

3/33 Rmc

INTERNAL BULLETIN No. 10

For Members Only

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March 18, 1933

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Communist League of America (Opposition)

---Issued by the National Committee---

Motion by Shachtman:

With regard to the present situation in Germany and the question of the role of the Red Army, the National Committee adopts the following policy:

The Communists cannot entertain any objections in principle to the use of the present Red Army in the Soviet Union for the purpose of giving direct material assistance to the proletarian revolution and the Communist movements in other countries. We do not regard the Red Army as a "Russian" army but as the army of the international revolutionary proletariat. The fact that the Red Army came to the assistance of the Polish movement in 1920 and gave direct aid to the Georgian proletariat and peasantry in their liberation struggle against foreign imperialism and its Menshevik agents, is proof that the Communist International in the Leninist epoch did not consider it wrong in principle for the "Russian" Red Army to carry out revolutionary tasks beyond the "frontiers" of the Soviet Republic. For this reason, it is necessary to reject the prevailing Stalinist opposition to employing the Red Army in the interests of the international revolution as a typical characteristic of national-Bolshevik degeneration of this faction.

The employment of the Red Army outside the "frontiers" of the Soviet Union to help the revolutionary movement triumph in the capitalist countries, is not and cannot be a question of dispute in principle for the Marxists. It is and cannot be anything but a tactical question, based upon concrete considerations of time and place and relationship of forces.

The accession of Hitler to power in Germany is a direct threat to the international revolution in general and to the Russian revolution in particular. That is why the International Left Opposition has declared that "the attempt of the Fascists to seize power in Germany can bring in its trail nothing less than the mobilization of the Red Army. For the proletarian state, it will be a matter of revolutionary self-defense in a most direct and immediate sense".

The International Left Opposition has not, however, and does not now raise the demand that at the present time, in the situation as it is today, with the present relationship of forces, the Red Army is to be mobilized for the purpose of "marching upon Germany" now. We do not advance this slogan at the present time and regard its propagation as out of harmony with the tactical line of the International Left Opposition on Germany today.

Before the worker masses of Germany have been unequivocally set in motion to resist Hitler, before the sharp cleavage that exists between Fascism and the working class has been translated into open civil war in Germany itself, so that the bare proposal of marching ~~into Germany~~ the Red Army into Germany would appeal to the German masses as well as to the world proletariat as meaning direct aid to their class in its revolt against bourgeois military dictatorship, such a slogan could only serve to alienate non-Communist workers and drive them into the camp of nationalist reaction. The premature advancing of such a slogan, before civil war in Germany has appeared unmistakable, means laying the I.L.O. open to the charge, on the part of the official C.P., of provocation to precipitate war on the Soviet Union. It means that we alienate the sympathies of those Communists who have become orientated towards the Left Opposition on the basis of the complete correctness of our policies in regard to the German situation.

If the Left Opposition is attacked similarly for advocating immediate mobilization of the Red Army, our answer is clear. The correctness of our position on German Fascism merely serves then to add emphasis to our analysis of the inevitable international consequences of a Fascist victory. This slogan clearly aims

to warn the Soviet Union to prepare in good time to defend itself. War in that case comes not on the basis of a Red Army marching into Germany, but because the International Brown Shirts are marching on the Soviets.

The propoganda and agitation of our League and the Militant is to be conducted accordance with the above views. This statement of position is to be sent out to all branches as the guiding line of the League for the work of all its members and spokesmen.

2-20-33

THE RED ARMY AND THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

Resolution by Cannon:

The Left Opposition takes the following position on the question of the Red Army and the German situation:

The Red Army exists to defend the conquests of the October revolution and to aid in extending this revolution to other countries. The Red Army is not only the arm of the Soviet Union as it exists at the present time within the territorial limits of old Russia (and not even the whole of that), but it is in the fullest sense of the word, the arm of the international proletariat.

In the international class struggle the bourgeoisie in every country threatened by a revolution of the proletariat counts on and receives international support economic, financial, political, and in case of need, military. This is particularly true of the countries contiguous to the present Soviet Union, such as Poland, Roumanic, Finland, etc. It is true also of Germany. The German proletariat, in the impending civil war, is entitled to, and must receive the same international support from the international working class.

Included in the international working class is the Soviet Union and its Red Army. The method by which this international working class support is extended to the German proletariat in its revolutionary struggle--moral, political, economic, military--and the nature and the time of the specific actions, or combination of actions--is determined exclusively by practical, strategic and tactical considerations, which flow out of the circumstances of the moment, the relation of international class forces, etc. Military action, which is nothing but the extension of politics, is not only not excluded, but in case of need and at a certain conjuncture, must be definitely and positively included in the genuine international concept of the question of the Red Army and the German Revolution. Moreover, the role of the Red Army cannot be exclusively a defensive one with respect to the present territorial limits of the Soviet Union, but under certain conditions can and must be an offensive one.

