

# FORUM

Discussion & Information Bulletin  
of the Independent Socialist League

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VOL. NO.  
MARCH  
1951  
15 cents

2444

## THIS ISSUE OF FORUM

has been long delayed because of several unavoidable difficulties and a couple of minor disasters beyond our control.

Two fires which broke out in the building at which the National Office of the ISL upset the routine functioning of the staff. Coupled with technical difficulties, Forum did not come out for a number of months. This issue, therefore, contains material months old as well as new. We believe, however, that all of the material merits publication because of their nature and content.

Future issues of Forum will appear more regularly, especially in connection with the forthcoming convention of the ISL.

-The Editors

## SUMMING UP THE DISCUSSION ON THE KOREAN STATEMENT

By Susan Green

The PC statement on Korea interpreted the Korean affair as the first step in World War III. That was the starting point for the opposition, namely, war being upon us, the world working people being unable to prevent it, a revolutionary solution of world conflict being nowhere in sight, can the ISL take the position that the peoples' vital interests are not concerned with which side wins? The PC statement declares that they are not. My position is that they are. I contend that if this is the war, Stalinism must be defeated. Therefore, critical military support of the United States is in order.

This article is by way of a summary of the discussion. First I will take up the points made against those who have my position.

1. We are accused of drifting with the patriotic current or of jumping on the bandwagon of patriotism created by the Korean affair.

For me there has been no jumping on any bandwagon. Before the 1948 convention, when the cold war was still cold, I wrote for the bulletin on the possibility of having to support the military efforts of capitalist democracy in a major war with Stalinism. At the convention most of one of the reports was devoted to an attack on my article. There has been no jumping, but thinking over a period of time.

Neither has there been any unprincipled drifting with the patriotic current. It was difficult to adopt an attitude of critical military support for capitalist democracy, especially because of the terrible devastation of modern war, the horrifying human slaughter, and the atomic threat to all civilization. My emotional attachments and traditional thinking made it much easier to adhere to the policy of the ISL, or to become a pacifist, than to decide that, if civilized life continues after World War III, for human liberty to continue also, Stalinism must not have been victorious.

2. With many variations and in several disguises, comrades say my position is pro-war.

The war and its heartbreaking horrors is not of our making.

It is here, or may be here, and ipso facto we are vitally interested in the outcome. In another century, when the problems of politics and of war were less complicated than today, Marx and Engels saw the advisability of the German Socialists supporting the arms of the German government against

France. And again they saw the possibility of such support against Russia in a war between Germany and Russia. They were trying to evaluate the military results in terms of Socialist progress. They may have been wrong in their evaluation, but were they pro-war?

Comrades have asked why war should not be advocated outright if the military defeat of Stalinism is desirable. The answer is that a Socialist does not advocate the destruction of peoples, their homes, their means of life in barbaric international war. However, if this is World War III - here in spite of us - a military solution one way or the other will be sought by the contestants. Is the outcome of no importance to the people?

Comrades also speak as if the advocates of critical military support for the United States consider World War III a progressive war - why don't the latter militantly participate on the progressive side? This is a gross misinterpretation. World War III is not between a progressive force and a reactionary force. None of us claims that. Nor would any but idiots claim that atom warfare can be progressive.

However, that does not mean that the working class has no choice between the two unprogressive forces. Under the one democratic and Socialist progress is doomed for an historic era. Under the other progressive forces may continue their fight.

3. It is claimed that my position overlooks the fact that Stalinism is a social problem for which there is no military solution.

The ISL statement on Korea took the Korean war as the grand opening of World War III. Therefore, the contest between the two systems has become a military one. I do not therefore negate the facts of the roots of Stalinism, and that it can be countered in the contest of social systems only by one better than both Stalinism and capitalism. I merely contend that a Stalinist military victory will end the struggle for that better system - and that is paramount now. Why does the ISL choose not to acknowledge the importance of military decisions in history.

Comrade Shachtman belabors the point that the roots of Stalinism are in capitalism and the source of Stalinism's power in working class failure. True, of course. But does that knowledge eliminate the certainty that a Stalinist victory will end the struggle for Socialism? Does it alter the fact that a Stalinist victory will put an end to the free labor movement; will institute monolithic politics? Does that knowledge soften or divert the Stalinist bullets that will pierce the bodies of labor leaders, Socialists, and any and all opponents? Does it lessen the terror that victorious Stalinism will visit on more millions?

Nazism was also rooted in capitalism and could seek power for itself because the working class had failed to take power for itself. Yet Trotsky was for the defeat of Hitlerism by the Noskes, Welses, Hilferdings, by the Bruning government, all inimical to the working class, whose overthrow was necessary to clean up the social swamp out of which Nazism emerged. The differences between the circumstance of Hitler's contest for power in Germany and the international situation today are very well known and nobody needs waste words explaining it. There is, however, a similarity that is important -- a historic common denominator. There are some junctures in human affairs of national or international scope, when everything depends on defeating the immediate menace.

Comrade Shachtman points out that Stalinism does not grow where the people themselves have taken their problems into their own hands. He gives as examples England, where a labor solution is in process, and India, where the national revolution was accomplished. This point is incontestable. But it applies to the rise of native Stalinism. What happens when a military victory puts these countries under the domination of Stalinism? That is what we are talking about -- what happens if Stalin wins a world war?

4. Many words have been used to describe the Rhee regime and to imply, if not state, that critical military support for the United States means support of Rhee.

This implication is altogether unwarranted. There is no disagreement about the Rhee regime. The "critical" factor in the "military support" covers, of course, criticism and opposition to such regimes as Rhee's. This is not, however, the issue raised either by the ISL statement or by its opponents. Both agree that Korea is either to be the slave satellite of the Kremlin or to be occupied by the United States for a time. The writer contends, not for Rhee, but that United States occupation permits the Koreans to overthrow Rhee, while a Stalinist dictatorship ends all people's rights.

5. I am told that by my policy I would have to seek to unite the workers of the world behind United States imperialism.

This is not the task of the Socialist who comes out for critical military support. Any uniting that the Socialist does is towards independent labor unity. Socialist education as to war, as to Stalinism, continues. Socialist criticism of the government continues. However, the overwhelming importance of the outcome of the war is part of policy, and military objectives are not hampered.

Just as the ISL official policy has many ramifications, and the supporters of that policy take the privilege of abstention from the slogan of withdrawal of United States troops from Korea, which to some appears a logical consequence

of that policy, so opponents must be given elbow-room in the working out of details in the application of their policy.

Most important, an attitude on strikes would have to be developed. Opposition to an across-the-board anti-strike pledge would stand. But the Socialist who supports the military victory of the United States, would advocate a tactic other than strike in instances where the war effort would be directly affected. In such cases other militant action would have to be taken. Possibilities are perhaps labor demonstrations or picketing Congress and government agencies.

6. I have been asked: Since many European workers and many Asiatic people do not consider American capitalism the lesser evil, how can the ISL follow this lesser-evil policy?

The answer is that there must be an objective evaluation of the two systems. Is our basic analysis of Stalinism correct? Is the ISL statement on Korea correct in that a Stalinist victory would be a disaster to Korea, to Asia, to democracy, to Socialism? This is what policy must be based upon, not on whether or not there are people in Europe and Asia who support Stalinism.

Ben Hall argues that if we support the victory of the United States over Stalinism, why should not those who believe in Stalinism support its victory over the United States? This is perverting the issue. The advocates of critical military support of the United States do not believe in it. Loyalty of a Socialist is not to the capitalist system, as the Stalinist's loyalty is to Stalinism. The former's loyalty is to the age-long struggle for freedom. It is from that angle that the disaster of a Stalinist victory is to be viewed.

It is our job to help disillusion those deluded by Stalinism. Contrary to Ben Hall's contention, Stalinism no longer has its pristine dynamism in Europe, and not even in Asia. In Europe word gets around about conditions in the Soviet paradise -- word carried by those who have fled from it. Also European workers tire of being the pawns of Kremlin foreign policy. In Asia it somehow gets known that Stalinist land reforms give with the left hand and take away with the right.

The policy of critical military support for the western camp must be explained to all workers for what it is, namely, made necessary because the working people of the world have not effected their own international settlements, made necessary because the victory of Stalinism will end the struggle for that social system which will be better than both Stalinism and capitalism.

7. Comrades have stated that my policy means the abandonment of Socialism.

This is a mistaken notion of the implications of

critical military support. A page of Russian history is pertinent here.

