



The 1939-40 split in the Fourth International



Contemporary cartoon by the Trotskyists. Where Hitler leads, Stalin follows.

Many Trotskyisms

More or less everywhere in the world now there are groups of avowed revolutionary socialists — usually, but not invariably, small or very small groups — who are “Trotskyist” or Trotskisant.

They trace their political genealogy back to Leon Trotsky’s politics in the 1920s and 30s, and before that to the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky which led the Russian workers to power in 1917.

The extant Trotskyist groups vary greatly in their politics and theoretical positions. In Britain, the SWP-UK, which allied for a decade with Islamic clerical fascism, and AWL, which fights clerical fascism, Islamic or Catholic, and which denounced the SWP’s alliance and the politics that went with it, are both “Trotskyist”.

So is the Socialist Party (formerly the Militant Tendency), which in the mid 1980s led the Liverpool labour movement to a catastrophic defeat by the Tories and the Kinnock Labour Party leadership of the time.

So is the very tiny Workers’ Revolutionary Party, which still publishes a daily paper with money supplied by Arab reactionaries.

And so on. Outside Britain, the situation is pretty much the same, varying only in details.

There are many “Trotskyisms”. “Trotskyism”, with any clearly defined political meaning, is now only a historical category.

Yet that historical category, and its accessible written record, are of immense importance to socialism now. For a period beginning, say, with the emergence of Bolshevism in 1903-5 and ending with the death of Trotsky in 1940, or maybe a decade after, there survives a large body of theory and workaday literature in which the political and practical questions and issues of Russia, Europe, and other areas of the world were defined, analysed, debated about, and fought over.

Those documents deal with the issues thrown up during the great mid-20th century world crisis of the capitalist system and its partial breakdown. They deal with the taking of power by the Russian workers in 1917, and the work of politically and organisationally preparing the forces which led the Russian workers to power.

That was a period in which history was intensified and events seemed to speed up. Issues were focused and clarified under the immense pressure of catastrophic events.

In terms of Marxist politics, it was a great laboratory, a crucible, a site of heightened and expedited political awareness. Events passed quick judgement on the work of the revolutionaries — on their politics and polemics.

Though the great Russian and international revolutionary Marxist movement of that time have disappeared as completely as a continent that has sunk under the sea, leaving only atolls and reefs and small islands above the waterline, the records of that experience are preserved in the writings of the revolutionaries of the time.

Socialists now and in the future will have to re-learn much that the old revolutionaries knew and took for granted.

No old texts can substitute for the living experience of the existing working class and its aspirant socialist vanguard. But old texts can help us to better understand issues now by making it possible to see the present in its real historical perspective. They offer us immense economies of effort in learning to be adequate Marxists and revolutionaries.

The aphorism of the American philosopher George Santayana — “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” — has become a cliché, but is no less true for that.

Either the history of our movement is known and understood, or we will be doomed to repeat its mistakes again and again. The arsenal of Marxism offers us irreplaceable help in avoiding the mistakes of the past.

One aspect of the decline of the Marxist movement in the last period is the loss of knowledge of our real history and of its real lessons.

In this issue of *Workers’ Liberty* we print two key documents about the split of the Fourth International (the Trotskyist movement) into two fundamental political tendencies 70 years ago, on the eve of the assassination of Leon Trotsky in August 1940. That split was the beginning of the emergence of two fundamental tendencies in Trotskyism in the years after Trotsky’s death.

One of the documents, Max Shachtman’s speech to the New York membership of the Socialist Workers’ Party USA in October 1939, has remained buried for 70 years.

The opposing speech at that New York meeting, by James P Cannon, has been printed and reprinted in many thousands of copies and a number of languages, as part of Cannon’s book about that 1939-40 split, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. So has an arbitrary and factional selection of Trotsky’s political writings of that time, in the book *In Defence of Marxism*.

Those two volumes constitute the Book of Genesis of post-Trotsky “orthodox” Trotskyism. But the arguments of Cannon’s opponents have not, until now, been available.

If our resources allowed it, we would reprint alongside Shachtman’s documents the contemporary writings of Trotsky and Cannon. That is impossible, but below we give the web addresses where readers can find those texts online.

This issue of *Workers’ Liberty* is the first in a number of projected issues dealing with the emergence of the two basic trends of post-Trotsky Trotskyism, and also with the 1953 split in the “orthodox” Trotskyist camp, which on one side was an incoherent and weak attempt to reopen the issues of 1939-40 and shaping years after that.

Sean Matgamna

- *In Defence of Marxism*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/idom/dm/index.htm>
- *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1940/party/index.htm>
- Introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*: <http://www.workersliberty.org/fate>

1939-40: when the Fourth International split into two tendencies

The “Report on the Russian question” which follows was a speech delivered by Max Shachtman to the New York membership meeting of the US Trotskyist movement, the Socialist Workers’ Party, on 15 October 1939

Part 1: the dispute in the party

In order to have a clear understanding of the present dispute, it is necessary to start with an account of how it originated and developed. It might have been possible to dispense with this aspect of the question if Comrade Cannon had not presented a completely distorted version of it.

Our differences did not develop out of thin air nor as a result of an arbitrary whim on the part of any comrade. It can, therefore, be understood only by a knowledge of the actual circumstances in which it arose.

The question now in dispute originated in reality at our last convention. As will be seen later, it is important to bear this date in mind.

As you know, prior to the convention and during its sessions we had no specific Russian discussion or special resolution. Formally the question was dealt with only to the extent that it was referred to in the program of transitional demands which the convention formally adopted. Apparently nobody deemed it necessary to

raise the Russian question in the manner in which it had been discussed in the past.

However, it was raised in a new form, at least in one of its aspects, during the discussion on the international report which I delivered. Comrade Johnson in his speech dwelt on the question of our attitude towards Stalin’s policy and towards the Red Army in the event of an encroachment upon or an invasion of Poland, the Baltic countries, and other lands adjacent to the Soviet Union. This question was assuming an urgent character because of the negotiations between Stalin and England and France. Stalin was demanding that he be given the right to “guarantee” the Baltic countries and Poland from German attack. I emphasize the fact that this was at the time of the Soviet alliance with France and what appeared to be an impending alliance with Anglo-French imperialism, that is to say, with the “democracies.”

Comrade Garter was the only delegate who took up the discussion on this point, and I referred to it in my summary. As I recall it, I said that it would be necessary to consider the question seriously, especially as it became increasingly pertinent, because the masses in Russia’s border states undoubtedly looked with the greatest suspicion, fear and hostility upon Stalin’s proposal to “guarantee them from aggression”. Nobody else took the floor on this point. I don’t know whether Cannon was disinterested in the question or did not consider it important at the time, but he did not say a word about it, either privately or on the convention floor.

Nothing came of this matter in any concrete form at

the convention or immediately afterward because the issue was still somewhat vague. It was still in the realm of secret and obscure diplomatic discussion in the European capitals and chancelleries. In any case, it had not taken on such concrete form as to require from us an answer or perhaps even to make it possible for us to give that answer. But at least one important thing to bear in mind is that the very fact that it was raised at that time is sufficient by itself to dispose of the slanderous falsehood now disseminated by Cannon, and repeated in the internal bulletin by Goldman, that our resolution and standpoint implied a rejection of Stalin’s policy only because he is linked with fascist imperialism, and an acceptance of the policy if he had been linked with the democratic bandits. The question, I repeat, was first raised in the period of Stalin’s alliance with French imperialism, and if we did not present a concrete resolution it then it was only because it had not yet assumed concrete form.

It was only after the Stalin-Hitler pact was signed and the invasion of Poland had passed from the realm of possibility and speculation into the realm of living reality that the question assumed the most urgent importance and actuality. It is not correct that everybody took the events in his stride. The fact is all the leading comrades were greatly disturbed. At the August 22 meeting of the Political Committee, I moved, “That the next meeting of the P.C. begin with a discussion of our estimate of the Stalin-Hitler pact as related to our evaluation of the Soviet State and the perspectives of the future.” Nobody argued that there is nothing new in the situation. Nobody proposed a

Polish soldiers taken prisoner of war by the invading Red Army

mere reaffirmation of our old line, My motion was carried unanimously, as a matter of course, so to speak. So that the record is given in full and no wrong impressions created among you, I point out that Comrade Cannon was not present at this meeting. His supporters were not so intransigent on the question then as they are now.

The next meeting of the P.C. took place after I had left on my brief tour on the Pact. That was September 1. The second world war had to all intents and purposes broken out and we were faced with enormous tasks and responsibilities. Comrade Gould, who was acting for a week or two in my place, made a series of motions for an immediate plenum, the aim of which was to put the party on a war footing, on the alert, for speeding the preparations to qualify the party for its multiplied tasks. Some of his motions were perhaps not feasible — that is possible, But the general line of them was absolutely correct and in order. Everybody present was in favour of an immediate plenum. The difference revolved only around the date a week earlier or a week later.

But it is most interesting to note that everybody agreed to put the Russian question on the agenda, and that Comrade Burnham was unanimously assigned to make the report on this question!

Now Burnham's position on the Russian question is no secret to the party, even less so to the P.C. It was as well known in the past as it is now. His editorial in the *New International*, about which there has since been so much clamour, was already out. If the P.C. majority really and honestly thought there was nothing new in the situation, and if they really were ready to defend their old position without further ado, why in heaven's name was Burnham assigned to make the report? It is entirely unprecedented in our movement to act in this way. If, for example, I am known as an avowed critic or opponent of the official party position on the trade union question, I would never be assigned by the Committee to report on this question to a plenum or a membership meeting. The Committee would assign a supporter of its position to report on it, and in a discussion I would be assigned to deliver a minority report. Why was a contrary procedure followed in the case of Burnham and the report on the Russian question?

The talk about our having created a crisis or a panic is completely absurd. In actuality it was these comrades who maintain that their political line is so clear, so unaltered, so uncompromising that they must have an organizational stranglehold on the N.C. and the P.C. — it was these comrades who showed themselves completely disoriented and incapable of giving the leadership they boast about. On precisely that question which they now claim marks the dividing line between the hard Bolshevik and the vacillating petty-bourgeois they demonstratively acknowledged their bankruptcy by failing to put forward one of their number to report and assigning it instead to Burnham. Again to keep the record accurate, Cannon was not present at the meet-

ing.

Two days later, a special meeting was held to consider the question, this time with Cannon present. Although I was still on tour, I venture to speak from hearsay because his arguments were subsequently repeated upon my return. Cannon charged that the comrades were creating a panic for nothing, that they were hysterical, that there was nothing new in the situation. As for the plenum, he was against its immediate convocation for the above reasons and because, he said, it had to be prepared documentarily. Good. Two days later, at the September 5 meeting of the P.C., Burnham submitted his document on the character of the war and Russia's role in it. Apart from this document, from my resolution, and Johnson's statement, no other document was submitted for the plenum. Cannon submitted nothing, absolutely nothing, in the form of a resolution or thesis on the question, or for that matter on any other question on the agenda of the plenum; nor did anyone else. Was that because other comrades thought there really was nothing new in the situation? In my opinion, no. For on September 3, Cannon moved that Crux [Trotsky] be asked officially "to express himself on the Russian question in the light of recent events." Furthermore, that Crux be familiarized with "the material submitted in the question" and that we "request his opinion before a decision is taken by the plenum."

Now it seems to me that an obvious contradiction is present here. If there is nothing new in the situation, if all that is needed, as Cannon contended, is a reaffirmation of our previous position, then a decision of that kind could be taken without requesting Comrade Crux's opinion and without making it dependant upon this opinion. The opinion would be, as it was, valuable, enlightening and important, it would be what you will, but yet it could not be of such a nature as to necessitate holding up a vote by us on the question.

The fact is that everybody was disturbed by the events and felt that the old line, even if correct, was not adequate. At the very least, something had to be added to it. And that was the only serious meaning contained in Cannon's motions on Crux. It goes without saying that the request for Crux's opinions was adopted unanimously. But I at least voted for the motion precisely because there was "something new" in the situation, and I was very anxious to read Crux's analysis of it. Yet, I say that the motions were in conflict with Cannon's views because at the very next meeting, on September 8, Cannon and his supporters came forward against a discussion of the Russian question — against any discussion. There is nothing particularly new in the situation, said Cannon, in the circular he sent out to the N.C. members commenting on Burnham's resolution. A discussion at this time is a luxury we cannot afford, he said, in just those words. When Cannon says now that a discussion of a position such as Burnham put forward would be fruitful and educational, it simply does not square with his statements a month ago that a new discussion would be a luxury we cannot

afford.

