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CONVENTION DISCUSSION

CONTENTS

1. Motions on Policy of the Political Committee on the Russian*German war
2. The Soviet Union and its defense - M. Alvin
3. The basis for defensism in Russia - E. Lund
4. Party Policy towards Russia in the War
(Excerpts from a letter to a West Coast Comrade)
M. Phachtman

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MOTIONS ON POLICY OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE ON THE
RUSSIAN - GERMAN WAR

Below are the motions of Policy adopted by the Political Committee (the basis of the statement published in Labor Action) on the outbreak of the German-Russian War at its meeting of June 24th, 1941.

- Motions:
1. Hitler's invasion of Russia is an integral part of the Second World War. The immediate aim of the German attack is the conquest of Russian territory primarily for economic and military advantages in the struggle to defeat British and American Imperialism. The Anglo-American alliance with aid to Russia are aimed primarily at the defeat of German imperialism. Thus, the fundamental character of the war as an inner imperialist war remains basically unchanged.
 2. Stalin's defense of Russia is a defense of the bureaucracy's dictatorial domination over the Russian peoples, the oppressed nationalities (Ukrainians, etc.) and his imperialist conquests since 1939 - in the Baltics and Balkans.
 3. We reaffirm the position of the organization that Russia's integral participation in the Second World War - whether on the side of German Fascism or the democratic imperialists - dictates complete opposition to support of Russia and its army. We remain the Party of the Third Camp of Labor and the Colonial Peoples - against Both Imperialist Camps - Berlin-Rome-Tokyo and Washington-London-Moscow.
 4. The main struggle, the main emphasis in the struggle, remains that of opposition to the Roosevelt war program and arousing the American working class against the war and for a workers' government which alone can conduct a progressive war for the defeat of capitalist Imperialism and Fascism.
 5. In all of the belligerent countries the interests of the working class - the cause of genuine national freedom and socialism - call for unrelenting opposition to the home government with the aim of a World Socialist Federation - the only road to durable peace and freedom.
 6. In directing our main fire against the American ruling class and government, the organization will organize a systematic campaign of exposure of the pending new turn of the CP in supporting American imperialism. The aim of such a campaign is to win to our ranks working class militants in and around the CP.
 7. The Political Committee will issue a public statement along the lines of the above motions for publication in Labor Action and for the general Press.

THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS DEFENSE

1.

The Soviet Union is no longer a link in the chain of world imperialism. This is what Lenin meant when he said that the Russian Revolution had broken the chain of world imperialism at its weakest link. Soviet economy is shut off from imperialist exploitation; the economy established by the October Revolution does not permit the influx of foreign capital in order to extract profits from it. This is what is still left of the great victory of the proletariat in 1917 and this is what we defend; the economy that prevents the vampire capitalists from sucking the blood from the Soviet Union.

The position of Max Shachtman with regard to the defense of the Soviet Union in the present war is in conflict with the premises established by him in the past. Shachtman takes refuge in the fact that the war in general, that is, the war between Germany & Italy on the one side and England & America on the other, is still an imperialist war. That much is indubitably true. Shachtman goes further and says that the entry of the Soviet Union in this war does not change its character. That is also true so far as it concerns Germany, Italy, England and the U.S. But where he goes off the deep end is precisely his contention that the participation of the S.U. is subordinate to the aims of Anglo-American Imperialism and that the S.U. has no other role to play in the war than that of an ~~agent~~ of the Anglo-American alliance. The fact that the S.U. has sought an alliance with Churchill-Roosevelt has blinded Shachtman to the fact that what is involved in the attack against the S.U. is a great deal more than just an extension of the Imperialist War.

Shachtman wrote, on more than one occasion, that he would defend the Soviet Union if its economy were in danger of being destroyed by a voracious imperialism. He not only justified his promised defensism for that reason but for others: "Such a transformation of the Soviet Union as triumphant imperialism would undertake, would have a vastly and durable reactionary effect upon world social development, give capitalism and reaction a new lease on life, retard enormously the revolutionary movement, and postpone for we don't know for how long the introduction of the world socialist society." (N.I., Dec., 1940.) One would think that a victory of Hitler, which would certainly result in the destruction of Soviet economy and the restoration of capitalism in the S.U., would impel Shachtman to become the stoutest defender of the S.U. Certainly the dire results of such a victory, as Shachtman enumerates, such as for example the retardation of the entire world revolutionary movement, would force Shachtman to move heaven and earth to prevent it.

But Shachtman is also hiding behind the fact that Hitler attacked the Soviet Union only in order to obtain supplies for a large-scale war against the U.S. We will grant that Hitler's attack at this time was for this precise purpose. But of what special importance is the particular reason that motivated Hitler? What is at stake in the war? This is what Shachtman must ask himself. And the answer is exactly as he gave it, world social development, capitalism, reaction, the world revolutionary movement and the socialist society. If it is true that all these things will be profoundly affected by the result of the war, if it is true that capitalism will be greatly strengthened by Hitler's

victory over the S.U., if it is true that his victory will postpone for a long time the introduction of the world socialist society, then it is manifestly the duty of every class-conscious worker to prevent this victory, even though Stalin makes alliances with the U.S. and England.

The fact that Stalin has been forced to change alliances in the middle of the world war and that his bureaucratic rule remains in the Soviet Union does not alter the fact that a defeat administered by the Nazis could result only in the restoration of capitalism and the re-organization of the S.U. as a great colonial sub-continent. Obviously this would greatly strengthen German Imperialism. But there are also other factors involved. The complete annihilation of the first workers state cannot but have the most reactionary effect upon all the exploited and down-trodden masses everywhere. Millions and tens of millions of toilers the world over still look, and correctly so, upon the Soviet Union as the land of the October Revolution. Its disappearance from the world will have a disastrous effect upon them and their desire to struggle to emulate the Russian workers and peasants in their own lands. Despite the ravages caused by the Stalin regime, the S.U. still stands today as the great symbol of revolutionary heritage.

Shachtman recognizes these facts, otherwise he would say that under no circumstances would he defend the S.U. However, he refuses to take a defensist position in this war because of what he calls the predominately imperialist character of the war as a whole. But we do not propose to defend the war as a whole, we propose only the defense of the Soviet Union. We would like to hear from the defeatists how the defense of the S.U. as we defend it can possibly aid any imperialism whatever.

In his speech to the membership on this question Shachtman stated, "let us grant for the moment--and I grant it freely--that the nationalized economy IS involved in the war as it is in its present stage. Does a position of defensism follow from this? In our opinion, given the concrete circumstances of the war, it does not follow. Not any more than it follows that just because Hitler's attack on Czechoslovakia involves an assault on the democratic principle of self-determinism of nations and peoples, as well as an assault on the rights and institutions of the working class, that therefore we must be for the defense of Czechoslovakia." This is a poor analogy. Firstly, we never said a defeat of the Czech state could have the results predicted by Shachtman in the event of a defeat of the Soviet Union, such as, retardation of introduction of the world socialist order and etc. Secondly, we excluded support of Czechoslovakia in war against Hitler, not because we did not want to defend the democratic right of self-determination or the rights and institutions of the working class but because we characterized the ruling Czech government as an imperialist government which itself oppressed national minorities and never defended the rights and institutions of the working class. Someone will say that Stalin also oppresses minorities and destroys workers organizations. True. But we do not propose to defend the Stalin regime or any of its crimes. We are interested only in the defense of the Soviet economy, the last remaining conquest of the October revolution. In order to do this it will be necessary for the Soviet workers to destroy the Stalin regime, to enlist the support of the international working class and to bring the war to a successful conclusion by dealing a death-blow to fascism. But while the Soviet workers are settling accounts with the Stalin bureaucracy, we do not want Hitler to come in and restore capitalism in

the S.U. For the Soviet workers, the danger of the restoration of capitalism during the war lies now with Hitler. It is also true that the continued existence of Stalinism in the S.U. can and will eventually lead, one way or another, to a restoration of capitalism. During the war, Stalin may have to pay that price to obtain aid from his new imperialist allies. We do not exclude this possibility, for there is no crime that Stalin would not commit against the interests of the workers. But this has not yet happened. When and if it does, one can say like Shachtman, that the participation of the S.U. in the war is subordinate to and in the interests of imperialism. This is not the case today.