The Bolsheviks fought Kerensky, but they were for the defeat of the Kornilov insurrection by Kerensky. A well-known quotation from Lenin on "abandoning socialism" is in order: "Without diminishing our hostility to him even by one single note, without taking back one word from what we have said against him, without giving up the task of overthrowing Kerensky, we say: We must calculate the moment. We will not overthrow Kerensky at present. We approach the question of the struggle against him differently: by explaining the weaknesses and vacillations of Kerensky to the people (who are fighting against Kornilov)."

Again, the historic circumstances are vastly different, but the historic common denominator exists: Critical military support does not mean the abandonment of the longer-range struggle -- but merely the use of different means.

The ISL falsely assumes that people want black or white patterns. Either you are fighting the pure and simple fight against capitalism every minute of the time, or you are a traitor to Socialism. However, people are prone to understand, taught by their own lives, that overpowering circumstances can compel a modification in conduct without a change in principle.

As it is, however, there is no reason why general Socialist education cannot continue with the policy of critical military support. Mary Bell feels that this education would cease. I don't see why. Such fundamentals as the cause of wars, the cause of Stalinism and its cure, the independent role of labor, could continue to be explained.

In the daily struggle, what could not be done, if the ISL had the policy of critical military support, that it did during the last war? Could it not expose inequalities of sacrifice, profiteering and black-marketeering, the injustices of wage ceilings vis-a-vis war profits, the snare of incentive pay? Opposition to the no-strike pledge would also be the policy. However, as pointed out above, every strike situation would have to be evaluated for its direct military effect, and other methods of struggle used where called for.

Where does the abandonment of Socialism come in?

Up to this point I have dealt with the arguments levelled against my position. Now the theme will be "j'accuse." The discussion has revealed certain factual and other mistakes on which the PC position is based.

1. While theoretically acknowledging the difference

between Stalinism and capitalist democracy, actually those who support the PC position equate Stalinist imperialism and American imperialism.

Placing the responsibility for war equally on both Washington and the Kremlin, as the PC statement does, is the kind of sweeping generalization that becomes meaningless. Of course, fundamentally imperialism as such is responsible -- which, however, tells nothing about this specific war. To illustrate, generally speaking some systemic disturbance produces a headache, but what does that reveal about a specific headache? In this particular war or prelude to war, one must be very blind indeed not to see that it is rising and aggressive Russian imperialism that creates the war crisis. The actions of the United States, including its willingness to submit to international atomic bomb control, indicated a desire to avoid war. Russia, however, was unwilling to forego the opportunity to spread out.

United States democracy is condemned in toto because of the company it keeps: Chiang, Rhee, Franco in the offing. No Socialist fails to condemn the policy of supporting these reactionaries and fascists. But this is not the whole story. The American political system permits open condemnation of its policies and the struggle to change them. Yes, says Mary Bell, but this applies only here; therefore, she says, my outlook is not international. But this is not so. For not only does United States democracy permit political freedom at home, but in the countries it has occupied it has also furthered certain democratic concepts. Even in Korea it did not bolster Rhee when the popular vote turned against him.

And still this is not the crux of the issue. The crux is that the outcome of the World War III will decide which camp will have domination of the globe. The proposition to be considered is whether the darkness of Stalinism must be prevented from settling upon the world.

None of the supporters of the ISL statement is willing to admit that there is a qualitative difference between Stalinist dismemberment and annihilation of nations, and United States occupation. Ben Hall makes it appear that either camp will bring national extinction and dismemberment. We know this to be true of Stalinism. It will, we know, suck nations into its empire and into its totalitarian police system.

Do we know the same about United States imperialism?

The lesser evil of United States imperialism would, says Comrade Shachtman, "be the most heartening tidings the German and Japanese have read since the war ended." The Germans have, however, already heard these tidings. Comrade Shachtman must also have heard that several political parties



function in Western Germany -- even the CP -- and that within the framework of occupation, life in western Germany attracts people to flee from the Soviet zone. In Japan, the MacArthur administration is certainly no exemplary democracy, still there is no equation between it and a Stalinist regime.

Those who continue to equate American occupation with Stalinism in satellite countries should study Rudzienski's article in August 21, 1950, LABOR ACTION. If Polish Socialists can see no way out of their political prison than the military defeat of Stalinism in a way, that indeed is an affirmation of what happens to the struggle for Socialism under Stalinist total, terroristic suppression.

In their effort to narrow the differences between capitalist democracy and Stalinism, some comrades engage in wishful thinking. They claim that if the United States wins the third world war, it will become so hopelessly militarized and fascistic that there will be no choice between it and Stalinism. On the other hand, if Russia should win, it is claimed that Russia will over-extend itself and thereby weaken its dictatorship -- and then naturally the day would come. This is reminiscent of the Comintern policy toward Hitler. Let him take power; his power will only weaken him -- and then the day would come.

2. Likewise, while making certain theoretical admissions as to the different systems, actually the supporters of the PC position equate United States war measures with the all-time totalitarian police system of Stalinism.

An incident from Kravchenko's "I Chose Justice" -- the story of his trial in Paris -- is worth relating. A high Russian bureaucrat had been exported from Moscow to testify that there is no police terror in Russia. Whereupon Kravchenko's lawyers produced on the witness stand a woman who had been a close friend of the bureaucrat's wife and of his family. This woman was an NKVD agent, planted in the bureaucrat's family as a spy. So flabbergasted was the worthy at the unexpected picture of himself as the object of police terror that he stammered, in open court, abject thanks to the ex-spy for not having ruined his life. Needless to say, this bureaucrat's life was thus ruined by his own words. But what of the terror that makes a man thank a spy for not ruining his life! This story is worth studying by those who rate as next to nothing the civil rights that are part of capitalist democracy.

It is false to grade the infringements of civil rights that come with war -- some necessary, some purposefully reactionary, others fanatically imposed -- with the inherent totalitarianism of the Stalinist system. I oppose with all my might fascistic measures like the McCarran bill, but must admit that any government, in face of war, takes measures to protect its internal front; And any government means any government, including a labor and even a Socialist

government. This has nothing to do with the character of a social system.

As Socialists there are aspects of capitalist democracy that we must and want to preserve and develop. Socialism does not start from scratch. Yet the ISL places itself in the same position anent capitalist democracy as do the Stalinists. It is indeed dangerously like the Stalinist approach to see no future for liberty in the United States, but to say nothing about what would become of liberty here if America is Stalinized.

3. The supporters of the PC statement reject the full implications of the ISL analysis of Stalinism.

The ISL analyzes Stalinism as the most reactionary, most counter-revolutionary force on earth. In the statement on Korea we read: "The victory of its (Stalinist) arms would mean nothing but the extension of the slave power of Stalinism over the whole territory of Korea, and therefore a disastrous blow to the people of Korea and the cause of democracy and socialism everywhere else."

Does the ISL stand by this statement or not?

A Stalinist victory in Korea would influence the whole continent of Asia. Stalinist forces everywhere would be emboldened, and anti-Stalinist nationalist elements would receive a severe blow. These small nations understand that they are the pawns of the military victory -- not themselves in a position to give military combat of a major order. Even India would find itself engulfed by victorious Stalinism. Such is the compass of modern warfare. Such would be the effects of Stalinist victory.

4. The PC position entirely ignores the problem of the European satellite peoples in hopeless political and economic enslavement.

Not only in Rudzienski's article, but in many other places, have we read of the desperation of the people in the satellite nations, to such an extent that they look for a military defeat of Russia as their only salvation.

The progressive potentialities of these European countries, freed from the Stalinist yoke, must be taken into account.

The ISL has nothing to say about this point, except Ben Hall who talks of the "axiomatic" thus: "The people of Poland, like those of every nation oppressed by imperialism, must persist in its struggles for freedom before, during and after any and all wars." But naturally, only tell the peoples of the satellite countries how to do this under the Stalinist terror. By his facile "axiomatic" Ben Hall shows that, while he has said a great many things about Stalinism, actually he

does not understand the extent of its enslavement of the people.

5. The supporters of the PC position refuse to admit that they were wrong about post World War II predictions, and now continue to make similar predictions for post World War III.

The ISL said during World War II that the barbarization of the war itself leaves no choice as to victors. This was a wrong prediction. Yet none of the proponents of the ISL present policy admits the error. Indeed they go right on making it.