On September 12, at the first P.C. meeting to be held after my return from the speaking tour, there was a turnabout face. My motion on the plenum was carried without objection. I did not propose, as is stated, to call the plenum on the Russian question. The four points I proposed for an agenda — the war crisis, the work of the International, the Russian question, and the organization-press drive — were adopted virtually without discussion. Why? Because, I believe, among other things I reported that every N.C. member I spoke with on the road was also "panic-stricken". Clarke and Solander in Detroit, comrades in Chicago, all were for an immediate plenum. In Minneapolis I signed a joint telegram with all the local N.C. members pointing out their readiness to come to a plenum almost immediately. There is not the slightest doubt that every responsible leading comrade outside New York felt that a plenum was urgently required to discuss the questions I mentioned.

In the middle of September the events precipitated the problem directly and concretely without waiting for us to get together a plenum. Stalin invaded Poland in alliance with Hitler. What was the party to say? What was its mouthpiece, the *Appeal*, to say? It is utter nonsense to argue that the membership of the party went blandly about its way, unmoved and uninterested in the events. They were intensely interested in the position the party would take on the invasion and there is not the slightest doubt in the world that the readers of the party press were equally interested. It was, of course, impossible for me to write in the *Appeal* on the basis of my personal opinion alone. I, therefore, called together all the available members of the staff and of the Political Committee. By its very nature the gathering could not be anything but informal. It could not adopt decisions on such a matter of policy and I announced both before and at the end of the meeting that I considered it a consultative body, that is to say, only the Political Committee could decide the line of our articles. After as through a discussion of the question as we could have under the circumstances it was generally agreed that an emergency meeting of the P.C. would have to be held to decide the question, if possible before the *Appeal* went to press.

That same evening, September 18, a special meeting was held. We were of the opinion that whatever the party's basic estimate of the class nature of the Soviet State might be, a specific answer had to be given to the specific question. Comrade Burnham moved that the *Appeal* take the line that through its invasion of Poland the Red Army is participating integrally in the imperialist war, that is to say, that we condemn the invasion. That point of view was rejected by the majority of the Political Committee. Comrade Goldman presented the following motion: "Under the actual conditions prevailing in Poland, we approve of Stalin's invasion of Poland as a measure of preventing Hitler from getting control of all of Poland and as a measure of defending the Soviet Union against Hitler. Between Hitler and Stalin, we prefer Stalin." Comrade Goldman was the only one to vote for his motion. Yet his position was entirely consistent, consistent in particular with the traditional position of the party and the interpretation we had always placed upon it. But with his motion defeated, Goldman voted for the motion of Cannon.

And what was Cannon's answer to the problem raised by the Polish invasion, the answer that the Political Committee adopted? Here is his motion in full: "The party press in its handling of Russia's participation in the war in Poland shall do so from the point of view of the party's fundamental analysis of the character of the Soviet State, and the role of Stalinism as laid down in the fundamental resolutions of the party's foundation convention and the foundation congress of the Fourth International. The slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine shall be defended as a policy wholly consistent with the fundamental line of defending the Soviet Union."

Now I contend that this was no answer at all, or rather that it made possible a variety of answers. On the basis of this motion, a half dozen members of the Political Committee could write a half dozen different articles. We would repeat time and again that the Soviet Union is a workers' state and that we are for its defence, but that did not answer the question uppermost in the minds of everybody: Do we support the invasion of Poland, or do we oppose it? Cannon categorically refused to give a reply to this question. His point of view was that it is purely a military question and that we were in no position to express ourselves affirmatively or negatively on it. Our task, said Cannon, is merely to explain. In support of this view, Gordon, for example, placed the invasion of Poland in the same category as the invasion of Belgium in 1914, and argued that there, too, we merely "explained" the

invasion as an "episode" in the war as a whole but did not say that we were for it or against it. (It might be remarked parenthetically that even in this comparison Gordon was wrong because the internationalists did not hesitate even in the case of Belgium to condemn the invasion by Germany, even though the invasion of Poland by Stalin is not on the same footing.)

At the same meeting I moved that the Committee "endorse the general line of the September 18 editorial" in the *Appeal* which I had written. Cannon and his supporters rejected the motion Cannon voting against it and the others abstaining. Why? For the simple reason that I condemned the invasion in the very mildest terms. I had characterized the reports that Stalin was moving to take the aid of Hitler as a "sinister plan." Cochrane took objection to this phrase. He motivated his abstention on the basis of it. He considered it too strong. The very next day the press carried reports of a statement made by Trotsky in Mexico condemning the invasion as shameful and criminal.

At the meeting we pointed out that the inadequate and evasive motion of Cannon would meet its first test twenty four hours later at the mass meeting which Goldman was scheduled to address and at which questions would undoubtedly be asked about the party's attitude towards the invasion. But the Committee refused to take any steps to deal with this matter. The result was that when Goldman awoke the next day, September 19, he not only declared at a public meeting that there was a dispute in the party on the subject and that we were calling a plenum to settle it, but also that the Political Committee disagreed with Trotsky in condemning the invasion. And as you know, in the article which Cannon was assigned to write for the *Appeal* on the subject, he carefully refrained from characterising or condemning the invasion and confined himself merely to rejecting the Stalinist contention that the result of the invasion would be the liberation of the Ukrainians and the White Russians.

Finally we came to the P.C. meeting on the eve of the plenum. The document which we awaited from Comrade Crux had not arrived. We had the Burnham resolution on the subject, but the majority, which had insisted on the need of preparing material prior to the plenum, had no resolution whatsoever to offer. I could not subscribe entirely to the Burnham resolution, and I announced that I would offer one of my own on the invasion of Poland. When the question of reporters arose, Burnham announced that he would either write a different resolution or support one that would be introduced. This announcement occasioned no astonishment or criticism at that time. At the same meeting, confronted with the fact that the majority had no document at all to present to the plenum on the Russian question, Cannon presented the following motion as his resolution: "We reaffirm the basic analysis of the nature of the Soviet State and the role of Stalinism, and the political conclusions drawn from this analysis as laid down in the previous decisions of our party convention and the program of the Fourth International." This was the sole contribution made by the majority.

To sum up, therefore, the Political Committee confined itself to a simple-reiteration of the traditional party position not as a basis for giving concrete answers to concrete questions, but as a substitute for these answers; that is, it failed and refused to give an answer to the specific questions posed by the events. To the extent that it tried to give one, it was false and spread confusion or else left matters hanging in the air. Cannon's article in the *Appeal* is one example. Goldman's speech at the New York mass meeting is another. If that is the meaning of revolutionary leadership on the issues of the day, I have nothing in common with it.

Now as to the actual contents of the dispute. One way of approaching the question is from the angle of the so called unprincipled bloc that we have formed. The argument runs about as follows: Burnham says that the Soviet Union is not a workers' state. Shachtman says he does not raise this question. Consequently, the minority is a bloc and an unprincipled one. I regard the charge as unprincipled bunk. While I have not and do not raise the question of revising the party's fundamental position on the nature of the Soviet State, I was and am ready to discuss the question. The fact is that I requested such a discussion and the minority supported me in this request. We proposed that the pages of the *New International*, our theoretical organ, be opened up for such a discussion. This was at first refused and granted only at the plenum. Why am I not in favour of centring the present discussion around that question here? Because I do not think it is necessary. In fact, under the circumstances I do not think it would be fruitful. The way in which the discussion has already been started indicates to me that it would only serve to obscure the real issue and dispute at hand. In what sense do I mean

this? (Burnham is now being condemned for having withdrawn his document. But this withdrawal actually occurred on the basis of the advice of Comrade Crux and on my advice).

In a brief letter to the Political Committee which arrived before his main document, Comrade Crux pointed out that in so far as the dispute was "terminological" no practical political question could be altered by changing the formula "workers' state" to the formula "not workers' state" or "bureaucratic caste" to "class". He said, granted that it is not a workers' state: granted that it is a class and not a caste. What change would then be introduced into our political conclusions? The opponents, as Crux pointed out, would have gained an "empty victory" and would not know what to do with it.

I do not begin to deny the importance even of the "terminological dispute" if only because we must strive for the strictest scientific accuracy in our characterizations. But under the circumstances, that is, of the need of answering the questions raised by the Polish invasion, such a dispute could very easily degenerate into a sterile and purely terminological discussion. That can already be seen by the manner in which the question has been presented. A workers' state is defined as a social order based upon nationalized property. On that basis, many comrades conclude that the whole problem is exhausted. That being the definition of a workers' state, the Soviet Union is a workers' state. Thus we do not advance an inch.

Why would such a discussion be sterile at the moment? Because it would not and does not necessarily alter one's political conclusions. Trotsky pointed that out and so do I. The political question is: Will you defend the Soviet Union? whereupon it must be asked *What* do we defend? The only remaining conquest of the Russian Revolution is nationalized property. Now there is not a soul in our party who stands for the denationalization of property in the Soviet Union — not Burnham, not Cannon, not Shachtman, not Johnson. The only question that can possibly be in dispute is — *How* do we defend nationalized property?

Let us take the question from another angle. The fundamental position of the party, no matter how often reiterated, does not provide us automatically with an answer to the concrete questions. For example, Goldman, Cannon, Trotsky, all proceed from the fundamental conception that the Soviet Union is a workers' state. Yet Goldman approved the invasion, Cannon was indifferent to it, considering it a purely military question which we were incapable of judging, whereas Trotsky denounced the invasion. It was for such reasons that Burnham was, therefore, prevailed upon to withdraw his thesis from the present discussion, to withhold it for another and more suitable occasion and place, to confine the discussion of the questions that he and others have raised to the theoretical organ of the party.

In this connection I was challenged by Cannon: Why don't you propose to expel Burnham as a defeatist? I made a motion two or three years ago declaring defeatist views are incompatible with membership in the party, and Cannon supported me in that position. I do not propose such a motion now. Cannon says that I speak equally well on both sides of the question. By the same token, he can speak well on one side of the question at one time and be silent on it at another. Why doesn't he propose the expulsion of the defeatists? But, it is argued, you make a bloc with Burnham against Cannon and Goldman, with whom you are in fundamental agreement. The argument is not valid.

In 1925-26 the Saprnovist group of Democratic Centralists declared in its platform that the revolution was over. The Thermidor had triumphed. Russia was no longer a workers' state. Yet when the opposition bloc was formed in 1926 by the Moscow and Leningrad groups, the Democratic Centralists entered into the bloc. If they broke from it later, it was on their initiative — "artificially", said Trotsky, and not on his initiative. He opposed the break, as he pointed out in 1929 in a letter to one of the supporters of the Democratic Centralist group. If he joined with them in one bloc, it was because all supporters of the bloc jointly gave the right answers to the concrete questions before the party. In my opinion, that is what we have to do now. I could vote a hundred times over, just as Goldman does, for the "fundamental motion" of Cannon. So can Abern and Erber and others. But I cannot give the same answer to the problems that Goldman gave or that Cannon gave. And that makes it impossible for me and all others to join with them just as it makes it mandatory for me and all others to join with these who give the same answer.

But does not that deprive you of a fundamental position from which to derive your policies? Not at all. There are fundamental criteria for a revolutionary

Marxist which are just as valid now as they were a year ago and twenty five years ago, even before the Russian Revolution. The first is the fundamental and decisive character of the war in question, and we say that the decisive character of the present war is imperialist. And secondly our policies in all questions must be derived from the fundamental conception of the interests of the world socialist revolution, to which all other interests are subordinate and secondary.

Part 2: Russian imperialism

Before I can return to this question I find it necessary to deal again with the point: **Is there anything new in the situation to cause us to change our policy? Yes! And in reality everybody acknowledges it, if not explicitly then tacitly.**

Is it because of the pact with Hitler? If so, then you are a People's Fronter. No, that is a slander. I have already pointed out that the questions we now raise were *first* raised three months ago, at the time of the Soviet alliance with the democratic imperialists. No, it is not the pact itself that changes the situation. I have pointed out a hundred times in articles and speeches that an isolated Soviet State not only may but often must conclude commercial, diplomatic, and even military agreements with imperialist powers, and that there is not a particle of difference in principle between an agreement with a democratic country, a fascist country or a feudal country. So it is not the pact itself that necessitates a change in our policy. It is the concreteness of the events and it is doubtful that we could have foreseen them in their actuality. And the actuality, if only because of its concreteness, is different from our necessarily limited prognoses as different as arithmetic is from algebra.