It must be made clear that we are for the defense of the S.U. against imperialist attack and not for the defense of Stalinism. Shachtman recognized the possibility and even the necessity of defending the S.U. under circumstances where the Stalin bureaucracy would be in power. Now then, we ask, does he make the following statement regarding the Nationalized economy of the S.U.: "In the hands of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy it is the basis of the power which they wield to keep the proletariat in subjection and themselves in the seats of aristocratic and totalitarian rule." (Labor Action, July 7, 1941). We we always said in the past that the bureaucracy was undermining the economy. We said that Soviet economy could not, separated from general world economy, hold out for any great length of time. We said that either capitalist economy would be restored in the S.U. or that world revolution would transform capitalist economy into socialist economy and absorb Russian-Soviet economy into it. Now, if Shachtman believes that Soviet Economy is conducive to the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy and that it is actually an instrument of its rule, then he should come out openly and say that he would under no circumstances defend the S.U. while Stalinism is in power there. We do not, however, take our position on the basis of whether or not a revolutionary government is in power in the S.U., no matter how much we want to see one there. For us, the defense of the S.U. means the defense of its economy from the possibility of capitalist exploitation.

The undermining of the nationalized economy by Stalin continues in war time just as in peace-time. If one accepts the Marxist analysis of this economy and how to maintain it, this becomes apparent. Aside from the direct measures taken by Stalin both before and during the war, his chief attacks upon the economy consist in the betrayal of all methods of its revolutionary defense. Trotsky never tired of pointing out the fundamental contradiction between imperialism on the one hand and the Soviet Union, cut off from imperialist exploitation on the other. That this contradiction would eventually break out into open hostilities and an attempt by the imperialists to bring the S.U. under their control, has been one of the basic perspectives of the revolutionary movement. Now it is here, and it makes no difference that these hostilities only broke out now because Hitler finds it necessary to obtain more supplies. The fact is that in order to obtain supplies, and this is imperialism's problem on a world scale, Hitler finds it necessary to reduce the Soviet Union to a German colony. The role of the Stalin regime in the war is reactionary to the core, and of course, is a continuation of its role during peace. It hardly needs repetition that Stalinism is fighting only to retain its own position and privileges. It is conducting the war as its bourgeois allies would like it to. We have said that the only real defense of the S.U. and its economy is the extension of Soviet economy to other countries, particularly on the European continent, to Germany. Stalin undermines the Soviet economy by not even appealing to the German workers to overthrow their own

capitalists and to join with the Soviet workers in building a socialist society. This narrow nationalistic method of Stalin places Soviet economy in jeopardy today. One can search in vain through the speeches of Stalin and Molotov for a mention of the words revolution, insurrection, socialism. This is what is reactionary in the role of Stalin in the war: his counter-revolutionary prosecution of the war.

Shachtman has also selected an unfortunate (for him) series of examples of where we would have or do support wars, that is, Serbia vs. Austria-Hungary, Ethiopia vs. Italy and China vs. Japan. In the war which broke out between Serbia and Austria-Hungary Lenin said that he would support Serbia if the war were confined to those two nations or, in other words if the character of the war was one for national liberation on the part of the Serbs. In that case, he pointed out, there would have been a non-imperialist country genuinely fighting for its freedom from imperialism. Since we have determined that imperialism, the modern expression of the dying capitalist order, is a chain that binds and enslaves the entire world, such a war conducted by the Serbs would have been historically progressive. However, the entry of the large imperialists of Europe into this war, Germany, Russia, France, England, converted the war of the Serbs into a minor and insignificant part of the war as a whole. It (Serbia) became a battleground of the large imperialist powers and its role thereupon became subordinated to that of its imperialist allies. It was no longer an independent role. Therefore, Lenin said we could not be for its defense. In the wars of Ethiopia (1936) and China, the fundamental conflicts were between semi-colonial, non-imperialist nations and imperialist nations. We supported both wars and continue to support China today. The reasons are the same that, in other circumstances as cited above in the case of the Serbs, would have impelled us to support them. In the present war, the participation of Ethiopia does not have the same quality as it had in 1936. Now, the country is involved as a subordinate part of the war of Britain against the Axis. It is plain that it plays no independent role whatever. The British army occupies the country, British generals dominate the military and political scene and in effect, the country has been transferred out of the Italian imperium into the British. Consequently, we give Ethiopia no support. We did not support any of the above nations because there was anything progressive about the semi-feudal economy of Serbia, the slave economy of Ethiopia or the dictatorship of the Kou-Min-Tang. In the case of these three countries we find nothing progressive in their entire social, political or economic orders as compared to their attackers. We supported them, the latter two actually, because they were non-imperialists fighting against imperialism. Contrast this with the war of Germany against the Soviet Union today. Shachtman says that Soviet economy is progressive as compared to German economy, and that if it were threatened, he would come to its defense. The attempt to equate the Soviet Union with the three countries mentioned above is based not upon Marxist criteria but upon a mystical method known only to Shachtman.

Finally to follow this equation a la Shachtman to its logical conclusion (we speak here of Shachtman's logic) we look once more upon China. China, in her struggle against Japan is constantly being helped by rival imperialisms such as the United States. In fact, they have received more from the U.S. than the Soviet Union has from both the U.S. and England. Why then does not Shachtman say that the Chinese are part of the Anglo-American imperialist camp and refuse to defend them? How is it that the aid of the U.S. to China does not come under the heading of "the war as a whole" whereas the struggle of the Soviet Union against

Germany becomes a part of the defense of the British Empire, obscured only by a geographical detail? Comrade Shachtman, some explanations are in order.

Shachtman is caught in a net of hopeless contradictions. He discovered a new class in the Soviet Union and promised, in certain circumstances, to defend it. When the circumstances arrived, Shachtman was not in. A clear lesson can be learned here. Those who cast off the Marxist method in favor of a superficial empiricism could not meet the events with the correct answers. The more they say, the more contradictions they fall into. It is not too late for the party to extricate itself from the position to which it has been led by those who see things that do not exist and are blind to living reality. We have yet to hear something on why Stalin did not carry out his original design to divide up the British Empire in partnership with Hitler. We have yet to hear some explanations about the attack upon India which Stalin was going to make any day a year and a half ago. The party can make a genuine step in the direction of Marxism by discarding the methods of Shachtman.

The revolutionary defense of the Soviet Union against Imperialist attack remains, as Trotsky taught us, the duty of all the workers. This is the goal towards which we must strive. Any other road can lead only to hopeless chaos and disintegration.

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Milton Alvin
7-18-41

THE BASIS FOR DEFENSISM IN RUSSIA

1. Russia's Economy and Russia's War

Long and violent polemics were waged between Trotsky and his supporters on the one hand and ourselves on the other during the Russian invasions of Poland and Finland over the relation between the economy of a state and the character of its wars.

Trotsky insisted, in the case of Russia, upon an automatic relationship, - "Progressive economy equals progressive war", - was what his formula boiled down to. This resulted in the contradiction of simultaneously denouncing the invasions as a "blow at the world revolution" but characterizing them as "progressive wars."