These fundamental internationalist considerations--concerning which there can be no two opinions in our ranks--determine our attitude toward the problem of the Red Army and the German revolution as it would be posed concretely in the event of a Fascist victory in Germany. For the Red Army to remain passive while the German working class is crushed under the heel of Fascism, its organizations annihilated and its capacity for resistance destroyed for a number of years, would not only create the conditions for a world imperialist assault against the Soviet Union, led by German Fascism, and endanger the existence of the former. It would signify in no small degree a colossal betrayal of the German and consequently of the whole international proletariat, on the part of the Stalinist

leadership. For the Left Opposition to keep silent in the face of a policy that leads objectively in this direction, for it to retreat to a presentation of the question from the point of view simply of the self defense of the present Soviet Union, would be to make itself a party to this historical betrayal.

Theoretical considerations, and the Polish experience of 1920, show that the Red Army cannot make the revolution in an important capitalist country. For it to intervene successfully there must be a conjuncture of the rising of the proletariat and such a relation of the class forces locked in mortal combat that the Red Army appears on the scene as the reinforcement of the rising proletariat, its ally against the murderous violence of the armed class enemy at home and its protector against the armed intervention of foreign imperialist forces. This conjuncture does not exist as yet in Germany and for that reason the International Left Opposition concentrates its present policy in the main on the internal action of the German proletariat and makes no demand for the immediate intervention of the Red Army. At the same time it explains openly and fearlessly the inevitable part the Red Army must play in a further development of events. By this it warns the Soviet Union to get ready and it encourages the German proletariat by reminding it of its own international resources and allies.

The agitation of the American Stalinists to the effect that "the Red Army is international in the sense that the workers of other countries will eventually join it", Wicks, that the German workers must complete their own revolution and organize their own Red Army without the direct aid of the existing Red Army of the Soviet Union, that the elucidation of the true international role of the Red Army by the Left Opposition is "provocation for a war on the Soviet Union"--in all this agitation of the Stalinists there are contained the most reactionary national-socialist conceptions and an ideological preparation to sanction a colossal betrayal. The spirit of this agitation is, in essence, the spirit of August 4, 1914. This the Left Opposition must say out loud.

The motion on policy "with regard to the present situation in Germany and the role of the Red Army", introduced by comrade Shachtman at the NC meeting on February 24, is a capitulatory retreat before the pogrom agitation of the Stalinists around this question. The document of comrade Shachtman is made all the worse by the introductory acknowledgements of the international role of the Red Army in "principle". The question is concrete and specific. It is not now a problem of the right and duty of the Red Army to be ready to "carry out revolutionary tasks" in some indefinite place beyond the "frontiers" of the present Soviet Republic. The place is Germany. And the question is: The revolutionary tasks of the Red Army in the German revolution.

Likewise must be rejected in the present situation the negative and defensive approach to the question contained in such apologetic formulas as "The Communists cannot entertain any objections in principle" and "The Communist International in the Leninist epoch did not consider it wrong in principle". The Left Opposition does not fulfill its duty in the given situation with general explanation to the effect that it has no "objection" and that it does not "consider it wrong" for the Red Army to cross the artificial national boundary lines established by the relationship of international class forces at a certain period. It is specifically the German revolution that is involved in the present instance. Not what we "have no objections" to, not what we "do not consider wrong", but what we consider right, what we consider necessary at a certain stage in the developments of the German civil war--this is the way the Left Opposition must approach the question.

Comrade Trotsky has explained with sufficient lucidity the direct menace to the Soviet Union that would follow inevitably from a fascist victory and consolidation in Germany, and the necessity of mobilizing the Red Army at the first news of a

Fascist state revolution. But he did not stop, as comrade Shachtman's motion does, with the self-defense side of the question. The quotation cited from Trotsky, is not complete--and therefore it is false--when it leaves out the sentences which followed it in reference to the offensive side of the same question: "The Red Army is not only the Red Army. It is the arm of the proletarian world revolution" (Germany - The Key to the International Situation). Our dispute with the Stalinists over the Red Army hinges precisely on this aspect of the question. They shall not drive us away from it.

Comrade Shachtman declares: "The international Left Opposition has not, however, and, does not now raise the demand that at the present time, in the situation as it is today, with the present relationship of forces, the Red Army is to be mobilized for the purpose of 'marching on Germany' now". That is quite true. And it could not be otherwise as long as the Left Opposition retains its conception that the role of the existing Red Army is to help the workers in revolution in other countries, and not to make their revolution for them.

But who has raised the demand for a "march on Germany" "at the present time" "in the situation as it is today", etc.? Moreover, who of any serious consequence in the League, who in its leadership, which--it is assumed--is composed of grown-up people who do not lose their heads at every turn in the situation--who among these could raise such a demand? If nobody has done so--and we know of nobody--then what is the necessity for such a solemn denunciation of the idea? Why is it necessary to protest that we regard the "propagation" of this slogan as "out of harmony with the tactical line of the International Left Opposition on Germany today?" Why is it necessary to make this the central point of our policy?