It cannot be gainsaid that the military defeat of Hitlerism dealt a solar plexus blow to fascism. Again, instead of the hopeless barbarism predicted, there emerged in England a labor government -- impossible with a Hitler victory. In America, instead of the hopeless barbarism predicted, the labor movement has grown stronger and has gained new social demands, the status of minorities has improved, the struggle for freedom and progress can continue.

Yes, a large part of the world has been swallowed by Stalinist Russia. But the victory of Hitlerism could have brought fascism not only to the Stalinized sections of the world but to those parts where today capitalist democracy or labor government exist.

Ben Hall says that if the war results in the victory of either camp and not in the victory of the third camp, "humanity will speed down the road to reaction." This is a prophesy which has yet to be fulfilled. Policy cannot be based on prophesy. So many prophesies, both of revolution and of reaction, have been wrong.

6. The PC position ignores that historic changes have made the acceptance of the lesser evil policy imperative.

Mary Bell writes of "the long and ignoble history" of the lesser evil, at the same time disclaiming hard-and-fast analogies. But actually she argues for an unbroken sameness of policy in spite of deep-seated differences in historic conditions.

The choice of the lesser evil to a Socialist means the decision that the fight for Socialism requires the victory of the lesser evil over the greater at a certain juncture in history. Every war does not create such a juncture.

In World War I, the economic and political systems in both camps were such that the fight for free labor, for human freedom, for Socialism, could have continued whichever side won. The capitalist system had not yet projected fascism and Stalinism came later. In the major countries of both camps certain political freedoms were common. Therefore, when during World War I, Socialists proclaimed that it did not much matter which side won, this was credible.

Furthermore, the ways of imposing defeat change with time. At the time of World War I, the old way still prevailed, namely, the victor nations imposed on the defeated the loss of valued colonies, spheres of influence, reparation moneys. Socialists could say, with reason, that such things made little difference to the working classes of the world. With Hitlerism a new concept of victory emerged.

Also at the time of World War I, international socialist movements were still untried, and above all unharmed by Hitlerism and by Stalinism. These movements could be, and were, an active and acting factor in the war situation.

Hitlerism brought a qualitative difference into World War II. One of the contestants was totalitarian, and aimed to impose its totalitarian system as the prize of victory. Socialists could no longer say it did not matter which side won.

Why then did the present advocates of the lesser evil not choose the lesser evil in World War II? There were, for me, several reasons. First, the hope for a revolutionary solution was present, basing itself on another hope, namely, that Hitler and Stalin had not sufficiently decimated and corrupted the revolutionary elements to bar a revolutionary solution. The melting away of the resistance movements under the heat of Stalinist betrayal put out that hope, and the extent of the debacle of international Socialism became apparent. Second, the meaning of military victory did not emerge fully until the victors began their activities: Stalinist Russia tucking European countries away in its vestpocket, and America imposing its democracy along with dollar aid. Hindsight showed what a Hitler victory would have been like. It shows what a Stalinist victory is.

Mary Bell gives an unwarranted twist to what the proponents of the lesser evil hope to accomplish. None of them, it can be safely said, hopes to democratize the war or to influence its prosecution by the government. These proponents merely contend that the ISL's evaluation of the disastrous world-wide effect of a Stalinist victory must honestly and openly be taken into account in its policy -- instead of wishing secretly for the military defeat of Stalinism.

7. Comrades have donned rose-colored glasses and see a third camp where there is none.

Ben Hall admits, as who can do otherwise, that the third camp does not exist as "an independently organized and united force, conscious of its own interest . . ." But, according to Ben, it does exist anyway "in the world proletariat and in the colonial and semi-colonial countries." It is a long time since this Johnsonian way of reasoning was employed in the ISL. To treat latent potentialities for revolution in the masses, as if they were actualities is the last stand of desperation. One might as easily say that the independent

labor party exists but is, unfortunately, divided between the Democratic and Republican parties as to say, as does Ben Hall, that the third camp exists but is divided between Stalinism and American capitalism.

We know that a labor party may never develop, though we hope for it. There are other possibilities. Similarly a third camp may never develop, though we hope for it. There are other possibilities.

Mary Bell quotes Trotsky against Rudzienski's idea that Polish Socialists look to the military defeat of Stalinist Russia as their only hope for Socialist revolution: "The revolution is not an automatic machine. The revolution is made by living people, conducted by certain organizations under certain slogans and so on . . ."

What is interesting in the quotation from Trotsky is that it can apply also to the third camp policy in this war. If the third camp has actuality, where are the "certain organizations" to conduct such a struggle? Or do we go back again to the Johnsonite theory of "spontaneous combustion?"

If one is furthering a program in the face of an imminent danger, then that program must be capable of execution. If the third camp is offered as the solution to the danger of Stalinism winning a military victory which will enable it to dominate the world, then the third camp must be capable of realization. Otherwise, you may be performing long-term socialist education, but you are not offering any program at all in face of the danger.

If, during World War III, groups form in a mass impulse against both camps, would they not have to be like the resistance movements in Hitler occupied countries? While having an existence and aim of their own, the latter aided, and were indeed part of, the allied forces. They could not say a plague on both your houses, though they had no use for capitalism. Should a third camp movement develop in World War III, though opposed to both capitalism and Stalinism, its first objective -- imposed by the war itself -- would be the military defeat of Stalinism. It is no longer a question of turning the guns the other way. The overwhelming cataclysm of modern war gives the physical issue top priority. Because of this military factor, the choices for a third camp will be either to give up fighting and be annihilated by the enemy, or to seek the protection of the side of the lesser evil.

8. The ISL position overlooks the lack of working class internationalism in the world today.

The iron curtain divides the west and east. The powerful radio stations of the western governments can penetrate and get a limited hearing beyond the iron curtain. Socialist connections are few and far between. What contact is there between working class and working class, between revolu-

tionary Socialist and revolutionary Socialist! The near-completeness of this international separation of worker from worker must be given its importance in any war policy.

Ben Hall wants to know what the Russian workers should do. Is there something the ISL, small and without means, can do about what the Russian workers should do? And if that iron curtain were smashed, the whole picture would be different, and this whole discussion would never have started.

However, as things are, I would say that the ISL should urge upon the rich, efficient, powerful labor movements that they, independent of the western governments, try to work out ways of contacting the workers behind the iron curtain, to offer help and solidarity to them to break the chains of Stalinism.

# # #

A NEW STAGE IN THE DISCUSSION

By H. D. Coleman

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I wish to associate myself wholeheartedly with Comrade Green's Summing Up the Discussion on the Korean Statement. Her words are entirely her own, but I find myself in almost complete agreement with everything she says. I might point out, however, that her phrase "summing up" suggests an end to a discussion which, in the nature of the case, is not ended and cannot be ended at this time, but will gain momentum as long as the war crisis continues and the PC adheres to its present position. Now that most of the basic issues have been presented by both sides, the discussion should enter a new stage, in which continued clarification of the main points of the discussion should be considered a "normal" element of the political life of the ISL. This is not a discussion which can be suddenly ended with the "triumphant" vindication of what is considered to be Leninist orthodoxy.

To carry forward the discussion, let me point to an historical "accident" which has just occurred and which exposes one of the fallacies of the PC's position. The PC is obliged to conceal its own awareness of the non-existence of the Third Camp by spreading before us an apocalyptic vision of universal chaos and barbarism, regardless of who achieves military victory in the war. With atomic warfare in the offing, that vision strikes home to each of us, of course, with peculiar force. But this vision remains, nevertheless, a substitute for political analysis. How dangerous and misleading such substitutes may be is demonstrated by a similar vision that originally appeared in the Bulletin of the Russian Opposition and was printed in the July, 1939, issue of the New International:

If there are chances (and there indubitably are) that the defeat of Germany and Italy - provided there is a revolutionary movement - may lead to the collapse of fascism, then, on the other hand, there are more proximate and immediate chances that the victory of France may deal the final blow to corroded democracy, especially if this victory is gained with the political support of the French proletariat. The entrenchment of French and British imperialism, the victory of French military-fascist reaction, the strengthening of the rule of Great Britain over India and other colonies, will in turn provide support for blackest reaction in Germany and Italy. In the event of victory, France and England will do everything to save Hitler and Mussolini, and stave off "chaos".

It would be hard to find another single paragraph with so many false prophecies in it! The prophet (perhaps Trotsky himself) proved far less reliable than many of the "social patriotic"

prophets of the day.