We answered that no war that dealt a blow at the revolution could be progressive since it was precisely the effect of the war on advancing or retarding the proletarian revolution that determined whether it was progressive or reactionary.

We did not, however, - (nor could anyone who considered himself a Marxist) say that there was no connection between the economy of a state and the character of its war. What we insisted on was that certain states could, on the basis of the same economy, fight both progressive and reactionary wars. Factors in addition to the economy would have to be weighed in connection with a specific war to determine its character. These would be rooted in the political, diplomatic, and military policies that preceded that war.

The war between Britain and Germany was an imperialist war on both sides because the economy of both countries forced them to fight for markets, raw materials, and outlets for surplus capital. It was a war over the re-division of the world.

The war between Japan and China was imperialist on Japan's side and national defensive on China's side because the economy of Japan forced her to expand into China while the latter was struggling to create a unified national existence.

In the war between Germany and Russia we must begin by asking "What is the nature of Russian economy?"

A defensist cannot discuss the character of the war with those who hold that Russia is a capitalist state. The discussion with them can only revolve around the question of the nature of Russian economy. If Russian economy is no different from that of Germany's or Britain's; then, obviously, the matter of defeatism or defensism requires no discussion.

With those, however, who hold that Russian economy is basically different from the economy of the capitalist world, as does Shachtman, there is common ground on which to discuss an attitude toward the character of the war.

2. The Economic Conflict between Russia and World Imperialism

The Russian Revolution dealt world capitalism a double blow. First, it established a workers' state to act as both a beacon and a spur to the revolution in the rest of the world. We can refer to this as a political blow to capitalism. Second, it wrested 1/6 of the earth from world imperialism and threw up a monopoly of foreign trade to keep it free from imperialist penetration. We can refer to this as an economic blow to capitalism.

The Stalinist counter-revolution has effectively wiped out the existence of Russia as a political threat to capitalism. Far from remaining merely passive, Stalinist Russia did its utmost in Spain, China, Germany, France, and elsewhere to reassure the capitalist states that it desired nothing else than the status quo--to be left alone. There was no political concession too treacherous or revolting for Stalin. He buried revolutions with an effectiveness that surpassed anything the capitalists could do themselves.

But he could not purchase peace and security! Neither from the Anglo-French imperialists nor from Hitler. For the new exploiting class in Russia was forced to exist upon the nationalized economy they had appropriated from the revolution. The existence of the nationalized economy was possible only as long as a monopoly of foreign trade kept Russia beyond the reach of world imperialism. Economically therefore, the Russia of Stalin remained as much a problem on the agenda of world imperialism as the Russia of Lenin. As capitalism declined the problem became ever more acute.

It is in this that the irrepressible conflict between Russia and world imperialism existed.

3. Why the Concerted Imperialist Attack Did Not Occur

In speaking of "world imperialism" it is necessary to bear in mind that the term refers to both a generalized economic law and to definite national states. Economically imperialism is the same system no matter which capitalist state carries it out. But politically, imperialism is the diplomatic and military activity of each particular imperialist state.

Thus we speak of the law of imperialist expansion into economically backward states. Yet in connection with a specific expansion, for instance Ethiopia, it was undertaken by Italian imperialism in the face of resistance by British imperialism. Not love for the Ethiopians, but their own imperialist interests motivated the British.

The above must be borne in mind when discussing the conflict between Russian economy and world imperialism.

The years following the revolution in 1917 saw feverish activities on the part of the imperialists directed against the Soviet Union. The first activities consisted of small scale intervention--

Americans at Archangel, Japanese at Vladivostok, French in the Black Sea--and material assistance to the White Guard armies. As long as the war lasted, the Germans were also active against the Soviets in Finland and the Ukraine.

Following the German revolution, the German bourgeoisie was unable to act against the Soviets on its own and unwilling to act as the agents of French and British imperialism. To do the latter would have only established Anglo-French imperialism on both of Germany's frontiers and make the resurrection of Germany's military strength all the more difficult.

Following the failure to successfully utilize Poland against the Soviet Union in 1921, the British imperialists made preparations for a direct intervention. The militant response of the British workingclass with a general strike threat put an end to these moves.

The German bourgeoisie answered the anti-Soviet agitation of Anglo-French imperialism with the Treaty of Rappallo, a German-Soviet pact for diplomatic and military collaboration. The pact was not the inspiration of German Social Democracy but of the Reichswehr general staff, the stronghold of the most aggressive German nationalists. Russian collaboration represented to the Germans both a weapon against Anglo-French imperialism and a means of blackmailing them. This tactic fore-shadowed the policy of Nazism, which was nothing else but the national chauvinist element in complete control.

From 1921 until 1933 the existence of a strong revolutionary movement in Central Europe and the anti-war sentiments of the British and French workingclasses prevented any further imperialist adventures against Russia. However, the victory of Hitler opened a new epoch. Beginning in Germany, the proletarian movements of Central Europe were smashed one by one. In their place arose the new military might of German imperialism. But German imperialism was not only a threat to the Soviet Union. It was also a threat to Anglo-French hegemony. Even if Germany struck at Russia first, Anglo-French imperialism would have little consolation. For the German organization of Russian resources would again make her the first military power on the continent and place France at her mercy. The result was the feverish and contradictory diplomacy of England and France from the advent of Hitler to the outbreak of the war. First, efforts to placate Germany with loans, permission to rebuild its navy, etc. - then the Stalin-Laval Pact - then the Munich Peace - then feverish efforts for a British-Russian Pact - then the war.

From this review it becomes apparent that the nature of the conflict between Germany and Anglo-France was such that a joint imperialist attack became ever more improbable. (The conflict between America, Britain, and Japan in the Far East had the same result.) History had cast Stalinist Russia for the role of an ally of one of the imperialist camps.

Had England been willing to sign a second Munich Pact over the body of Poland, it is highly probable that German imperialism would have launched its first offensive against Russia. But another appeasement would have cost Britain every continental ally, with the possible exception of France. When Hitler realized that a second Munich was out of the question, he chose the pact with Stalin and the war against Britain first.

But the war against Britain has bogged down. The Channel could not be blitzed. The prospect is a long war. Russian supplies now became imperative for Germany. The economic organization of Russia by German imperialism would solve both its historic objective and its immediate military needs. The long awaited imperialist attack on Russia is taking place.

4. The Hitler-Stalin Pact and Russian Imperialism

For the Kremlin, the pact with Hitler promised two advantages; (a) another chance to escape involvement in the war and (B) the opportunity of sharing in the conquests of German imperialism. But did not the Russian participation in the division of Poland, the conquest of the Baltic states, etc., prove that Russian participation in the war was identical with that of Germany? Superficially it was identical. In both cases armies attacked and occupied territories. But fundamentally it was different.

The imperialism of Russia was of that primitive kind found in embryonic form in every exploiting class and awaiting but the opportunity to become active. Every exploiting class seeks to perpetuate itself against internal and external foes. This requires military and economic strength. An opportunity to increase its military and economic strength is therefore eagerly accepted. Parts of Poland and Finland, Bessarabia and the Baltic states were to be picked up, practically, for a song. The Russian rulers would truly have been altruists had they declined the invitation.

But is this the same as modern finance imperialism with its dictum of "expand or die"? Has anyone yet proven that Russian expansion was forced by internal economic pressures? Has anyone yet explained why Russia took such modest slices of Finnish territory when she could have extracted more, if Finnish resources were vital to her? Or why she relinquished the nickel mines? Or why she chose territory that had primarily military value and little economic value?

