toward the latter solution of the mortal crisis the Russian Revolution is experiencing.

Will Hitler really attack the Soviet Union? Whoever examines the situation intelligently must reply, Yes! The feeble Stalinist arguments that the "pact has weakened the Axis" are so much nonsense, and dangerous nonsense at that.

What Stalin gave away in the pact we have already seen.

## The Trotskyist split of 1939-40



What did Hitler abandon? His designs upon Russia, especially on the granary of the Ukraine and the mineral riches of the Urals? Not for a moment! His idea of immediately attacking the Soviet Union? He didn't have to give up that idea, for the simple reason that he did not contemplate such an attack at this time. His objective, for the time being, is more modest — the conquest of Poland — and Stalin gave him invaluable aid in achieving his goal.

He did abandon Japan, of that there is no doubt. And the Stalinist press presents this as a tremendous victory. Hitler abandoned Japan for the time being and only for the time being, in exchange for a much solidier ally. And he did abandon the so-called "Anti-Comintern Pact". Small consolation! The "fight against the Communist International" was as much a fraud with Hitler as the "fight for democracy" was with Stalin. Hitler has known for years that Stalin himself liquidated the Communist International. The Hitlerites know what Stalinism represents: they know where the real threat of working-class revolution comes from. It is not the discredited pawns of Stalinist diplomacy, the Communist International, that Fascism fears. As the banner-bearer of the working-class revolution, of the revolution for socialism, it sees the "Trotskyists" — the Fourth International. And it is right, for the Fourth International is the mortal, implacable foe of Fascism, of imperialism in general, of capitalist oppression, and as their foe it shall triumph! That is why the Socialist Workers Party summons every militant worker who is conscious of his class interests, who is imbued with the real spirit of internationalism, to rally to its great banner and to fight in the great cause. Our call is addressed in particular to the rank and file of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League and their sympathizers.

The Soviet Union is not relieved of the threat of attack; that threat is aggravated. Hitler had a non-aggression pact with Poland not so long ago. Stalin's policy facilitates the coming

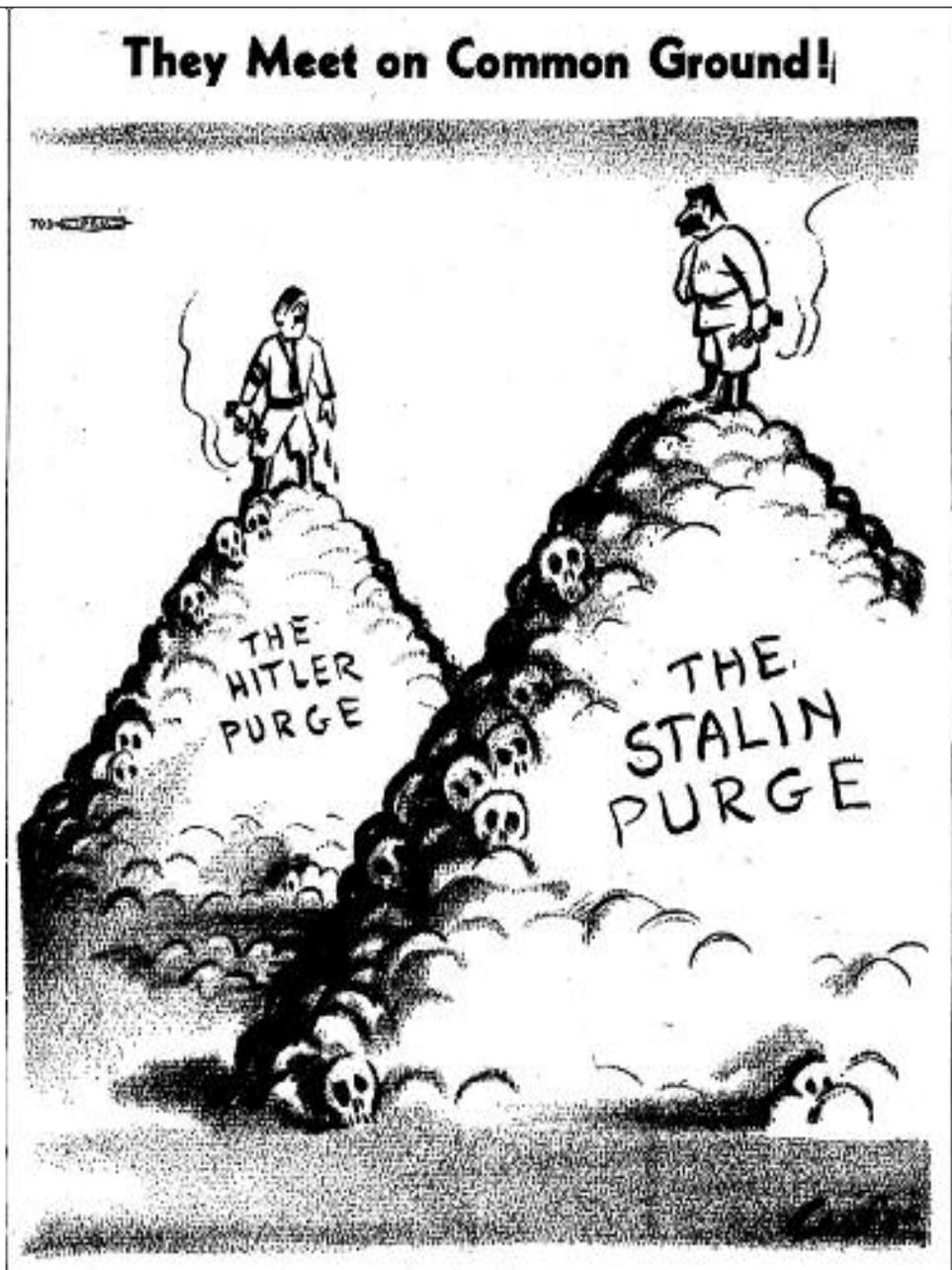
attack upon Russia because, by giving Hitler a free hand through Poland, he grants him a highly important strategical base of operations against the Soviet Union. Tomorrow or the next day, Hitler will seek to repay Stalin for the pact in even more ringing coin than he is repaying Poland. Every worker, every Communist worker, must understand that.

Every worker must be also clearly aware now of the monstrous crime that was perpetrated by Stalin in his series of "trials" and purges. How many thousands of revolutionists did he send to their deaths in the last few years on the charge of being "Trotskyist agents of Hitler"! We called the trials frame-ups, and now, by signing the pact with Hitler, Stalin draws the black pencil of emphasis under our charge. While he was framing up and assassinating all opponents, all critics — past, present or potential — with the accusation of "Hitlerite agents" he was busily engaged in becoming the principal agent of Hitler! The Moscow Trials, the horrible purges, the nightmare of terror — these were all part of the preparations for an alliance with Adolph Hitler and his bandits.

Together with Ribbentrop, Molotov and Stalin signed the death-warrant of the Communist Parties. Stalin long ago drained the revolutionary blood out of them. Now he is smashing them bodily. Their organizational disintegration is taking place at a terrific rate before our very eyes.

Where will those sincere and devoted workers go who are now abandoning the Communist Parties by the thousands in England, France and the United States? We know where the bureaucrats will go. They will remain the paid lackeys and scribblers of the Kremlin despot, or they will become full-fledged servants of their own imperialist overlords.

But the Communist workers? Will they go over to capitalism? Will they become the dupes of that fantastic fraud known in capitalist society as "democracy"? Will they abandon the class struggle entirely, and become docile serfs of the



rulers of industry and finance, willing cannon-fodder of the coming war?

The Stalinist party is through, and nobody will mourn at its burial. Nobody will try to defend the Stalinazi pact in a serious trade union, in a Jewish organization, or for that matter wherever intelligent workers are assembled. What then? We say: there is a need, greater than ever today, to struggle against reaction, against the capitalist offensive, for socialism and freedom, for peace and plenty. There is a road to struggle, too. That road was broadly marked out by the great teachers of the working-class movement, Marx and Lenin. That road the workers must take if they are to survive as human beings, if they are to rise to new heights of human dignity.

That road is the revolutionary struggle for socialism!

All the professional "democrats" and the "social democrats" and the "liberal intellectuals" who only yesterday approved the Moscow frame-ups or covered them up, and who presented Stalin as a noble, worthy ally of the Great Democracies, are turning tail now and scurrying off like rats. Now they no longer declare that "Soviet democracy" and bourgeois democracy are practically the same thing and make natural allies; now they expound the new wisdom that "communism" and "fascism" are the same thing and make natural allies. Their conclusion? Their road? On to a new War to Make the World Safe for Democracy? On to the trenches! Long live the divine goal of modern humanity — the battlefield graveyard!

**Our road was never theirs. Our road leads to the great socialist society. Our methods are the methods of militant and uncompromising class struggle against all exploitation and iniquity. Stalin has succeeded only in — discrediting Stalinism. The banner of revolutionary struggle, of the Fourth International, continues to fly without a shameful spot upon it.**

# April 1940: USSR and the World War

By Max Shachtman

New International, April 1940

The outbreak of the Second World War has once more put prominently at the top of the order of the day the "Russian question". The signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact was followed by the joint invasion of Poland; by the reduction of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the state of vassals of the Kremlin; by the invasion and seizure of part of Finland by the Red Army; and by speculation and prediction of coming events which, a year ago, would have been waved aside as preposterous.

In bourgeois-democratic circles, these events furnished the occasion for more pious homilies about the identity of communism and fascism. In the labor movement, the patriots skilfully exploited the workers' indignation against Stalin's crimes in order to promote the cause of the democratic war-mongers. Among the revolutionary Marxists, however, the events provoked an intense and thoroughgoing discussion, resulting in a re-evaluation of the role of the Soviet Union in the war and in a revision of the traditional slogan of the Fourth International, "For the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union." It is with this discussion that the present article is concerned.

## WHY MUST WE CHANGE?

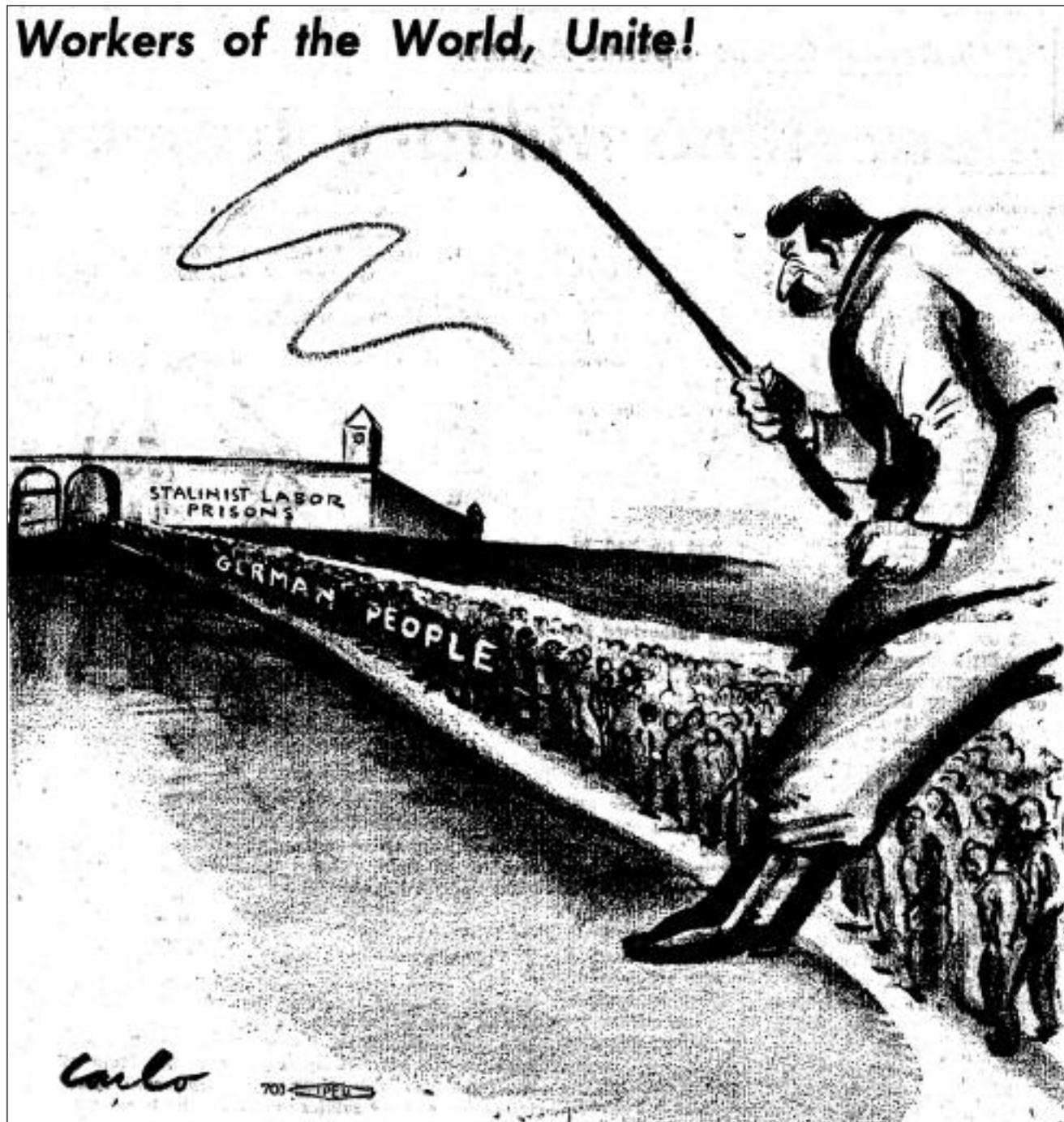
The views of the Fourth International on the question of defense of the Soviet Union in a war, put forward up to the time the present war broke out, may be summarized as follows:

The Soviet Union, existing on the basis of state property and dominated by a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy, is a degenerated workers' state which must be defended (by internationalist, class methods independent of those employed by the bureaucracy) in any war with a capitalist power, regardless of which side appeared to be the "aggressor" and regardless of the immediate cause of the war. This defense is "unconditional" in the sense that it is not conditioned on the abdication or overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy, or even upon its acceptance of a revolutionary policy. The Soviet Union must be defended in a war with a capitalist power not because of the Stalinists but in spite of them; must be defended, however, with our own independent policy which is aimed, among other things, to overthrow the bureaucracy because we have no faith in its ability to organize an effective defense of the Soviet Union.