We know that the Stalinists have imputed this slogan to us. They are inciting a pogrom against us on this ground--on the ground that we are "provoking a war on the Soviet Union". But the Stalinists are liars, and the way to answer them is to say they are liars, to show how by this very agitation they cover their own national-socialism, and to explain fully, clearly, and boldly what the Internationalist standpoint of the Left Opposition on the question of the Red Army and the German revolution really is. To react to the Stalinist slander by denouncing the viewpoint they falsely impute to us is not the best way to meet the reactionary incitement of our opponents. Moreover precisely, it is the worst way.

The concessions which comrade Shachtman makes to the pogrom agitation of the Stalinists increase progressively in every paragraph of his motions on policy. Beginning with a defensive general promise about our lack of "objections" (instead of a positive statement of our principal views), he glides, in the next paragraph, to the denunciation of the slogan for an immediate "march on Germany" (which nobody proposed) and then draws nearer to the position of the Stalinists, in the next paragraph with the more direct statement that "the premature advancing of such a slogan, before civil war in Germany has appeared unmistakably, means laying the I. L. O. open to the charge, on the part of the official C. P. of provocation to precipitate a war on the Soviet Union". (Nothing less!)

Already, we are not only accused by the Stalinists of provoking war on the Soviet Union, but we (or someone among us, name unknown) are "laying ourselves open" to this monstrous accusation. Perhaps that is why, in his motions on policy, "With regard to the present situation", as well as in his journalistic comments in the Militant, comrade Shachtman has not devoted a single word to the slander of the Stalinists, has not answered it, has not called it slander, and has not soon fit to print my article on the subject. What he has written in the document under consideration is not an answer to this slander. It is a supplement to it. But what the members of the Left Opposition require from an NC motion which is

to be sent to all branches as a guiding line of the League for the work of all its members and spokesmen" (who are these mysterious spokesmen?), is advice on how to meet the pogrom agitation of the Stalinists, how to refute it, and, above all, how to explain its fundamentally reactionary content.

Comrade Shachtman's notion in no way serves this purpose. And in the next paragraph of his document, following after referred to above, comrade Shachtman expounds a view which has nothing in common with ours and has very little to distinguish it from the standpoint of the Stalinists. It is possible that comrade Shachtman has written it hastily and will clarify his position and formulate it in a different--that is, in an opposite--sense. It is to be hoped that he will do so. But as the formulation stands now, we can under no circumstances accept it "as the guiding line of the League" and "all its members", not overlooking its "spokesman".

"This slogan", he says, (immediate mobilization of the Red Army) "clearly aims to warn the Soviet Union to prepare in good time to defend itself". The necessity of preparation for such self-defense is of course correct, self-evident, and obvious" and there is not a Stalinist from Stalin's cabinet to Browder's private office who will object to the Soviet Union "defending itself". But this slogan (for the immediate mobilization of the Red Army) aims to do more than that. And when comrade Shachtman concludes: "War in that case comes not on the basis of a Red Army marching into Germany, but because the international Brown Shirts are marching on the Soviets", he stops precisely at that point, where the difference between Internationalism and National-Socialism on this particular question begins.

The essence of comrade Trotsky's warnings on the inevitable war between the Soviet Union and a victorious German-Fascism consist precisely in this, that the Soviet Union must not wait until the Fascists "are marching on the Soviets" but must strike them down before they are ready. The "self-defense" of the Soviet Union in this case merges completely into the offensive struggle against German Fascism and the defense of the German Revolution. The schematic separation of these three aspects of one and the same question is the heart of the falsity in the policy, dangerous and even treacherous in its implications, which is expounded by the American Stalinists. Comrade Shachtman, retreating before the Stalinists' incitement and "looking for deviations" in his own camp, offers a formula "as the guiding line of the League" which would make it follow the Stalinists as a captive on this fundamental issue.

The discussion of the role of the Red Army in the German Revolution must take into account, at the present time, diplomatic and military considerations which dictate a certain tact in public utterances. But for all that, the Internationalists must speak in such a way as not to confuse and mislead the proletariat but to inform it and put it on guard. Trotsky, writing in the bourgeois press (The Forum magazine article reprinted in the Militant of July 16, 1932) showed how to do this even within the restricted limits of this medium. Contrary to Shachtman, who counterposes the "march on Germany" to the march on the Soviets", Trotsky wrote:

"When you have a mortal enemy before you, and when war flows with necessity from the logic of the objective situation, it would be unpardonable lightmindedness to give that enemy time to establish and fortify himself, conclude the necessary alliances, receive the necessary help, work out a plan of concentric military actions--not only from the west but from the east--and thus grew up to the dimensions of a colossal danger.

"Hitler's shock troops are already singing all over Germany a marching song against the Soviets, composed by a certain Doctor Hans Buchner. It would be imprudent to let the Fascists draw this martial air. If they are destined to sing

it, let them sing it staccato". (our emphatics).