To avoid a similar prophetic failure, the PC should take warning from the little historical "accident" I have referred to: the collapse of the North Korean offensive, which may even mean the end of full-scale war in Korea. As a consequence of American encirclement, the North Korean forces appear to have melted away with a rapidity that is certainly extraordinary. And this was preceded, over a period of many weeks, by the reorganization of the South Korean forces, which after their first debacle managed to give a pretty good account of themselves. (I am sure that at this point my critics will lick their lips at the prospect of demolishing me with a pointed reference to the atrocities of the South Korean marines; so, to save time, I insert the reference myself.) The PC, emphasizing the "social" factor in the war above everything else, would never have recognized that a mere American military maneuver could have accomplished what it did.

Why is this misinterpretation of the Korean situation on the part of the PC significant? Because a belief that American military victory over Russia is really impossible anywhere helps, psychologically, to prop up the theory that whatever the outcome of World War III, universal barbarism and chaos is inevitable - in the absence of workers' revolution. (See the quotation above, from the Bulletin of the Russian Opposition) The refusal of the PC to recognize any qualitative distinction between capitalist democracy and Stalinist totalitarianism of sufficient importance to influence socialist policy, is simply one aspect of this theory. And this theory, in turn, is today merely a means of disguising the totally unrealistic character of the slogan and strategy of the Third Camp.

But the PC will hang on to the slogan of the Third Camp at all cost, because to give it up would involve a re-examination of certain aspects of Leninist doctrine - an uncomfortable process. It would involve, in fact, a re-examination of the Leninist concept of "defeatism", of which the Third Camp is an amorphous version. At this stage of the discussion, some analysis of the Leninist concept would be very valuable, especially from Comrade Shachtman, whom I once heard remark that Lenin at various times advanced at least five different definitions of defeatism. It would be interesting to discover just which of the five we are now supposed to use. It is a purely theoretical discussion, of course, but one that is long overdue. As a starting point, I shall give the best definition that I know of, and one that I assume is still considered authoritative by the PC:

Lenin's formula: "defeat is the lesser evil" means not that defeat of one's own country is the lesser evil as compared with the defeat of the enemy country; but that a military defeat resulting from the growth of the revolutionary movement is infinitely more beneficial to the proletariat and to the whole



people than military victory assured by "civil peace".  
(War and the 4th International, 1934)

Over-simplifications of "Lenin's formula", like the one so popular in our ranks about "promoting the class struggle without regard to the consequences" - (just try it, and see how fast the fraction will slap you down!) - should give way to careful analysis of definitions like that quoted above, within the context of the actual situation in American and throughout the world. The key phrase in the definition is the reference to military defeat "resulting from the growth of the revolutionary movement". There is, of course, not the slightest sign of an anti-Stalinist revolutionary movement of the dimensions suggested in the United States today, as we approach World War III. The chances of the development of such a movement are very, very slight, though our comrades avoid acknowledging this in any precise way on what appears to be the theory that if you talk about the odds they might become even more unfavorable. What I wish to suggest, however, is that in the remote possibility of such a movement developing, (a possibility on which I believe it would be fatal to depend), the movement, if effective at all, would certainly tend to result in the defeat of one's own country and the victory of the enemy - that is, Russia - rather than in the state of universal exhaustion of both camps which the supporters of the PC position seem to envisage as the inevitable and at the same time desired conclusion of the war! (Why that state of universal exhaustion would be less likely to produce barbarism and chaos than the victory of democratic capitalism, has never been explained to me. The "economy", presumably, is exhausted, while the working-class remains fresh as a daisy and immune to the demoralization that generally, we know, goes with exhaustion).

A socialist America and a completely Stalinized Europe and Asia: this is revolution somewhat in the style of "America First"! American workers, who have been doing pretty well under capitalism, get the benefits of socialism; while the workers of Europe and Asia are obliged to accept Stalinist rule, in the hope that socialist America will eventually come to their rescue. European workers at least, might prefer a more direct way of fighting Stalinism, even if it involved American workers "enduring" capitalism a little longer. It will be pointed out, of course, that the workers of other countries have the privilege of establishing socialist regimes at the same time that the American workers do it. The only obstacle would be the Russian armies occupying their countries or at their borders.

There is, however, an interesting observation to be made regarding the revolutionary movement in America which supporters of the PC position are obliged to believe will arise in the course of World War III and take America out of the war. That movement, as soon as it begins to be effective, must inevitably be revealed as a movement which contributes to Stalinist victory, at least in a short-term sense, in Europe

and Asia. The withdrawal of America from the war could mean nothing else. Could such a movement resist Stalinist infiltration? It seems to me that there might be considerable infiltration from a very early stage. The entire Stalinist apparatus would be directed toward such an end. It seems to me probable that, in a democratic nation, any such movement not committed to critical support of military resistance to Stalinist aggression, will be used in one way or another by Stalinism as soon as the movement reaches a stage where it can influence the conduct of the war. This is probable because, in a period of great ideological tension, the only effective guarantee against Stalinist or Stalinoid tendencies in the socialist movement is a position of critical defensism. Any avoidance of a clear answer to the military question opens the door to Stalinism in one form or another. We should have learned this in 1939.

The comrades should examine the meaning and consequences of the defeatist position of the ISL while it is still possible to do so in a reasonably calm atmosphere. As with most holy objects, it is not easy to get this sacred Leninist relic brought out into the open air. And if the comrades prefer to worship the relic without seeing it, and practise their faith in the orthodox manner - by being conscientious workers in war industry, making an occasional militant speech in their local union, and reading Labor Action regularly - I cannot object. All this is entirely harmless. Unfortunately, my confidence in the comrades' good sense is not shared in all quarters. And no relic is worth much of a sacrifice.

## THE NEW LABOR ACTION

By R. Fahan and H. Judd

In appearance and design the new LABOR ACTION is unquestionably an improvement over the old format. Any doubt there may have been about the typographical advantages of the tabloid have by now been dispelled. Yet, in all frankness, we feel that the paper cannot be considered satisfactory, either by comparison with previous papers of our movement or in terms of what is now needed. When we say it is not a good paper, we refer to the content, the manner and style of presentation, and the overall tone and impression given. We propose here to elucidate this criticism and add to it suggestions for improvement, with the hope that the editors of the paper will take them in the constructive spirit in which they are intended.

A general judgement of any paper must be based on the predominant note it sounds. In this sense, then, LABOR ACTION is far closer to the agitational and sloganizing type of paper than to the propaganda-educational paper. The kind of agitation it conducted during the war? No, for then it was the deliberate policy of the editors to write that kind of paper; there were immediate situations in the unions which called for agitation around specific issues and which, because they were real and immediate situations where our people were involved, made that agitation highly exciting, readable and necessary. Today however there are no -- or very few -- such situations; yet the paper is still written in essentially an agitational manner, so baldly and crassly editorialized, so constantly ragging in agitational tone, often so oversimplified in analysis that the result is a hybrid -- neither genuinely an agitational paper (since there are few situations in which we actively intervene to agitate) nor an educational paper, since its level is too primitive for that purpose.

The paper is permeated by a spirit of sectarian agitation, with some exceptions we shall mention. This spirit is seen in the following: Although a presumed reason for the shift to the tabloid was to avoid the news front page, with all the artificial filling that now requires, nonetheless that kind of front page is still being used. Several articles, adjuncts to the "lead" and largely repeating its simple agitation are usually also printed. From a journalistic standpoint these articles are usually poor -- full of familiar cliches, phrasemongering and devoid of concrete intensive analysis; invariably they end up with the "solution is socialism" or "form a labor party" phrase. These articles are bad not merely because most of the paper's writers are inexperienced; they are bad because these writers don't have a clear notion of what they are trying to do. They are still stuck in the old groove of sputtering at when they should be clearly and quietly talking to. What is so particularly bad about this kind of article is that the kind of readers we now have, almost all of them sympathizers, with some

knowledge of our views, must invariably skip these articles -- just as our members do -- for the simple reason that they feel these articles are pre-fabricated Marxism with predictable beginnings, middles and ends. Try a few and you know the formula.