As I understand it, that is how Lenin dealt with the reality of the democratic revolution in Russia. His prognosis about the "democratic dictatorship" did not and could not conform with the concrete reality. He had no hesitation in altering his political conclusions to suit that reality. I can give many other examples. It is argued that there is no need to be surprised at the events and no need to modify our policy because we foresaw them. Before 1914 Lenin foresaw the degeneration of the Second International. But it was only after August 4, when the Second International ranged itself openly and, so to speak, dramatically on the side of imperialism that he proposed a change in policy, that is to say, to withdraw from the Second International to which he had belonged and to call for a Third International.

Another example. Trotsky saw and foresaw the degeneration of the Third International. In Germany Stalinism betrayed the proletariat and the revolution no more than it had betrayed them in China six years earlier. Yet although we retained our fundamental views on the principles of revolutionary Marxism, we broke with the Comintern not on the occasion of the Chinese betrayal but on the occasion of the German. It is argued against us now that we propose a change in policy only because the alliance is made with the fascist imperialists and that we did not propose such a change when the alliance was made with the democratic imperialists four years ago. One could just as legitimately argue that we considered it all right for the Stalinists to betray Chinese coolies but not to betray the superior white workers of Germany. Both arguments are equally wrong. What was involved in both cases was an accumulation, precipitated in the form of a concrete event or a series of events.

Similarly in the case of the invasion of Poland and the Baltic countries. In the period of the pact with France, the question was essentially theoretical and we could put forward only hypotheses. It is true Stalin was then also an agent of imperialism. But the war and the concrete events attending it had not yet broken out. Years ago the Stalinist regime indicated that it might or would act in the way it has now really acted, just as before the war of 1914 the social democracy indicated that it might or would act the way it finally did when the war broke out.

The challenge to present some fundamental change in the situation is in this case either superficial or irrelevant. As I understand our basic position, it always was to oppose separatist tendencies in the Federated Soviet Republics. Now I ask: what fundamental change occurred, what was the nature of this change, and when did it occur, to cause us to raise the slogan of



Nazis invade Poland

an independent united Soviet Ukraine, that is to say, a separatist slogan?

Another example: when and why did we decide in favour of a political revolution in Russia? Because of the imprisonment or the shooting of Zinoviev? No. That is so much nonsense. We changed our policy on that question because an accumulation of things dictated that change.

Take the question from still another angle. I do not have to be instructed on the admissibility of a workers' state extending the revolution to other countries, even by military means and without regard for frontiers laid down in imperialist treaties, or for that matter any other kind of frontiers. I have taught that to thousands of people. But I point out that throughout the early years of the Bolshevik movement we hailed the advances of the Red Army into other countries. when the Red Army marched into Poland in 1920, then regardless of whether or not it was tactically correct, we hailed its progress enthusiastically. We called upon them to weaken and destroy the Polish army and to facilitate the victory of the Red Army. We took the same position when the Red Army invaded Georgia; We said then that "democratic" considerations about which international menshevism howled so much were entirely subordinate (if they were involved at all in the Georgian case) to socialist considerations. We denounced the opponents and critics of the Red Army. We justified the entry of the Red Army into Georgia.

Now, if there is nothing new in the situation, why does not the majority propose to hail the advance of the Red Army into Poland, into the Baltic countries, into Finland? Why don't we call upon the workers and peasants of these countries to welcome the Red Army, to facilitate its victory, to help destroy all the obstacles that stand in the way of this victory?

Again we endorsed Stalin's seizure of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1929. We defended the action from all varieties of democratic and "revolutionary" critics who pointed out that the railway was Chinese or partly Chinese, and that the Chinese were not consulted about the seizure. Why don't we by the same token endorse the seizure of Poland and other countries by Stalin today? What is new in the situation? The refusal even of the majority to take the same position today that we all took in 1920 and even in 1929 indicates that at least in this respect the burden of proof about what is new in the situation rests upon the majority.

I cannot take seriously the argument of the majority that the only thing really new in the situation is that people in the party are succumbing to "democratic

pressure." That there is an enormous democratic pressure being exerted upon the labour movement and even our movement is undeniable. That it is necessary to guard against yielding to that pressure is equally true. But it is necessary not only to guard against that pressure but to fight against it. How? We must first recognise that the whole policy of Stalin facilitates the work of democratic demagogues. As in the past they exploit Stalinist crimes and the resentment against them felt by the working class in order to bring the working class more completely under the sway of imperialist and anti-Bolshevik ideology. We can combat the efforts of the democratic imperialists' agents only by a correct and unambiguous policy of our own and not by mere denunciation. We can combat them only by pointing out that Stalin's course has nothing in common with ours. Only by condemning the Stalinist invasion as an act which is contrary not only to the interests of the international working class but to the interests of the Soviet Union itself. We cannot combat it — the workers will rightly turn their backs on us — if we endorse Stalin's action, if we condone it, or even if we appear to do so.

Now as to the slogan of unconditional defence which we must now abandon, in my opinion, unless we mean to keep the formula and by means of sophistry to fill it with a new content. What did this slogan mean to us in the past? Goldman says now: "I repeat. It was taken for granted that the slogan of defending the Soviet Union against the Soviet Union." Let us grant that for a moment and we shall see who it is that unwittingly yields to the pressure of democratic patriotism and to the pacifist distinction between wars of aggression and of defence.

What we really meant in the past when we said we were for unconditional defence was this: We are for defeatism in the enemy country and patriotism in the Red Army. In the Red Army we are the best soldiers. we are for the victory of the Red Army and for the defeat of its enemy, and that regardless of who "started the war." We never asked who struck the first blow or who first crossed his own frontiers. By Soviet patriotism we also meant that we call upon the soldiers and population of the enemy to give active support to the Red Army; that we call for sabotage in the country and in the army of the Red Army's enemy. Isn't that what we always said and meant in the past by our slogan?

Now why didn't we and don't we say that in the case of Poland, or tomorrow, in the case of Finland? Isn't Poland a capitalist country? Isn't it an imperialist

power? Isn't it an ally of the democratic imperialists opposed to Russia? In accordance with our old conception, we should have called upon the Polish masses to welcome the Red Army. Why didn't we? Was it because Russia was the military aggressor? But we have not ever and we should not now draw any basic distinctions between defence and aggression, and Cannon was a thousand times right in pointing out that Marxian platitude, as he so very often is.

Further. Why don't we take that line in the case of the Baltic countries — Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia? They are capitalist countries, they are tools of one or another imperialist bloc. If they are engaged in any kind of struggle — regardless, I repeat, of who fired the first shot or who first crossed frontiers — it is obviously a question of war between the Soviet Union and a capitalist power. In that case, by unconditional defence we must mean, as we always did in the past, that we are for the victory of the Red Army. Surely we never took the position in the past that we gave unconditional defence of the Soviet Union only when the troops of a capitalist power take the initiative in the struggle and cross into the territory of the Soviet Union. By virtue of our old position, we should fight for the victory of the Red Army and simultaneously for the defeat of the opposing armies. The majority is simply not consistent with itself. While holding to the old conception, it has adopted a document which says that we are opposed to the seizures of new territory by the Kremlin. According to Comrade Trotsky, the Stalinist invasion was shameful and criminal, that is to say, we condemn it. Now we would not condemn Russia for invading Germany, would we? And if Poland had first attacked, militarily, the Soviet Union, I do not believe we would condemn Stalin or the Red Army for repulsing this attack and pushing the Polish Army back to Warsaw or further. Why would we? Would it be because in that case Poland was the "aggressor," whereas in the actual case Russia was the "aggressor"?

Again. Comrade Goldman said his error, which he now acknowledges, consisted in supporting the invasion under the impression that it was not done in agreement with Hitler. When he became convinced that it was done in agreement with Hitler, he opposed it. It seems to me that Comrade Goldman replaces here one error with another. If that is his motivation for opposing the invasion, then at the very least we overlooked an important problem in failing to oppose a similar step when Stalin sought to take it in agreement with Daladier and Chamberlain. That was precisely the point that was dealt with by Comrades Johnson, Carter and myself at the last convention. Certainly the reason we failed to act at that time could not have been based upon the fact that Stalin planned his action in alliance with the democratic imperialists.

You give no answer to the concrete questions! Trotsky says: "We were and we remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin." Goldman says now: All right, but it's all over now in Poland; consequently, the basis for the dispute has been removed. Unfortunately this is not the case. If we are against such seizures, we are against them not only after they take place but also before. It is radically false to think that Poland was an incidental or accidental episode in the war, an episode of no characteristic importance. Yesterday it was Poland and today the Baltic countries, tomorrow and the day after, Finland, Rumania, Afghanistan, India, China, and other countries. The same problem will arise continually and with it the necessity of giving an answer far more concrete than we were systematically given by the majority of the P.C.

Do not think for a moment that you can dispose of such questions the way Cannon tried to do today. I was shocked when I heard him say half jokingly, "off the record", that the best thing that could happen to Finland would be to wipe it off the map altogether. That is a piece of first-class political cynicism. I am not a Finnish patriot any more than I am a Polish patriot. But as a revolutionary Marxist I am at the same time a consistent democrat. I am ready to subordinate democratic considerations only to socialist and internationalist considerations. I have no hesitation at all in saying that I am concerned not only with the socialist revolution but also with the national and democratic rights of Finland and the Baltic countries. I am prepared to subordinate even these rights to the interests of the socialist revolution if and where the two conflict. I am not ready to subordinate them to the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Decisive in politics is not only the "what" but also the "who." I am damned particular as to *who* "liberates" countries like Danzig or the Sudetenland. Under Hitler the right of self-determination "triumphed" in appearance. In actuality reaction triumphed. And when Stalin invades Poland it is the Stalinist counter-

revolution that has triumphed.

Your policy or rather your lack of policy makes it impossible for us to talk intelligibly or effectively to the masses of these countries who are *threatened* by Stalinist seizures or invasion. I want to see the party and the International adopt a policy which enables us to advance the cause of international revolution in these countries. We say in our international program that the anti-Hitlerite patriotism of the masses in the bourgeois countries has something potentially progressive in it. I want to be able to say to the masses of Russia's border states:

"Your anti-Stalinist patriotism has something potentially progressive about it. Your fear of a Stalinist invasion, your hostility to it, is entirely justified. You are not so ignorant that you do not know what Stalin's rule over you would mean. You must resist any attempt, military or political, to establish that rule. You must fight against the Red Army and not for its victory, if it seeks to establish Stalin's domination over you. But I say to you, your present patriotism is only potentially progressive. You cannot and must not fight against Stalinism under the rule of your own bourgeoisie, be it in Poland or Latvia or Finland, because that bourgeoisie is imperialist or the agent of imperialism. You must resist being driven into slavery under Stalin. So fight for power in your land. Win over the army and establish an army of your own, the people's militia, and fight for your own socialist cause."

It is true that by this line I will not succeed in having a revolution in Poland or Finland overnight. But if I reach two workers with it I will have brought them one step closer to the goal they must attain, and that is what should be the purpose of any political line. The majority says: We will not approve and we will not condemn. We will merely "explain" the invasion. I say: Resist. Fight the Stalinist army under your own independent class banner. Fight them because they have imposed upon them the execution of an imperialist policy.

At this point the majority objects. The term "imperialist policy" cannot be applied to the Stalin regime. Comrade Goldman adds that while the term may be used in a broad or journalistic sense, it is incorrect because it may be deduced from this term that the Soviet Union is a capitalist imperialist state. That may well be. I do not deny it. But it does not necessarily follow, for otherwise many of our characterizations would have to be rejected on the same grounds. In the first place I am not the first one to have used this term in our movement. Only a couple of years ago, in a discussion with a Chinese comrade about the dangers of Stalinist intervention in China, the question was asked by the comrades: does that mean that Stalin can follow an imperialist policy in China? To which Trotsky replied: Those who are capable of perpetrating the Moscow frame-ups are capable of anything. Could not a "capitalist imperialist Soviet State" also be deduced from this entirely correct statement?

We say that Stalin has adopted the political methods of fascism. Stalin's regime is closer to the political regime of fascism than to any other we have ever known. From this statement, often repeated by us, some people have deduced that fascism rules in Russia. But this has not altered our characterization of the Stalin regime. We say in one and the same breath that Hitler's regime is totalitarian, Mussolini's regime is totalitarian, Stalin's regime is totalitarian. I still believe that this is entirely accurate. The false deductions that some make from these statements do not mean that the statements are wrong.

We say that there is a Bonapartist regime in Germany and in Russia. I recall that when Trotsky first presented the formula of Soviet Bonapartism, he was criticized by many comrades. They argued that his Bonapartism covers too many different things. He replied that while neither Marx, Engels or Lenin had ever applied the term Bonapartism to the workers' state that was not to be wondered at; they never had occasion to, although Lenin did not hesitate to apply terms of a bourgeois regime with the necessary qualifications to the workers' state, as, for example, "Soviet state capitalism." Bonapartism, said Trotsky, is an exact, scientific, sociological characterization of the Soviet regime. Yet it may very easily be objected that it follows from this characterization that the Soviet Union is a bourgeois state.