Between this estimate of the problem, which makes its meaning clear even through the screen of the capitalist press and the estimate of comrade Shachtman, written with all the frankness that is possible in a document for internal circulation in the League, there is a wide abyss. The NC can do no other than categorically reject the whole presentation of the question by comrade Shachtman. The present resolution is submitted from this point of view--as a statement of policy different from that expounded by comrade Shachtman and against it.

The gross perversion of principle in comrade Shachtman's motion can be fully understood only in its setting in the present internal crisis of the League. Comrade Shachtman is not a Stalinist. We are convinced that he is no less hostile to their policies in general than we are, and that he has no more intention of capitulating to them than we have. If he retreats before them in this particular issue, and expounds a position that is nearer to their standpoint than to ours--and that is indubitably the case in the single question at issue--it is the result primarily of the indefensible and hopeless position he has taken in the internal faction struggle.

embarking on a fight against the NC without any "political differences" and organizing a faction without a political platform he inevitably gathered around himself all those elements in the League who are in conflict with the NC. In this unprincipled faction struggle comrade Shachtman attracted and became the rallying center for the confused, politically backward and casual elements, for those who resist all organizational restraint and discipline, and also those elements who have not completely broken their ideological bonds with Stalinism, who are impressed by the agitation of the Stalinist bureaucrats, and transmit in one form or another, their ideas and their slander into the League.

These latter elements, who register the pressure of the Stalinist agitation against us outside the League by the volume and intensity of their unbridled agitation against the NC inside the League--as a seismograph records earthquake shocks--are beginning to exert an increasing influence on the policy of the Shachtman faction is compelled by the logic of its position to yield more and more to those dubious political elements within it who really disagree with the NC on more than one question. Among these the elements who differ with us in the direction of Stalinism are naturally the most aggressive, because behind them and their half-thought-out and half-spoken ideas is the weight and pressure of the Stalinist campaign. Their influence on the policy of the Shachtman faction is recorded in the present instance--and not for the first time.

A persistence with the present unprincipled faction combination cannot fail to bring further divergences and sharper conflicts with the NC and all those in the League who are firm in their convictions and united on the basis of them. The Shachtman faction began--and still remains--without a separate platform. On this basis it is impossible to continue for any length of time, and this fact is evidently becoming clear to the leaders of the faction. They are beginning to look for "differences", to exaggerate them, and to manufacture them where they do not exist. The experiment "with regard to the present situation in Germany and the question of the role of the Red Army" is a shocking revelation of the dangers which bostrow this path. It gives the comrades who have been supporting the unprincipled struggle against the NC--as well as the leader--an occasion to pause and reflect on its logic and its inevitable consequences, and to turn back in due time.

—James P. Cannon.

THE RED ARMY AND THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

(Article written for publication in the Militant. Submitted to NC meeting on February 24th)

Our references, in speeches on the German crisis, to the international role and duty of the Red Army have called forth a furious agitation and incitement against us by the Stalinist bureaucrats. In the press and on the platform they are accusing the Left Opposition of "provocation" to precipitate a war against the Soviet Union. And with this monstrous slander as a covering formula they are turning the internationalist concepts upside down, disorienting the Communist workers, drugging them with murderous doses of national-socialist poison and closing their eyes to one of the most important and decisive aspects of a Fascist victory in Germany. It is high time for an elucidation of this question in the columns of the Militant, for it is precisely the function of the internationalists to tell the truth and conceal nothing.

The Stalinist demagogy around this question is in essence a capitulation before bourgeois public opinion. The Left Opposition has the duty, not to retreat before this demagogy but to probe it to the bottom and reveal its treacherous implications. It is not the danger of provoking a war on the Soviet Union that might be avoided. It is the danger that the Soviet Union and the world's working class will be taken unawares and fail of the necessary preparation in a war that is inevitable if Fascism triumphs in Germany. That is the danger. That is the crux of the question.

It is hardly necessary to deny that the Left Opposition is demanding that the Red Army "march to Germany" at the present time and under the present conditions. For us it is self-evident that the German working class will organize and conduct its own struggle for power. That is why the Left Opposition concentrates its agitation on the demand for a united front and a program of action to smash Fascism and clear the road for Soviets in Germany. But in this life and death struggle, which will not be settled in a day, the German bourgeoisie will seek and receive the support of international capital—moral, financial, and, if necessary, military. The German working class will also seek and must receive international support in no less degree. To exclude the Red Army from participation in this grandiose world struggle on the side of the German working class on the ground of "protecting the interests of the Soviet Union" is to leave the ground of internationalism, to bind oneself in advance to the national boundary lines established by the bourgeoisie which in crucial moments are not in the least binding on them, and in the final analysis to endanger the existence of the Soviet Union itself.