Should the Soviet Union, in a war against one or more capitalist powers, find itself in alliance with one or more other capitalist powers, the slogan of defensism retains its full validity, just as the slogan of defeatism retains its validity both in the countries Russia is allied with and at war with; the only difference in policy in the two capitalist countries would be tactical and practical (for example, we would not oppose the shipment of munitions to Russia from the factories and ports of one of its capitalist allies).

Why is it necessary to revise this point of view, it is asked, above all now, when the war has actually broken out? Is it because Stalin has allied himself with a fascist imperialism instead of with a "democratic" imperialism? Can Marxists allow themselves to make a fundamental distinction between the two? And if such a distinction is made with respect to alliances with the Soviet Union, does it not imply a patriotic position towards the "democracies" with respect to their war with Germany? What, in a word, has changed so fundamentally as to justify a change in our position on the defense of the Soviet Union?

The change which the Marxists must make in their position has nothing whatsoever to do with all the petty-bourgeois lamentations over Stalin's shift from "democrats" to fascists. While allied with France, Stalin was already allied, at least indirectly, with a number of totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships in the orbit of French imperialism. The alliance of the notorious butcher Chiang Kai-shek with the equally notorious butcher Stalin does not eliminate the duty which every revolutionist has to defend China from Japan. The change in position is dictated by far more profound and real considerations.



## TRADITION VS. REALITY

The discussion of the role of Russia in the war during the period of the Franco-Soviet Pact was based on hypotheses and prediction. Reference to the policy proposed by Lenin in 1917 for an "alliance" with France and England against Germany was invalid, and in any case not decisive, among other reasons because the "alliance" never seriously materialized.

It was therefore false to generalize from this experience which was never experienced. The discussion of the role of Russia in the war during the Hitler-Stalin Pact is based upon tangible realities. These realities make it as mandatory upon us to reconsider our slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" as the realities of the March, 1917, Revolution in Russia made it mandatory upon Lenin to reconsider the traditional and, up to that point, intransigently defended Bolshevik slogan of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry."

What are these concrete realities?

The 1935 Pact with France was a defensive alliance for the Soviet Union. It was directed against a rising and truculent German imperialism but it was calculated essentially to maintain the status quo, to keep Germany from precipitating war. The status quo policy of People's Frontism was adopted

by the Comintern in accordance with this objective.

Stalin's capitulation to Hitler in 1939 took the form of an aggressive military alliance. This is precisely what was not foreseen or allowed for by us in the past, as Trotsky himself acknowledged at the beginning of the war. In general, it is true, the possibility of a rapprochement between Hitler and Stalin had been envisaged in our literature, but not an aggressive military alliance. The difference between the two pacts does not lie in the fact that one was made with such an illustrious democrat as Pierre Laval and the other with an undemocratic fascist. It lies in the real difference between the two imperialisms, French and German. This difference is in no wise of such a fundamental character as to warrant supporting one against the other, in the manner of the war-mongering social-democrats. But it is sufficiently important to change the character of the alliance made by Stalin. In the past, too, it was sufficiently important for us to distinguish between Hitler and Laval, not fundamentally, not so far as their social role is concerned, but to the extent of characterizing Hitler and not Laval as the "super-Wrangel", that is, the spearhead of world imperialist assault upon the Soviet Union. This difference was not based upon a feeling of tenderness on the part of Laval for Russia, but upon the fact that German imperialism, for a series of historical reasons, was

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

dynamically aggressive and forced, in the most immediate and direct sense, as Hitler himself has said, to “expand or die” (just as England, for example, is forced to hold on to her empire or die).

## STALIN AS HITLER’S SATELLITE

**The role of the Soviet Union can be followed and understood only if one is clear about the predominant character of the war. It is not a war of imperialist attack upon the Soviet Union; it is not a “mixed war”.**

It is a war between two big imperialist camps for the redivision of the world, with the Soviet Union as an integral part of one of the imperialist camps.

The strategy of the imperialist camp to which Stalin is subordinated, is fairly clear. It is to keep all sides of Germany protected by herself and her allies, to confine the front to the comparative safety of the Westwall-Magint lines; to destroy the British Empire for the benefit of the Rome-Berlin-Moscow axis, primarily for the Berlin section of it. Stalin’s role in the war, from the very beginning, has been that of auxiliary executant of this strategy.

Hitler did not descend upon Poland until he had assured himself not of Stalin’s neutrality but of Stalin’s active support. Poland was defeated and partitioned jointly and by pre-arrangement, with Hitler, in accordance with the real relationship of forces between the partners, getting the lion’s share and Stalin the jackal’s. The work of covering Hitler’s eastern flank from possible attack by the Allies or their vassals was then completed by Stalin’s invasion and subjugation of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Far from meeting resistance from Hitler, Stalin was encouraged to proceed along the indicated line in order that Germany might have at its Baltic rear governments no longer subject to the manipulations of Anglo-French imperialism but sterilized governments kept in escrow for him by his friendly sub-partner of the Kremlin.

Of the same order and in accordance with the same imperialist strategy was Stalin’s invasion of Finland, presented to us so cynically by the Stalinist press as a “defense of the Soviet Union from imperialist attack” and characterized so naively by the *Socialist Appeal* in the same terms. Whoever did not understand the real meaning of the Finnish invasion at the time, should surely understand it in the light of subsequent events. The middle-class journalistic muttonheads who still talk about Hitler being Stalin’s captive in the pact, sought to present the invasion of Finland as a “blow at Germany”. The truth is just the opposite. Hitler wanted Stalin to invade Finland and Trotsky is without doubt right in saying that Berlin “obviously pushed” Stalin towards Helsinki. Why?

For two reasons which are really one. In the first place, the action involves Stalin more deeply in the war on Hitler’s side. In the second place, the occupation or subjection of Finland was needed by Germany as the first step towards closing to the Allies a northern front they were seeking to open against Hitler. Only after Stalin had crushed Finland and enormously weakened Sweden, did Hitler feel able to take those brutal and decisive measures which are calculated to guarantee his northern flank. Denmark and Norway fell to German instead of to Anglo-French imperialism only because Finland fell to Germany’s partner. It goes without saying that if Hitler consolidates himself in Norway (as he appears to be doing at this writing), the fate of Sweden, hemmed in between Hitler and Stalin, is a foregone conclusion.

Thus, in two big moves, Hitler, with the Soviet Union at his orders, has succeeded in doing what the Kaiser and Hindenburg were unable to do in the first World War: to confine the conflict to a momentarily “defensive” war of position on a single well-protected front, the West. With Stalin’s aid, Hitler has fairly well assured his eastern, northeastern and northern flanks. With Stalin’s aid – today in the form of a threat, tomorrow in the form of active military intervention – he is assuring his southeastern flank, in the first place in Romania. The day after, it is not at all excluded that Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union will be fighting jointly for the “defense of the Soviet Union” in the southeast and the Near East – in actuality, for the partitioning of the Balkans and the Near East among the members of the Rome-Berlin-Moscow axis. What the Moscow *Izvestia* said about Hitler’s invasion of Norway, really holds true here: War has a powerful logic of its own.

Alongside of this parallelism of military action, there is a corresponding parallelism of political agitation. Moscow echoes every claim of Berlin, every diplomatic lie, every self-justification. The same “war-guilt” explanation is given by both. The diplomatic offensives which precede military action are carefully synchronized in both capitals. The Stalinist

parties, it goes without saying, do their part loyally for the Axis, concentrating all their attacks upon England and France, to the exclusion of Germany. In the colonies Hitlerite and Stalinist agents, whether by formal agreement or by the internal logic of their war alliance, conduct a harmonious campaign for the “liberation” of the oppressed peoples from Anglo-French imperialism (that is, for subjecting them to the yoke of the Axis). This is what the participation of the Soviet Union in the war looks like in reality. Under these conditions, the slogan of “unconditional defense of the Soviet Union” is tantamount to giving objective political aid to one imperialist camp against another. It is therefore imperative that the slogan be radically altered to read “defense of the Soviet Union in a progressive war”.

## THE KREMLIN IS WAGING A REACTIONARY WAR

**Wherein is Russia’s participation in the war reactionary? In two respects: (1) it is acting primarily as agent of German imperialism in the war; (2) it is itself fighting a war of bureaucratic expansion, of subjugation and oppression of other peoples.**

From these follow the reactionary social and political consequences of its participation in the war: instead of the class consciousness of the workers being heightened, their bourgeois-patriotic feelings are intensified; instead of being brought closer to the revolution, they are driven into the arms of their own ruling class, and not the most liberal sections of it, at that (Poland, Finland); instead of becoming more sympathetic towards the principles and achievements and defense of the Russian Revolution, they become more antipathetic towards them; instead of advancing the interests of the world revolution and weakening world imperialism, the participation of the Soviet Union in the present war retards enormously the former and strengthens enormously the latter.

The two respects in which Russia’s war is reactionary are not contradictory or mutually exclusive. In the partnership of the Pact, Stalin is very much the subordinate; it is indeed quite accurate to say that the Stalinist bureaucracy capitulated to Germany in the hope (a) of buying itself off from an immediate attack by Hitler upon the Soviet Union and (b) of escaping complete involvement in the world war. The first hope has been realized, of that there is no doubt. But it has been realized precisely at the expense of the second hope. The very conservatism, the provincial pacifism, the timidity and national-narrowness that have characterized the Stalinist bureaucracy, are precisely the forces that drag it deeper into the war as a tool of one of the imperialist powers. It is no mere literary paradox but a political fact of primary importance that the very fear of war which has dominated the course of the Stalinist bureaucracy has led it progressively further into war. Not less important is the fact that while serving as an agent of a big imperialist power, the Kremlin bureaucracy pursues an imperialist (expansionist) policy of its own.

The programmatic documents of the Fourth International, in all its pre-history and since its foundation, have never taken into account the possibility of a war of expansion by the Kremlin. Quite the contrary. Our analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy emphasized its national conservatism, its characteristic of staying-at-home-at-all-costs epitomized in Stalin’s famous phrase about not fighting for an inch of foreign soil and not yielding an inch of Soviet soil. Throughout our political history, one can find only one or two purely incidental remarks about the possibility of the Kremlin seizing new territory; in our programmatic documents, one cannot, we repeat find any whatsoever. This explains, at least in part, the silence, confusion and equivocation that characterized the press of the Fourth International throughout the initial period of Russia’s invasion of other countries. We had not been prepared for such a development. But there is no reason why such a state of affairs should be perpetuated in the revolutionary Marxian movement

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY STALINIST “IMPERIALISM”?

**Is the imperialist policy of the Kremlin of the same nature as the imperialism of Germany, Japan, France, England and America? No, for it has different origins, different bases, different paths of development.**

Is it based upon the dominance in economy of finance capital, the export of capital and other characteristics of modern imperialism, we have been asked with misplaced sarcasm. No, it is an imperialism peculiar to the Stalinist bureaucracy

in its present stage of degeneration.