Russian imperialism has perhaps something in common with Chinese imperialism in Tibet but nothing in common with modern finance imperialism

5. Stalin's War Against Finland and Stalin's War Against Germany

The invasion of Poland and Finland was an attempt by the Kremlin to strengthen its own reactionary rule. Since it made the workers of the occupied countries victims of nationalist illusions

and agents of their own national bourgeoisie and through them of world imperialism, the Soviet occupation lowered their revolutionary consciousness and retarded their class development. This constituted a blow at the world revolution. The revolts in the Baltic states have revealed that Stalin had not turned them into fortresses but rather into prisons with inmates who were prepared to mutiny at the first opportunity. This has justified our position that military occupation of buffer territory at the expense of alienating the support of the workers of the world would be a loss, not a gain, to the defensive efforts of the Kremlin. The purposes, the execution, and results of the Soviet occupations were thoroughly reactionary.

Can we, however, say the same for the Kremlin's attempts to defend Russia against German imperialism?

In the case of the conflict between Germany and the British Empire we are not concerned with who is waging a defensive and who an offensive war. All finance imperialism is, by its very nature, aggressive. If Germany attacked first, it only meant that the solution to her economic problems could not bear as long a postponement as those of Britain and France.

But can we also say that the conflict between Germany and Russia is basically an attempt to re-divide the world? We can say that on Germany's side it was caused by the pressure of German economy upon the frontiers of Russia. But can we say that it was also caused by the pressure of Russian economy on the frontiers of Germany?

Germany's attack on Russia is so obviously a predatory imperialist raid against Russian economic resources that no one--no one--has yet tried to attribute it to anything else.

Is the reactionary war against Poland and Finland--undertaken on the initiative of the Kremlin--being repeated in the attempt of the Kremlin to resist German imperialism? The answer is so obviously no that it seems a bit childish to have to deal with the question in these terms.

Russia is participating in this war because the Kremlin is fighting for its life. Further concessions to Hitler would have so lowered its prestige and strength within the country as to make it vulnerable to its internal enemies--either of the right or left. True, it turned down Hitler's demands and chose to fight because its own neck was at stake. But why did Negrin fight? Why did Haile Salassie fight? Why does Chang-Kai-Chek fight? Stalin can save his own neck only by resisting German imperialism. In doing this his interests co-incide with those of the world proletariat. Russia's defense against Germany is a progressive war.

6. How Outcome of Russo-German War will Effect World Revolution

Victory or defeat for either Germany or the British Empire will offer the proletariat as great or as small a perspective for

revolution. The destruction of the British Empire will open up an epoch of colonial revolutions in Asia and Africa which might prove the Achilles heel of "victorious" German imperialism. The defeat of Germany will liberate Europe and once more offer the proletariat an opportunity to play its historic role.

What will Hitler's conquest of Russia offer the world proletariat? The only answer that might be given--we hope never in our ranks--is that it will destroy Stalinism. This program has long ago been written for "Trotskyism"--not by revolutionists but by the G.P.U. and Stalin's pen prostitutes. The destruction of the Stalin regime by the Russian proletariat would, of course, mean the destruction of Stalinism everywhere. The destruction of the Stalin regime by Hitler would--aside from its other reactionary consequences--forever prevent history from putting the Stalinist lies about the Soviet "paradise" to the test. The Stalinist dupes would not become revolutionists because Hitler destroyed Stalinism. They would carry their illusions about the Soviet Union to the grave.

The effect of an imperialist conquest of Russia was very ably described by Max Shachtman in the December, 1940 issue of "The New International":

"The aim of imperialism in that case, whether it were represented in the war by one or many powers, would be to solve the crisis of world capitalism (and thus prolong the agony of the proletariat) at the cost of reducing the Soviet Union to one or more colonial possessions or spheres of interest. Even though prostrated by the victors in the last war, Germany remained a capitalist country, whose social regime the Allies did their utmost to maintain against the revolutionary proletariat. In the present war, we find victorious Germany not only not undertaking any fundamental economic changes in the conquered territories but preserving the capitalist system by force of arms against the unrest and revolutionism of the proletariat. There is no reason to believe that victorious imperialism in the Soviet Union would leave its nationalized property intact--quite the contrary. As Germany now seeks to do with France, imperialism would seek to destroy all the progress made in the Soviet Union by reducing it to a somewhat more advanced India--a village continent. In these considerations, too, the historical significance of the new, collectivist property established by the Russian Revolution again stands out clearly. Such a transformation of the Soviet Union as triumphant imperialism would undertake, would have a vastly and durable reactionary effect upon world social development, give capitalism and reaction a new lease on life, retard enormously the revolutionary movement, and postpone for we don't know how long the introduction of the world socialist society. From this standpoint and under these conditions, the defense of the Soviet Union, even under Stalinism is both possible and necessary."

(Comrade Shachtman, however, would defend Russia against the above consequences only in case of a combined imperialist attack

in which Russia would have no allies. Why such a combined attack becomes virtually impossible was dealt with in point 3 of this article.)

But there are those who argue that Hitler is not invading the Soviet Union primarily to destroy the nationalized economy and make it a German colony. His primary concern, they say, is to defeat Great Britain. The Russian campaign is merely (!) a raid to secure the resources with which to continue his main war. True, perhaps. But how absurd when used as an argument to define the character of the war! Hitler, likewise, was not primarily interested in expropriating the German Jews. He only wanted their resources for his war against Britain. True, perhaps, but of little comfort to the Jews.

But what would the effect of a Russian victory be? The possibility of a Russian victory without the support of proletarian revolutions in the West is extremely hypothetical. But we can be sure that news of serious German reverses tomorrow would set the wheels in motion in Britain for an understanding with Germany. Is anyone so hare-brained as to believe that Britain would turn over the task of organizing Central Europe to Stalin?

But if the European revolution breaks out before Hitler has smashed Stalin, will it not fall victim to Stalinism as did the Spanish revolution? Of this we have no guarantee. All we can say is that with the rise of the revolutionary current, the revolutionary Marxists can again swim with the stream and seek to win it for their program. We can ask for no more.

7. Stalin's Relations with Anglo-American Imperialism

"War is a continuation of politics by other means" has long been accepted as a guide-rule by Marxists. But progressive politics in time of a general imperialist war often become inseparable from one of the imperialist camps, and, thereby, lose their progressive character.

In the 1st war the struggle of the Arabs against the Turkish Empire became merged with the reactionary struggle of British imperialism to control the Near East. The struggle of Serbia for national unity and independence became merged with the struggle of Russia to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire and control the Balkans. The struggle of Belgium to maintain its national independence became merged with the struggle of Anglo-French imperialism to control the continent. China was ordered by the Allied imperialists to declare war on Germany. The nationalist revolutionary movement of the Czechs was enlisted by the Allies against Germany. The fighting organizations of the Polish nationalists were enrolled by the Central Powers.

The Irish revolutionary movement entered into military relations with the German. Submarines landed arms on the Irish coast and conveyed information between Ireland and Germany. But revolu-

tionary Marxists hailed and supported the uprising of the Irish nationalists against British rule in 1916.

These examples illustrate the fact that the mere alliance with a reactionary force for military reasons does not affect the progressive nature of a struggle. What is important is the extent to which the progressive side in the war can maintain its independence.

Had the Ethiopians risen in revolt against Italian rule at the outbreak of the war and accepted British arms, would this have changed the revolutionary content of their struggle? The fact that they arose at a time when Italy was occupied in a war with Britain would have attested to their perspicacity but would not have changed the character of their struggle. But their current role as auxiliaries of the British army in conquering Ethiopia for British imperialism has no progressive content whatsoever.