A Fascist victory and consolidation in Germany means an inevitable war on the Soviet Union. A victorious German Fascism, which has crushed the working class at home and annihilated its organizations would become the spearhead of a world attack on the Soviet Union on a scale far surpassing the previous interventions. This war would be accompanied by a world wide wave of reaction against the labor movement everywhere. Such a war, headed by German Fascism, cannot be undertaken now because German Fascism is not yet victorious; it has not consolidated its power and established the economic and military basis for such an undertaking. What stands in the way is—the German working class, still powerful, still undefeated. The attempt of Fascism to crush the German working class is a necessary preliminary; looked at correctly, it is already the beginning of the war. Can the Red Army remain passive and indifferent to the outcome of this struggle on German soil? Can it hesitate for a moment, in case of need, to throw its weight into the scale before the Fascization of Germany is completed and the "march on Moscow" formally begins? That is the question

which we have realized in our speeches and which evoked the rabid campaign of the Stalinists against us.

Please do not answer this question with acknowledgements of internationalism "in principle" and "in general". The proletariat was hurled into the bloody net of the world war in 1914 by people who "had no objections" to internationalism "in principle". The question of internationalism now as then, has a meaning in terms of the concrete. The focal point of the international situation at the present time is Germany. Our internationalism, and the internationalism of the proletariat in every country, including the Soviet Union and the Red Army, is put to the test there. Here the principle lines must be clearly marked out and the fundamental question given a precise answer. Our reference of course, does not deal with the moment and the nature of an intervention by the Red Army on the side of the working class. Such questions naturally belong to the domain of political and military strategy which in turn depends on an estimation of the conditions, the relation of forces, the tempo of development, etc. As propagandists, our concern now relates to the fundamental question of attitude and not to the actions of the moment.

And here, we affirm our conviction--not "in general", if you please, but in direct connection with the civil war in Germany--that "the Red Army is not only the Red Army. It is the arm of the proletarian world revolution". So it was conceived by its founders and organizers. So it was understood by the workers of the entire world and by its own soldiers under the Lenin teaching. Before the Red Army ever existed in reality, before there was any "socialism in one country" or any talk about it, Lenin elucidated the internationalist role of a proletariat (and its army) which would triumph in "several or even in only one individual capitalist country."

"The victorious proletariat of that country (wrote Lenin in 1915) having expropriated the capitalists and organized socialist production, would be up in arms against the rest of the capitalist world, attracting oppressed classes of the other countries to its side, causing insurrection in those countries against the capitalists and acting in case of need even with military power against the exploiting classes and their governments". And it is known that Lenin was not talking idly, and still less was he "provoking" the capitalists to make war against the proletarian country. For one thing he knew that the capitalist governments needed no such provocation but only the capacity to make good with their war. He was speaking calmly and deliberately of what a victorious proletariat in a single country should and must do "in case of need". In Poland, in 1920 and in Georgia the Lenin doctrine laid down in 1915 had a literal fulfillment--the latter successfully and the former unsuccessfully. But from the experience in each case, Lenin, and all the Marxists with him, drew conclusions only of a practical character relating to the situation, the time, the place, and the "need". The demagoguery of the bourgeoisie and their social democratic lackeys about "red imperialism" influenced his strategy not at all and his principle considerations still less.

Zinoviev, Chairman of the Comintern, said in 1919 in a speech to 3,000 military experts of the Petrograd District at the Uritsky Palace:

"Military men often object, 'but if the war is coming to an end now, what will they do with us?'. . . First, we must liberate, not only Russia, but also, together with the workers and peasants, the whole world too. The international Red Army will grow. Our Red officers and former officers of long standing will achieve the great honor of supporting in their struggle not only the Russian workers and peasants, but also the workers and peasants of France, Germany and the other countries. (applause)

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"There can be no greater honor than this! Is not the bourgeoisie of France and England sending its sons to Tsernrog Novotcherkassk, Odessa, to train the Russian boys for the struggle against the workers and peasants? With far greater right we shall send our best men to show the French and English workers how to organize the Red Army, overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, take the power into the hands of the people."

It may be objected: Is it necessary to talk about this A B C question of the international role of the Red Army? Isn't this understood by everybody, and is it not best to keep quiet so as not to alarm the class enemy? Yes, it is necessary to speak because, unfortunately, in these days of the Stalinist degeneration there is a lack of understanding and more than that, there is a muddling and distortion of the question which forbodes great evil to the cause of the international proletariat. The very fact that the Stalinist bureaucrats incite against us for our reference to the international role of the Red Army in the German events, conceals within it the most treacherous implications. The dogma of socialism in one country has wrought a fearful havoc in the brains of those who stand before the communist proletariat in the capacity of official leaders.

Wicks, for example, said at the Bronx meeting that "the Red Army is international in the sense that the workers of the other countries will join it. The German workers will make their own revolution and organize their own Red Army." This half-truth contains a treacherous lie, for it evades, and thereby answers in the negative, the question of whether the existing Red Army will help the German workers to make their own revolution "in case of need". This is the theory of neutrality toward the civil war of the classes in Germany, of capitulation to bourgeois opinion. If the Russian proletariat is not to intervene, in its own way and with its own means, then why should we in America, "intervene", as we are doing now in our own way and with our own means? In this connection it is not without significance that the first meetings of the Party on the German crisis were held three weeks after the appointment of Hitler and only then after the Left Opposition had shaken the whole Party with its campaign and driven the panic-stricken bureaucrats into action.