The opposition to our characterization of Stalinist imperialism (it is not at all “red imperialism”, as the social-democrats would say; there is nothing red about it), is based in large measure on a mis-reading or misunderstanding of Lenin’s conceptions of imperialism. Modern imperialism is characteristic of the last stage of capitalism, of capitalism in decay. But Lenin did not and could not say that imperialism, imperialist policy and imperialist war are possible only under decaying capitalism. Thus, of pre-war Czarist Russia, Lenin declared that “the prevailing type of Russian imperialism is military and feudal”, in distinction from the modern capitalist imperialism of England and Germany which he described so fully in his study, *Imperialism*. Thus, and even more pertinently to the present discussion, he insisted on a precise formulation of the question in his article *On the Revision of the Party Program* written in 1917 not as a casual piece of journalism but as a fundamental and critical programmatic document:

*Crises, precisely in the form of over-production or of the “stocking up of market commodities” (if comrade S. prohibits the word overproduction), are a phenomenon which is exclusively proper to capitalism. Wars, however, are proper both to the economic system based on slavery and on feudalism. There have been imperialist wars on the basis of slavery (Rome’s war against Carthage was an imperialist war on both sides) as well as in the Middle Ages and in the epoch of mercantile capitalism. Every war in which both belligerent camps are fighting to oppress foreign countries or peoples and for the division of the booty, that is, over “who shall oppress more and who shall plunder more”, must be called imperialistic. When we say that only modern capitalism, that only imperialism brought with it imperialist wars, that is correct, for the preceding stage of capitalism, the stage of free competition or the stage of pre-monopolist capitalism was predominantly characterized by national wars in Western Europe. But if it is said that in the preceding stage there were no imperialist wars in general, that would be false, that would mean that the equally imperialist “colonial wars” have been forgotten. (Collected Works, German ed., Vol. XXI, pp. 387f.)*

“Every war in which both belligerent camps are fighting to oppress foreign countries or peoples and for the division of the booty ... must be called imperialist,” wrote Lenin. Does not the joint invasion of Poland by Hitler and Stalin fall precisely into that category? Does not the joint invasion of Scandinavia (of Finland by Stalin and immediately thereafter of Denmark and Norway by Hitler) also fall into the same category? The Poles are brought under full enslavement by Hitler; the White Russians and Ukrainians, according to Trotsky, under “semi-enslavement” by Stalin. It may be argued, and it is, that in Eastern Poland Stalin carried through the nationalization of property and in Finland he acquired military bases which are valuable to the defense of the Soviet Union from imperialist attack, and that from the standpoint of the international working class these measures are progressive. On October 18, 1939, Trotsky wrote that “the economic transformations in the occupied territories do not compensate for this by even a tenth part!” – meaning by “this” the antagonizing of the world proletariat and oppressed peoples. Even if we granted for the moment the above argument, we would reply, paraphrasing Trotsky:

“The nationalization of property in Eastern Poland and the acquisition of military bases in Finland do not compensate by even a tenth part for the enormous strengthening of one of the imperialist camps, for the demoralization of the world working class, for the subjugation of millions upon millions of Ukrainians, White Russians, Lithuanians, Karelians and Finns to the Kremlin yoke.”

## STALINIST IMPERIALISM: THREE ASPECTS

**Space does not permit a complete elaboration of the question of Stalinist imperialism, which must be reserved for another article. Let us conclude here by touching on a few brief supplementary points:**

1. What is the nature of Stalinist oppression in the Soviet Ukraine? In that country, the Fourth International has added to the general, “All-Soviet-Union” slogan of a political revolution against the bureaucracy, the special slogan of the independence of the Ukraine. We not only insist on the Ukraine’s right to separation from the Union, but we advocate its separation. This position, especially applied to the Ukraine, has meaning only on the condition that the Ukraine suffers under national oppression. And what is the nature of this national oppression? We characterize it as a type of imperialist oppression peculiar to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

2. In the U.S.S.R. in War (Sept. 25, 1939), Trotsky wrote: “We do not entrust the Kremlin with any historical mission.

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

We were and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin." It would be more accurate to say, "We are against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin," for the simple reason that the question of Stalin seizing new territories was never raised in our movement for either an affirmative or negative reply. That is, we never envisaged the possibility of a war of bureaucratic expansion.

Now that we see both the possibility and reality of such a war, we declare our opposition to it.

Why? We did not oppose "seizures of new territories" under Lenin (Georgia, 1921). We oppose them now because the Stalinist war of expansion, which we are today compelled to see as a reality, is reactionary, because, as Trotsky rightly says, we do not entrust the bureaucracy with any historical mission, and because we oppose the national oppression of new millions under the imperialist yoke of the Kremlin.

3. The Stalinist bureaucracy, we were told in the party discussion, is not imperialist, but an agent of imperialism. But that is true, in a sense, also of the imperialistically-corrupted labor aristocracy of the great capitalist powers. This aristocracy profited directly from the imperialist advancement of the bourgeoisie, although at the expense of the broad masses of the toilers. It is quite accurate to describe it as an imperialist labor aristocracy.

The Stalinist machine is a labor aristocracy raised to the nth degree, to a new and unheard-of power. Naturally, its ambitions, hopes, appetites are limited, not merely by the economic base on which it rests, but above all by its subordinate position in world politics and economics. This "agent of imperialism" has its own imperialist aims and ambitions. These aims do not have, let us repeat, the same roots as British imperialism, but they exist.

The Stalinist bureaucracy is not averse to acquiring oil wells in the Western Ukraine, copper and nickel mines in Finland, stocks of goods however modest, skilled and semi-skilled workers in occupied territories, and – far from least important – a wider basis for the extension of its bureaucratic power (at least a million hard-boiled Stalinist bureaucrats will be placed in power in the occupied East-Polish territories, inhabited by some 13,000,000 people).

## CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED

**The other arguments of the proponents of the traditional policy are contradictory and untenable. "We condemn the invasion but we remain for the defense of the Soviet Union," that is, for the victory of the Red Army, they say in connection with Poland or Finland.**

They condemn the invasion, but support the invaders! They are against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin, but support those who are fighting to seize them! They are against the invasion before it takes place; they are against it after it has succeeded (once Stalin is triumphant, they will raise the slogan of an independent Soviet Finland); but they are for the invasion (for the victory of the Red Army) while it is taking place.

The attempt to draw an analogy with a conservative trade union on strike misses fire completely. We do not condemn any strike, even if conducted bureaucratically by a reactionary leadership; we may criticize the methods, the timing, etc., of a strike. We do not oppose the "seizure of new territories" (the organizing of the unorganized) even by a reactionary union; on the contrary, we condemn the bureaucrats for not "seizing enough territory" (for not organizing more and more of the unorganized). "It is not a question of 'little Finland,'" we are told, "since Finland is only an episode in the Second World War. This war will inevitably turn into a war of imperialist attack upon the Soviet Union, aimed at reducing it to a colony of world imperialism." Essentially the same objection, made in reverse, was put forth by ultra-leftists against our policy in Spain. On Sept. 14, 1937, Trotsky replied to the argument about the "episode" as follows:

*It can be objected that the two imperialist camps (Italy and Germany on one side and England, France and the USSR on the other) conduct their struggle on the Iberian peninsula and that the war in Spain is only an "episode" of this struggle. In the sense of a historical possibility, it is true. But it is impermissible to identify a historical possibility with the actual, concrete course of the civil war today. The intervention of the imperialist countries has indisputably great influence upon the development of the events in Spain. But until today it has not changed the fundamental character of these events as of a struggle between the camp of the Spanish bourgeois democracy and the camp of Spanish fascism. (Internal Bulletin, Oct. 1937, p. 38)*

What is called an "episode" today is indeed an integral episode of the development of the second imperialist World War, in which the Soviet Union is fighting primarily the bat-

tle of German imperialism. The present war may be transformed, at a later stage, into an imperialist war against the Soviet Union, in which case it will be the duty of the international working class to defend the Soviet Union even under Stalin. But it is absurd to apply to the war today the policy applicable to the war into which it may be transformed.

*Only a sophist (wrote Lenin) could wipe out the difference between an imperialist war and a national war on the grounds that the one can be transformed into the other. The dialectic has not seldom served, even in the history of Greek philosophy, as a bridge to sophistry. We, however, remain dialecticians who struggle against the sophists, not through a denial of every transformation, but rather by means of a concrete analysis of the given instance, as much in its momentary situation as also in its development. (Gegen den Strom, p. 417.)*

A concrete analysis of the given instance shows – it is imperative to repeat this time and again – that the Soviet Union under Stalin is participating in the present war as an integral part of one of the two imperialist camps. To defend the Soviet Union in this war, i.e., to be "the best soldier in the Red Army," to fight for its victory wherever it marches, means, objectively, to work for the victory of one imperialist camp against the other.

## THE NATIONALIZED ECONOMY

**"It is not Stalin we are defending, but the remaining conquest of October – nationalized property." In the present war, the nationalized property of the Soviet Union is not what is primarily involved.**

What is at stake is the world dominance of Anglo-French imperialism on the one side, and the imperialist ambitions of German imperialism and the concern for "power, prestige and revenues" of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the other. In a war between Daladier and De la Rocque the fascist, bourgeois democracy would be at stake; the trade union bureaucrats supporting the democratic side would be participating, whatever their motives or methods, in a progressive war against fascism. In a war between Daladier and Hitler, bourgeois democracy would not be at stake but rather the respective imperialist interests of France and Germany; the trade union bureaucrats supporting Daladier on the basis of desiring to defend the French trade unions from Hitlerism, would be participating – again regardless of motives and methods – in a reactionary, imperialist war.

The corollary argument that Stalin did, after all, nationalize property in the occupied territories is no more valid for the thesis of support of the Red Army. In the first place, property relations remain intact in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, so that the Soviet Union is in the unique position of commanding three capitalist colonies, or rather semi-colonies. In the second place, the fact that property was nationalized in Western Ukraine and Southern Finland only means that the proletariat in conquering those territories (as in the Soviet Union itself) would proceed from this new reality in its struggle to overthrow the Stalinist regime, that is, it would base itself upon statified property and give it a genuinely progressive, i.e., socialist significance. It does not have it in and by itself and under all circumstances. Arab or Irish nationalists might utilize, for their own purposes, material aid which German imperialism might give them for its own purposes; it would not follow that revolutionists must work for the victory of the German army. Finnish revolutionists will not only "accept" Stalin's nationalization but will extend and deepen and fructify it as they grow in power; but it does not follow that they should support the counter-revolutionary troops of Stalin. Capitalism itself, as Marxists have always pointed out, has found itself compelled time and again to take steps which had revolutionary consequences. "Did not the fact that Guchkov and Shulgin [Russian monarchists] brought with them to Petrograd the abdication of Nicholas II play a revolutionary role," Trotsky once asked.

"Did it not arouse the most downtrodden, exhausted, and timid strata of the population? ... Did not the entire activities

## The Camp Followers



of capitalism rouse the masses, did it not rescue them, to use the expression of the *Communist Manifesto*, from the idiocy of rural life? Did it not impel the proletarian battalions to the struggle? But does our historical evaluation of the objective role of capitalism as a whole or of certain actions of the bourgeoisie in particular, become a substitute for our active class revolutionary attitude toward capitalism or toward the actions of the bourgeoisie? Opportunist policies have always been based on this kind of non-dialectical, conservative, tail-endist 'objectivism'." (*Third International After Lenin*, p. 175)

The nationalization of property is not an abstraction and has no absolute merits in and of itself. "Its progressiveness is relative; its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors." (Trotsky.) In the present war, it must be considered in its social and political context. It must be considered in the light of the character of Russia's participation as an integral part of the imperialist war. The conception that since nationalized property is "progressive by its very nature" a regime based upon it must automatically be fighting a progressive war, has as much in common with Marxism as vulgar economic determinism has with historical materialism; the conception is, at bottom, nothing but a variety of immanent idealism.

To sum up briefly in conclusion: That "concrete analysis of the given instance" which Lenin demanded shows the imperative need of revising one of our traditional slogans. If, at a later stage, the present war between the imperialists should be transformed into an assault upon the Soviet Union, the slogan of defensism would have to be raised again, for it is not to the interests of the socialist world revolution and the working class to have one-sixth of the world, which the October uprising removed from the control of imperialism, restored to capitalist exploitation.

In the present war, however, the world proletariat, the Russian included, cannot take upon itself a shadow of responsibility for the participation of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the imperialist conflict. The revolutionary vanguard must put forward the slogan of revolutionary defeatism in both imperialist camps, that is, the continuation of the revolutionary struggle for power regardless of the effects on the military front.