Chang-Kai-chek has long been acting as an ally of British and American imperialism in China. American imperialism has already given him more financial, material, and diplomatic support than they will ever give Russia. American engineers, military advisers, aviators, and other specialists have long been part of the Chinese forces. Roosevelt seeks volunteers for China's army by offering to accept service there as equivalent to service in America's own army and therefore releases them from the draft obligation. Has this changed the character of China's war? No. Will an American declaration of war against Japan alter the situation? It might. We would have to wait and see. Naval struggles in the Pacific between Japan and America and military operations on the Philippines would not affect the character of the war. Even a few regiments of Marines joining the Chinese forces would not necessarily change the character of China's war. Those who would become defeatists in China at such a time would, in effect, be punishing China for remaining at war with Japan while the latter was being attacked by a third power. Was the American Revolution any the less historically progressive because it was accomplished with aid of Louis XIV's army and navy?

If, however, the Chang-Kai-chek government were reduced to a mere facade for American imperialism the character of its war would obviously change. Its outcome would only determine whether Japanese or American imperialism would exploit China. The world proletariat has no interest in this question. It rejects both imperialisms.

The argument that Russia takes part in the war in a reactionary manner because she is allied to Anglo-American imperialism becomes at first incomprehensible, and then, ludicrous. She has merely "switched sides" is the argument. That she has "switched sides" is incontestable. But this would only have validity if we had been defeatists during the Finnish war on grounds that Russia was allied to Germany. This was not the case. We were defeatists because the alliance with Germany had reactionary purpose, the conquest of new territory by the Kremlin. Is this the purpose, today

of the alliance with Anglo-American imperialism? How utterly absurd! What the Kremlin may do tomorrow we will leave until tomorrow. No one has yet asked us to be defeatists in China on the ground that Chang Kai-Chek has designs upon Japan which he will realize after crushing the Japanese army. The argument that the alliance with Anglo-American imperialism makes Russia's war reactionary is nothing but the other side of the coin from the Stalinist argument that the same alliance makes the war of Anglo-American imperialism progressive.

Those who held that it is possible for Russia to fight a progressive war against imperialist encroachment upon her territory and who refuse to be for Russian defense today can only do so on one basis--that Stalin has already become a mere facade for the Anglo-American imperialists and turned the country over to them. That this might take place is improbable but not impossible. In that event it will be immaterial whether Russia becomes a colony of German or of Anglo-American imperialism. But since when do we base our strategy of today on the possibility of tomorrow?

Stalin's alliance with Anglo-American imperialism today does not give the latter 1/10 as much entree to Russia as the Anglo-American alliance with China gives it entree to the latter country. To be consistent, those who hold that Russia is fighting a reactionary war by virtue of her alliance must certainly say the same for China.

8. THE Lines of Defeatism and Defensism Tested in Action

An attitude toward the character of a war must be based on the fundamental factors--strategy of the world revolution, nature of imperialism, character of Russian economy, etc. But the position based on these considerations must also coincide with the obvious tactics of the revolutionary struggle. If they do not, something is wrong with the position. It was in this test that the line of Trotsky on the Polish and Finnish events bogged down worst. It bogged down so badly that a Finnish civil war had to be discovered to bolster it.

The revolutionary defeatist in Russia today must tell the workers to continue the class struggle without regard for its effect on the military front against Germany. This could only be justified with the argument that a German conquest of Russia is no different for the world proletariat than a German conquest of France. The quotation from Shachtman has already pointed out the significant difference. Or the defeatists would have to become preposterous and tell the Russian worker that the country was already in the hands of imperialism--Anglo-American imperialism--and that resistance to German imperialism is only in the interest of Wall Street and London investments.

(Or would the defeatist tell the Russian worker that there are only three camps in this war--two imperialist camps and the revolutionary camp and that Russia is part of one of the imperialist camps? If it is the slogan of the Third Camp that has led our

defeatist astray than the motion of Comrade Coolidge of a year ago to expunge all reference to the Third Camp from our documents was absolutely correct. The "Third Camp" as an agitational slogan was very much in order. But the "Third Camp" in the sense of military line-ups which precludes the possibility of a military alliance between a progressive and a reactionary force--this is a snare and a delusion. The sooner Marxist education roots it out of our movement, the sooner will the damage be undone.)

Basin; himself upon this line, the defeatist would seek to institute a mass movement against the Kremlin on the demand that it cease its imperialist war against Germany--the slogan of "peace" in time of war is very revolutionary. But what would our movement say tomorrow if Stalin made peace--which could only take place on Hitler's terms? We would denounce him as a capitulator and traitor. Why? We did not do it when he made peace with Finland. As true defeatists, we welcomed the latter. Would we welcome peace with German imperialism?

Would the defeatist ever be able to explain to a Russian worker why he should take the manufacture and transport of supplies to China into account when waging the struggle against Stalin but not the needs of the Russian front against Germany? How explain to the Russian worker that the conquest of Russia by Germany does not matter sufficiently to require defensive efforts?

The program of the Russian revolutionary defensist would be along the following lines:

No political support to the Stalin regime. Only a democratically-constituted workers regime can victoriously defend the Soviet Union. Continue the struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucratic exploiters as the first step in the organization of defense against German imperialism. On guard against attempts of the Kremlin to capitulate to Hitler.

"War at the front---revolution in the rear!" Support to all mass movements against the Kremlin, on a defensist basis, i.e. choice of those weapons of struggle that will not weaken the front.

Workers control of production--increase the output for military defense--decrease the salaries of managers and directors to specified maximums.

Election of committees in the shops, villages, and armed forces as first step toward reconstituting Soviets. Freedom of press, speech and organization. Dissolution of the GPU and creation of workers vigilance committees. Release of all political prisoners held for revolutionary activity against the Stalin regime.

For a free and independent Soviet Ukraine! For self-determination for all national minorities oppressed by the Kremlin regime.

In America this policy calls for:

Revolutionary struggle against American imperialism and independent working class defense of Russia and China. No support

of Roosevelt or Churchill. No cooperation with government "aid" to China or Russia.

Struggle against attempts of Anglo-American imperialism to utilize military aid as means of economic penetration in Russia and China.

Struggle against war aims of American imperialism.

Fight efforts of Stalinists to stop class struggle in interest of "national unity."

For strike action against shipments to Japan--facilitate movement of goods to Russia and China.

Ernest LUND

PARTY POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA IN THE WAR

(Excerpts from a Letter to a West Coast Comrade)

Dear S:

...I should like to try to make as plain and convincing as possible, the position I hold on the present stage of the war, with particular reference to Russia.

1. Some comrades argue that the character of the war has changed. Others even quote the article I wrote for The New International a few months ago, which says in effect that if the character of the war should change, then we should be for the defense of the Soviet Union whether it is attacked by one or more imperialist powers. But, while I still hold to that, the quoters are still obliged to prove that the character of the war, that is, its predominant character (for there is no such thing as a war which is "purely" one thing or another) has changed. Here it must be said that the Cannonites are more consistent than some of our own defensists. And although B. is evidently losing all his bearings, from his point of view it nevertheless makes sense when he now says that the Cannonites are right now and were right a year and a half ago. One of the principle arguments of the Cannonites at the beginning of the war was that it did not matter who fired the first shot because you cannot, and it is not necessary to, decide between the "aggressor" and "defender" in a war. From a military point of view, this is of course, unassailable. Therefore, they could be for the defense of the Soviet Union when Stalin invaded Poland, the Baltic, Finland and the Balkans, in anticipation of the next stage of the war in which the conquests resulting from these invasions would serve as defensive outposts protecting the Soviet Union when it is attacked. In other words, if it is correct to defend the Soviet Union now, in the second stage of the war, then it was correct to defend it twenty months ago, and we would have to say that the genial Stalin showed a lot of foresight in providing himself in advance with protective armoring he acquired during the initial invasions. And summa summarum, that is now the big trump card Stalin's apologists are playing in this country. To a lot of simple people that even sounds convincing. For supporters of the Stalin regime this argument is and should be enough, and if I were such a supporter, all the petty lies and deceptions of Stalin would then recede into twentieth place.