Yes, it is necessary for the Left Opposition to speak openly about this and every other problem of the German civil war, giving each one its proper place and emphasis at the moment but concealing and soft-peddling on none. The Left Opposition is a small faction armed with great ideas which have been tested and confirmed in world events. It can grow and expand in numbers and influence only by being true to itself, fearing no incitement and telling the whole truth to the Communist workers about each and every question. Our mission is to keep alive the doctrine and spirit of internationalism. That cannot be done fully and completely without elucidating the question of the Red Army and the German revolution.

—James P. Cannon

STATEMENT ON THE DISPUTE OVER THE RED ARMY AND THE GERMAN SITUATION

The motion by comrade Cannon on "The Red Army and the German Revolution" demands an unambiguous and blunt reply. The whole dispute is presented by him in a deliberately falsified light, and an objective discussion of it is recklessly perverted for the factional ends of his group. This is not the first time Cannon has practised this method in our internal disputes; this time, however, he has exceeded all possibly legitimate boundaries.

Some Facts

My original motion on the question is characterized as if it were forced upon me by semi-Stalinist elements in the League (who are they?) for the purpose of "manufacturing" political differences with the National Committee majority. Exactly the contrary is the case. So that the precise nature of the dispute, and the manner in which it arose, may be known, it is necessary to establish the following facts:

At our first meeting on the German situation in the Stuyvesant Casino, comrade Cannon in his speech raised the slogan of mobilizing the Red Army to intervene in Germany. This is not a "Stalinist lie", but a simple statement of fact. "Hitler's knife is poised over the body of the German proletariat"--I quote directly from Cannon's speech--"the Red Army must shoo the knife out of the hands of Fascism." This was no mere rhetorical flourish. Everyone in the audience understood it in just that sense. The numerous questions that were asked from the floor, orally and in writing, showed that this is how everybody understood Cannon's slogan. Nor did Cannon seek to rectify any "misunderstanding" when workers in the audience protested against the demand to send the Red Army into Germany under present circumstances. Smachtman, in replying to the questions from the floor, was obviously unable to separate himself openly from Cannon's position, and consequently confined his remarks to an explanation of the principled Communist position on the international role of the Red Army, illustrating our stand by reference to the events in Poland in 1920 and in Georgia in 1921. Unfortunately the damage had already been done and it was obvious that the workers present did not perceive a distinction between the two presentations.

Had the matter rested there, it would have remained an incident without much repercussion. I did not take up the matter officially, although any number of our League members requested that I bring up the question in the National Committee. At the German meeting in Brooklyn, however, Cannon repeated the same false slogan in somewhat different terms, but no less unmistakable in purport.

The impression immediately made the rounds of the Communist and sympathizing workers that this was the viewpoint of the Left Opposition. Wicks (with whose view I will deal further on), at the Bronx meeting exploited this irresponsible blunder of Cannon to the maximum, seeking to whip up a lynching spirit against the Oppositionists present, whose arguments for the united front policy he found it impossible to meet. Among the Communist workers--both amongst followers of the Stalin faction and the ~~Stalinist~~ Lovestone faction--the discussion of our viewpoint (in New York, of course) immediately turned away from our main standpoint (united front) to a discussion of the slogan raised by Cannon, on which score our opponents naturally took the offensive.

It thus became imperative that the matter be brought up formally in the National Committee. Far from ~~xxxxxxx~~ seeking to make a factional issue of the matter I was concerned with the League and its leading representatives adopting

a correct position without making the question a subject for factional dispute. It was in this spirit that I discussed the matter not only with comrades directly associated with me in the internal League dispute, but with a number of comrades who are not associated with either of the factions. It is a demonstrable fact that I wrote my original motion after consultation with the latter; it was they who suggested that I write the motion in that manner, without making a criticism of Cannon, without even mentioning his name, without referring directly to the mass meetings or the fact that Cannon raised the slogan in the manner mentioned above. I readily agreed with this suggestion. My main concern was not with an attack upon Cannon, but with settling the question correctly and without factional bickering.

Cannon's reply to this effort can be read in his document. When my motion was introduced into the Committee, Cannon opposed its adoption. Later he presented--not a counter-motion, but an article for the Militant, filled with ambiguous formulations, deliberate evasions of the only real issue involved, and factional attacks upon his opponents in the League (myself in particular) made in the now customary form of innuendo and insinuation. I voted against the article and demanded that before any article on the disputed point is printed in the official organ of the League, the National Committee should first adopt an official position--an opposite procedure being false from beginning to end. The official position proposed by Cannon was presented by him at a later meeting in the form of the motion referred to above.