**That, and only that, is the central strategy of the third camp in the World War, the camp of proletarian internationalism, of the socialist revolution, of the struggle for the emancipation of all the oppressed.**

# 1948: Flashback on 1939

Flashback on the "Russian Question". The 1939 dispute in the light of new documents, by Ernest Erber: New International February 1948

**The captured German archives bearing on German-Russian relations during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, published by the US State Department, are of special interest to our movement.**

The captured German archives bearing on German-Russian relations during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, published by the US State Department, are of special interest to our movement. The infamous pact and the train of political and military events it set in motion were the immediate cause of the sharp political struggle that split the American Trotskyist movement in 1940 and led to the formation of the Workers Party. The documentary material released by the State Department now permits an instructive re-examination of the two points of view that struggled for dominance in the then united Socialist Workers Party.

The signing of the pact on August 24, 1939, did not catch our movement entirely unawares. Trotsky had already indicated the strong possibility that Stalin would seek an understanding with Hitler after the "collective security" policy had suffered shipwreck at Munich.

The October 3, 1938 issue of the *Socialist Appeal* headlined: "Trotsky predicts Stalin Will Seek an Understanding With Hitler." Trotsky's article said: "The collapse of Czechoslovakia is the collapse of Stalin's international policy of the last five years. Moscow's idea of 'an alliance of democracies' for a struggle against fascism is a lifeless action.... We may now expect with certainty Soviet diplomacy to attempt rapprochement with Hitler at the cost of new retreats and capitulations which in their turn can only bring nearer".

Yet the actual news that a German-Russian pact had been consummated, breaking suddenly and without warning, came as a distinct shock to the party. The party's reaction revealed that despite Trotsky's reference to the possibility and many similar references in the party press, neither Trotsky nor the party leadership in this country had given any serious thought to the possible consequences of such a major realignment of Kremlin strategy.

The view prevailed, somewhat vaguely, that a German-Russian pact would not be different in essentials from the Franco-Russian pact of 1935 and that its consequences would be similar. The party was especially concerned to combat any concessions to bourgeois-democratic sentiments which might open the way to favoring the democratic imperialist powers against the fascist imperialist powers. As a consequence, the thoughts of the party were directed toward the similarities between the Franco-Russian pact and a possible German-Russian pact rather than toward the differences. The thought of the party confined itself to the concept that capitalism is capitalism, whether in bourgeois-democratic France or in Nazi Germany; that a pact is a pact; therefore, a pact with Germany in place of a pact with France could not possibly change anything essentially.

The shock which the party experienced by the announcement of the Hitler-Stalin pact was born of the fact that the pact was signed at a time when Hitler was making overt preparations for an attack upon Poland and the pact was obviously part of the diplomatic preparation for the impending military operation. However, it was not clear, during the first days following the pact, just how Russia figured in the deal. The emphasis in our analysis of the pact was upon Stalin's fear of war. Stalin's part in the pact was described as a capitulation to Hitler's demands in a cowardly effort to buy neutrality in the impending war.

This was in line with the traditional views of the Trotskyist movement: that the main antagonism in the world was between Russia, the workers' state (however degenerated), and the common interests of the capitalist powers; that the bureaucracy was seeking to restore capitalism within Russia; and that, consequently, the bureaucracy was capable of playing only a capitulatory role in world affairs, unless Russia was directly and militarily attacked, in which case the bureaucracy would fight in defense of its own survival.

The movement had come to think of the bureaucracy solely in terms of "socialism in one country," of Stalin's timidity and conservatism; and to think of Stalin's statement, "not one inch of foreign territory, not one inch of ours," as really inviolable Kremlin doctrine. Such a concept precluded even giving thought to the possibility that the bureaucracy could conduct an aggressive foreign policy for purposes of expanding Russia at the expense of the capitalist world.

The false overemphasis upon Stalin's fear of war and his "capitulation" to Hitler did not impede the party in making a vigorous campaign against the Stalinists on the issue of the pact. The party's weekly organ, the *Socialist Appeal*, spread itself over pages with a loud note of "we told you so." Issue after issue was filled with lengthy analyses of Kremlin treachery, exhortations to the Stalinist rank and file and the unequivocal slogan of "Down with the Hitler-Stalin pact!" That the latter slogan had no counterpart in our campaign on the Franco-Russian pact in 1935 went unnoticed in these first weeks. The entire party and its press bristled with hostility toward the Kremlin's latest move and mobilized itself with political confidence and aggressiveness to make the most of it among the thousands of pro-Stalinists who were repelled by the pact.

Yet some four weeks later the party and its press reacted to the Russian invasion of Poland in an entirely different manner. Far from spreading itself over pages with "we told you so," the party press was all but struck dumb. For the next months it was to express itself in a mumbling, stumbling fashion that was in stark contrast to the ringing self-confidence, almost cockiness, that had traditionally been the hallmark of the Trotskyist press.

The fact is that the Russian invasion of Poland threw the party leadership into utter confusion and divided it into a minority which sought to face the new events and work out a revolutionary policy and a majority that persisted in remaining confused about what Russia was up to.

Baffled by the unexpected turn of events, the majority fled the world of actuality and took refuge in what it reverently referred to as "the party's fundamental analysis of the character of the Soviet state." A special meeting of the political committee, called to work out a line on the Polish events, was presented with the following motion by James P. Cannon, the national secretary, which was adopted by the majority: "The party press in its handling of Russia's participation in the war in Poland shall do so from the point of view of the party's fundamental analysis of the character of the Soviet state and the role of Stalinism as laid down in the fundamental resolutions the party's foundation convention and the foundation congress of the Fourth International. The slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine shall be defended as a policy wholly consistent with the fundamental line of defending the Soviet Union." That was all.

### FUNDAMENTAL

**The editors of the press were instructed to deal with the new events from this "fundamental" position. Should the revolutionary movement declare itself a partisan of the Russian army in the invasion of Poland?**

All efforts to pry loose from the majority an answer to this question — really the only question that shrieked for an answer — were blocked by the intransigent determination of the majority not to commit themselves to anything until they heard from Trotsky. Efforts by the minority to commit the party to a condemnation of the invasion were defeated. Even a reference to Stalin's move as "sinister" was rejected.

The unwillingness of the majority to take a position on the events in Poland was due to the fact that the "fundamental position," specifically the slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union," seemed to demand of them a role which their past training as revolutionists and their spontaneous revolutionary reactions caused them to shy away from — namely, the role of Stalin's helpers (no matter with what curses for Stalin) in picking bare the broken body of the Polish nation and (no matter how reluctantly) giving objective aid to the counter-revolutionary blows which the Russian

army would strike against the revolutionary movement of the Polish workers and peasants.

Does the slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" really demand this of us? the majority asked itself. While they wondered and marked time waiting for Trotsky's answer, the minority answered, "Yes, it does, if you really adhere to that slogan. That is why the old position must be revised. Given the evidence of the new stages of degeneration of the bureaucracy as seen in the Hitler-Stalin pact and the division of Poland, we must give up 'unconditional defense' and defend the Russian state only under those conditions which are consistent with the needs of the world revolution". Trotsky's views arrived in the form of his well-known article, "The USSR in War." Reduced to their bare essentials, Trotsky's views in "The USSR in War" were already presented in his letter to Cannon dated September 12, 1939 (*In Defense of Marxism*, by Leon Trotsky, p. 1). A reading of the bare points of his argument in this letter, unprotected by his literary and polemical skill, makes it far easier to see the chinks in his structure.

It was Trotsky's concept that the workers' state in Russia could only be replaced by the restoration of capitalism, either from within or from without. The proof that capitalism had been restored would be the dissolution of the nationalized property. Therefore, as long as the latter remained, Russia remained a workers' state. As long as Russia remained a workers' state it had to be unconditionally defended in any military conflict with a capitalist state. To conceive of the end of the workers' state, according to Trotsky, with the continuation of nationalized property meant to conceive of a new social order that was neither working-class nor capitalist, i.e., bureaucratic-collectivist. The latter, Trotsky claimed, meant the overturn of the whole Marxist concept of historical development in our epoch. Trotsky's reasoning could be summarized in the formula: nationalized economy equals workers' state equals unconditional defense.

But what if Russia emerged from the war with its social relations unaltered? What if the existing situation was continued into the post-war period? This was inconceivable to Trotsky. The rule by the bureaucracy on the basis of nationalized economy would soon come to an end. Therefore, why meddle with our "fundamental analysis" on the eve of the great war that will resolve everything? "Such an adventurist jump would be doubly criminal now in view of the world war when the perspective of the socialist revolution becomes an imminent reality and when the case of the US will appear to everybody as a transitory episode in the process of 'world socialist revolution.'" (*In Defense of Marxism*, by Leon Trotsky, p. 2.) So what if Stalin expands the territory of the Soviet Union and nationalizes property in the occupied areas? Even if we did not foresee this, it is of secondary importance. It is a mere episode in the war and not the beginning of a new role of expansionism for the bureaucracy.

Given these views of Trotsky, the majority felt released from the need of making detailed analyses of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the concrete events in Poland. The latter questions were sidestepped by Trotsky through the device of saying that once the Polish territories were added to the Soviet Union our political role in such areas becomes the same as in Russia itself. What our attitude should have been in the minor war which the Russian army waged in invading Poland was not even hinted at.

The minority, on the contrary, occupied themselves closely with the concrete events. Their then position of "defense of the Soviet Union only under certain conditions" made mandatory a constant and detailed analysis of what was taking place. As a result, the polemics between the majority and the minority took a peculiar course. The majority chose to be what they called "fundamental." The minority chose to be concrete.

The actual course of debate revealed, however, how artificial the "fundamentalist" approach was. The party could not dodge the concrete events. It was forced to answer. Likewise, the majority spokesmen in the inner-party debates were forced to descend from the lofty heights of sociological abstractions from time to time and express an opinion on what

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

was going on in the world of everyday affairs. It is only the somewhat sparse record of these latter reluctant excursions into daily events that affords us now the possibility of probing the majority's analysis of the Hitler-Stalin moves in the light of the new documentary evidence.

The majority found it difficult to accept the view that the Russian invasion of Poland was prearranged with Hitler. Though they were equally skeptical of the Stalinist claim that the Russian army was invading Eastern Poland to save the population from the Nazis, they leaned toward the explanation that the invasion had the purpose of defending the Soviet Union against Germany.

The only leader of the SWP who showed any concern for publicly defending the majority line in terms of the actual events was Albert Goldman, who tried to apply the "fundamental position" in his articles on the later invasion of Finland. For example, in the *Socialist Appeal* of March 23, 1940, Comrade Goldman wrote down what all the majority leaders had been saying: "... anyone who is not blinded by hatred of Stalin can easily see that what he is after primarily is to obtain defensive footholds. It is well-nigh impossible to explain what he has done thus far on the basis of the theory that he has entered into a partnership with Hitler to divide the British Empire or even (some have said it!) the whole world. Of course people do not have to consider facts; they can let their desires and imaginations run away with them. But then these people are not Marxists". We quote Goldman because his remarks have the merit of being a forthright presentation of the SWP line, as well as because he was the only one who sought to defend it regularly and consistently. In this connection, it is significant to us that with the progress of later events it was Comrade Goldman who broke with Cannon and the Cannon line and is now a prominent member of the Workers Party.

In a recent article setting forth his present views on Russia and defensism he has written that the position of the minority in 1940 "in the light of events, has proven to be the correct approach." (NI, September 1947, p. 213.)

Cannon, in his first speech to the party membership on the Polish events, mainly skittered around giving any explanation but expressed this concept more or less clearly: "For a week or so we had quite a flurry in the party about the evasion of Poland, and demands to change our line on Russia because of it. In this, for the first time, we saw unmistakable signs of the powerful pressure of bourgeois-democratic public opinion on our party. We had to ask ourselves many times: Don't they know that Western Ukraine and White Russia never rightfully belonged to Poland? Don't they know that this territory was forcibly taken from the Soviet Union by Pilsudski with French aid in 1920?" [Internal Bulletin of SWP, Vol. II, No. 3, November 14, 1939, p. 10.]

At a later point in the same speech he emphasized his view of the Russian invasion of Poland as a defense against Germany with the following analogy: "Defense in war also means attack. Do you think we will respect frontiers when we make our revolution? If an enemy army lands troops at Quebec, for example, do you think we will wait placidly at the Canadian border for their attack?" [Ibid.]

This aura of revolutionary defense of the Soviet Union was being thrown about the Kremlin's invasion of Poland more than a month after Molotov, we now learn, had telephoned the following message to the German Ambassador at Moscow: I have received your communication regarding the entry of German troops into Warsaw. Please convey my congratulations and greetings to the German Reich government. Molotov.