Again, Trotsky points out — and I think it is right even though Comrade Weber characterized it as stupid — that in one sense the Soviet Union is a bourgeois state just as in another it is a workers' state. Elsewhere he says that the bureaucracy which has the state as its private property is a bourgeois bureaucracy. Shouldn't we reject these characterizations because of what some people may deduce from them as to the nature of the Soviet State?

It is in accordance with this spirit that we say Stalin is pursuing an imperialist policy. In two senses. In the first place, he is acting as a tool of imperialism, an agent of imperialism. To that characterization nobody seems to take objection. Stalin crushed Poland jointly with Hitler. The spoils of their victories are being jointly divided throughout eastern Europe. But also, in another sense, he is pursuing an "independent" imperialist policy of his own. To my characterization, Comrade Weiss among others answers that there is no such thing and can be no such thing as imperialism except as a policy of decaying monopoly capitalism. That reply is correct only in one sense; namely, that the policy of monopoly capitalism is the modern form of imperialism. But there was imperialist policy long before monopoly capitalism and long before capitalism itself. "Colonial policy and imperialism," said Lenin, "existed before this latest stage of capitalism and even before capitalism. Rome, founded on slavery, pursued a colonial policy and realized imperialism." It is entirely correct, in my opinion, to characterize the Stalinist policy as imperialist, provided, of course, that one points out its specific character, that is, wherein it differs from modern capitalist imperialism. For, as I have insisted on several occasions, I do not identify Stalin with Hitler, Chamberlain or Roosevelt.

Stalin has showed himself capable of pursuing imperialist policy. That is the fact. The Kremlin bureaucracy has degenerated beyond all prediction. when we say it has interests all its own, we do not only mean that they are diametrically opposed to the interests of the proletariat but that these interests are very specific. They also have a specific economic basis. Like every bureaucracy, the Stalinist is interested in increasing the national income not in order to raise the standard of living of the masses but in order to increase its own power, its own wealth, its own privileges. In its struggle for self preservation not only from the living forces of the proletariat and peasantry in the Soviet Union, but also from the consequences of the chronic economic crisis in the country, it is now seeking new territories, new wealth, new privileges, new power, new sources of raw material, new trade facilities, new sources of labour power. A policy of expansion which under Lenin and Trotsky would mean extending the basis of the socialist revolution means under the Stalinist bureaucracy, degenerated and reactionary to the core, a policy of imperialism. That is, it has an imperialist policy peculiar to the Soviet regime in its present stage of decay.

Now, that is as close to a characterization of it as I can come. How do you characterize this policy? What is your political or sociological definition of it? You do not give any. Bonapartism, too, is not 100 per cent exact. The analogy upon which it is based is like all great historical analogies a limited one, but it is close enough; it is an approximation and no improvement upon it has yet been made. Similarly with the term imperialist. Until a better term is found to describe the present Stalinist policy and you have proposed neither a better one or any at all I shall persist in using the one which I have put forward.

These are the considerations which in our opinion make it impossible for us to continue employing the slogan for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union in the sense in which we construed it in the past. It is that sense which dictated the attitude of the majority, most explicitly, consistently and not accidentally expressed in the position taken by Comrade Goldman.

It is, of course, entirely true that a fundamental line is required for a correct approach to all concrete political problems. That fundamental line must be in general the interests of the world socialist revolution. In so far as the war itself is concerned, we must proceed from the fundamental and decisive character of the war, and judging it by that standard it is necessary to characterize the war as imperialist in its decisive aspects. I say, "in its decisive aspects," because in all modern wars there are, so to speak, conflicting elements. Let me take a well known example: In the last world war, Lenin contended in 1914 that if the struggle had been confined as to a duel between Serbia and Austro-Hungary, on the part of Serbia the progressive element of struggle for national unity would have been decisive, that is, revolutionists would have wished for the victory of Serbia, even of the Serbian bourgeoisie. But scarcely had *that* war started than it was extended throughout Europe. The progressive element represented by Serbia's national aspirations was lost in the midst of the struggle for imperialist mastery between the two big blocs. That is, the character of the war changed. In its decisive aspects it was imperialist. Serbia was nothing more than part of one of the imperialist camps.

Another example is furnished by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Bismarck's struggle against

Napoleon III for the establishment of a united German nation was historically progressive. But when Bismarck proceeded to take Alsace-Lorraine, the character of the war changed, so to speak, and was condemned by Marx and Engels. Now the present war may and in all probability will also change. Our resolution foresees that and provides for it. If the character of the war changes into a war of imperialist attack upon the Soviet Union, the position of the revolutionary party must change accordingly. Comrade Cannon notes that this is contained in our resolution, but instead of recognizing it for its real and simple significance, he devotes himself to scathing remarks about the phrase "bourgeois counter-revolution is on the order of the day." For this obviously true statement I am denounced as a pessimist. Why? Trotsky used exactly the same phrase more than two years ago. As far back as then he said that if Franco wins in Spain, the bourgeois counter revolution will be on the order of the day in the Soviet Union. I deeply resent the attitude which accepts without a word a phrase or formula or concept uttered by Comrade Trotsky, and for purely factional reasons condemns those who merely repeat the phrase as pessimists, if not worse. If the character of the war changes, I repeat, and if the bourgeois counter revolution has not triumphed in Russia, we will defend the Soviet Union from imperialist attack.

It may be asked: How can you defend a country that has pursued an imperialist policy? The class struggle is not as simple as it is implicitly represented by that question. Under certain circumstances, we have done that in the past; we will do it in the future. Even in the case of Spain, which none of us believed to be a workers' state of any kind, we were for the "defence" of Azana and his regime in our own way and by our own methods, even though that same regime was openly imperialist and still claimed imperialist domination over the colonies of Spain. With all the greater reason, with all the greater force, will the policy of defence apply in the case of an imperialist attack upon the Soviet Union.

I have said that Stalin is following an imperialist policy in two senses, in that he is a tool of imperialism, rather an agent of imperialism, and that his own policy is imperialist. I have at the same time denied the foolish charge that we consider this policy identical with the imperialism of Hitler or Chamberlain. No, there is imperialism and imperialism, just as there is Bonapartism and Bonapartism.

As a matter of fact I believe that the key to the imperialist policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy is to be found in the historical analogy with Bonapartism. The analogy between the Stalinist regime and the old Bonapartist regime has been used repeatedly by Comrade Trotsky and by our press in general. Given certain limitations, and allowing for the necessary changes, the analogy is both correct and illuminating. Bonaparte came to power to safeguard the social rule of the bourgeoisie by expropriating it politically. The bourgeoisie admitted, in Marx's words, that in order to preserve its social power unhurt its political power must be broken. Yet though Bonaparte came to power to preserve the social rule of the bourgeoisie, Marx pointed out that the third Napoleon represented an economic class, the most numerous in France at that time, the allotment farmer. To be sure, the farmers then as now, were a class only in a limited sense. Like Bonaparte Stalin represents not what is revolutionary but what is conservative in the farmer and in all other groups upon which his regime rests. In order to perpetuate his domination, Bonaparte carried out a policy which Marx characterized as the "imperialism of the farmer class," that is, the policy or hope of opening up new markets at the point of the bayonet, so that with the plunder of a continent the dictator would "return to the farmer class with interest the taxes wrung from them."

Now it may be argued that imperialism is a class policy. In the interests of what class, it may be asked, does Stalin carry out this so-called imperialist policy? Let us assume the legitimacy of this question for a moment. Here, too, we can find illumination in the analogy with the Bonapartist regime. Like the second Bonaparte, Stalin "is forced to raise alongside the actual classes of society, an artificial class, to which the maintenance of his own regime must be a knife and fork question." I do not believe that the Stalinist bureaucracy represents a new class, in any case none comparable with the great historic classes of society like the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. But in the sense in which Marx used the term to describe the Bonapartist bureaucracy, so, too, the Stalinist is an "artificial class." It seeks new resources of labour and of raw materials, markets, sea-ports, gold stores, and the like. It is compelled in life to recognize what it denies in theory, the impossibility of constructing a socialist society — even that caricature

Part 3: the bureaucratic conservatism of the Cannon majority

Iwant to turn now in my concluding remarks to other questions raised in the discussion on the Russian question and related to it. We are accused of many things.

We create constant crises, we are panic-stricken at every turn of events, and so forth. These charges I have already taken up in my presentation, and upon another occasion I will take them up in even greater detail.

Our charge against the majority, however, is of a different nature and we describe it politically as bureaucratic conservatism. There have been numerous manifestations of this in the past and especially in the recent past. We have found that whenever a proposal is made for implementing the party policy or for establishing a new line of policy or action, we are immediately confronted with the accusation that this creates a "crisis". We had that at the last national convention, where a perfectly normal and proper, and, in my opinion, still necessary proposal to establish an organizational department with an organization secretary was met with a barrage of attack. Instead of a calm discussion on the proposal, the convention was thrown into a turmoil in which we were accused of not understanding the A.B.C. of Bolshevik organization. To the extent that the discussion on the proposal was taken out of this "theoretical" realm, it was rejected on the grounds that no qualified comrade was available for the position in question. Our proposal that Comrade X be considered for the post was condemned, and we were condemned along with it because of our alleged lack of appreciation of the importance of trade union work, work in the field, and so forth. To shift that comrade to direct organization work for the party was allegedly light minded and God knows what else. Less than a month after our proposal was rejected, the same comrade suddenly did become available, and this time the proposal was made not by us but by these who had originally opposed it, and it was hurriedly approved and adopted. It suddenly ceased to be a scatterbrained idea; it suddenly ceased to be the occasion for creating a crisis.

When the war broke out, we confronted a similar inertia. In this case, too, our proposals for immediate action to prepare the party for its tasks were answered with the assurances that there is nothing new, that we had always foretold the war, that we should not be panicky because it broke out, and more of the same. Yet although this was the position of the majority of the Political Committee, I found during my tour that the reaction of the minority to the war [one line of text is missing] crisis, which was described as panic-mongering, was nevertheless the spontaneous reaction of all the non-resident National Committee members with whom I came in contact.

Again, more recently on the question of the Russian invasion of Poland. The record establishes the fact that the majority was not only not prepared to give an answer to the new problems but denied that such an answer was required. And when that which was qualified by the P.C. as a concrete answer was finally written, it proved to be more of an evasion than an answer. And even this article, which appeared in the *Appeal* over the signature of Comrade Cannon, was and could be only a personal opinion of its author for the simple reason that the motion of the Political Committee on the subject, as I quoted it to you before, was so general as to admit of a variety of purely individual interpretations. The Political Committee simply did not show a serious attitude towards the problem.

At the plenum the majority presented for a vote the document of Comrade Trotsky which had arrived only a few hours earlier. There could not have been an opportunity for any comrade to reflect on this document. Some of them had not even had a chance to read it. Moreover, it was physically impossible for anybody to have read it in full for the simple reason that one page of the manuscript was accidentally lost in transit. Nevertheless, read or unread, studied or unstudied, complete or incomplete, the document was presented for a vote and finally adopted by the majority on the grounds, as comrade expressed it, of faith in the cor-

Cannon was the founder of US Trotskyism. James Cannon (center) with Max Eastman (left), and Bill Haywood

of socialism represented by the present regime — in one country. As a bureaucracy, increasingly separated from the masses because increasingly threatened by them it is interested in a growing national income only for its own sake. Only in order to enhance its privileges and power — economic, social and political. But its own existence, its own rule, constitutes the greatest brake on the development of the productive forces and consequently on the national income. Hence, its growing urge to expand and to resolve its crisis abroad. And where the earlier Bolsheviks sought to resolve the crisis abroad in a socialist internationalist sense, by spreading the revolution, by raising the spirit of the class struggle abroad, the Stalinist regime seeks to resolve its domestic crisis by a policy which we cannot characterize as anything but imperialist. It is substantially on the basis of this analysis alone that we can consistently oppose what Trotsky calls "new seizures of territories by the Kremlin." It is on the basis of such an analysis that we are able to tell the masses or their vanguard what to do both before and after the Stalinist invasions.

And what policy shall we advance for the Russian masses? There, too, I do not believe we advance very far by the simple reiteration of the formula of unconditional defence. I would say to the Russian worker or soldier: The Stalinist bureaucracy is hurting Russia. It is discrediting the revolution in the Soviet Union throughout the working class of the world, which it is driving into the arms of the imperialist bourgeoisie. It is using you as tools of imperialism. The task that you are performing now under Stalin's command is an ignominious and reactionary one. Unite with the Ukrainian workers and peasants in the territory you have been sent to conquer and jointly overturn the Stalin regime in order to establish a genuine Soviet power. And I would say this to them tomorrow in the case of an invasion of Finland or India.