This, however, is not true for the entire paper: the labor reports and analyses, particularly those from the field, are often first-rate and no doubt the most valuable material in the paper. The reason is that these correspondents write from intimate knowledge and because they must mediate their remarks to the situation in which they find themselves, they know that mere phrase-waving and agitational fuzz won't do. Thus, even those comrades who don't agree with our UAW line would have to agree that the recent article on the GM settlement by Comrade Jason is a serious effort at analysis, sober and responsible in tone. Similarly, many of the articles written by various comrades in the "World Politics" column and as special features are valuable. Unfortunately, these items should be the central material of the paper, not rear-page bulk.

What would we suggest?

First, that the editors seriously consider what is the actual purpose of the paper now. LABOR ACTION is ten years old, and has passed through many changes. The agitational paper of the war years served a valid purpose. Today that purpose is beyond us, as the brutal circulation figures show. We should be writing a paper that sets out to enlarge, from week to week, the understanding of our friends and members -- through the presentation of reliable facts (unfrilled with agitation). Marxist analysis and the drawing (not the beating over the head with!) of socialist conclusions. Articles based on primitive determinism, scissor-bill economism, old-fashioned "American approach" vulgarity should be rigidly excluded. Nor is it required that the "socialist solution" come at the end of each article with a painful insistence. Our few thousand KNOW our general conclusion; what they want from is us specific discussion.

The "news lead" approach should be dropped except under the rarest of circumstances, i.e. when there is a sensational event warranting it, or better yet, when we have some news of importance that no one else has. We would recommend that the editorials be written without their present benzedrine joggling, that in a paper as small as ours it is a waste of space to devote as much time to clever or cute little items as we do, that reports of meetings never exceed a few inches on the general ground that summaries of speeches are a sheer waste of space, that the present magazine "reviews" be either extended to include serious discussion of ideas or be dropped entirely.

Our movement is not unfamiliar with the kind of paper we have in mind. Think of the old Militant, a weighty and serious paper from which people learned; remove from it its "left opposition" approach, its excessive concentration on the American CP, and its inclination to jargon and you have something like

what we have in mind. Better yet, look at the inside four pages of the eight page LABOR ACTION of a few years back and you get even closer to what we want. Both of these had serious weaknesses, but they point to the necessary direction.

We know that part of the fault for the present inadequacy of the paper cannot be placed on the editors. It is difficult to get serious material, particularly since the party leadership contributes so infrequently. It is easier to churn out the old stuff -- God knows, both of us have done it often enough. On the other hand, we know that in the time the editors spend in looking for clever and cute items -- almost as if we were competing with THE NEW YORKER -- they could be writing serious articles. And then perhaps one reason is that a dull and sloganeering paper attracts dull and sloganeering writers.

We do not have any illusion that it would be easy to get the kind of paper we propose. Everyone knows the difficulties -- particularly the difficulties over which we have no control. A mental, emotional and spiritual block to thought and analysis exists among all layers of our society. But if the editors set the example, rather than working themselves up into weekly synthetic froths, a step would be taken in the right direction. We know that there are today minor labor bureaucrats and union militants who read LA because they find labor material and analysis unavailable anywhere else; if the same were true for serious young people searching for analysis of the world in which we live -- if, for example, there were analysis of domestic and foreign news, of intellectual problems, of political ideas, of books and articles on a level with, say, Brad's articles on China -- then our circulation might even go up. Let our ideas speak for themselves, with dignity and restraint and sufficient subtlety to show people that we are not merely replaying the old records; and let us consider the possibility that sometimes in a room full of loud and raucous voices it is the man speaking quietly and earnestly who will be listened to.

(This letter to LA is published in  
Forum by decision of the PC, upon  
recommendation by the editorial  
Board of LABOR ACTION)

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LETTER FROM H. D. COLEMAN

Dear Comrades:

I wish to reply briefly and without waiting to give my remarks literary polish, to some of the points raised by the Editor and comrade Bell in their answers to my letter on socialist policy in the war.

The Editor takes the position that what I call the "inexplicable omission" of the slogan "Withdraw All Troops from Korea!" from the statement of the Political Committee, is a matter of small significance, a minor tactical question. But this slogan is the central feature of Stalinist propaganda today - how can one avoid dealing with it? If it is essentially correct, but merely misused by the Stalinists, then it is surely LABOR ACTION'S job to say so and explain why. The Editor's rather suddenly revealed preference for socialist "education", as opposed to "agitational slogans", is "pretty thing ground" for his unwillingness to handle this hot potato. That in the course of World War II, we did not raise the slogan of "Immediate Withdrawal of All Troops from France" is not much of an argument. We were not in the position at that time of having to differentiate ourselves from the Stalinists with respect to such a slogan. And - a small point! - the American invasion of France, (or of North Africa, for that matter), only occurred after the military struggle on a world scale had been going on for a long time. The invasion of Korea, on the other hand, is the beginning of the military struggle - and an exceptionally appropriate juncture for the ISL and LABOR ACTION to explain, (if they insist on being so foolish), why it is entirely proper to demand the withdrawal of American troops from Korea, regardless of the accidental similarity to the Stalinist demand.

Comrade Bell, in a long article, does not get around to giving a straight answer to the question to which I most desire an answer, as I plainly stated; Does the difference between capitalist democracy and Stalinist totalitarianism, as social systems, have no consequences in the formation of socialist policy in the war? Comrade Bell suggests an answer, but manages to avoid stating it in so many words. She refers to the "lesser evil" theory in World War I. I recall, with some confusion, a speech I heard quite recently by a supporter of Com. Bell's viewpoint, a national leader of the SYL, who began his remarks by emphasizing (with eminent good sense), that World War III differs from all other wars in that it is a conflict between two radically different social systems. However, it turns out that Com. Bell is only trying to make the point that World War I did not solve the social crisis of capitalism. Then she takes up World War II, and her argument seems to reach its conclusion on the question: "Did the labor movement, the socialist movement and the democratic forces of the world which, in their vast majority lent their support to the Allies in that war, thereby contribute to the progress of mankind?" The answer is obviously "yes", although Com. Bell does not seem to expect it. The defeat and destruction of Nazism was a "contribution" of some importance to the progress of mankind.

Com. Bell's view seems to be that World War II automatically and inevitably grew out of World War I; and World War II automatically and inevitably grows out of World War II - given the failure of the socialist movement in each instance. In this grand Hegelian progression, small events like the destruction of Hitlerism and the hoped-for destruction of world Stalinism are, of course, of minor importance.

And if one pays any attention to ways and means of bringing about such "small events", then one is, according to Com. Bell, a person who has abandoned all interest in "the struggle to resurrect civilization". (In this connection, however, Com. Bell with surprising charity does not go further than insist that "once committed to the support of an imperialist war, one must take many of the means along with the end." The

emphasis is mine. This is a pleasant change from the accusations of our more drastic theoreticians, generally the younger comrades, to the effect that any concern over the military consequences of the war marks one as a monster who delights to wade in the workers' blood.)

Com. Bell comes about as near as she ever does to answering my main question when she refers to the "two faces" of democratic capitalism. "Dollar imperialism", she says roundly, "rests on the reactionary discredited compradores, colonial and European". She has just spoken of the "relative freedom...relative prosperity" in the United States; and the argument thus far suggests that the relative freedom and prosperity of the American worker is based on the imperialist exploitation of European and Asiatic workers - a thesis which I would like to see Com. Bell defend in greater detail. However, it turns out that she is mostly concerned with showing how imprudent it would be to depend on the continued enjoyment of democratic rights by American workers. Com. Bell does not want to take one step that would seem to depend on the continuance of those rights. For my part, I feel that the imprudent thing to do would be to abandon those rights before they are lost and exclude in advance any course of action flowing from a recognition of those rights. Even a considerable restriction of civil liberties in America, in the face of threatened atomic attack, would not make me as pessimistic about the future of American democracy as Com. Bell appears to be right now. What is more disturbing than this kind of pessimism, however, is another kind which may be current in the leadership of the ISL: pessimism over the military outcome of the war, from the standpoint of America. This is a rather grisly kind of manipulation of facts to fit a theory.

Com. Bell feels morally superior to those socialists who "support" the war. She opposes the war, and will continue to do so, in the same principled way that the ISL opposed World War II. But she speaks of the "limited" way in which that opposition took effect, and I quite agree. It was opposition of an exceedingly limited nature; and the general agitation of the ISL at that time had practically no connection with its attitude on the war. Those who want to enjoy that easy kind of moral superiority in the coming or present war have, of course, that privilege. I am not much impressed by it. The most useful job of socialist education, (as distinct from trade union activity), which the organization accomplished during World War II, was the development of its position on the so-called "national question": the policy of forthright support for the national resistance movements in the Nazi-occupied countries - movements which, at their most effective, were closely integrated with the military apparatus of the Allies. Our position on the "national question" represented an important break with the old "defeatist" position carried over from the Comintern. We need to still further modify our views in this respect; but, these days, it seems almost impossible to even get the old position defined.