In reply to Cannon's speech from which we have quoted, Max Shachtman put forth the following views for the minority: "Stalin crushed Poland jointly with Hitler. The spoils of their victories are being jointly divided throughout Eastern Europe. But also, in another sense, he is pursuing an "independent imperialist policy of his own.... Like every bureaucracy, the Stalinist is interested in increasing the national income not in order to raise the standard of living of the masses but in order to increase its own power, its own wealth, its own privileges.... A policy of expansion, which under Lenin and Trotsky would mean extending the basis of the socialist revolution, means under the Stalinist bureaucracy, degenerated and reactionary to the core, a policy of imperialism. That is, it has an imperialist policy peculiar to the Soviet regime in its present stage of decay". [Ibid., p. 14A.]

How accurate this summary of the Kremlin's motivations was we now learn from the projected Four-Power pact, which was to divide what Hitler called the British bankrupt estate between Germany, Russia, Japan and Italy. Secret pro-

ocol No. 1 in the draft of the pact read: (4) The Soviet Union declares that its territorial aspirations center south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean.

This slice of booty proved unsatisfactory to the Kremlin and it drafted a counter-demand which provided for additional territories. The latter was submitted to the German government on November 26, 1940. On December 18, Hitler ordered his army to begin preparations for an invasion of Russia. He had concluded that the imperialist appetite of the Kremlin was such as to endanger German imperialist ambitions, especially if Germany tackled England first.

The dispute was still raging around the Polish events when items began appearing in the press that indicated a possible Russian move into the Baltic countries. The minority immediately seized upon these new developments to strengthen their thesis that the Russian expansion into Poland was not merely an "accidental" departure from its role of capitulation to the world of capitalism, but part of a new pattern of Russian imperialism.

The majority answered with denunciations of the "irresponsible speculations" which the minority were introducing into the discussion. The charges of "speculation" were hardly out of the mouth of the majority when, to their dismay, Stalin forced the Baltic states to grant Russia military and naval bases, thereby surrendering their sovereignty. The majority immediately interpreted the Kremlin's moves as directed against the German advance into Poland.

The *Socialist Appeal* of December 1, 1939, wrote editorially: "At the same time, however, the Kremlin lives in deadly fear of the possibility that despite all its courting of German imperialism, the latter will make peace with Britain and turn on Russia. It is against that dread day that the Kremlin's moves in the Baltic are calculated. The military and naval outposts secured from the other Baltic countries, plus similar outposts from Finland, would close the defensive circle of the Baltic against Germany".

When, six months later, the Russians dissolved the Baltic governments completely and added their territories to the Soviet Union, the German Foreign Office gave its view in a circular telegram to all German missions abroad which read: "The unresisted reinforcement of Russian troops in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and the reorganization of the governments of the Baltic states, sought by the Russian government to bring about more reliable cooperation with the Soviet Union, are the concern of Russia and the Baltic states.

"Therefore, in view of our unaltered friendly relations with the Soviet Union, there is no reason for nervousness on our part, which some of the foreign press has tried to impute to us in only too transparent a manner".

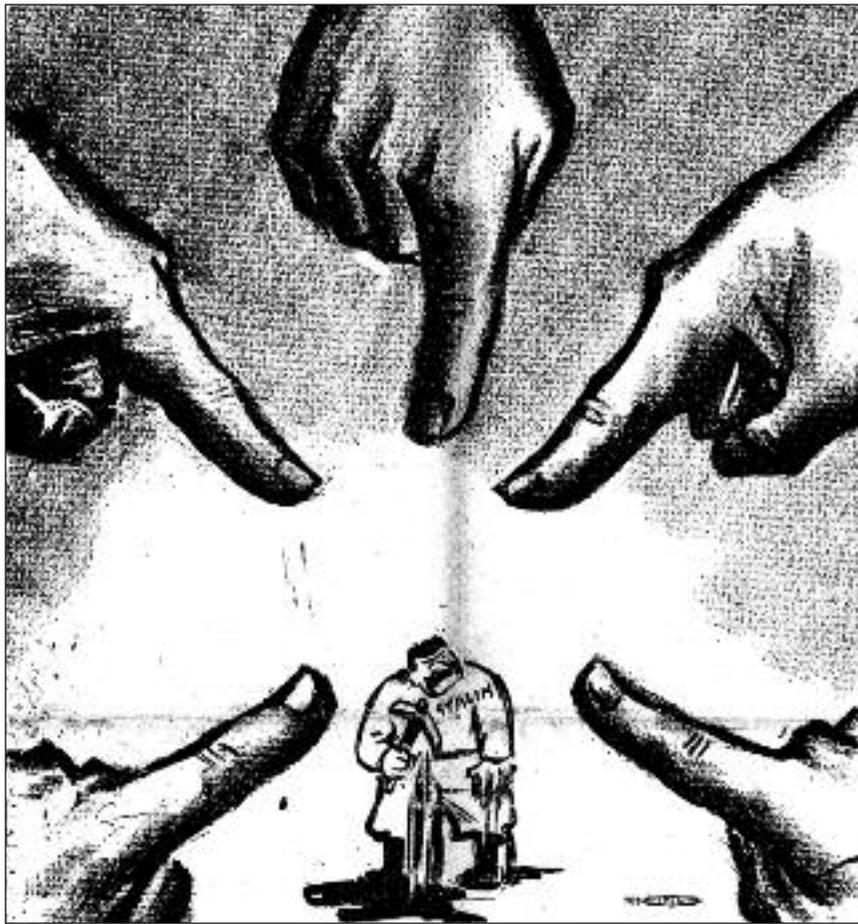
## BALTICS

**Not having learned their lesson from the events in Poland, the majority continued to see the Kremlin's moves in the Baltic states and Finland in terms of defense against Germany.**

The same issue of the *Socialist Appeal* which we quoted above commented on the Russian moves against Finland along the traditional lines.

"This unmistakable bid [by Chamberlain] to Germany came at a time when Stalin seemed to be readying his grab of Finland, a move that Germany cannot possibly relish, for it would put Soviet Russia astride Germany's vital northern trade routes." As usual, this interpretation, flowing from Trotsky's "fundamental analysis," ran counter to the facts. The new documentary evidence is unnecessary to establish this, since the majority was forced to eat crow and write the following in the February, 1940, issue of *The New International*.

"That Hitler was highly gratified by Stalin's becoming involved in war with Finland was clearly shown at the time of the invasion by the Berlin press which congratulated Stalin! Stalin's involvement in the war strengthens Hitler's western front, gives him greater bargaining power with the Allies,



more thoroughly entangles Stalin in the pact, opens wider channels to the resources of the USSR..."

The majority found it possible to say the most contradictory things when dealing with the concrete events, but the "fundamental analysis" remained unquestioned. Why should it be questioned? The "fundamental analysis" was constructed out of materials that had no relationship to daily events. That the latter should serve as a test of the basic theories was denounced as "empiricism".

The kind of sidestepping which Trotsky did on the question of what tactics the revolutionists should pursue vis-a-vis the Russian troops fighting their way into Poland was impossible in Finland. Here it was necessary to descend completely from the clouds of sociological abstractions and speak in terms of revolutionary tactics. The majority was finally forced to carry the logic of its "unconditional defensism" to its full dimensions by calling upon the Finnish workers to become Soviet partisans, i.e., work for the defeat of the Finnish army and the victory of the Russian army.

The *Socialist Appeal* of December 9, 1939, carried a Statement of Policy by the Cannonite Political Committee which proclaimed their line to be "Soviet patriotism.... Unceasing criticism and exposure of the Stalinist methods of starting and conducting the war, but not the slightest relaxation of material and military support. The Fourth Internationalists in the Soviet Union will be the best soldiers in the Red Army and inspire it to victory over the imperialist bandits and the Stalinist betrayers". This frank statement of their position was pried out of them by our insistence on an end to pussy-footing on their part; but actual propaganda for the "defense of the Soviet Union" in the *Socialist Appeal* continued to play an insignificant role in its pages — after all, it was so unpopular! Even their May Day manifesto in 1941 had barely a scant word on the task of defending Stalinist Russia.

In contrast, when Hitler invaded Russia and Stalin switched over to the Allied side, the very next issue of their paper bore the screaming headline "Defend the Soviet Union!" and an appeal to CP members told them: "You set the defense of the Soviet Union as your great task. We do likewise." Cannon himself sent a telegram to Joseph Stalin calling for the release of Trotskyists from the GPU jails so that they might "take their proper place in the front ranks of the defenders of the Soviet Union." He never explained why this telegram was not sent at the outbreak of the Russian-Finnish war, but only after American capitalism and bourgeois public opinion also became "defenders of the Soviet Union".

Trotsky tried to place this unpalatable solution [supporting the Russian army against the Finnish] in the possible light by stating: "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." (*In Defense of Marxism*, by Leon Trotsky, p. 57.) Trotsky's reference to it was the first and last news the world was to hear about the "civil war" in Finland. At a later date, information became available that the Finnish population, almost to a man, fled before the advancing Russian army as before a scourge. It was a far cry from Georgia in 1921.

The new documents explode another favorite line of reasoning used by the "fundamentalists." This was to the effect that the "nub of the strategy" of all the imperialist powers was for a joint attack upon Russia for the purpose of dividing it among themselves. Since the "fundamental" antagonism was between the Soviet Union and the world of capitalism, they reasoned, the war was bound to conform sooner or later to such a line-up.

As a consequence, the party press saw evidence of an imminent peace between Germany and England nearly every week. The hysteria on this theme reached its high point with the Russian invasion of Finland. One issue of the *Socialist Appeal* headlined the Finnish resistance as the beginning of the joint imperialist attack upon Russia. But only the popular press repeated this theme.

Typical of their train of thought was the following: "The real military and financial aid of imperialism to Finland, the international political and ideological crusade against the US, the diplomatic jockeying, particularly of Britain in relation to Germany, all testify to the incontrovertible fact that the US stands face to face with the danger of a fully developed war of imperialist intervention. That war is already in its first stage. [*Marxist Criteria and the Character of the War*, by Murry Weiss, Internal Bulletin, Vol. II, No. 12, emphasis in original.] The new documentary material reveals how really wide of the mark the majority was shooting. It is now to be read that Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to Moscow as the British ambassador to win the Kremlin away from Hitler, that Stalin's rejection of this British wooing was blunt in its defense of Germany, and that the whole course of German diplomacy, as revealed in these documents, was directed against a rapprochement with England.

### DISTRUST

**Hitler's letter to Mussolini now reveals that the decision to attack Russia was born of a distrust of the Kremlin, especially of a fear that Stalin would attack the Germans' rear if they launched an invasion of England.**

Yet the party press often dealt with the war during its first year as if it were a "phony war" or a mock war between Franco-British imperialism and German imperialism, the real aim of which was to mobilize their forces for a joint attack upon Russia.

Abstract reasoning from a so-called fundamental analysis and self-imposed blindness to the concrete events never carried a political tendency further afield from the truth than in the case of Trotsky and the majority on this question.

In 1940 one of the minority documents (*The Judgment of Events*) concluded its attack upon blind adherence to the "fundamental analysis" in the following words: "We have examined herein seven instances of the application of the majority views to the events of the Finnish war. The result in each instance is the same: the theories refuted by the facts. Our selection has not been arbitrary. So far as we can discover, we have included every important case of specific application of the theories to the war — that is, every important case where what was said can be checked by what happened.

"We confess that it is hard for us to see how there could be a more conclusive demonstration of the falsity of the theories in question. And this demonstration retains its full force if everything that the majority has written about the social and psychological nature of the opposition, about dialectics and sociology and the auto crisis, is completely true.

"At Zion City the followers of Glenn Voliva continue to believe that the earth is flat. They prove their theory, moreover, by ample reference to the Bible, and by the condemnation of all dissenters as heretics; nor has any assemblage of facts ever been able to shake them in their belief. Are Voliva's methods to serve as model for the science of Marxism?"

**This flashback into the disputes of 1939-40 has importance for the discussion of the Russian question now being carried on in the ranks of the Fourth International not merely to vindicate our point of view but also to vindicate the Marxist method of dealing with the concreteness of events as a test of political theory.**

# 1940: A "petty bourgeois" opposition? Examine the evidence

Where Is the Petty Bourgeois Opposition? A Repeated Challenge Remains Unanswered. **By the SWP Political Committee minority, 9 March 1940**

**In his open letter to Comrade Trotsky, Comrade Shachtman, repeating the challenge issued by the Minority since the moment it was accused of representing a petty-bourgeois tendency in the party, declared:**

"... it is first necessary to prove (a) that the Minority represents a deviation from the proletarian Marxian line, (b) that this deviation is typically petty-bourgeois, and (c) that it is more than an isolated deviation — it is a tendency. That is precisely what has not been proved."