But I am now asked by Goldman and Cannon: You give no answer in your document to what should be our policy towards the defence of property nationalized by Stalin after the invasion. Is it progressive or reactionary? I cannot characterize this question, considering who are its authors, as anything but impudence. The majority refused to give an answer to *any* concrete question. We at least tried to give an answer to some of the concrete questions. However, in so far as the question has an independent merit of its own, it presents no difficulties for us. Naturally nationalization of property is progressive as against private property, just as the freeing of the serfs by Alexander III was progressive as against the enslavement of the serfs. I would resist any attempt to reduce emancipated peasants to serfdom again. And it goes without saying that I would defend nationalised property. But I must continue to emphasise that the questions of today are not answered or successfully evaded by necessarily hypothetical questions about tomorrow. However important the latter undeniably are, they do not eliminate the urgency of today's problems and the problem of a Hitler attack against the Ukraine was and is the question of tomorrow.

The question of Stalin's invasion of Poland and of the Baltic countries is the question of today, and that is the one we must answer first and that is the one the majority failed and still refuses to answer.

I find very interesting and important the formulation in Comrade Trotsky's latest document that we subordinate the overthrow of Stalin to the defence of nationalized property and planned economy, and we subordinate the defence of planned economy and nationalized property to the interests of the world revolution. I should like to ask a question about that formula. What is meant in it by "subordinate," especially in the phrase dealing with the subordination of the defence of the Soviet Union, that is, of nationalized property, to the interests of the world socialist revolution? Now my understanding of our position in the past was that we vehemently deny any possible conflict between the two. The defence of Russia was always and unalterably in the interests of the world revolution, and especially against the Stalinists we maintained that the world revolution was the best way to defend the Soviet Union. But I never understood our position in the past to mean that we *subordinate* the one to the other. If I understand English, the term implies either that there is a conflict between the two or the possibility of such a conflict. If there is a possibility of such a conflict, and I believe there is (it has already been shown in life), that indicates again that we cannot continue maintaining the slogan of unconditional defence of the Soviet Union. By that slogan in the past we meant nothing more than this, that we place no conditions to our defence of the Soviet Union, that is, we do not say we will defend the Soviet Union on the condition that the Stalin regime is first removed. If I understand the meaning of Comrade Trotsky's new formula, it is this: we defend the Soviet Union *on the condition that it is to the interests of the world socialist revolution*; that it does not conflict with those interests; and that where it does conflict with those interests, the latter remain primary and decisive, and the defence of the Soviet Union is secondary and subordinate.

I should be very much interested in having the comrades of the majority give me concrete examples of conditions under which they would subordinate the defence of the Soviet Union to the interests of the world revolution. Give me one or two, and by an example I do not mean the case of, let's say, a political revolution of the workers and peasants in Russia against the Stalin regime. How can that be interpreted as subordinating the defence of nationalized property to the interests of the world revolution? We have said in the past at least that the political revolution against the Stalin bureaucracy is not a blow against its economic foundations but that it is the best way, and, in fact, the only really sound and fundamental way in which to defend these economic foundations. The two concepts in that case are not in conflict. There cannot be in that case any question of subordinating the one to the other. The interests of both are identical.

Until concrete examples are given by the majority, and until the other questions I have raised are answered, and answered objectively and convincingly, I continue to contend that our slogan of unconditional defence of the Soviet Union has been proved by events, by reality, to be false and misleading, to be harmful, and that therefore it must be abandoned by our party. We must adopt in its place a slogan which is clear, which is defensible, and which makes possible a correct policy in harmony with our revolutionary internationalist position.

rectness of Comrade Trotsky's position.

Faith is a very good thing, and a prompt support of Comrade Trotsky's position on various questions has justified itself on more than one occasion in the past. But faith is no substitute for arriving seriously at a thought-out position. This was all the more so the case with this document. Even a hasty reading of it must convince any serious person, as it convinced me, that it is one of the most audacious and breathtaking documents in Marxian literature. In it Comrade Trotsky deals not only with these questions which we have long been familiar with and on which we have had a traditional and thoroughly discussed position, and also with a number of matters and viewpoints which I contend are new to our movement. The question of the inevitability of socialism is not, in my opinion, dealt with in this document as we have dealt with it in the past. In any case, it raises the question from a new angle. Similarly with the question of the nature of our epoch which we have hitherto characterized as an epoch of war and revolution. Similarly with the point raised in the document about the possibility of a new type of state which is neither bourgeois nor proletarian. These are questions which I do not want to deal with here and now but which are, to my view, so obviously a matter for deep reflection and discussion as to exclude so light minded a treatment as is represented by a motion to adopt the document a few hours after it has been given to the members of a party plenum.

When Trotsky raised the slogan of a united independent Soviet Ukraine a few months ago and proposed to submit it to an international discussion, not the slightest objection was raised. When we proposed to open up a discussion on the Polish invasion and problems related to it, the majority raised the most vehement objections. We are not a debating club, they said. The question was settled fundamentally at our last convention, and the convention before, and twenty two years ago. Up to the plenum even our proposal for a theoretical discussion of the questions in the pages of the *New International* was rejected. Discussion had become, in Cannon's words, a luxury that the party could not afford. I point to the fact that even at

the Tenth Congress of the Russian Party held under the threat of the guns of rebelling Kronstadt and of peasant uprisings throughout the country which menaced the very existence of the Soviet Republic, the same delegates who condemned the views of the Workers' Opposition as incompatible with party membership, and which prohibited the formation of factions, nevertheless adopted at the same time a resolution which provided amply for the continuation of the discussion on a theoretical plane in special discussion bulletins of the party and at special meetings. Discussion was not a luxury that could not be afforded by the Russian party, even under these acutely dangerous circumstances. For our party we were told it was a luxury we couldn't afford. And in addition, these comrades who insisted on discussion were sneeringly and demagogically dubbed "independent thinkers" who believe that they are wiser than Trotsky.

The political passivity of the party leadership has as its counterpart an organizational rigidity and a supersensitivity and brusqueness towards all critics, and regardless of the merit of the criticism. This is especially and notoriously the case in its attitude towards the youth. This fact has been observed and commented upon more than once and I will not elaborate on it here except to say that the truth about it cannot and will not be eliminated by repeating the commonplace formula that "we must not flatter the youth".

At the last national convention Cannon and his supporters demanded in their slate an organizational majority on the new national committee. On what political grounds? At the plenum at least the claim was presumably based upon the political differences over the Russian question. What was the political basis for this organizational majority at the convention? There simply wasn't any. At the preceding convention in Chicago two and a half years ago, a more or less united leadership was established. Yet Comrade Cannon could come to the convention in New York and declare that he would not assume responsibility for one single member on the Political Committee. We insisted at the convention, as you know, upon including in the new National Committee a number of young comrades.

The slate presented by Cannon's friends completely excluded the youth except for the one direct representative to which they are constitutionally entitled. The convention gave the party leadership what was tantamount to a mandate on this point by voting into the N.C. a number of youth comrades whom we proposed.

After the convention a Resident Political Committee was established by the majority, a committee that was presumably satisfactory to this majority. That was only three months ago. At the last plenum, this committee was drastically reorganized and so reorganized that we refused to take any responsibility for its recasting. The national labour secretary of the party was eliminated from the committee. All the youth comrades elected at the convention were dropped from it, including Comrade Gould and Comrade Erber, as well as Comrade George Breitman. That is, the committee was reorganized on a purely factional basis. I deny that this had an established political basis. I deny that it was reorganized on the basis of positions taken on the Russian Question. I deny that it was reorganized in order that the fundamental position on the Russian question, about which the majority speaks, might prevail in the party leadership. If that was the only ground for the reorganization, why were not comrades like Bern and Erber and others who voted for the original Cannon motion on the Russian question invited to the caucus meeting that was openly convened at the plenum for purpose of deciding on the reorganization? I do not agree with the steps taken for a single minute.

I do not agree either with the conception of leadership growing among the majority and even openly advocated by many of them, at least in informal conversation. I do not agree that any one man must under all circumstances be guaranteed the leadership of the party or the control of that leadership. I do not agree that if you approve that concept you will have a democratic regime in the party. I want a genuinely collective leadership, one that operates, discusses, and decides collectively. And a leader cult which we have had flagrantly expressed by a number of responsible members of the Political Committee is a bad substitute for a collective leadership.

I freely admit that these questions were not brought up, at least not brought up fully, at the July convention. In the first place, the pre-convention meeting of the NC plenum decided against discussing such questions at the convention. The majority argued that "the membership can't settle these questions... They must first be settled by the leadership." There is a kernel of truth in this and that is another reason why I did not bring the matter before the convention in all its amplitude. It has not been my custom because I do not believe it is correct to precipitate every dispute and disagreement among the leadership into the ranks of the party. I am not a professional "rank and file" demagogue who rushes into a membership discussion on the slightest provocation or no provocation at all, and it was with the intention of exhausting the last and remotest possibility of resolving these problems among the leading comrades themselves that I hesitated to bring them before the convention. Yet the situation demanded that the convention be given an opportunity of exercising an influence and pressure on the leadership, if only on a limited scale. That is probably the reason why there was a certain confusion and bewilderment during one part of the July convention. And while I am willing to take my share of the responsibility for it, I cannot take it all or even the major portion of it because it does not belong on my shoulders.

I believe also that it is imperative to change that alien spirit of arrogance and contempt for the membership which is manifested by responsible representatives of the party leadership in organizational and literary posts, which rightly irritates and angers the comrades but which is considered by those responsible for it as a good characteristic of "hard Bolsheviks." Repeated manifestations of this ugly spirit continue to go unrebuked, particularly by these whose main responsibility is to rebuke and eliminate them.

These phenomena and many others that could be referred to create a distinctly unhealthy and harmful situation in the party. The indispensable and preliminary condition for restoring a healthy state in the party is a frank, sober, calm and objective discussion, not envenomed by personal and factional recriminations and insinuations. This alone can create that free atmosphere in the party which will permit an intelligent and fruitful discussion of the multiplicity of questions now raised again so acutely by the war and the new stage of degeneration of Stalinism. Only that way can we arrive at decisions; adopt policies which will be a firm and lucid guide to our party and, through it, to the working class. In that sense and in that spirit, as a contribution to that desirable end, we submit our resolution to the discussion of the party.

Max Shachtman

Trotsky and his critics

In a 1963 article, Shachtman looked back on the 1939-40 split

What distinguished Trotsky from all other opponents of the Stalinist regime was his theory that it represented a bureaucratically-degenerated workers' state.

Why was it still a workers' state, even after the Opposition, representing the revolutionary proletariat, had in the late twenties been driven out of the ruling party and into prison and exile, even after the consolidation of an exclusive bureaucratic monopoly in the party and state? Because, first, there was still the possibility of defeating the bureaucracy by means of a vigorous but peaceful reform of the party. And, second, the principal means of production were still nationalised in the hands of the state, and not yet converted into private capitalist property. While the bureaucracy had betrayed the principles of the revolution, it had not yet surrendered this vital material achievement — nationalised property — to bourgeois counter-revolution. The latter was moving rapidly forward under the regime of the bureaucracy, but it had not yet triumphed. In no circumstances should it be allowed to triumph. Therefore, whenever and wherever there was an attack by bourgeois forces on the Stalinist regime, which for all its degeneration remained a workers' state, it was the duty of the Trotskyists and workers throughout the world to stand up for the *unconditional defence of the Soviet Union*.

In sum: the Stalinist bureaucracy was paving the way for a counter-revolution in Russia. A timely victory of the Opposition would restore the state to Soviet democracy and internationalism. The vacillating, parasitic bureaucracy was not a serious alternative. The alternative was the victory of the counter-revolution. Its social content was bound to be the restoration of private property following the destruction of nationalised property. Proletariat and bourgeoisie were the only two basic and decisive classes. The issue would be joined and determined in open conflict between them; and that conflict was imminent. Up to that moment, even the degenerated Stalinist state must be defended against bourgeois attack.