Com. Bell is scornful of those comrades who change their minds. If you must be a social patriot, she seems to say, you should at least be able to date your social-patriotism back to World War I. Com. Bell does not do it, but others are a little too free with sneers about "social pressure", etc. Some of those who sneer would hardly be able to recognize any pressure on their thick skulls; but the capacity to respond intelligently to the pressure of events, to the lessons of history, is something that we all need.

In this connection, Com. Bell directly falsifies my position. She begins her article with a reference to the theory of the "lesser evil" which "our three correspondents" advance. She remarks that "this proposal did not come before the actual outbreak of the hot war in Korea, but only after Truman...ordered U.S. troops to Korea." And she then has a little fun with the "proponents of the 'lesser evil' theory" who are "presumably for the 'third alternative'...in time of peace", but "once war breaks out, one is forced to choose---". It is odd that Com. Bell did not take the trouble to find out that my "proposal", dated April 15, 1949, appeared in the discussion

bulletin of the ISL in the summer of 1949. And I had made my views fairly clear to some of the comrades a number of months before April, 1949.

Com. Bell falsifies my position in another respect, also. Quoting my phrase "within the democratic camp", she remarks on how ridiculous it is to suggest that a tiny organization like the ISL could "have some influence on the conduct of the war, democratize it, as it were, or give it a 'socialistic' tinge". I am often puzzled by the way some of our comrades appear to hand on to the impotence of the socialist movement in America, as if it were the last guarantee of Marxist rectitude! However, Com. Bell certainly did not read my letter if she thinks I advanced any such idea as the above. I speak, with emphasis, of the choices "imposed by the brutal realities of the present world situation". Does that sound as if I had any idea of the ISL giving the war a "socialistic tinge"? On the contrary, it is the theoreticians of the Third Camp who have delusions of grandeur along this line.

It is Com. Bell and Com. Draper who have all the answers. I do not pretend to have. We may all change our minds about many things in the course of the terrible period ahead of us. I have tried to make it clear that what I am concerned with is the preservation by American socialists of the power to make themselves heard on the very limited scale that this is now possible - within the limitations, that is, imposed by the indifference of the American working class. I do not believe that this is a ridiculous objective. And I am convinced that the American working class will listen to the ISL or any other socialist organization only to the extent that that organization is able to unequivocally declare that it prefers the victory of the democracies to the victory of Stalinism. That is a minimum basis for existence, and also for the development of a socialist policy on concrete issues. Such a choice does not in any sense commit one to a fully developed "line", applicable to every single situation that may confront the movement. The socialist cannot avoid terribly difficult choices. Not even the magic of the Third Camp (or its new abstentionist version) will accomplish that.

August 23, 1950

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#### ANSWER TO COLEMAN

By Mary Bell

In the note accompanying Coleman's letter on the dispute over policy in the war, mention is made of "tone". I personally do not believe there have been any overstepping of the bounds of polemical vigor on either side. No one has been called an "agent of imperialism", or "a monster who delights to wade in the workers' blood (Coleman)." And I think that is all to the good.

On account of the infrequent appearance of Forum, two months have elapsed since Coleman wrote his letter. I think therefore it would be unfair to write a full-scale reply, dealing with the important events that have taken place since August 23 - especially the increasing withdrawal of the Indian government from taking responsibility for the Korean war - and would like to limit myself to a few "off the cuff" comments in the same manner as Coleman wrote on the major points of his letter.

While Coleman and other critics of our "neither-Washington-nor-Moscow" policy propose a major change in our attitude, none of them has made a rounded theoretical analysis of the war, its laws and causation and reasons why we should support it. They have largely limited themselves to a posing of questions, flat assertions and flank attacks. Yet it is really they and Coleman on whom falls the burden of proof, who owe us a



thorough re-analysis. The simple assertion that the social differences between the two sides in the war, which have been closely analyzed only by ourselves, is justification for support of the war is insufficient. One does not ask here for a new weltanschauung, but at least a substantial theoretical analysis is indicated.

Coleman, for instance, implies that World War II was a progressive war, I think - he may correct me if I am wrong - that this is a retrospective view on his part. There is nothing wrong with that. But apparently there is in Coleman's mind some kind of connection or analogy between that war and the present one. (Even if he tends to disallow that type of argumentation on our part.) He states that our most important contributions during that war were on the significance of the national movements, "movements which, at their most effective, were closely integrated with the military apparatus of the Allies." This again is a kind of implied criticism of our policy, a shorthand, rather than any attempt to form any theory or line of argumentation.

"Did the labor movement, the socialist movement and the democratic forces of the world which, in their vast majority lent their support to the Allies in that war, thereby contribute to the progress of mankind?" What was a rhetorical question on my part is answered by Coleman - "obviously 'yes'." Obvious to whom? The destruction of Nazism was not the only or the most significant outcome of the last war. This destruction of Nazism was effected by an alliance of Stalinist totalitarianism with the Allied camp. The war contributed to the strengthening of Stalinism on a vast world scale. The victorious powers redivided the world after a terrible destruction of soldiers and civilians, machines and culture. The Second World War ended in a world political situation that immediately polarized the planet into two armed camps, feverishly preparing for another war. War - modern war - as an element of politics, sociology and culture does not seem to concern Coleman. There is totalitarianism and democracy with a small "d"; even the shrinking of the latter is of no great moment. According to Coleman's way of thinking, Nazism, Stalinism, democratic capitalism, militarization, world war, totalitarianism would appear as discrete-phenomena, with no causal relationship. Our reasoning on the nature of the three big imperialist wars is called "a grand Hegelian progression." We cannot get exercised over Coleman's private war with the diabolic Mr. Hegel. And, since we are unfamiliar with Hegel's views on the last war, or the threatening one, we find it hard to engage in any debate with Coleman.

Coleman uses as a negative proof that our position is weak the "inexplicable omission" of the slogan "Withdraw All Troops from Korea!" He appears to have an idea that the "withdrawal of the troops" slogan is part of some orthodox-Marxistical bag and baggage or Hegelian mystique with which we are supposedly accursed, to be trotted out for use in any and all wars, irrespective of the concrete circumstances, which determine the concrete use of such a slogan. He also seems to suggest that opposition to the war on our part has some identity with that of the Stalinists and that therefore we should be using the slogan of withdrawal and hence need to differentiate ourselves from the Stalinists.

To use such a slogan, at this time, given our analysis of the war, the nature of the North Korean aggression undertaken "not simply after consulting...Russian masters but only after instructions from them" (PC statement, Labor Action, July 10, 1950), would be utterly stupid. It has to be a realistic slogan in tune with the concrete development of the war. Its use in the present context would imply a preference, as is naturally the taste of the Stalinists, for the North Koreans. If we did not deal extensively with this question in our propaganda, that is not really Coleman's criticism. The question of differentiation on this score was of no importance. The Stalinists supported the North Koreans and hence their use of the "withdrawal" slogan and their phony peace proposals. Our articles appropriately differentiated us from them and their ideological confreres of the SWP.

Coleman also seems to suggest that by our lack of use of the slogan we are in some backhanded way also veering towards support of the "democracies".\* But then he simply fails to understand our analysis of the war. We considered the Korean "police action" Act I of the third world war, both from the standpoint of the North Korean Russian-inspired aggression and from the standpoint of U.S. intervention. And we cannot, from that standpoint, take any responsibility for the military outcome.

I do not give a "straight" answer to the question Coleman most desires answered: "Does the difference between capitalist democracy and Stalinist totalitarianism, as social systems, have no consequences in the formation of socialist policy in the war?" If "straight" means yes or no, that would be a crooked way of dealing with such a question. Coleman is satisfied, with slight attempt at proof, with saying the difference between the two systems is such that we must change our attitude towards one of the belligerents and support it. While Stalinism has modified drastically our approach to many problems of socialism, our tactics, our strategy, in some cases our concept of our goal, the differences between it and the system of capitalism is not, in our opinion, justification for support of the third world war, i.e., the surrender of our socialist principles and socialist morality.