Comrade Trotsky has been the only one thus far to take up this challenge and to attempt to answer it. Before we deal with his answer, a preliminary observation is necessary.

Our challenge was addressed in the first place to the Cannonites. If there were a petty-bourgeois tendency which had been developing gradually but unmistakably in the party for the past year or two or three (time enough for any tendency to manifest itself), the ones who would be in an excellent, if not the best, position to discern and describe it would be the Cannonites. They know the records of the party directly and intimately. They know, in particular, the political records of the representative spokesmen of the Minority. Shachtman wrote of the record of these comrades:

"They have one and, as said above, it is easily available. There are the records of the Political Committee, containing the views of all the comrades on every question; there are our articles in the press, there are our programs and manifestoes; there are our brochures and speeches. Let them be cited! There has been no lack of bourgeois-patriotic, anti-Soviet, reformist pressure upon our party in the past. Show us from the record when and where any of our leading comrades yielded to this pressure! I say confidently: It cannot be done."

Indeed, it was not done. What is more, Cannon, Goldman and the other Majorityites replied that it need not be done — because they knew it could not be done. Hundreds of comrades who heard him at membership meeting debates recall Cannon's statement that he did not charge the Minority with having or representing a petty-bourgeois tendency prior to the outbreak of the present dispute. In fact, Cannon gave the following "analogy" with the present fight: Zinoviev and Kamenev had been flawless Bolsheviks, the closest collaborators of Lenin, up to April 1917, and suddenly, overnight, so to speak, they broke from Leninism and became "strike-breakers." We leave aside here the question of Cannon's ignorance of the historic basis for the petty-bourgeois tendency represented in 1917 by Zinoviev and Kamenev (Trotsky devoted most of his *Lessons of October* to explaining the political roots of what Cannon thinks had no roots in the past), and emphasize merely the fact that in Cannon's view the "petty-bourgeois tendency" had no roots in the past, that it was a sudden, so to speak, an accidental (or episodic) phenomenon — as sudden and accidental (in his presentation of the analogy) as the 1917 action of Zinoviev and Kamenev. In other words, it was not a tendency at all. In other words, again, Cannon met our challenge up to recently by denying its validity, by declaring in effect that until the present Minority adopted its position on the Russian question there was no petty-bourgeois tendency in the party. He was compelled to put forth this view because he knows that the records of the party and of the Minority spokesmen cannot possibly substantiate any other view.

The merit of Trotsky's reply lies, first in his recognition of the validity of our challenge, and, second, in his attempt to substantiate the political characterization of the Minority in the only possible and permissible way, namely, by producing documentary material dealing with political questions of the past period and the political position taken by various comrades on these questions. In doing so, he adduces eleven pieces of evidence aimed to prove his point. Before we take up the evidence, it is well to bear in mind what it is that has to be proved:

To establish that, as against the Majority, the political tendency of the Minority is petty-bourgeois, it is necessary to show, concretely and not by mere assertion, that in a whole series of political questions in the past period the representative spokesmen of the Minority tended to take or did take a petty-bourgeois position, while the representative spokesmen of the Cannon faction tended to take or did take the contrary position, that of revolutionary Marxism.

With this important point in mind, it will be easier to judge the value of the evidence Trotsky adduces against the Minority. We will take it all up, point by point, in the order in which it is presented.

### 1. THE POLICY IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY

**Trotsky quotes a letter to our faction center in the Socialist Party criticizing the estimate of the situation represented by "(a) the private letter of 'Max' about the convention, and (b) Shachtman's article Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party."**

At best, this is calculated to prove that Shachtman made an opportunist mistake in 1937. But let us see what this has to do with the political position of the present Minority and that of the Majority.

The "private letter" signed "Max" was a circular letter sent out to all the Trotskyist groups in the Socialist Party under instructions and with the approval of the entire Political Committee of our tendency at that time. The same is true of the article by Shachtman in the SP monthly magazine. Let us grant for the moment that the line of these two documents was erroneous and opportunistic. But this line represented the unanimous opinion of the entire faction leadership, with the exception of Burnham. More important, it was the line initiated by Cannon. Here are the facts:

On the eve of the Chicago convention of the SP, a violent campaign was launched by the right wing to expel us from the party. Cannon was then in California. He hastened to New York to confer with the Political Committee. He advanced the policy that it was necessary to retreat before the right wing offensive in order to avoid expulsion, to moderate our tempo and our line. Rightly or wrongly, our Political Committee agreed with this line, except, we repeat, Burnham, who advocated what may be described as a more aggressive policy. In the PC, and on the basis of PC discipline, Burnham was not granted his request to present his own view to the New York membership meeting of the faction. Cannon's main slogan, reporting for the PC at that meeting, was: "We must make a 'second entry' into the SP." Every New York comrade who belonged to our group at that time will remember the meeting and the slogan very vividly. Shachtman and the others bore the same responsibility as Cannon for this line, not less, but not more. It was Cannon who initiated the conversations with Norman Thomas at that time, with the aim of establishing a sort of "truce" which would prevent the right wing from carrying through its drive

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

against us. At the Chicago convention itself, our delegates' fraction was directed mainly by Cannon and Shachtman, for the Political Committee. Still following the line initiated by Cannon, our delegates were constantly held in check. This was true especially of some of the "natives," who wanted to make a stiff political fight against the right wing and the Clarityites. The PC line was to evade the political fight. Our delegates were even instructed to vote for the Clarityite war resolution if our own failed of adoption, as it did. Our delegates were instructed not even to raise the question of the Moscow Trials or the endorsement of the American Committee's work. Our delegates were instructed not to make a serious fight for representation on the National Committee of the SP. And so on.

Wherein did the spokesman of the "proletarian Marxist wing" differ from the spokesman of the "petty-bourgeois tendency"? Only in that the former initiated the policy pursued, was its principal and most vigorous protagonist, while the latter supported the policy. Using Trotsky's method of proof and criterion, a much better case could be made out to "prove" that Burnham represented the intransigent Marxist line while Cannon and Shachtman "revealed excessive adaptability towards the left wing of the petty-bourgeois democrats."

The letter and article of Shachtman were only a continuation of the official policy of the Political Committee. Trotsky, who opposed it, sought to have it changed, as indicated by the letter of May, 1937, which he quotes. Although he does not quote them, his letters to Cannon, who returned to California after the Chicago convention, also pursued this aim. Cannon subsequently proposed a change in the policy – his own policy! – and a new line was finally adopted by the whole Political Committee, which finally led to the split in the SP.

These are the facts. If Trotsky was unaware of them, it was his duty to acquaint himself with them. Cannon, who was aware of them, has taken good care to make no reference in the present dispute to the question of our SP policy in 1937. The same is true of Goldman, who also knows the facts cited above, as well as a number of other facts. Like every other informed comrade, they know that Point 1 in Trotsky's evidence does not even begin to prove his contention about the Minority. For, remember, Trotsky's task is to prove the existence of a certain tendency in the Minority which distinguishes it from the "Marxist" wing of Cannon.

## 2. THE QUESTION OF WORKERS IN THE LEADERSHIP

**Trotsky's second point deals with the question of introducing workers into the local and national leadership. "To believe Comrade Shachtman, I dragged the question of the class composition of the factions into the dispute by the hair."**

To prove that he did not, he quotes a letter to New York dated October 3, 1937. Read the letter: by what single word does it deal with the "class composition of the factions?" It does speak of the need of electing more workers to leadership and points out 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." Quite correct. Conclusion: "I have never met either attention or interest from Comrade Shachtman in questions of this kind."

From whom has Comrade Trotsky met with attention and interest in questions of this kind? If not from Shachtman or the Minority, then perhaps from Cannon? Let us see.

At the Chicago founding convention of the SWP, the list of candidates for the National Committee was prepared mainly by Shachtman, with the knowledge and approval of most of the other leading comrades. At the July 1939 convention, two lists were presented, Shachtman's for one group of comrades, and Dunne's for the Cannon faction. Which one was oriented towards the conception of "traditional committee members"? In which one did "secondary, factional and personal considerations play a too great role"? An examination of the list can give only one answer: Dunne's slate. Shachtman's slate proposed to introduce new and fresh elements into the National Committee – worker-militants like Breitman and qualified youth comrades like Gould and Erber. There being no important or visible political differences in the party, the slate did not aim at any faction majority. Dunne's slate aimed first and foremost at a majority for the Cannon clique, and, towards that end, of retaining some of the "traditional committee members." Dunne and Lewit were the two spokesmen of the Cannon group for their slate. Who were the only four in-

dividuals on their slate for whom they spoke by name? Clarke, Cochran, Morrow and Stevens – not a single one of them a proletarian, and one of them, in particular, distinguished by his petty-bourgeois intellectualism, rudeness and snobbery which repelled any workers' milieu into which he was placed.

The July convention dispute was not without significance. The Cannonites talk a good deal about "proletarians in the leadership," especially on ceremonial occasions or for what they consider are good factional ends. The reality is quite different. The actual, functioning leadership of the Cannon faction, even though it does not live in the Bronx but in Greenwich Village, does not show any special "interest or attention" in introducing proletarians into its ranks – unless (we except such comrades as Lewit and Breitman) Gordon, Cochran, Clarke, Morrow, Wright, Hansen, Goldman, etc., are to be written down as workers.

## 3. THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY

**In Point 3, Trotsky quotes a letter in 1937 to Cannon concerning the poor social composition of the party. He stresses the need of orienting the party membership towards the factories, having each branch, or groups in each branch, concentrate all its forces on one, two or three factories in its area.**

In this way, it would be possible to alter the composition of the party in favor of the proletarian instead of the non-proletarian elements. Good.

This letter was addressed to Cannon. Why does not Trotsky conclude on this point, as he did on point 2, that "I have never met either attention or interest from Comrade Cannon in questions of this kind"? What single proposal did Cannon make in the past two-and-a-half years with reference to orienting the party and its membership towards the factories? Wherein was the leader of the "proletarian Marxist wing" distinguished in this respect from other comrades? When Trotsky wrote to the Political Committee, some time back, that a rule should be adopted providing that any non-worker who does not bring a proletarian into the party within six months shall himself be reduced to the rank of probationer, McKinney supported the proposal, but no one else, not even Cannon. The latter proposed to send a copy of the letter to the branches without a word of comment, and that is all that was ever heard of the letter, of the proposal, or of Cannon's position on it.

Where does the letter quoted by Trotsky indicate that there was in the party, in his opinion, a petty-bourgeois tendency peculiar to the present Minority. That is what he has set out to prove, but the letter does it in no wise. The social composition of the party as a whole is very poor from the standpoint of a proletarian organization. That is incontestable. But both factions in the present dispute represent, to a somewhat greater or lesser extent, cross-sections of the party as a whole. The contention that the Cannon faction represents all the proletarian elements in the party, or the bulk of them, and the Minority all or most of the non-proletarian elements, will not stand the test of investigation for a single minute. An objective examination of the social composition of the two factions will not show any class preponderance in the ranks or the leadership of either one of them – especially if the party is taken not in an isolated city but as a whole, nationally. A similar examination of the social compositions of the New York organization, which is indeed far from what it should be, would help to dispel many of the consciously and unconsciously fostered exaggerations and even myths, many of which are so "cleverly" disseminated by the Cannonites in order to arouse unhealthy prejudices especially among the newer comrades in the outlying branches.

It is true that the Cannonites now show both "attention and interest" in the question of the social composition of the party. But only because they believe that by falsifying the relative composition of the two groups and by demagogical speeches this "issue" can be utilized for their factional advantage, especially since they, who show an interest in theoretical questions about once every two years, have been qualified, so unexpectedly to themselves, as the "Marxist" wing of the party. Their "attention and interest" have been displayed before in this question, and in the same way. If it seems to suit them as a factional football, they make very solemn speeches about it. As soon as it no longer has a value as a factional issue, it is forgotten by them ... until the next time.

## 4. THE DEWEY COMMISSION

**Shachtman's failure to "surround the (Dewey) Commission by**

**delegates of workers' groups" is cited as another piece of "evidence" that the Minority represents a petty-bourgeois tendency.**

This proposal by Trotsky two years ago was supported in the Political Committee by one comrade, McKinney. No other member did, neither Shachtman, nor Burnham, nor Cannon, nor Lewit. Under the circumstances, the Committee considered it from the standpoint of practical possibilities and effectiveness, and decided that it was not feasible to undertake the formation of such workers' groups.