Banished from the territory of the Soviet Union by political decree at the end of 1928 Trotsky only intensified his war upon the Stalinists upon the basis of this doctrine, analysis and programme. He was now able for the first time to assemble and lead an international communist Opposition based entirely on his theory. But he soon found that he had to defend his theory almost as often and as vehemently from his partisans as from his enemies. From the time of his banishment until his tragic death, there was hardly a year in the existence of the Trotskyist movement abroad or of its counterpart inside Russia (so long as it retained any sort of coherent and articulate form) that did not see a crisis that rent its ranks in disputes over Trotsky's views of the Russian question. There was hardly a year of his last exile when Trotsky did not find himself obliged, by new developments or by reconsideration, to modify his theory, sometimes drastically, while trying to preserve its essentials. The last year of his life saw another crisis, occurring at the outbreak of the world war. His position on Russia was again challenged by his followers. In this last controversy he allowed for an amendment to his conceptions so far-reaching in its implications as to shatter the very basis of his theory, in particular the theory of his opposition to Stalinism.

Even before Trotsky was banished to Turkey, the process of disintegration of the Russian Opposition had begun and it continued at an accelerated pace.

The Democratic Centralists — residue of a faction in the controversies of the early twenties which had joined with Trotsky and Zinoviev in the United Opposition Bloc of 1926 — were the first to part with their allies. Led by old Bolshevik militants like

Sapronov and Vladimir Smirnov, they took the view that the Thermidorian reaction — the counter-revolution had already triumphed in Russia and that the workers' state was at an end. Relatively, this was a minor loss; graver ones soon followed.

In the middle of 1928, with all the Oppositionists already expelled, it became evident that a new struggle was developing among the anti-Trotskyist leaders, precipitated by a crisis in grain collections. Now the fight was between Stalin's followers and those led by Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky. It was the prelude to what was to be called the Great Change or "Russia's Second Revolution" — the programme of massive industrialisation and forced collectivisation which was to be the decisive feature of Russia's development for the next three decades.

Trotsky, then in Asian exile, treated Stalin's turn with the greatest scepticism and reserve. Indeed, he sounded the alarm against the impending counter-revolution more vigorously than ever. Stalin, he wrote repeatedly in those days and for a long time afterward, had not adopted and could not adopt a left course but only a "left zig-zag". He represented only the bureaucratic apparatus vacillating under the pressure of real and effective classes. Tomorrow, "the right tail" would come crashing down on his head, because it represented the powerful restorationist and proprietor classes; and to them Stalin would capitulate.

In a famous 1928 article, which was one of the pretexts for his expulsion from Russia, Trotsky insisted that the country was facing a "dual power" situation, as it did in 1917 just before the Bolshevik victory, when Kerensky represented the state power of the bourgeoisie and the Soviets were the incipient socialist power. Only, this time, the "film of October is unwinding in reverse" — that is, it was not the bourgeois element of the dual power that was about to be overturned by the socialist element, but exactly the other way around. Voroshilov was even mentioned as the possible "man on horseback" — a counter-revolutionary Bonaparte.

As late as April 1931, even though the right wing had already been crushed by Stalin, Trotsky still spoke of the "dual power" in Russia and declared that the further degeneration of the party machine — Stalin's faction — "undoubtedly increases the chances of the Bonapartist form" of the overturn of the Soviet state, that is, "The form of the naked sabre which is raised in the name of bourgeois property." (To my knowledge, he never again referred to the "dual power" in Stalinist Russia, or to the outcome of the contest between the two classes it was said to represent.)

This analysis was entirely in keeping with Trotsky's idea of expected developments, but it was almost equally out of keeping with the political and social reality. It could not and did not serve to retard the decline of the Opposition, upon which the Stalinist apparatus was in any case exerting an almost unbearable pressure. As it became clear that Stalin's course was not a "zig-zag" but a sustained and resolute line, that the Bukharin faction was irretrievably defeated; that the propertied, semi-propertied and potentially-propertied people in the country were being economically (and even physically) annihilated; that a restorationist bourgeoisie was not within miles of a struggle for power (then or later) — the Zinovievist and then the Trotskyist Opposition collapsed. First, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their friends capitulated to the regime. Then of the Trotskyists, came the capitulation of Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smilga. Then (this was an especially hard personal blow to Trotsky) Rakovsky; then dozens upon dozens and finally hundreds of others. A tiny, dwindling minority remained steadfast, and none of these survived the blood purges of the Moscow Trials period — nor indeed did the capitulators.

In virtually every case — if we set aside exhaustion, apparatus pressure and the like — the political reason given was at bottom the same: the perspective of a rising bourgeois counter-revolution had proved to be

false. If anything, Stalin was smashing the economic and political foundations of the bourgeois elements more ruthlessly than the Opposition had ever proposed to do. And his economic policy was not a momentary tactic but a durable line by which he was expanding and consolidating the basis of socialism. In this they had to work along with him.

This reasoning was not without its defects. It is true that even the soundest theoretical and political arguments would have been of little avail in holding together the Opposition in the extraordinary circumstances. It is true, too, that Trotsky's analysis, criticism, and predictions about the Stalinist course in a dozen vital fields of domestic and foreign policy were matchless and were confirmed by events.

But in the basic theory that the bourgeois counter-revolution and the restoration of capitalism were on the order of the day in Russia, that the destruction of the economic and political power of the workers under Stalin was bound to bring about the counter-revolution and this one alone, that the Stalinist bureaucracy could not effectively resist it but would only manure the soil from which it would surely arise — this theory found no confirmation at all.

Yet Trotsky reiterated the analysis and forecast in a dozen different ways in all his writings during the critical decade of the thirties, emphatically and without reservation. From a mind so luminous and penetrating, it is almost incomprehensible, unless we remember that it was a fixed point in Trotsky's doctrine: a workers' state can be destroyed and replaced only by a bourgeois state based on private property.

Outside Russia, the Trotskyist movement enjoyed far greater continuity and coherence, if only because it was free of the ruthless police pressures of the Kremlin.

Trotsky never had to cope among his foreign supporters with the problem of capitulation to Stalinism or conciliation. Except for a few trivial individual cases, no such tendencies manifested themselves. But he was not free from the necessity of defending his views continually from doubts and challenges in his own ranks. It may be said that even those who accepted his theory, including the changes he introduced into it from time to time, did not always agree with the passionate enthusiasm and conviction they shared for his trenchant attacks upon the Stalinist regime and its policies. But Trotsky's prestige and authority in his movement were probably unequalled by the leader of any other branch of the radical movement. For most of his followers this sufficed to turn the balance against doubt, but not for all.

Barely settled in his Turkish exile, Trotsky was forced into a sharp struggle with a large part, if not the majority, of his adherents in Europe. In the Russo-Chinese conflict of 1929 over the Chinese Eastern Railway, in which Moscow held important rights inherited from Tsarist times, a military clash appeared possible. This raised the question, among the Trotskyists, of the validity of the policy of "unconditional defence of the Soviet Union in wartime". Many of them held that Moscow was displaying an imperialist attitude towards China and the revolutionists should not support it. Trotsky attacked them furiously. Russia was to be defended in spite of Stalin because it was still a workers' state.

The ensuing debate ended in the first big split in the Trotskyist movement. Most of the Germans followed their chief, Hugo Urbahns, in separating from Trotsky. In France, most of the communist-syndicalists, around Fernand Loriot and Pierre Monatte, founders of the French (Communist Party and partisans of Trotsky as early as 1924, broke with him in the dispute. So did many who were in the Trotskyist group led by Maurice and Madeleine Paz. The split extended to Belgium, where Trotsky lost the allegiance of the group around Van Overstaeten, the former head of the Communist Party and then of the Trotskyist opposition,

This split was a stiff blow, But under Trotsky's tire-

Chronology

October 1917: Russian workers take power.

November 1917 to summer 1921: The Russian workers' state fights for its life in civil war against counter-revolutionaries, peasant revolts, and 14 foreign armies.

1923 to 1927: Trotsky leads the Left Opposition against the rising Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotskyists and dissidents purged from many Communist Parties outside Russia.

December 1927: Defeat of the Left Opposition in Russia. Trotsky's allies Zinoviev and Kamenev capitulate immediately; Trotskyists sent to exile in remote parts of the USSR.

January 1928 to early 1930: Stalin launches (waveringly at first) a new economic course, to forced collectivisation and forced-march industrialisation; and crushes all life in the trade unions and the Bolshevik party.

January 1929: Trotsky deported from USSR. Until his death in 1940, Trotsky will be evicted from one country after another.

April 1930: First international conference of the Trotskyist movement (seen at first as an international grouping of expelled factions of Communist Parties).

1933: After the German Communist Party's collapse in the face of Hitler's seizure of power, and the failure of the Communist Parties to react, the Trotskyists turn to building a new International and advocating a new workers' ("political") revolution in the USSR.

1934-8: Great Terror in the USSR. All known Trotskyists, and most surviving Bolsheviks, are wiped out by Stalinist repression.

August 1939: Hitler and Stalin sign military pact, followed by almost simultaneous invasions of Poland by Hitler (seizing the west) and Stalin (seizing the east). Debate among Trotskyists about how to react.

November 1939: Stalin invades Finland. Meets fierce resistance. The debate among the Trotskyists is intensified by dispute how to react to this new invasion.

April 1940: The US Trotskyist movement, which as the Nazis sweep across Europe soon will become almost the only sizeable Trotskyist movement in the world able to operate openly, splits after the dispute on Finland and Poland. James P Cannon leads one faction, Max Shachtman another. Trotsky backs Cannon.

August 1940: Stalinist agent murders Trotsky.

1941: The majority of Shachtman's grouping, the Workers' Party, moves to seeing the USSR as a "bureaucratic collectivist" state rather than a "degenerated workers' state".

1943-5: With USSR's victory at Stalingrad and advance into eastern and central Europe, differences between the "orthodox" Trotskyists (Cannon) and the heterodox (Shachtman) sharpen.

1946-7: Temporary rapprochement between the two Trotskyist currents, as the Cannon group takes a sharper anti-Stalinist line under pressure from Trotsky's widow Natalia Sedova. But reunification talks fail.

From 1948: after the outbreak of open conflict between Yugoslav Stalinism (Tito) and Stalin, the "orthodox" Trotskyists start hailing Stalinist states outside USSR as "deformed workers' states", deficient in democracy but still expressions of an advancing "world revolution".

Late 1953: The "orthodox" Trotskyists split, as a section of them, led by Cannon, recoil and strive for a sharper anti-Stalinist line.

less hammering, the oppositional groups in Europe and the Americas, though they never became a political force, were re-united around his views. The union did not endure. It was breached, at first in a minor way, during the period of the Moscow Trials and the Spanish Civil War. Up to that time, Trotsky had defended his theory that Russia was still a workers' state on the ground that the workers retained the possibility of turning the political helm in Russia and bringing the bureaucracy under their control, without resorting to a revolution, by means of an internal reform of the ruling party. By 1936 he could no longer maintain this view and abandoned it.

The bureaucracy had now, he argued, attained total political power. Indeed, in its *political* rule, it did not differ from the fascist bureaucracy in Germany. In fundamental distinction from the latter however, it rested upon different social foundations, defined as nationalised property, which the Stalinist bureaucracy preserved "in its own way", just as the Nazi bureaucracy preserved private property in its way. The Russian workers had been completely expropriated of all political rights and power. Because the "way" in which the bureaucracy defended nationalised property was such as to bring closer the return of capitalism, the bureaucracy had to be removed from political dominance, which had reached such a totalitarian level that it could not be corrected by peaceful reforms. The bureaucracy could be overturned only by a revolution; but this revolution would not be a social revolution as it would not alter the prevailing property forms. It would be a "political revolution".

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the dimensions of the hole this thesis created in the wall of Trotsky's basic theory. Here it must suffice to refer to two reactions in the ranks of the Trotskyists. The vast majority in Europe and America accepted it out of hand, so to speak, with little reflection on its significance. Few recalled that only a little earlier Trotsky, both in exposition and in polemic, had insisted that Stalinist Russia was a workers' state precisely because, while the bourgeoisie need a revolution against the regime in its interests, the working class could realise its interests by means of peaceful reform.

The other reaction was shown by those Trotskyists, a very small and ineffectual minority, who rejected Trotsky's thesis. One of them was the young Frenchman Yvan Craipeau. In Russia, he wrote, the loss of all political power by the working class meant that it no longer ruled in any social sense, that Russia was no longer a workers' state, and that the bureaucracy had become a new exploiting and ruling class. Furthermore, this new class, by its military alliance with French imperialism (in the form of the Stalin-laval Pact), and by its role in the Spanish Civil War (where the Stalinists opposed all steps towards a socialist revolution and proclaimed themselves defenders of private property) ruled out, for revolutionists, the policy of defence of Stalinist Russia in a war.