Some of our comrades, however, fail to take into account that we are the revolutionary enemies of that regime. We are not its advisors, we are not out to reform it, we are out to overthrow it. We must therefore judge its "aggressive" and "defensive" measures not from a military, but from a social and political standpoint. We subordinate the former to the latter. The Cannonites subordinate the latter to the former. Example: they said the invasion of Poland or of Finland was a blow to the world revolution, that

it was shameful and criminal. Presumably it was shameful and criminal primarily from a political and not a military standpoint. But, they said, they were for the defense of Russia, that is, for the victorious execution of this shame, this crime, this blow at the world revolution because it was militarily necessary. We said there is no conceivable abstraction in this world, not even the talk about nationalized property, that can get us to defend a blow against the world revolution, and a shameful and criminal one at that. We refused to be defensists because the Soviet Union was engaged in a reactionary war. Did that mean that the nationalized property of Russia was not at stake in the war? Of course it was. Would the fact that Leningrad would be more heavily protected if Stalin got southern Finland, help defend the nationalized property if Russia were attacked at a latter stage? Of course it would. Isn't it also a fact that in the conquered territories Stalin abolished bourgeois property and nationalized it? Of course it is. But our basic criterion is the interest of the world proletariat and the international revolution. Stalin's war stuck the most brutal blows at these interests. And, we said with Trotsky, the nationalization of property in the occupied territories does not compensate ~~for~~ these blows by one-tenth!

Just exactly what were these blows? 1. Capitulation to German imperialism. 2. The joint imperialist subjugation of the conquered territories, which should now be clear to anybody after the disclosures of Hitler and Von Ribbentrop a couple of months ago, was deliberately decided upon in advance and by agreement between the two bandits. 3. The political alliance between Stalin and Hitler, as exemplified, among other things by Stalin's white-washing of Hitler's war and of Hitler's peace. 4. The fact that Stalin drove the workers of Finland and of other countries, Germany and the United States included, deeper into the arms of their bourgeoisies. 5. That Stalin's army and GPU immediately suppressed all genuine revolutionary and Soviet manifestation of the masses in the territories he invaded. And so on.

All these either constituted or followed inescapably from the character of the war in which Stalin was engaged. We never condemned Stalin just because he and not the Finnish or Polish bourgeoisie fired the first bullet or because he was the first one to cross a boundary line.

Now let us see what has changed. The boureaucracy is now defending its imperialist conquests of a year and a half or more ago. We were against the Stalin bureaucracy's acquiring these conquests. Why should we defend it when it seeks to retain these conquests? We said with Trotsky, "We are and remain against Seizures of new territories by the Kremlin." Why should we be for the Stalinists holding these territories after they have seized them? The Stalinists have changed imperialist camps. That is of great importance, but by no means of principled importance. In 1939 and 1940 their alliance with and subjugation to German imperialism drove the workers into the arms of the bourgeoisie. I contend that their

alliance with Anglo-American imperialism in 1941 drives the workers into the arms of the bourgeoisie at least as much. The objective consequences of the bureaucracy's war in 1939 was the victory of one imperialism; now, of another imperialism. But, isn't the nationalized property, which is not bourgeois, "really" at stake in 1941, as was not the case in 1939? Allow me to return to the question at a later point. Right now I want to deal with the question of the famous "mixed war".

2. We used to speak a great deal in our movement, before the war broke out, of the "mixed war". It arose in connection with the Stalin-Laval pact in 1935 and it meant this: If Russia and France are allied in a war against Germany that would make it an imperialist war on the one side but not on the other. More concretely: while we would not be defensists in imperialist Germany or in imperialist France, we would be defensists in Russia because it is a workers state. This conception was based upon analogy and hypothesis. But when the "mixed war" took place in reality, it did not correspond to our original suppositions. That is the fact. You know, perhaps, the origin of the "mixed war" business, and the historical circumstances of the Soviet republic to which Trotsky referred in 1935-36. It would be well if every comrade understood these circumstances concretely and in detail.

Early in 1918, after the Bolsheviks had offered peace to the entire imperialist world, the Germans proceeded to march deeper into the territory of the Soviets. Negotiations with the Germans were snarled up, and towards the end of February the Kaiser resumed the offensive against the Bolsheviks. Noulens, the French ambassador to Moscow thereupon telegraphed Trotsky an offer of military and financial support "in your resistance to Germany". The Social Revolutionists were against accepting any support. So were many of the Bolshevik leaders. Trotsky was in favor of it. So was Lenin, who sent the following note to the Central Committee, "I am in favor of accepting potatoes and arms from the robbers of Anglo-French imperialism".

Against the left Bolsheviks who advocated a revolutionary war against Germany, Lenin later pointed out that while a peace treaty with Germany would help German imperialism, continuation of the war would help Anglo-French imperialism, and that in this very narrow and restricted sense, Russia could not escape helping one or another of the bandits. But listen for a moment to the resolution presented by Trotsky to the Central Committee, and adopted on February 22nd by a vote of 6-5: "As the party of the socialist proletariat, which is in power and is conducting war with Germany, we apply, through the medium of the state organs, all means of equipping our revolutionary army in the best possible way, with everything that is necessary, and in order to acquire them (the equipment - M.S.) wherever it is possible, then also from the capitalist governments. In doing so, the Social Democratic Workers Party of Russia (that was then the name of the Bolshevik Party - M.S.) retains its complete independence with regard to its foreign policy, obligates itself in no wise to the capitalist governments, and in every single case con-

siders their proposals from the standpoint of expediency". Read over this resolution carefully. It established a principled foundation upon which alone the Soviet government could make any agreement, even a military agreement, with an imperialist government. From these words, to which corresponded the practice of the Bolsheviks, you can, so to speak, determine the character of the war the Bolsheviks would have carried out even if the "alliance" with Anglo-French imperialism had materialized, which it did not. The mixed war did not take place in 1918 because imperialism could not make an alliance with a workers state under the terms of Trotsky's resolution. At least not in my opinion and in the past 21 years life seems to substantiate this opinion. Lenin and Trotsky knew that even a circumscribed agreement with the imperialists was an extremely perilous business. But, precisely by the terms of Trotsky's resolution this hazard was more than sufficiently compensated. By what? By the provisions of the second sentence of the resolution. Why? Because in practice Lenin and Trotsky would have more than cancelled out the effects of their "support" of one imperialism against another by the revolutionary activity which the Bolshevik state and the Bolsheviks conducted precisely in the ranks of their imperialist "ally". This is not mere hypothesis. It is borne out by the facts. Example: After signing the imposed Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany and thereby "supporting" German imperialism against Anglo-French imperialism, the effects of this were more than cancelled out by the unceasing revolutionary propaganda of the Bolsheviks which resulted a very few months later, in the overthrow of German imperialism.

We cannot stand still in our own conceptions or be bound by the fetishism of words or memories. We must allow life to influence our conceptions. Life has proved that the degenerate Stalinist regime cannot fight a "mixed war" as a progressive or revolutionary war. But its very nature its agreements and alliances - alliances without quotation marks this time - with imperialism are reactionary through and through. And that again brings us to the character of the present war and the character of Russia's participation in it, even in the present stage of the war.