Wherein was the Minority distinguished in this question from the Majority, or from Cannon in particular? Trotsky does not say, and that for the good reason that he cannot say. The letter from which he quotes was addressed to Cannon, Shachtman and Novack. What was Cannon's answer to the proposal?

The work of the party, and especially of the party leadership, in connection with the Moscow Trials and the Dewey Commission, was not, to be sure, flawless. There are many lessons to be learned from our experience in this campaign, especially with respect to the liberal democrats with whom we cooperated. We did not always take advantage of the revolutionary possibilities offered us by the situation. At the same time, let it be borne in mind that the problem of the Dewey Commission was not a simple one, and only special reasons which every comrade will understand prevent us from going into the details of the problem. Yet, with all its defects, the campaign we launched around the Moscow Trials (at a time when we were half-tied and half-gagged in the Socialist Party!) was the most successful we ever undertook – a real triumph for the party and the International. Comrade Trotsky played an invaluable part in working out the campaign, and in its success; that goes without saying. But the daily work – elaborating the not always simple policy, directing the work in general, the writing, speaking and organizing – that had to be done on the spot under the leadership of the Political Committee. We have no hesitation in saying that a good eighty per cent of that work was done by comrades of the present Minority. They feel no reason to be ashamed of or apologetic for that work – quite the contrary – either organizationally or politically. To ignore all that was accomplished, especially the political gains for our movement, and to reduce everything to the comparatively trifling question of whether or not we carried through the organization of the workers' groups, is to abandon all sense of proportion.

Here, as in all the other cases mentioned in Trotsky's "evidence," we are prepared, without exempting ourselves from responsibility for mistakes, to match the main line against the incidental error, the great achievement against the episodic shortcoming, the record of political line and activity of our comrades which is known to the party as a whole, and even to the radical public, against the obscure trifles which constitute most of Comrade Trotsky's "proofs" of our "tendency."

## 5. EASTMAN IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

**Point 5 is also supposed to prove that the Minority represents a petty-bourgeois tendency whereas the Majority represents revolutionary Marxism.**

What is this proof? Not the publication of Eastman's open letter to Corliss Lamont on the Moscow Trials, for that "is all right, but the prominence given it on the cover, combined with the silence about Eastman's article in *Harper's*."

The "proofs" for Trotsky's contention must be scarce indeed to mention this one among them. The size of type used to announce Eastman's article on the cover of *The New Internationalist* was too large; presumably the Cannonites proposed to use a smaller type, or would have proposed it if they could ever be gotten to display any interest in the theoretical organ of the party. But perhaps the prominence given the article on the cover is not the most important point; it is the "silence about Eastman's article in *Harper's*." In that case would it not have been better, if only in order to complete the point, to indicate that a reply was written to Eastman's article? Who wrote the article? Burnham. On whose direct personal request? Trotsky's. Trotsky knows then, as well as he knows now, Burnham's position towards Marxian dialectics. He knew then that Eastman's *Harper's* article on *The End of Socialism in Russia* had as its point of departure Eastman's particular criticism of Marxian dialectics. In his article on *A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the SWP* Trotsky declares that without a Marxian criticism of the opponents of dialectics, it is impossible to expose the essence of the false political position of Eastman, Hook and others. If that is so, why did Trotsky propose to Burnham, in 1938, that he write a polemical reply to Eastman's *Harper's* article? Why did he not propose

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

that Cannon or Weber or Wright or Gordon or Cochran or Morrow write the reply? And why was there no criticism of the reply (and the counter-reply to Eastman's rebuttal) after Burnham had written it? If it was a satisfactory reply from the standpoint of the party program, should not Trotsky have mentioned this fact in his Point 5? If it was unsatisfactory, why was nothing heard about it, either from Trotsky or anyone else in the party? And above all, where were the spokesmen of the Majority in all this, of the Cannonites who represent themselves today as the exclusive defenders of Marxism and dialectics?

## 6. EUGENE LYONS AND THE BANQUET

**Another point to prove that the Minority represents a petty-bourgeois tendency is made by Trotsky when he refers to the fact that "you are so tolerant 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."**

To whom does the "you" refer? To the Minority perhaps? To Shachtman?

What are the facts in this case? The Pioneer Publishers organized a banquet to which a number of people were invited as speakers in a symposium on the Russian Revolution and Marxism. Lyons, Tresca, Hook and others were among them. The Political Committee knew nothing about the details of the affair. When the advertisement for the banquet appeared in the *Socialist Appeal*, Cannon and Shachtman discussed the question and took a critical attitude towards the speakers' list; the other leading comrades did likewise. The main objection was to the fact that the list was "weighted" heavily against representatives of revolutionary Marxism. It was decided that Shachtman be designated to take the floor at the banquet for the party point of view and, after the brief speeches of the critics of the Russian Revolution, to present the views of the Marxists. This is exactly what he did, to the satisfaction, politically, of every one present, except, of course, the Lyonses and the Hooks. The composition of the speakers' list at the banquet was a mistake, for which no member and no group of members of the Political Committee was responsible.

To adduce this miserable incident, not for its actual worth, but in order to demonstrate that the Minority represents a petty-bourgeois tendency, only shows with striking force the weakness, or more accurately, the baselessness of the case which Trotsky is trying to make against us.

As against such trivialities which could be dug up by the dozen if one were interested, can and should be placed the vigorous, effective and intransigent political campaign in defense of revolutionary Marxism, of the Fourth International and of the party, and against precisely that type of critic represented by the Eastmans and the Lyonses. Trotsky mentions only a yellow leaf here and there and makes no reference to the big green forest. The defense of the party and its program from the Lyonses, the education of wide circles of radical workers and intellectuals to the true meaning of the "democratic" backsliders and renegades — have the representatives of the Minority been behindhand in this work in the past? If anything, they have been in the forefront.

It is not necessary to institute an objective re-examination of the record as a whole, instead of taking up isolated, insignificant incidents of fugitive importance. The party needs no such re-examination for the simple reason that the record is already common knowledge.

And if there were such a re-examination, it would reveal that it is the Cannonites, more than anyone else, who showed a complete indifference to the defense of the party program and of Marxism on the theoretical front. Except for one article by Goldman and another by Wright, the Cannonite leadership is represented by a blank space in the past two-three years of struggle against precisely that tendency in and around the radical labor movement which is represented variously by Hook, Eastman, Lyons, Stolberg, etc., etc.

Has Trotsky failed to notice this fact? Has he failed to call attention to it in the proper quarters? In any case, the party in general has noticed it and has drawn the necessary conclusions: Except for factional considerations, the "normal" interest of the Cannonites, Cannon in particular, in theoretical questions of Marxism, is distinguished by its absence.

The "practical" leader leaves that to the "intellectuals."

## 7, 8, 9. THE SOCIALIST APPEAL

**It is not necessary to dwell on the defects of the Socialist Appeal in this document. They are not unknown to the party.**

On the basis of criticisms of the *Appeal* made by Trotsky and comrades in the American party, on the basis of many

direct experiences, on the basis of criticisms of many readers of the paper, these criticisms, with proposals for improving the paper, were incorporated in the report to the July Convention delivered by Comrade Abern, in the remarks of Morrow, Shachtman and many other delegates.

However, to refer to the defects of the *Appeal* for the purpose of characterizing either one of the factions in the party, or any group of comrades, or any individual comrade, is totally absurd. The problem of the *Appeal* is, and always has been, and most likely always will be, the problem of the party itself. The official organ of the party can, so to speak, rise above the party to a certain extent, as has been pointed out on more than one occasion, but it cannot reflect the class struggle in the country to a radically different degree than the one to which that struggle is participated in by the party itself.

On more than one occasion, the editorial staff made efforts to organize a network of worker-correspondents for the *Appeal*, and it succeeded in a modest measure. If the success was far from what is desirable and necessary, it is, as was recognized by all comrades in many discussions, due basically to the detachment of the party as a whole (with isolated exceptions) from the political life and the life of the working class of the country. It is at bottom only to the extent that the entire party enters into the political life of the country, into the life and movements of the working class, that the "face" and the contents of the *Appeal* will be altered in the right direction.

But it is precisely at this point that the criticism of the Minority shows its validity — the criticism of the bureaucratic conservatism that characterizes the Cannon faction. The analysis of the Minority, "War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," replete with facts that are easily verifiable where they are not already common party knowledge, has not been refuted to the present day. The attempt to dispose of the indictment of the Cannon regime by a few sarcastic remarks in passing, will not serve as a refutation.

## 10. AGAIN, THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION

**Trotsky quotes also from a letter to Cannon on June 16, 1939, on the poor social composition of the party and its consequent greater liability to the pressure of "official public opinion".**

Wherein is this a point of proof of the charge that the Minority group represents a petty-bourgeois tendency? In quoting his letter to prove his charge, Trotsky assumes that which he is attempting to prove, namely, that the Cannon group is the group of the proletariat in the party, and the Minority the group of the petty-bourgeois. But this is just what it is impossible to demonstrate on the basis of the facts.

In the first place, even if this division corresponded to the reality — and we deny it — it would be necessary to emphasize that it would not have the same significance in our tiny organization that it has in a mass party of tens or hundreds of thousands which, because it is deep in the turbulent streams of the class struggle, is directly affected by the changes of the prevailing current. In general, the smaller the organization, the less rooted it is in the classes — the less accurately it reflects social forces and pressures.

In the second place, even if this division corresponded to the reality — again, we deny it — it would be necessary to examine the actual situation not so much in terms of generalities, not so much in terms of what holds true "in the long run, in the final analysis," but in terms of what is demonstrable in the given dispute, of what is shown by concrete experience.

The social composition of the revolutionary party is decisive in the long run, for the quite obvious reason that the working class is the decisive and only consistently progressive class in modern society, that the working class alone can lead the struggle for socialism. The social composition of the revolutionary party is decisive immediately, in this sense, that the revolutionary party, regardless of its social composition at its formation or at any given stage, must constantly strive to become a proletarian party, it must orient itself mainly towards the working class.

It would, however, be erroneous to make the arbitrary deduction from this that at any given stage, and in any political dispute, that party or group in a party which is predominantly proletarian in its composition, is correct in its political standpoint, as against another party or group whose social composition is, from the proletarian viewpoint, inferior. Such a conclusion would have meant, as we know from the past, the capitulation, on more than one occasion, of the revolutionary Marxist tendency to the reformist tendency, specifically in the Russian Social Democratic party, where the Mensheviks at times had by far the greater number of prole-

tarians in their ranks, compared with the Bolsheviks.

The problem then boils down, as it always does fundamentally, to the question of the political position, as it does in the present dispute. And there it is necessary to decide, objectively, on whether victory of Stalin's annexationist army in Finland, for example, or the struggle for the development of the independent class activity of the Third Camp, is the correct position, the one that really represents the interests of the proletarian revolution.

The triumphant reference of the Cannonites to the fact that the Minneapolis branch, for example, supports the Majority — with such remarkable unanimity, too — does not decide for a minute the correctness or incorrectness of their political position. There is no smaller number of proletarian militants in other sections of the party who support the standpoint of the Minority.

But even if this were not true (and its truth is easily demonstrated), it would not be as decisive, precisely from the standpoint of social composition and class pressures, as the fact which we consider to be much more decisive and significant in the present dispute, namely, the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Youth comrades support the Minority. The Youth, with all the deficiencies that characterize them, are precisely the ones who, more than any other single stratum in the party, are the best barometer in the present discussion.

The young comrades who make up our Youth movement are, by and large, quite different from the elements who made up the revolutionary youth organizations in the past, say, ten-fifteen years ago. They are literally the vanguard of the "locked-out generation." In the past, many of the youth aspired (and even had the possibility) to "lift" themselves out of the working class, to become part of the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois world — lawyers, doctors, teachers, members of the "liberal professions" or even "better". Their conduct in the movement corresponded to this aspiration. Thus, their constant conflicts with the party (we speak of the early days of the CP in the USA) were most often based on their resistance to the party's demands for activity in the class struggle, in the political life of the country, to the party's demands for sacrifices, etc.

The Youth of our party differs radically in every respect. With few exceptions, they have no illusions about the possibilities for "rising in the world" of American capitalism today. They have a deep attachment to the movement, based on far more than intellectual reasons. It is not comfort they seek but struggle. The war question to them is not an abstraction but a reality. It is most significant that their conflicts with the party in the past two years have been based precisely on their criticisms — substantially if not always justified — of the party leadership's tendency to do-nothingness, to routinism, to lack of initiative, to lack of planned and systematic activity.

It is most significant that in Cannon's pre-convention articles in the *Appeal*, he attacked the Youth comrades not for "petty-bourgeois dilettantism" or for "opportunism" or for "inactivity" or for "refusing to get into action," but rather in the opposite sense, for their alleged "adventurism" and "leftism."