No, I did not say nor mean remotely to suggest that American freedom and prosperity are based upon imperialist exploitation of European and Asiatic workers; but it does rest on the domination of the world economy by the U.S. I made the point, in blunt English, that the United States rests upon, political supports, reactionary interests abroad. Susan Green speaks of this as a "pin-head" policy. That is all right, if you equate "pin-headedness" with bourgeois imperialism. The point is that the United States is not carrying out a progressive policy, is not fighting a war of liberation and that its policy is not one of mere mistakes and bad choices. Its policy is based upon the entire complex of a profit economy in rivalry with another system for domination of the world. Coleman has yet to shoulder the burden of proving otherwise.

I do not know what point Coleman is making in regard to pessimism over the military outcome of the war. Our policy is not based upon pessimism or optimism. I personally think that, other things being or remaining equal, the U.S. together with the Western bloc, has a better chance than Russia to win the war, for the same reasons the Allied bloc won in the last war: superiority in means. Other comrades may think otherwise. But what does this have to do with our position?

What I am pessimistic about and so, I think, are many others, is the prospect of the third world war. Consider the lives that the Korean "police action" has taken and the destruction it has caused. Now that the North Korean Stalinists have been beaten back, what is in prospect? For the United States the most immediate announcement was the deployment of more armed forces in the Far East. For the Stalinists, the Indo-Chinese war has been stepped up, another German crisis looms. Militarization everywhere will grow and grow and grow.

Coleman is "convinced that the ISL or any other socialist organization (will be listened to) only to the extent that that organization is able to unequivocally declare that it prefers the victory of the democracies to the victory of Stalinism." Where is the demonstration of this argument? If the Socialist Party exists for no other reasons, it is there to disprove this argument. In comparison, the size and influence of the Communist Party, despite its line and persecution, is negative proof. Those merely demonstrate that being listened to by the working class is dependent upon many other factors.

\*As a matter of fact, Coleman tries to have it both ways. In an earlier article, as he intimated we were clinging to a long since discarded "defensist" position ("along with Canon & Co.") in regard to Russia, while now he suggests by our not using the "withdrawal" idea, we reflect a preference for the U.S.

I do not quite understand the snide comments on our size, lack of influence and singling out such phrases as the "limited effectiveness" of our opposition to the last war. Coleman hints that our adherence to certain socialist principles is the cause of our isolation. Again we refer to the other socialist organizations and the absence of a labor party not to exult, but to instruct. It would be a cause for rejoicing in our party if even such an organization as the SP would experience a mass growth.

Yes, I believe that the anti-war position is political superior, yes, morally superior, because it proposes a program in opposition to the barbarism and mass murder of imperialist war. This is hardly the time for Coleman to sneer. The world and civilization is endangered. The one hope - and this is not rhetoric - for peace and human progress, is socialism. It is, finally, a new twist to be accused of being or fooling "moral". Usually, the charge is one of amorality. We accept the label "moral" - in its broad, social meaning. We believe it is superior morality to offer a program in opposition to mass murder, an internationalist, socialist program.

Oct. 20th, 1950.

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CLEVELAND WORKERS DEFENSE COUNCIL

(Note: Several months ago, a number of organizations, including the Cleveland Branch of the ISL, met to form the abovementioned committee to consider problems of democratic rights and labor defense. Subsequently, this body put out a leaflet on the Korean War and the problem of civil rights in the US. The political line of the leaflet is in conflict with our own, particularly in relation to the role of Stalinism in this war. The PC called attention of the Cleveland branch to the exceedingly important omissions of the leaflet and its false, misleading headline, requesting that it disassociate itself from the leaflet. We are publishing below the leaflet, excerpts of the letter from the ISL secretary and the letter of the Cleveland branch to the WDC in accordance with a decision of the PC and for your information.)

LEAFLET OF THE WDC:

"KOREA AND GROWING DICTATORSHIP"

"No international crisis precipitated by the power struggle of the 'cold war', such as the Korean war, can justify suspension, much less suppression, of civil liberties for American workers.

"The Workers Defense Council calls the attention of all workers to the drive of the American employing class to destroy our precious, hard-won freedoms of the press, speech, assembly, union organization, and political affiliation. The employers - Big Business - want only one freedom in America - the freedom to make profits.

"We especially point to the attempt to hide this campaign behind the slogans of 'national security,' 'national interest,' 'national unity,' and to label all resistance on the part of the workers as being dictated from or sympathetic to the Kremlin.

"Such slogans and unjustifiable labels are merely dishonest phrases to cover up the real intent of employers, especially large corporations and financial interests, to use the coming imperialist war not only for foreign conquest at the cost of the blood of our youth, but to destroy working-class political parties and organization at home.

"The Workers Defense Council calls upon all workers to resist this drive to crush their freedoms, their organizations, their political parties, their union struggles.

"The Workers Defense Council stands as a rallying point of this resistance.

"We call upon all workers' organizations especially to fight the latest and most vicious of the political attacks of the employers and financiers, the act which scuttles the American Bill of Rights: - the so-called 'Communist-control' McCarran Bill.

"We take the position that all workers' organizations should refuse to comply with this law and should fight its enforcement with all their resources."

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(The above leaflet is signed by the ISL, Libertarian Socialist League, Peacemakers, Revolutionary Workers League, Trade Union Educational League, United Labor Party.)  
((The ULP withdraw its name from the leaflet after allowing its representative "full freedom" to endorse it.))

The following are excerpts of letter of Gates to Cleveland Branch. This was the second of two letters send on the subject.

"While putting the views of the committee in my own language and manner, I assure you, that they represent the views of the whole committee... In the first place, we agreed to go ahead with the Cleveland experiment precisely because it revolved around the question of civil liberties and would not go far afield politically. This was important to us in view of the organizations participating in its formation...

"... The leaflet takes the Korean situation as a springboard for a discussion of the war and democratic rights. It is the total effect of the leaflet which is bad, in our opinion - not this or that sentence.

"Take the title of the leaflet: Korea and Growing Dictatorship. Is that an accurate political appraisal of the situation in this country? Do the comrades know what a dictatorship is, or a growing one? There are many things one can say about the rise of rule by presidential decree, congressional laws (Smith Act, etc.) the activities of the FBI, etc. But is this evidence of a "growing dictatorship?" Is that the character of the class struggle in the U.S. today? That's nonsense, comrades. It is a misleading description of the conditions which exist or of the main trend. What, for example, will you say when a condition of "growing dictatorship" does accompany a war condition, i.e., world war as the reality of the day? It does not make us one bit more radical to use the cited phrase; on the contrary, it is, for want of another word, Oehlerism.

"Comrades say: Well, suppose we added something to the leaflet on Stalinism, wouldn't it be all right then? That's like saying: Capitalism would be a wonderful system if it had no poverty, exploitation and war. It is precisely our uniquely accurate position on Stalinism which distinguishes us from all other groupings, and any analysis of war, any pronouncement which fails to even mention this quintessential factor, cannot be correct. ...

"Read over the leaflet and ask yourselves how it can be distinguished from anything the Stalinists write and say. There is as good a test as any. It is as important to distinguish yourself from Stalinism in a question of this nature as it is to express yourself on the war itself. What can result from such writing? Confusion about what the organizations committed to the WDC stand for...

"Could we have written a better leaflet? Of course, a thousand times better, more accurate and politically sound, above all. You have to judge this leaflet as a whole and not its separate sentences. Its total effect is bad for the reasons I have already cited, for a one-sided analysis, for a foolish alarmist tone. Even if there were nothing wrong with the leaflet, it is still an extremely poor leaflet and its design and content. There is a great deal to say about civil liberties and especially the McCarran Bill. Labor Action deals with the question repeatedly and it is one of the reasons so many articles were devoted to a review of the book on the FBI. But pray tell us, what is said about the McCarran Bill that is intelligible to any worker reading the leaflet? Why is it bad? First, what is it? Do you assume that every workers knows what it is and is against it? Wouldn't it have been much better to have put out a leaflet on the Bill itself, explaining it and pointing out its dangers? As it stands, the leaflet is a piece of intramural self-agitation. It assumes, instead of explaining, and one of the reasons for this is that it tries to give a worldly approach to the problem, motivated on the basis of the international situation (which, by the way, can be done intelligently and accurately) which is indistinguishable from Stalinist propaganda..."