Again and again I repeat, we must judge our position of defeatism or defensism in any country by the interests of the socialist world proletariat, and not of the workers of one country. The victory of German imperialism in the war would have nothing but reactionary effects. The victory of Anglo-American imperialism over Germany, likewise. We are for the defeat of German imperialism - not by Anglo-American imperialism but by the German proletariat. We are for the defeat of the British empire - but not by Hitler. From the standpoint of our basic criterion what are the objective consequences of "defense of the Soviet Union" now? Taken on a world scale, and that is the only way we can take it, since we are not Russian nationalists, it means the imperialist victory of Washington and London over German imperialism, with all the tragic consequences that flow from that. Why? Because of the very nature of the Stalinist alliance with London and Washington, which is fundamentally and in principle different from the "alliance" that Trotsky

proposed to make in 1918. A few examples: the victory of Stalin in Poland was undoubtedly a "victory for nationalized property", if considered as an isolated national phenomenon. In the realities of present world politics and the present world war, however, this victory was a victory of German imperialism over its rivals. That is the fact and even children ought to know it. The same is true of the invasion of Finland. Trotsky said it was carried out at the dictates of Hitler. Correct. Did it help protect Leningrad? Of course. But from the international point of view, which is decisive, the invasion was a necessary part of the war strategy of German imperialism. What has changed now is that concretely "defense of the Soviet Union" means promoting the grand strategy of Anglo-American imperialism - objectively to be sure. Hence the dilemma of the defensists. I mean, of course, of revolutionary defensists like some of our comrades and the Cannonites. What concretely do they propose to do that we do not propose? I would like very much to hear that. In 1935-36 we used to say that in the hypothetical mixed war we would be for facilitating shipments to Russia but not to France or Germany. In the present real and not hypothetical war I ask the following question of the defensists: Are you for facilitating American shipments to Russia today? Alas, the accursed realities of the war show that shipments to Russia mean convoys and that convoys, as our good president says, mean a shooting war. Is that a fact or not? Even Goldman is compelled to acknowledge this in the Militant. He tries to get around the dilemma by the poor lawyer's argument that he doesn't "urge" shipments, because that means convoys and they mean war, but his party will not oppose them. Isn't that a beauty of a position? Or will the defensists be proposing, for example, tomorrow, that we demonstrate before the Japanese consulates if hostilities break out between Japan and Russia? I doubt it. Because even they understand that such demonstrations, given the real and not hypothetical situation, would only be grist to the mill of American imperialism.

Or what will they do in the not at all inconceivable situation which may confront them tomorrow morning, so to speak, where British and Russian troops are fighting side by side in Afghanistan or Iran? Where do the British troops end and the Russians begin? Where does defensism end and non-defensism begin? Every intelligent observer knows that this is an entirely practical and immediate possibility. And where are the revolutionary compensations for the inevitably reactionary effects of Stalin's war, compensations which the Lenin-Trotsky regime could and did provide for? They do not exist and in the nature of the case cannot.

3. The mixed war theory, so far as the Stalin regime is concerned, has not worked out, and that is all there is to it. But suppose the character of the war does change? And what do I mean exactly by a change in the character of the war? Simply this, that it ceases to be a predominantly imperialist, or rather inter-imperialist war. Is there such a possibility? Certainly. You might say that that is what Hitler's whole present strategy is. That is the essence of his whole so-called peace offensive. You might say that that is the whole objective of the conscious appeasement elements among the British bourgeoisie also. What else is the objective of the propaganda of the America Firsters, the Hearst press, and their

ilk? They are seeking deliberately to change the character of the war; because they know, as we should know what the precominant character of the war is at present. We want to change the character of the war into a war of the working class against the bourgeoisie and world imperialism. They want to change the character of the war into a war of world imperialism against the Soviet Union. ~~Should they~~ succeed in this, and it is not impossible, then it would be a social war of world imperialism against the Soviet Union. Whether it would be conducted actively by one imperialist power alone with the tacit support of the others, or by all of them jointly and actively, would ~~not~~, in my opinion be decisive, for the number of troops employed against Russia would not be the important thing. That and that alone is what I meant by the paragraph in my New International article of a few months ago, which has been so unwarrantedly quoted by some of the defensist comrades. Were the character of the war to change as indicated, then you could easily see that the arguments about the Stalinist alliance with imperialism referred to in the preceeding point, would not and could not apply. From the point of view of the SU, even under Stalin, the objective consequences of the war could not and would not be the same as they are now. Revolutionary defensism in such circumstances would not in any way involve support of imperialism or subordinate the interests of the workers in one country to the interests of the International proletariat. Under such circumstances the greater likelihood is, in fact it is almost a certainty, mobilization of the working class of any country for revolutionary defense of the Soviet Union would be and could only be directed against the bourgeoisie of that working class. I don't think that should be hard to understand. Yet, contrast such a situation with the obvious facts of the present situation. To anyone for whom "defense of the Soviet Union" is not a collection of religious words, but concrete problem of revolutionary politics, the difference, as the French say, leaps to the eyes.

4. What about the workers in the Soviet Union? What about the defense of Nationalized Property? Nationalized property is not an abstraction any more than democracy is an abstraction. Nationalized property under the regime of Soviet democracy, ~~that~~ was a revolutionary workers state. The nationalized property with the regime of the anti-soviet autocracy whether you call it a degenerated workers state or bureaucratic collectivism, is certainly not equivalent to a revolutionary workers state. On the basis of this very same nationalized property, in fact, during the very period when this property was consolidated and expanded enormously at the expense of bourgeois property, the proletarian and revolutionary movements in Russia were all but completely destroyed and the international proletarian movement frightfully undermined. As you know, I consider nationalized property in the Soviet Union a historically superior form of property to any form of private property in history. But I do not attribute to it what Marx would call a supra-historical significance, any more than, for example, I would attribute such a significance to democracy. Is it worth defending? That depends on concrete circumstances, and not upon an evaluation of nationalized property in and of itself. It

is dangerous to argue by analogy because people can easily demonstrate that analogous situations are not identical situations. Yet to argue by analogy is also often illuminating. In the Spanish civil war there were elements of imperialist war and we pointed them out. But, we said; the war is decisively between bourgeois democracy and Fascism; and given the fact that the proletariat was not ready to take power in its own name, we supported bourgeois democracy as against Fascism - critically, to be sure. In the same manner, in a social war between world capitalism and the Soviet Union I would be a revolutionary, i.e., a critical defencist in Russia, because I do not want to see world imperialism get a new lease on life by reducing the non-capitalist Soviet Union to a capitalist colony. Isn't the nationalized property at stake in the present war too? Of course it is. But isn't the working class movement in the United States, its rights and institutions and in England too, also at stake in the present war? That is, if Hitler conquers the United States, would that not mean that in addition to the crushing of American imperialism the working class movement and the more or less democratic basis on which it can exist and progress, would also be destroyed? Of course it would. Yet, we are not defencists in the United States because however important the role this element plays, it does not alter the decisively imperialist and reactionary character of the war. But at the same time, even in the United States, we do not take a completely negative position. Without becoming defencists, or even flirting with defencism, we fight right in the midst of the imperialist war itself for the interests and rights of the working class. We fight to advance that which is worth defending. In the present situation in Russia, I would apply much the same policy. Would I tell the Russian workers not to fight to war? That advice is meaningless or stupid. I could not and do not tell them that in the United States. Do I tell them in Russia not to obey their officers? Of course not. I am not an anarchist, In Russia and anywhere else the workers and especially the soldiers will obey their superiors until they have accumulated the organized power... not to obey if they so desire. In the Soviet Union now what would I fight for? You understand, of course, that "fighting for" anything in the Soviet Union today is, so far as our movement is concerned, a work of "patient enlightenment" as Lenin used to put it. I would say to the workers, organize and mobilize your strength to re-establish the Soviets, in the cities, in the army and on the land; to re-establish your trades unions; to take power again; to drive out the bureaucrats. Demand even now the diminution and eventual abolition of all bureaucratic privileges. Demand the release of all the revolutionary opponents of Stalin who were imprisoned. Demand the right of self-determination for the Ukraine (I notice that the Cannonites dropped this slogan out of their program of action for Russia), and so on.