The Youth of our movement in this country are immature in many respects. They have not gone through many indispensable experiences. They have not passed all the tests. But in the present party dispute, they passed the test of the war crisis and the problems posed by it, far, far better than did the Cannon clique. To try to pass off the strong support which the Youth have given to the Minority with the argument that it is most susceptible to "bourgeois-democratic and patriotic pressure," can be put down either to ignorance of the real composition and sentiments of the bulk of our Youth, or, at best, to sheer rationalization.

One last point may be made here.

The self-styled "proletarian" wing of the party claims Minneapolis and the seamen's fraction as its citadels. Let us grant that for the moment it is correct.

It claims also that the Soviet Union has been under the attack of imperialism for the past six months, and particularly now, in the war in Finland; claims, too, that the United States is also engaged in an imperialist attack on the Soviet Union. What social pressure has thus far prevented the Majority, completely in control of the party apparatus, from issuing a single leaflet to the American seamen, to the longshoremen, calling upon them to refuse to load or sail ships with material for Finland and its backers and to load and sail ships with material for the Soviet Union? What social pressure has prevented the raising of this concrete slogan even in the columns

# The Trotskyist split of 1939-40

of the *Appeal* since the war began?

What social pressure has prevented the comrades in Minnesota, heavily populated by Finnish and Scandinavian workers, from issuing a leaflet explaining in simple but clear terms that we are not only for the defeat of the Mannerheim army in Finland but that we are for the victory of the Red Army? The Minority has asked this question for months. The answer is still to be heard.

## 11. NEGRIN'S MILITARY BUDGET

**One of Trotsky's trump cards, so to speak, is the exchange of letters between him and Shachtman on the question of voting for the military budget of Negrin in the Loyalist Cortes. Let us grant that Shachtman's position on this question was entirely wrong.**

But in whose name did Shachtman write his letter of inquiry? The letter speaks of "we" and "us".

The "we" and "us" referred to most of the comrades of the Political Committee. Upon receiving Trotsky's 1937 article in which he said that we would not vote for the Loyalist military budget, Cannon and Shachtman, among others, could not believe that this was Trotsky's position. This may not speak well for their political development, but it is the fact.

It was decided that Shachtman write Trotsky about it, not in his name alone, but in the name of Cannon and the others. The "opportunist position" which Trotsky attributes to Shachtman alone, in an attempt to prove a continuity of line of the Minority, was the position of Cannon and other leading comrades of the party. In this as in so many of the other cases noted above, Trotsky tries in vain to separate that which was inseparable.

It may be argued, after all this, that Trotsky does nevertheless prove that for the past two-three years he constantly called attention to the dangers and mistakes of a petty-bourgeois tendency that existed in general in the party, and that by its present position in the Russian question, the Minority shows itself to be the clearest expression of this tendency.

In the first place, what it was necessary to prove was that the Minority, on a series of political questions in the past, took or tended to take a petty-bourgeois position on these questions as against the Cannonites, who took or tended to take the Marxist position.

Even if Trotsky is granted all his points, they would at best show that on the whole the position of both the Majority and the Minority was the same in the eleven cases he mentions. The distinction between the two groups first occurs clearly on the Russian question. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate how, on this question, the position of the Minority is petty-bourgeois. But this is no easy matter. At least, it has not yet been done and, in our opinion, it cannot be done.

In the second place, we contend that by Trotsky's method of selection, one could "prove" almost anything about the tendency of the two groups. Out of two-three years of the political record of the party and its leadership, Trotsky has taken a number of isolated instances in which he adopted a critical attitude, and then quite arbitrarily, and after the fact, he makes the present Minority the object of that criticism. Trotsky writes: "Let Shachtman not object that the lapses and mistakes in which the correspondence is 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."

But why should we not object? Whether or not Cannon's name is mentioned as often as Shachtman's (it is), is besides the point. What is important is that, as has been demonstrated above, what applied to one comrade applied at least as well to many others, to the Majority as well as the Minority. Why is it not just as legitimate to say today, "Cannon's present position on the Russian question is the logical flowering of the petty-bourgeois tendency he showed on the question of Negrin's military budget, of the S.P. tactic, of the Eastman letter, of the *Socialist Appeal*, etc." To answer: "But it is not, it is the Marxist position!" is merely an assertion, which is made just as vigorously by the Minority.

The conflicting assertions have to be examined objectively; the arguments have to be judged on their merits. The fact that Cannon and Shachtman, or Goldman and Burnham, took the same position on political questions in the past, does not prove that one of them represents a different tendency today.

In the third place, even if it were granted that in every one of the eleven cases Trotsky's criticism was valid, and that it applied to Shachtman, or even to all the leaders of the Minority exclusively, as against the Majority leaders, it would still be necessary to ask: What importance have all these



cases, including the invitation of Lyons to the Pioneer banquet and the prominence given to Eastman's article on the cover of *The New Internationalist*, in comparison with the known record of these comrades on all the other political problems facing the party in the past period? The struggle for the Fourth International and its program, their defense from all varieties of democrats, social-democrats, Stalinists, sectarians and others, did not begin a couple of months ago, when Cannon discovered that Burnham was not a defender of dialectics. It has been going on in the party for some time.

We repeat: the record of the leaders of the Minority in the struggle to build the Fourth International and to defend its program, above all in the question of war and bourgeois-patriotism, is well-known, and it is not worse than the record of the other comrades. Can it so easily be forgotten, or wiped out, even by all the eleven "proofs" cited by Trotsky, even if they were multiplied by two? That, too, will not be so easy.

For the party to try to deny this record would be to deny itself.

Our characterization of the political tendency represented by the Cannon clique has only been denied, but never refuted. Not even the attempt has been made. To our challenge to show the development of the "petty-bourgeois tendency" from the political record of the Minority in the past, only Comrade Trotsky replied, although one would suppose that our most immediate collaborators, the Cannonites, who know that record intimately, should have been the first to meet the challenge by drawing on that knowledge.

**Not a single one of Trotsky's eleven "proofs" have been evaded in our answer, which shows the utter groundlessness of the political characterization which he has attempted to attach to the Minority. The charge remains unproved because there is no proof for it.**

# 1940: the Mensheviks split

Russian Mensheviks in split over attitude toward Soviet Union, by John G Wright. Socialist Appeal, 6 April 1940 (the issue for the SWP convention of 5-8 April 1940).

**The "Foreign Delegation" of the Russian Mensheviks, that is, their leading center, has split on the question of the attitude toward Stalin's regime.**

Theodore Dan has resigned as chairman and left his post as one of the two editors of *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* (*Socialist Courier*), the Menshevik organ published in Paris. Yugov has resigned as secretary. Abramovich is now provisional chairman and sole editor, B. Dvinov the new secretary.

Abramovich and his friends are "principled defeatists" in relation to Stalin and the Soviet Union.

They refuse to draw any distinction whatever between their "defeatist" policy toward Hitler and their policy toward Stalin. Dan, on the other hand, seeks to establish "subtle" distinctions between his attitude toward Hitler as "against Stalin and the Soviet Union". Dan and Abramovich, who remained defensists under the Czar and under Kerensky, have finally become "defeatists". Abramovich wants to go the whole hog. Dan apparently has reservations.

As we shall presently see, Dan's reservations do not at all flow from any deep desire on his part to defend the remaining conquests of the October revolution, but rather from his hopes that a possibility still remains of bringing the Soviet Union back into the orbit of the democratic imperialists. Abramovich thinks the only way to attain this is by "unconditional defeatism." Dan believes the more realistic policy to be that of "conditional defeatism."

Formally speaking, in recent years, the Mensheviks have recognized in Russia "elements of socialism." Insofar as Stalin marched shoulder to shoulder with "democracy," they were "defensists." In other words, they were "defensists" yesterday for the self-same reason that they are "defeatists" today.

When Stalin signed his pact with Hitler on August 30, 1939, Dan and Abramovich concluded it was necessary to re-evaluate their attitude toward Stalin, whom they have always identified with the Soviet Union. There were no disputes among them as to what was involved in this re-evaluation.

As Abramovich writes: There was complete harmony in appraising Stalin's rule as the "rule of a nationalist-imperialist clique, which has completely broken with the proletariat and with socialism and has degraded itself to the level of Hitlerite Nazism." "All of us," complains Abramovich, "have unanimously recognized that his (Stalin's) regime has completely broken with revolution and socialism; that his regime is the greatest enemy of the working class and has become transformed into the rule of a national imperialist Bonapartist clique, on the same plane as Hitlerism, with its fate tied irrevocably to Hitlerism." (*Sots. Vestnik*, March 5.) Unanimity was preserved when the second world war actually broke out. Dan and Abramovich lined up solidly on the side of the "democracies," where they still remain despite their differences.

And the invasion of Finland found both of them unconditional supporters of Mannerheim's "democracy" and "independence." Abramovich reminds Dan that Dan himself "wants with all his heart a debacle and a defeat for Stalin in his brutal assault on Finland."

Why, then, have these good friends split? And after all these years! They have a principled difference. At least Dan claims it is. Abramovich, on the contrary, brands as artificial Dan's "attempt to construct some sort of difference between 'principled defeatism' which he (Dan) advocates towards Hitler, and some other kind of defeatism, apparently 'tactical' defeatism .... in relation not only to the Soviet Union as a country but even towards the Stalinist regime (!) which oppresses the country." (The ironic exclamation is Abramovich's.) Abramovich, it appears, holds that there is only one kind of defeatism. Dan argues there are various kinds. Abramovich is ready to concede to Dan that there is a "difference" between Germany and the Soviet Union as such, i.e., as countries, but that this difference has no bearing on the question of defeatism.

Abramovich's argument in summary form is as follows: (1) If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then "totalitarian war is the continuation of totalitarian politics"; (2) A preliminary condition for the violent overthrow of a total-



itarian regime is military defeat; therefore, (3) "We must strive for the most complete and ruthless military defeat of the Stalinist regime."

"From this it does not, of course, follow at all," continues Abramovich, "that we want the atomization, dismemberment, bankruptcy or enslavement of our country or any of its various sections. On the contrary, we will fight might and main against this." Lest some innocent reader faint with surprise at Abramovich's conversion to violence and lest he conclude that therein lies the crux of the differences between Abramovich and Dan, we hasten to add that Dan, too, supports the thesis of "violent overthrow" (totalitarian regimes cannot be overthrown in peace-time or peacefully, they both agree).

Furthermore, this "revolution" so ardently supported now by Mensheviks is a "palace revolution." Or, as Abramovich so aptly puts it: "Of all the forms of violent overthrow of totalitarian dictatorship the most probable appears to be that which bears in our literature the highly-qualified label of 'palace revolution.'" And Abramovich swears that Dan himself acknowledges that "history, sad to say, has apparently left no other way out save for a palace revolution." A Menshevik sheds tears even when confronted by "history" with such a revolution!

Dan, however, is a pessimist. He warns against any illusions. It would only mean that "another Bolshevik clique will come to power." That is why a different "defeatist" approach is necessary. He does not want to wait for a military defeat but seeks rather to liquidate Stalin's regime "by means of inner forces" and make the "revolution" a lever for the defeat of Stalin's "criminal war policies."

Despite his tears, Abramovich is very optimistic. He lists various "palace candidates" to replace Stalin, and concludes

that all of them (including Voroshilov) would be compelled to be very, very progressive. Why? Because a palace revolution, even with Voroshilov at the head, he argues, must unavoidably catapult Russia from the present coalition with Hitler into an alliance with the Allies. And what could be more "progressive" than this to a Menshevik?

Dan does not contest the "progressive" character of such a change. He simply refuses to cherish any illusions that a Voroshilov will behave better than a Stalin. After all, they are both "Bolsheviks" — in Dan's eyes.

P. Garvey, a "principled defeatist" argues as follows against Dan's position: "What we need is clarity! The instrument of the Marxist method must serve us but so as not vainly to obscure controversial issues; so as not to cover up semi-assertions, immediately accompanied by qualifications; so as not to linger and temporize, which only paralyzes action.... Our times demand forthright answers to the accursed questions. It is impermissible under the cloak of 'dialectics' to cover up lapses and irreconcilable contradictions in one's own position..."

"It is impermissible to see in Soviet Russia a totalitarian state.... and at the same time to seek in this social order of state slavery 'elements of Socialism' which must be 'sustained' until the world social revolution. It is impermissible to want the defeat of the Soviet Union in the war against Finland — and at the same time, with glaring inconsistency, to insist on a subtle distinction between the two aggressors.... advocating towards one of them, the Third Reich, principled defeatism, and towards the other, the Soviet Union, a restricted, temporary and conditional defeatism."

**What style! What thought!**