This motion is not meant, so to say, for "New York consumption", but exclusively for the record and for the branches outside of New York. For while there is of course no stenographic record, the New York comrade--and the hundreds of other workers who attended the mass meetings--know only too well what Cannon really said and advocated in his speeches. They can and will designate his present denial of his own slogan as nothing but a falsehood. That this denial is made amid a barrage of fire against me, will not suffice--at least not in New York--to cover up the incontestable facts.

"In his Journalistic (ahem!) comments in the Militant," writes Cannon, who does not make any sort of comment in the Militant, "comrade Shachtman has not devoted a single word to the slander of the Stalinists, has not answered it, has not called it slander." Shachtman's motion, continues Cannon, "is not an answer to this slander. It is a supplement to it." This "slander", i. e., the charge that Cannon advocated in his speeches the immediate Red Army intervention in Germany, was first made at the Stuyvesant Casino meeting, on FEBRUARY 5, by workers present who challenged Cannon's exposition on this point. Cannon did not call it a slander then, nor did he think it necessary to point out to these workers that this was not really his position. When Wick repeated it at the Bronx meeting two weeks later, on FEBRUARY 19, Cannon did not consider it a slander either. He never once proposed to me or anyone else that the Militant should repudiate Wicks' charge as a perversion of our point of view. He never once proposed, did not even mention, that he would write anything in the Militant so that his actual position, and the actual position of the International Left Opposition, might be clearly stated. Cannon presented his article on the Red Army for Militant publication only at the National Committee meeting of FEBRUARY 24, that is, only after I had introduced my motion on policy, which evidently caused comrade Cannon to reflect on the untenability of his previous position.

But instead of making a simple acknowledgement of the error, he merely denies the whole thing and seeks to cover it up with a violent factional assault upon me. We have always attacked the Stalinist leadership for its

repugnant method of "self-criticism" which consists in ascribing to others the mistakes which it itself has made, or in covering up its own mistakes by bald denials that they were made or by concocting "mistakes" on the part of its opponents or critics. In the present dispute, there is no distinguishable difference between the method we attack and the method employed by comrade Cannon.

But you are capitulating to the Stalinist pogrom agitation against the Opposition? Not in the least. The best way to meet such an agitation is to present our position correctly and not falsely, so that we force the Stalinists to attack us for what we really advocate. That they do not like to do, because it cannot be done successfully. The argument about "capitulation" and "retreat" is simply flag-waving, in a demagogic appeal to sentiment. When Urbahns demanded the "return of the Chinese Eastern Railway" to Chiang Kai-Shek, the Stalinists launched a violent ~~xxxxxx~~ campaign against him and the whole Left Opposition. Their agitation against Urbahns' utterly false position (like the Wicksian agitation against us now) had a distinctly reactionary and National-Bolshevik flavor in many respects. This did not prevent Trotsky and the I. L. O. from condemning Urbahns and eventually breaking from him. We did not then "capitulate" to the Stalinist agitation, as Urbahns accused us at that time! And we did dissociate ourselves from the Stalinists at the same time. The real capitulator at that time was Urbahns, and his capitulation was in the direction of Korschist ultra-Leftism. When the Right wing in the French Opposition was capitulating to its "allies" in the Unitary Opposition, Trotsky did not hesitate to distinguish himself from the former, even though it was under attack by the Stalinists (who attacked it from the Stalinist; i. e.; the false, standpoint).

In the present case, the Stalinists and Lovestonites have launched an attack upon the Opposition in the same way: their attack upon Cannon's position has a distinctly ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ nationalist and treacherous connotation; they utilize Cannon's false slogans in order to cover up their own reactionary position. Cannon, on the other hand, tries to cover up his own error and to make factional capital against us, by bracketing me and several un-named others with Wicks and the Stalinist pogrom agitation to which I am "capitulating". But it is precisely in order to arm our comrades against Wicks and Co. that I proposed to settle the question by my motions aimed to end the confusion in Cannon's presentation and the consequent confusion on the subject which he has helped to create among our own comrades as well.

Even this stratagem might be contemptuously overlooked were it not for the fact that Cannon's motion on policy does not yet make matters clear.

What is the dispute about? The only genuine point at issue has already been indicated above. To evade this point, Cannon "finds" a point of "principle" dispute. As this does not exist, so far as I am concerned, Cannon is merely creating straw men to knock down, is merely rushing violently through open doors. Towards the beginning of his motion, Cannon grudgingly acknowledges that I recognize the truly international role of the Red Army, its "defensive" as well as "offensive" role. I do it, of course, "apologetically", "negatively", "defensively"; comrade Cannon, being more radical, does it fearlessly, positively and aggressively. But towards the end of his document, carried away by his own flourishes, he charges me with a "gross perversion of principle".