Below is the letter of the Cleveland Branch to the WDC:

"Cleveland Workers Defense Council

"Dear Comrades:

"Some time ago, the Cleveland Workers Defense Council issued a statement, "Korea and Growing Dictatorship." When adoption of this leaflet was under consideration by the council, the delegate from the Independent Socialist League attempted to amend it to reflect more truly the policy of the ISL, especially in respect to the lack of mention of the role of Stalinism in the present situation. When this attempt failed, the Cleveland Branch of the ISL decided to lean over considerably and agreed to go along with this statement in the interest of joint action by the various organizations. Since that time the Cleveland Branch has experienced a decidedly unfavorable reaction to this leaflet, in the sense that the ISL name was given as an endorsement to a statement <sup>with</sup> which it does not have agreement.

"Furthermore, the National Office of the ISL has communicated with this Branch, and has requested that it clarify its position on this leaflet. The Branch discussed this matter fully, considering the question of Stalinism as mentioned above, and also the question of "dictatorship" as it appears in the leaflet. This word appears only in the title, but implies that the signatory groups believe "a growing dictatorship" does exist. This is not a position held by the ISL, for while we recognize the growing attacks on civil liberties and on the standard of living, we are still a long way from experiencing a dictatorship, or "growing dictatorship" in this country. We will resist these attacks to the best of our ability, but we will also endeavor to characterize the situation correctly.

"For these reasons, the Cleveland ISL wishes to record itself as withdrawing any further support from this leaflet, and asks that its name be removed from any remaining stock of these leaflets. This action is taken with respect to this one leaflet, and is not meant in any way to alter the existing relationship between the ISL and the Workers Defense Council.

Fraternally,

Joe Hauser, for the ISL,  
Cleveland Branch."

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ON THE ABNER CAMPAIGN

We wish to bring before the League membership, as we have already brought before the Political Committee and the National Committee, the question of the P.C. handling of the endorsement of the Abner campaign. We believe that the P. C. action was wrong politically and undemocratically carried out. The P.C. disregarded the most elementary rule of democratic procedure--the rule to keep the membership informed and to seek its opinion on all important matters. We believe the issue of League support to Abner was the most important political one facing us in the last year.

Let us recall the background of the Abner endorsement. The early 1950 Plenum of the League had rejected all resolutions on political action which had been presented to it, but had voted to direct the P.C. to initiate a discussion in the League on this matter using as a basis the resolutions presented at the Plenum. Thus, after the Plenum, the P.C. had to guide it only the general practices that the League would support its own candidates or Independent Labor candidates running on independent or labor tickets. The P.C. had no authorization from either the P.C. or the League to even consider the question of endorsing any candidate running in a Democratic Party primary (since the Shachtman resolution along these general lines had just been rejected by the National Committee).

Then the Abner endorsement issue came before the P.C. Since they lacked authorization to even consider this special case, we believe that the P.C. could have proceeded democratically and parliamentarily in only one of two ways; they could have refused to consider the special case or they could have cleared away the parliamentary difficulties by getting from the membership, as soon as possible, a reversal of league practice and acceptance of the Shachtman resolution. The P.C. took neither of these actions but instead tacitly assumed that the Shachtman resolution was already in effect and proceeded to consider just the kind of special case which that resolution was designed to handle.

Those defending the P.C.'s action try to impress us with the importance and urgency of the Abner case. If this were true then we say that the P.C. should have immediately initiated the Political Action discussion in the League and --since they were (with but two exceptions) all in favor of considering a special case of endorsing a Democrat (merely the Shachtman resolution in practice)--asked the membership to adopt by referendum the Shachtman (or an equivalent) formula so that they could then place the Abner case on the agenda. We too would defend the right of the P.C.; to react in one way or another to the Chicago branch's request for endorsement of Abner, but we believe their action was unwise

and undemocratic. The P.C. handled a special case for which they had no authorization to consider, and thereby invited the danger that the arbitrarily permitted exception would almost automatically establish the general rule, i.e. the P.C. shall consider cases of backing candidates in Democratic primaries.

Several other aspects of the handling of the Abner case were also, in our opinion, undemocratic. They were:

(1) The League membership was not informed that the P.C. and N.C. were considering the Abner endorsement. Thus branches having no N.C. members were ignorant of the matter until informed thru Labor Action.

(2) Labor Action itself did not announce the ISL's endorsement of Abner for many weeks after it occurred even though it carried stories on the Abner campaign.

(3) Several months ago our branch voiced much the same objections to the Abner endorsement as has been contained herein with the request that they be published in Forum.. This material was never published and, therefore, never made available to the League.

The Abner campaign is over and the ISL appears to have gained little from it. Even if the gains had been 10 times as much they would have been more than offset by the resultant loss of faith in the democratic functioning of our Political Committee.

Comradely yours,

Philadelphia Branch, ISL

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

The disagreement which the Philadelphia branch has with the political decision of the P.C. and the N.C. on the Abner campaign, is a matter which should be discussed separately and on the merits of the respective political positions. Such a discussion has been taking place within the League and in the pages of Labor Action, and will continue until the next convention of the ISL which will finally review and decide the question. Quite a different matter is the point to which the statement of the Philadelphia branch is mainly devoted, namely, the manner in which the P.C. and the N.C. adopted their decision on the Abner campaign. It is quite true that the ISL Secretariat did not fully discharge its obligation to the membership in every respect in this case. However, the statement of the Philadelphia branch is not based on all the facts:



1. The ISL membership was informed both about the conflicting opinions and about the decision of the P.C. and the N.C. in four different ways: a) through reports made by members of the N.C. returning to their branches from the Plenum; b) through the April 23, 1950 ISL Newsletter No. 4 addressed to all members under date of April 23, 1950, which called attention to the confusion that might result from the publication of the Ferguson article on the Abner campaign in Labor Action and which announced a P.C. statement on the matter in the next issue of Labor Action and the opening of a public discussion on the question of policy; c) through the aforementioned issue of Labor Action which published the resolutions representing the three positions put forward in the N.C. and also the statement reporting the decision on the Abner campaign adopted by the National Committee in referendum vote, as well as subsequent issues of Labor Action containing discussion articles by Hall, Shachtman and others; d) through the report made on the question to virtually all branches, early this year, by Shachtman during the two stages of his national tour.

2. The P.C. did not in any sense usurp powers not delegated to it in this case, inasmuch as it referred its proposal for final decision to the National Committee, which is the sovereign body of the ISL between conventions. Neither the P.C. nor the N.C. is under obligation by the terms of the ISL constitution to submit all controversial questions to membership referendum, and such submission is in no way a mandatory requirement of democratic procedure. The constitution allows for membership referendums, under specifically defined conditions, but does not compel them. The P.C. is fully authorized to adopt such decisions as it did in the Abner campaign case, its decision being, of course, subject to review and approval or disapproval by a subsequent convention, and failure to present its decision for referendum - which the N.C. considered, in the given case, to be neither practical nor fruitful - is not a violation of democracy. The statement of the Philadelphia branch that the "P.C. had no authorization from either the N.C. or the League to even consider the question of endorsing any candidate running in a Democratic Party primary," is based on a misunderstanding. In the first place, it is contradicted by another statement by the Philadelphia comrades that "we too would defend the right of the P.C. to react in one way or another to the Chicago branch's request for endorsement of Abner." It is precisely this right and no other that the P.C. exercised. In the second place, the P.C. received full authorization for its action from the N.C., and did not put its own decision into effect until it had received such authorization by the N.C.'s referendum vote. In the third place, the N.C. by its vote, did not violate its preceding Plenum action on the matter, since the voting on this question at the Plenum obviously left the matter open for further decision. And finally, the N.C. showed by its referendum vote that it did not consider its decision on the Abner case to be

in conflict with the resolution political action adopted by the last convention of the ISL but an application of it which had not been specifically provided for or against by that resolution, inasmuch as it did not consider such concrete cases as was presented by the problem of the Abner campaign. Whether this consideration by the N.C. is correct or incorrect, is a political and not a procedural question. The political position of the Philadelphia branch is evident, but like the position of the N.C. and every other member or body it is subject to our regular discussion and to final review by the next ISL convention at which the N.C. will take full responsibility for its course.

3. If the objections voiced by the Philadelphia branch in a statement submitted several months ago were not published, it is only because, most regrettably, no issue of the Forum was issued between the time that statement was sent in and the present.