The other was an American Trotskyist leader, James Burnham, a somewhat unorthodox Marxist who was later to become more widely known in a different capacity. Leaning heavily on Trotsky's contention that the Russian working class had lost all trace of political power, Burnham argued that, though Russia was no longer a workers' state, it was not yet a bourgeois state. The bureaucracy was playing a reactionary role because it had "definitely entered the road of the destruction of the planned and nationalised economy." It expressed only the interests of those social groups that were "now in the process of transformation into a new bourgeois ruling class. However, since nationalised property still existed, the defence of Russia in war was the "imperative and inescapable duty" of the proletariat. This was in 1937. It did not even foreshadow the altogether different position Burnham was to take later. Trotsky's response was moderate, for clearly Burnham did not differ too widely from his own view.

One element in Trotsky's reply is worth recalling, however, for the special light it throws on a later development. Although in a certain sense Hitler and Stalin both served the bourgeoisie, "between the functions of Stalin and Hitler there is a difference. Hitler defends the bourgeois forms of property. Stalin adapts the interests of the bureaucracy to the proletarian forms of property. The same Stalin in Spain, that is, on the soil of a bourgeois regime, executes the function of Hitler." It was thus shown again, concluded Trotsky, that the bureaucracy was not an independent class "but the tool of classes" — a tool (a bad one) of the workers in Russia where state property prevailed, and a tool of the bourgeoisie outside Russia where private property existed.

The 1937 dispute was allowed to lapse. Neither Craipeau nor Burnham pressed his views further, and

Trotsky seemed content to let it go at that. The new doctrine of the political revolution became official, and in 1938 Trotsky added an amendment that the revolution which was to restore the democracy of the Soviets would exclude the bureaucracy from participating in them.

Two years later the war broke out, and the conflict over the "Russian question" flared up more intensely than ever before. It proved to be the most bitter and most wracking of the internecine struggles of the Trotskyist movement, and the last one in which Trotsky was able to participate,

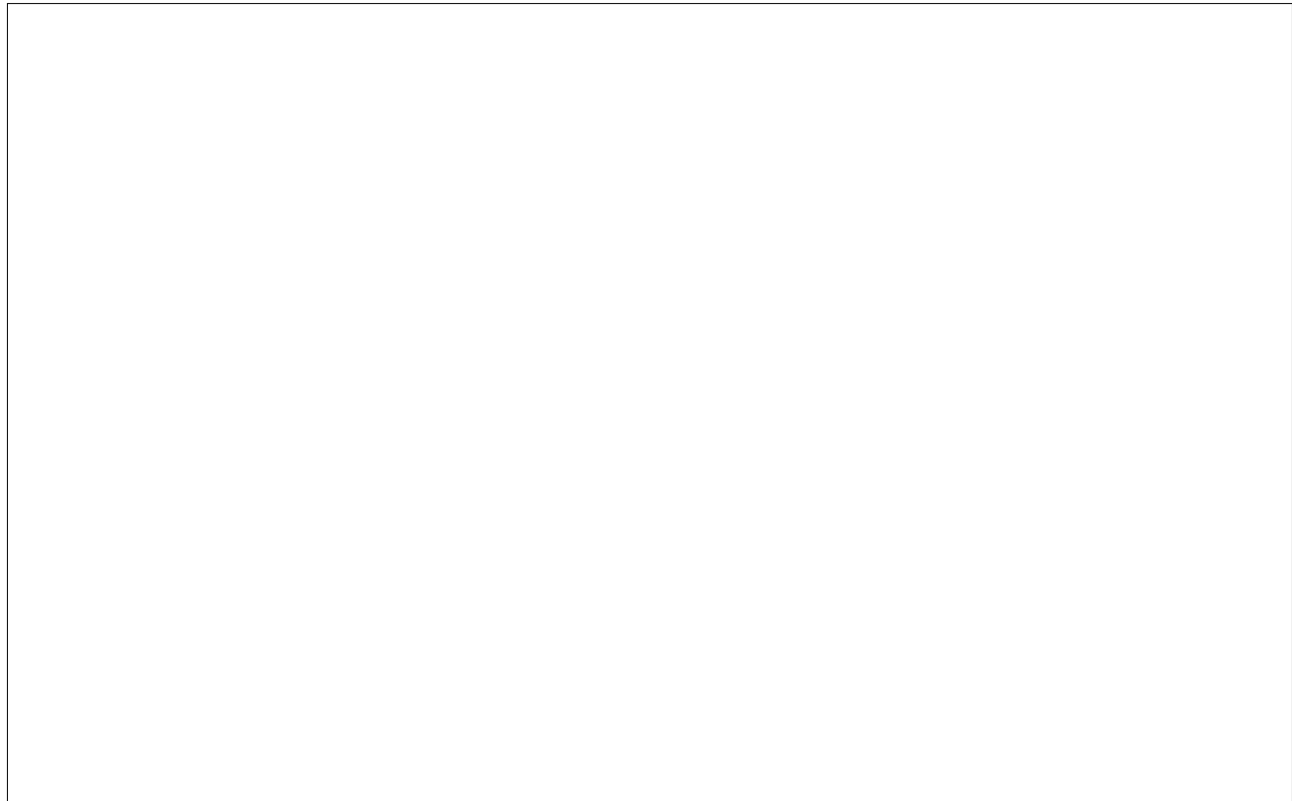
The theory of "unconditional defence" of the "workers' state" was given its crucial — indeed, its only concrete — political test with the firing of the first gun. The armies of Hitler and Stalin joined forces to conquer and subject Eastern Europe and to divide the spoils of victory. The annexation of the Baltic lands and parts of Poland and Finland was undoubtedly required for the defence of Stalinist Russia in much the same way as the subjugation of Korea and Manchuria were required by Imperial Japan. But what had such a course in common with socialist politics, asked a minority of the American Trotskyist leadership. Their answer to this question was: nothing! Russia was now an integral part of an imperialist war, allied with a reactionary imperialist power, and pursuing with its ally an imperialist policy of conquest and oppression. Russia's invasion of Poland and Finland must be condemned, and the slogan of defence of Russia discarded. They did not advocate support of the western coalition, which they characterised similarly as imperialist. The break with Trotsky's rational policy was unmistakable and portentous.

The minority leaders included Martin Abern and Max Shachtman, two of the founders of American communism, and two of the three communist leaders who launched the Trotskyist movement in the United States in 1928. Shachtman founded the theoretical journal of the American Trotskyists and edited Trotsky's works in English. The third, James Burnham, although a later adherent to Trotskyism, was widely respected in its ranks. The three could not easily be dismissed as casual figures. The American organisation was by far the most stable, steadfast, and important branch of the international Trotskyist movement, and Trotsky could not let it depart from his position by default or negligible interventions. From Mexico, he plunged into the debate.

Although differing on the sociological question, the "class character of the Russian state" (Abern believed that it was still a degenerated workers' state, Burnham had abandoned that view in 1937, and Shachtman was uncertain), they agreed not to debate, the three were at one about the political question (unconditional defence). It was perfectly obvious that analysis of the theoretical question was in itself far from being decisive in determining policy towards the war.

Trotsky ignored the fact that it had only recently been just as obvious to him, and after starting out with a relatively mild article against the view of the minority, he launched a large-scale attack upon it. Drawing on his exceptional intellectual resources, which the minority could not match, and using his unrivalled gift for irony, he blanketed his opponents under a mounting drumfire of polemic. They stood firmly by their position even though Trotsky exploited its every weakness and gap, reassured by their conviction that he had not answered what was sound and rational in their rejection of "defencism".

A few weeks later, Trotsky expanded the range of his assault. He confronted the minority with questions ranging from the class nature of Russia to the logic of Aristotle and Hegel; from dialectical materialism down to the most trivial of internal organisational matters. He called into question the revolutionary probity of the minority leaders, their personal characteristics, and their records in the movement. They were denounced as a "petty-bourgeois opposition" suffering from "gangrene". The political question, the only one posed by the minority, was all but lost in this universalised turbulence. With this kind of intervention from Trotsky, his supporters retained control of the American organisation at the end of the dispute, but only by a narrow margin; the minority won the decisive majority of the young Trotskyists and almost half of the party membership as well. After the 1940 convention, the minority were expelled en bloc without trial, and the split was irrevocable. Abern, Shachtman, and their friends continued in a new organisation; Burnham, deeply shaken and repelled by the fight Trotsky had conducted, quit the movement entirely with a disavowal of Marxism in general, and soon moved to the position presented a year later in his *The*



Trotsky and Lenin in 1919

Managerial Revolution.

Trotsky's victory was as complete as it was dubious. From the vigour and intensity of his participation in the dispute, nobody could have imagined that he was at the same time in such despair about his personal condition that he was seriously contemplating taking his own life. Of this melancholy prospect there was not the slightest sign in his polemical writings.

Yet, oddly enough, it was neither the direct targets of these writings — his party opposition — nor the arguments levelled against them that were the most important aspect of the development of Trotsky's theory in this last period of his life. From this standpoint, the fight against his own opposition was of decidedly secondary, at most of auxiliary significance. Primary importance belongs instead to Trotsky's critical observations on a theory put forward by a non-participant in the dispute. This was a former Italian communist and ex-Trotskyist who, on the eve of the war, published a book in French, *La Bureaucratisation du Monde*, under the name of Bruno R — Bruno Rizzi.

Rizzi rejected Trotsky's theory of the "degenerated workers' state" and held that a new revolution was taking place throughout the world. It had brought, or was bringing, to power a new ruling class in a new social order, "bureaucratic collectivism". It was neither capitalist nor socialist in any significant sense. The working class is reduced to totalitarian slavery, exploited collectively by the new bureaucracy. The Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia and the fascist bureaucracy are equally representative of the supremacy of this new class and new social order. So too is the New Deal of Roosevelt, even if in a not yet equally advanced form. Thus, Rizzi. Thus also a little later *The Managerial Revolution*, in which Burnham adopted Rizzi's thesis virtually *in toto* and with the addition of some extravagant predictions.

Up to the appearance of Rizzi's work, Trotsky defended his theory from critics in or around his movement (except in the case of Craipeau) who held that the Russian state stood above the contending classes, or that it had become a bourgeois state, usually called "state capitalism". Hugo Urbahns, for example, put this label upon Stalinist Russia as well as upon fascist Italy and Germany. In Marxian terms and in terms of social realities this label was an absurdity. Trotsky had little difficulty in ridiculing and riddling this point of view, and more generally, in rejecting the identification of the Stalinist and Hitlerian social regimes despite the similarities of their political rule. Rudolph Hilferding, the eminent Austro-German socialist theoretician and economist, who in 1940 linked fascism and Stalinism in the same social category of "totalitarian state economies", likewise gave short shrift to the theory of "state capitalism".

A social order in which there is no capitalist class, no capitalist private property, no capitalist profit, no production of commodities for the market, no working class more or less free to sell its labour power on the open market — can be described as capitalist, no matter how modified by adjectives, only by arbitrary and meaningless definition. In any case, there was no capi-

talist anywhere in the world who would accept such a definition.

In Rizzi's case Trotsky had a different problem. He did not hesitate to acknowledge the merits of Rizzi's work, or to criticise what he called its mistakes. But in acknowledgement and criticism he managed to subvert the foundations of his own theory:

"Bruno R in any case has the merit of seeking to transfer the question from the charmed circle of terminological copybook exercises to the plane of major historical generalisations. This makes it all the easier to disclose his mistake [he wrote on 25 September 1939]. Bruno R has caught on to the fact that the tendencies of collectivisation [operating in all modern economy, in Russia, Germany or the United States] assume, as a result of the political prostration of the working class, the form of "bureaucratic collectivism". The phenomenon in itself is incontestable. But where are the limits, and what is its historical weight?"

The answers given by Trotsky to these questions were little less than startling in view of the tenacity with which he had till then clung to his own theory of Stalinism and the arguments he had mustered in support of it. Three weeks later (18 October 1939) he wrote:

"Some comrades evidently were surprised that I spoke in my article (*The USSR in the War*) of the system of bureaucratic collectivism" as a theoretical possibility. They discovered in this even a complete revision of Marxism. This is an apparent misunderstanding. The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity has nothing in common with fatalism. Socialism is not realisable 'by itself' but as a result of the struggle of living forces, classes and their parties. The proletariat's decisive advantage in this struggle resides in the fact that it represents historical progress, while the bourgeoisie incarnates reaction and decline. Precisely in this is the source of our conviction in victory. But we have full right to ask ourselves: What character will society take if the forces of reaction conquer?"