Would I raise the slogan of peace? One of our defencist comrades demanded that I answer why I do not raise the slogan now whereas I did raise it during the Finnish invasion. The problem is a very simple one. The peace slogan is not in and of itself a revolutionary or a defeatist slogan, even in a reactionary war. Not at all.

The peace slogan should be raised by us under any situation only when it means the revolutionary mobilization of the working class against the reactionary regime. Lenin was against the slogan up to 1917, because in that period it was a purely pacifist slogan. After the revolution, the situation was such that the slogan was revolutionary. But an even better example. We do not even raise the slogan of peace in the United States or England today.* Why not? Because we are for the war? Of course not. But because the demand for peace, the slogan for peace, would, under the concrete circumstances in England today, play right into the hands of Hitler and the British ultra-reactionaries and would not mobilize the masses for revolutionary struggle. In the United States also, the peace slogan would not mobilize the masses for revolutionary struggle, and would play right into the hands, not only of Hitler, but more important of the pacifist bone-heads, the America Firsters, and all other reactionary appeaser elements. At a later stage the peace slogan may very well have revolutionary significance. But not now. So in Russia today. In the case of the Finnish invasion, the slogan of peace would have been a good slogan, not only for its revolutionary effects upon the Finnish proletariat, but because it would have been directed against the reactionary regime in alliance with Hitler. Right now, assuming you want to look reality in the face, such a slogan would only play into the hands of those elements of the bureaucracy who undoubtedly aspire to a complete surrender and capitulation to Hitler. And I am not for that.

* Since this letter was written, my attention has been called to the fact that this formulation may lead to a misunderstanding. To clear up any such misunderstanding, I would add the following: In saying that we do not even raise the slogan of peace in the United States today, I mean that exclusively in the sense of not making it the center of our activities NOW. In general, we are just as much, fundamentally, the opponents of capitalist "peace" as we are of capitalist war. In particular, that is, at every concrete stage of the developing situation, the peace slogan, as referred to above, is to be adopted or rejected by us in accordance with whether it advances or retards the revolutionary struggle against the class enemy. It goes without saying that our refusal to advance this as a fighting slogan now does not in the least imply a relaxation of our struggle against the war, or against American participation in the war. On the contrary, we carry on that struggle no less intensively than in the past. Only, as has been explained time and again in our movement, with special reference to the demands and slogans of our transitional program, the struggle against the war right now cannot be effectively conducted by a naked counterposing of "peace" to "war" but only by putting forward such concrete demands and slogans as are best calculated to mobilize the working class in a movement which is, in fact, directed against the imperialists and their war and towards the establishment of workers' power.--M.S.

But I would like to raise this question, especially to the defensist comrades. The Stalinist alliance with Anglo-American imperialism is reactionary through and through, is it not? It means support of world imperialism, political and military, does it not? In my agitational and educational work among the Russian masses I would raise the slogan: break the reactionary imperialist alliance with London and Washington. The Cannonites, I am pretty sure, would not countenance this slogan, which is eminently correct. Would our defensists? I would like to hear from them on this score.

5. Finally, it is necessary to have a little more clarity on the question of defeatism. You remember in the SWP dispute, the gifted Marxist, Cannon, explained to us that the Leninist theory of defeatism means that you prefer the victory of the enemy to the victory of your own government. That is, you prefer the defeat of your country by the enemy country, to the defeat of the enemy country by your country. Of course, Lenin never had such an idea, but trifles like that have never bothered Cannon in his theoretical flights. I personally think that so much confusion has been introduced in the concept of defeatism that I doubt if we would be losing too much if we dropped the word out of our vocabulary. However, be that as it may, let me try to specify what I mean by the content of this conception in the present situation. I am not for throwing open the front, so that Hitler can march in. Not at all. For that matter, in a considerably different situation, and for somewhat different reasons, I am not for throwing open the front in England either. By defeatism in Russia, if I may still use that word, I aim at the defeat of the Stalinist counter-revolution by the soviet working class. Right now, to talk realistically of revolutionary actions which endanger the front is phrase mongering, playing with formulae, and nothing more. If ever a situation called for "patient explanation" it is the present situation in Russia. To the extent that anything can be done in Russia I would seek to direct the efforts of the Internationalists at reconstituting the independence and the integrity of the proletariat. Then one of two things. This would either facilitate the development of a favorable revolutionary situation, or else would be facilitated by the development of such a situation; more accurately, the one would influence the other. After such an independent proletariat became strong enough to have an influence on the front and on the military operations, then, given the continued existence of the Stalin regime you would have the beginnings of the dual power in Russia. In that case, without yet becoming a defensist, while continuing to denounce Stalin's reactionary war and reactionary war aims, I would try to appeal to the soldiers as Lenin did in 1917, not to engage in futile mutinies or riots or in any sporadic actions, to hold the front, so that the Germans do not break thru and crush the proletarian elements of the dual power, and to speed the day when the Russian proletariat can crush the Stalinist elements of the dual power and change the war into a revolutionary war against imperialism.

I know that among certain comrades in the Party, a tiny minority I

hope, there is what you might call a reactionary mood about the famous "Russian question". In their fury at Stalin and Stalinism and the Stalinists, some comrades are seeking some magic formula which will "rid them of the Russian problem" - and of Stalinism. I am firmly in favor of resisting and counter-acting such moods of desperation, because that is all they are. It is even reported to me that one comrade said that he is a "defeatist" in Russia, because, you see, if Russia is defeated we won't have the problem of Stalinism in the unions any more! I cannot, of course, vouch for the accuracy of this remark. But, I hardly need say that I have nothing in common with such a point of view. I can understand such a point of view only as a result of a reaction provoked by the hideousness of Stalinism and perhaps to a lesser degree by some extremist statements by defensists. It is necessary to be on guard against such extreme reactions, because even the best comrades, once they start on that road, will sure as fate go to hell. I appeal, rather, for the calmest and most objective judgement of the problem. I don't for a moment contend that it is a simple one. For the Stalinists of course, it is simple. They don't even have to think. Anything Stalin does automatically merits support. For the Cannonites too, it is pretty simple. Any war that the "nationalized property" fights against capitalism, they defend it. The present Soviet state, said Trotsky, is a terrible monstrosity. It was never thought of or conceived by Marx or Engels or Lenin or Trotsky himself. It is unprecedented and unique and full of startling surprises and innovations. I consider it the height of stupidity to believe that every single problem connected with it can be answered by a simple formula. For my part I am ready to leave that travesty on Marxian politics to the Cannonites.

I do not think, however, that what I have said in this ever so long letter, exhausts the whole problem or even all the important aspects of it or that it succeeds in answering every question to 100% satisfaction. I like to believe, however, that it will throw more light on our position and thereby accomplish at least this, that it will facilitate the continuation of an objective discussion of the question.

I am sending copies of this letter to a number of comrades who may be interested in it.

With best wishes.

Max

New York
August 8th, 1941