"Marxists have formulated an incalculable number of times the alternative: either socialism or return to barbarism. After the Italian 'experience' we repeated thousands of times: either communism or fascism. The real passage to socialism cannot fail to appear incomparably more complicated, more heterogeneous, more contradictory than was foreseen in the general historical scheme. Marx spoke about the dictatorship of the proletariat and its future withering away but said nothing about bureaucratic degeneration of the dictatorship. We have observed and analysed for the first time in experience such a degeneration. Is this revision of Marxism? The march of events has succeeded in demonstrating that the delay of the socialist revolution engenders the indubitable phenomena of barbarism — chronic unemployment, pauperisation of the petty bourgeoisie, fascism, finally wars of extermination which do not open up any new road.

What social and political forms can the new "barbarism" take, if we admit theoretically that mankind should not be able to elevate itself to socialism? We have the possibility of expressing ourselves on this subject more concretely than Marx. Fascism on one hand, degeneration of the Soviet state on the other, outline the social and political forms of neo-barbarism.

An alternative of this kind — socialism or totalitarian servitude — has not only theoretical interest, but also enormous importance in agitation, because in its light the necessity for socialist revolution appears most graphically."

What "some comrades evidently were surprised" at, and not without cause, was the view Trotsky had set down in his article of 25 September 1939. It is worth citing:

"Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy [the Stalinist regime] the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?..."

"The second imperialist war poses the unsolved tasks on a higher historical state. It tests anew not only the stability of the existing regimes but also the ability of the proletariat to replace them. The results of this test will automatically have a decisive significance for our appraisal of the modern epoch as the epoch of proletarian revolution. If contrary to all probabilities the October revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts — then we shall have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copybook label on the I USSR or the Stalinist gang but of re-evaluating the world historical perspective for the new decades if not centuries; have we entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or on the contrary the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?"

"The twofold error of schematicists like Hugo Urbahns and Bruno R consists, first, in that they proclaim this latter regime as having been already finally installed; second, in that they declare it a prolonged transitional state of society between capitalism and socialism. Yet it is absolutely self-evident that if the international proletariat, as a result of the experience of our entire epoch and the current war, proves incapable of becoming the master of society, this would signify the foundering of all hope for socialist revolution, for it is impossible to expect any more favourable conditions for it; in any case no one foresees them now, or is able to characterise them."

With these pronouncements, Trotsky turned a corner in his thinking so abruptly as to bring him into violent collision with the main pillars of the theory of Stalinism he had long and stoutly upheld:

1. The doctrine that Russia was still a workers' state because the bourgeoisie had not yet become the ruling class, was essentially exploded. It is possible for Russia (or other countries) to be ruled by a new exploiting class which is neither proletarian nor bourgeois.

2. The doctrine that the maintenance of nationalised property proved that the Stalinist regime was a workers' state, however degenerated, was similarly exploded. It is possible for nationalised property to be the economic foundation for the rule of a new class.

3. The conception of a new ruling class commanding a society which is neither capitalist nor socialist (a conception not long before derided by Trotsky) was not a revision of Marxism at all. "Marxists have formulated an incalculable number of times the alternative: either socialism or return to barbarism." And this conception does not of itself mean the end of socialism or the fight for it. "An alternative of this kind [has] enormous importance in agitation, because in its light the necessity for socialist revolution appears most graphically."

It is true, to be sure, that Trotsky endeavoured at the same time to reaffirm his old theory. It was no longer so easy. Having insisted that Russia remained a workers' state because the rule of the bourgeoisie had not been restored and nationalised property still prevailed, he now conceded that the workers' state could be utterly destroyed even if the bourgeoisie did not come to power and even if property remained nationalised.

The Russian state, he argued, remained proletarian because the Stalinist bureaucracy had no prospect of retaining control of it ("its inglorious downfall" might be a matter of "a few years or even a few months", he said in 1939, almost a quarter of a century ago), whereas Trotskyists had the perspective that in all probability the October Revolution would "find its continuation" in advanced countries "during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter."

To determine the nature of a social order by appraising the prospects for political success of its upholders and its opponents, is extraordinary procedure for a

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Remember Leon Trotsky!

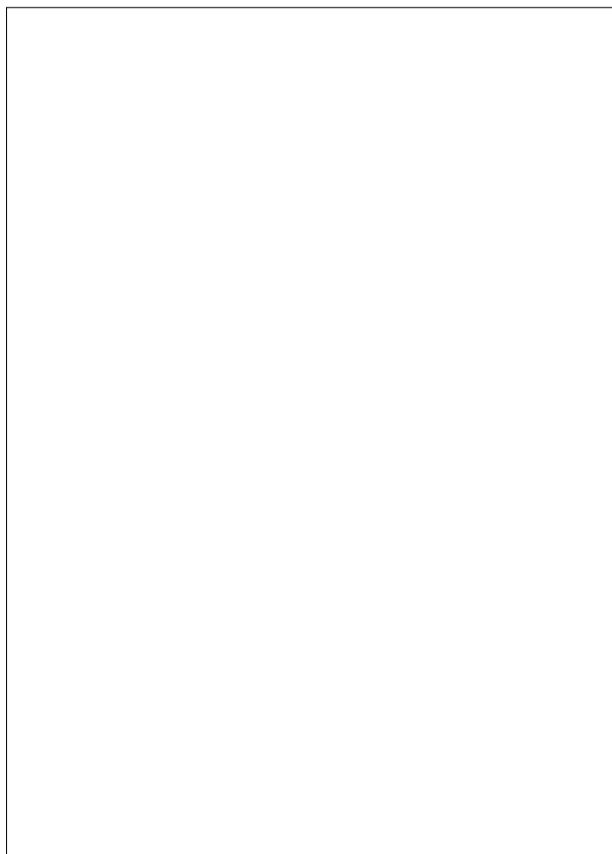
It was in the fight against the Moscow Trials that so many many American radical intellectuals learned to understand the modern communist state and movement. Most of them became friendly to the Trotskyists; a few even joined their ranks.

But even though none of them remained Trotskyists for long, they took this insight with them for the rest of their lives. So did others during this stormy period. Still others gained this insight during the Hitler-Stalin pact. And still others were to require it only after the sanguinary suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, years later.

If there is one man to be singled out as the individual who was the main source of this insight, this understanding, this cleansing of the struggle for democracy and socialism from the corroding blight of totalitarianism, that man is Trotsky. No movement that I know of was ever so dependent on a single leader for its ideas, its guidance, and its inspiration, as was the Trotskyist movement. However that may be judged, it is a fact.

He may have erred in many ways, as indeed he did — in more ways, I believe, than today's Trotskyists might grant. And not everything he said or did has endured the unmerciful test of time. But no matter how severely critics may rate him, objectivity and fairness would compel a recognition of his gifts.

He was the captain of the Bolshevik Revolution. Without any professional training, he was the creator and leader, and often the field commander of the Red Army in the early days. The theory and politics of Marxism was the home in which he was an easy master. He was probably the greatest orator of his time, certainly the greatest in the revolutionary movement. The muscular elegance of his literary gift was not equalled by anyone else in the ranks of the Marxists, whatever their school. The purity and wholeness of his commitment to the socialist idea was unsurpassed and he was as unflagging in adversity, of which he had had



Leon Trotsky

an ample share, as he was unaffected in victory.

Early in the days when the process began that transformed the liberating hopes of the revolution into the reality of the new tyranny, he took his stand against the recession without asking if it was popular or

unpopular to do so, without making sure first of all that victory was guaranteed in advance, without concern for his personal fate.

Against the rise of totalitarianism he planted his feet wide and stubbornly, never giving ground or bending his neck, fighting with open visor and with the weapons of his rich intellectual arsenal.

Even after all his comrades had fallen or conceded to the enemy, even after he was driven from exile to exile on three continents he did not waver in his chosen battle until his last day, and then only when a blow split open his skull.

There have not been many figures like this in the political world of our century. It is no wonder then that his ideas and his struggles opened the minds and lifted the hearts of many of the best of a whole generation, young and old.

The Trotskyists did not succeed in the thirties, or afterward, in becoming a real political force, as the Communists for a while did.

But while Trotskyism did not create a political party, it did create a political school. And many learned their politics and their ideals in it.

In studying in this school, in working in it, in fighting with it, there was much to learn. And if in later years, many found that some of it had to be unlearned, much of it proved nonetheless to be fructifying and durable; and it remained.

It would not be easy to find many of those who went through this school and fought its fight in the thirties who would express resentments or regrets. Justice Holmes once wrote: "A man should have a part in the passions and the actions of his time, at the peril of being judged not to have lived." Those of us who went through the thirties would subscribe heartily to these handsome words. We know how true they were then. You will surely understand me if I add that they are no less true of the sixties.

Max Shachtman 1967

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Marxist. The two are closely related, but in exactly reverse order. The nature of cancer is not established by the success of medical science in finding the cure for it or the speed with which it is found. The nature of the atomic bomb is not determined by the use to which it is put, by the appalling consequences of its use, or by society's success in controlling or destroying it. Marx determined the class nature of capitalism by an analysis of its social anatomy, starting with the commodity. The validity (or invalidity) of this analysis is not to be determined by the conclusions he drew from it about the prospects for a socialist revolution in the Europe of 1848 or later.

By reducing the question of the nature of the Stalinist state to a matter of the prospects for success of the bureaucracy and of the socialist revolution in the period he indicated, Trotsky effectively abandoned the essential elements of the theory of the "degenerated workers' state."

The course of the war undermined another of Trotsky's doctrines and drove him to another radical revision. Before the war, he had unremittingly attacked Stalinism for its theory of "socialism in one country". This theory was, to him, the central axis of the bureaucracys thought, from which it derived, or with which were inseparably connected, all its errors, crimes, and betrayals of the revolution. If, on the Russian soil, it might still play a positive role in so far as it maintained or defended state property, abroad it played an unequivocally reactionary role in that it defended capitalist private property. In Spain, as has already been noted, "i.e. on the soil of a bourgeois regime, [Stalin] executes the function of Hitler," wrote Trotsky only two years before the war.

In the first months of the war, it should have been clear, this analysis of Stalinism proved completely indefensible. And it was clear enough to Trotsky to end any attempt to defend it. "On the soil of a bourgeois regime" — that is, the part of Poland which was occupied by the Russian army at the start of the war — Stalin did not "execute the function of Hitler" within the meaning of Trotsky's phrase. Instead, he destroyed the power of bourgeois and landowner, abolished private property, and set up the same economic-political-social regime as the Russian. It was an inconvenient turn of events. Given the theory he would not disavow, Trotsky had no choice but to acknowledge that Stalin's course in Poland (as later in the Baltic lands) was "revolutionary in character — 'the expropriation of the expropriators'... that the stratification of property in the occupied territories is in itself a progressive measure."

This acknowledgement placed Trotsky squarely in the centre of a dilemma from which he was not allowed the time to extricate himself. A few weeks after acknowledging the basic social changes introduced in Poland by Stalin, Trotsky introduced a new modification of his theory. "Some voices cry out: if we continue to recognise the USSR as a workers' state, we will have to establish a new category: the counter-revolutionary workers' state." Well, why not? he continued in an article on 19 October. "The trade unions of France and Britain and the United States were counter-revolutionary since they support completely the counter-revolutionary politics of their bourgeoisie, why is it impossible to employ the same method with the counter-revolutionary workers' state?"

The "new category" did not alleviate his position. The term "counter-revolution" had been applied to the reformist unions in the west precisely because they

"defended private property" and refused to "expropriate the expropriators". The "counter-revolutionary workers' state", however, was now acting in Poland in an exactly and fundamentally opposite sense by carrying out measures that were "revolutionary in character — 'the expropriation of the expropriators'." The dimensions of the "revolutionary expropriation" could not be known to Trotsky. Only after his death were they extended far beyond Poland, nowhere under the auspices of the proletariat, everywhere under the aegis, direction and control of the "counter-revolutionary workers' state."

Yet he saw enough in 1939, and wrote enough, to indicate that his central indictment of Stalinism for its theory of "socialism in one country" was no longer relevant. The bureaucracy was showing that while it remained "counter-revolutionary", it could and would carry out a fundamental revolution against the bourgeoisie abroad, but without the working class and against the workers; indeed, in Trotsky's own words, in order to convert them into its own semi-slaves.

The counter-revolutionary proletarian revolution against the bourgeoisie and the working class was a concept which not even the much-burdened dialectic could sustain. It was too much for the back of a theory which held that a regime under which workers and peasants enjoyed not a shred of economic or political power but were pitilessly exploited, was nevertheless a workers' state because it was not a bourgeois state.

The unique nature of Stalinist society, of its ruling class and of its social relations, and its true international significance both for capitalist society and for socialism — on these crucial problems of our time Trotsky found and offered promising clues to an understanding in the last polemical fight of his life. The assassin's axe soon ended all chance of his pursuing