To my mind there is only one perversion of principle conceivable in this question: the assignment of a purely defensive role to the Red Army. Such a perversion is really practised by the Stalinists, who assign to the Red Army, and to an ever increasing extent, to the whole Communist International, the role of defending the frontiers of the Soviet Union, neither more nor less; this practise flows from their fundamental theory of socialism in one country. If I share this standpoint to a y degree, then there is little room indeed left for me in the Opposition. Fortunately, matters are not so bad. My reply to the questions from the floor at the Stuyvesant Casino meeting was heard by everybody; I spoke at length on the fundamental principles involved in the Polish offensive and in the Red Army's activities in the Georgian revolution. Comrade Cannon's expositions do not "convince" me for the simple reason that I was convinced quite a while ago that the Soviet Union and its Red Army have not only a "defensive" but also an "offensive" role to play. Together with many others I also learned in the Marxian prisons: 1) that "only a traitor can reject the offensive in principle" and 2) "only a blockhead, however, can confine all strategy to the offensive." Because I take such ideas for granted, in our ranks at any rate, I do not find it necessary to present a lengthy argumentation in favor of them when I present a motion to the National Committee; I confine myself, as I did in the present case, to a reference to the Polish and Georgian cases. Comrade Cannon's annoyance with my point of view does not arise out of the fact that I fail to recognize the "offensive" role of the Red Army as well, or that I recognize it "apologetically". It arises out of the fact that I recognize it so unmistakably that it does not fit into his factional constructions against me, and compels him to resort for an argument to worked-up protests against a supposed "apologetic" formulation.

Is there a distinction between the "defensive" and the "offensive"? In the fundamental sense which was attributed to the distinction during the World War by each of the imperialist powers and their respective social patriots, to justify the "defense of the fatherland", it does not exist. Is there a distinction in the case under consideration? Of course there is, even though not a fundamental one.

What is required at the present moment, especially in the ranks of the Opposition, is not banalities, and extensive disquisitions on the fact that the Red Army cannot be excluded from participating in the world revolution, that it is not to be confined to a defensive role only. No, what is required is a clear and unambiguous presentation of the task of the Red Army now, at the present conjuncture of events. In his motion, comrade Cannon still fails to give a correct presentation, because what he says is ambiguous, vague, rhetorical, and he reveals that he has not yet completely given up the false position which he now denies having advanced.

"For the Red Army to remain passive," he writes, "while the German working class is crushed under the heel of Fascism, its organizations annihilated and its capacity for resistance destroyed for a number of years, would not only create the conditions for a world imperialist assault against the Soviet Union, led by German Fascism, and endanger the existence of the former. It would also signify in no smaller degree a colossal betrayal of the German, and consequently of the whole international proletariat, on the part of the whole Stalinist leadership. For the Left Opposition to keep silent in the face of a policy that leads objectively in this direction, for it to retreat to a presentation of the question from the point of view simply of

the self-defense of the present Soviet Union, would be to make itself a party to this historical betrayal."

And just what is the Red Army to do while "the German working class is crushed under the heel of Fascism"? That is, what is it to do if--assuming the worst variant--the German working class "remains passive", if it fails to organize its resistance in time, if it continues as at present without having organized even a serious national defensive movement, much less an offensive against Fascism? The Opposition counts, of course, upon arousing the Communists and the proletariat in good time; it goes without saying that we have not drawn a "Finis" line under the struggle in Germany. But to ask the above question is enough to show how equivocal, and therefore dangerous, is comrade Cannon's formulation.

Again: in his article for the Militant, Cannon pleasantly insinuates an identity between my position and that of the social democracy during the World War. They were "also" for "internationalism in principle"; but when the question became "concrete and specific", they betrayed. In his motion he continues: "It is not now a problem of the right and duty of the Red Army to be ready to 'carry out revolutionary tasks' in some indefinite place beyond the 'frontiers' of the present Soviet Republic. The place is Germany. And the question is: The revolutionary tasks of the Red Army in the German revolution." What is the only possible meaning of the shoddy comparison? If it has any meaning, it is this: Shachtman, like the social democrats, is quite ready to acknowledge internationalism "in principle"; he is ready to give the Red Army the right and duty to intervene beyond the "frontiers" of the present Soviet Union--"in principle"; but now, when "the place is Germany", when the "question is concrete and specific", Shachtman...capitulates to Stalinist national-Bolshevism. The cloven hoof of the position which Cannon denies he ever held, sticks right out of this argument.

Finally: the essence of comrade Trotsky's warnings, writes Cannon, is "that ~~the~~ the Soviet Union must not wait until the Fascists 'are marching on the Soviets' but must strike them down before they are ready. The 'self-defense' of the Soviet Union in this case merges completely into the offensive struggle against German Fascism and the defense of the German revolution." This is not, to our mind, the essence of comrade Trotsky's warnings. The advice that the Red Army be mobilized as soon as the Fascists take power, I construe as follows: We must not wait for the mobilization, the preparation, the arousing of the Soviet Union and its Red Army until the Fascists have completed their preparations for the attack, supported and urged on by French and international imperialism. This preparation and mobilization must take place before then, as a "matter of revolutionary self-defense in a most direct and immediate sense." To sound the alarm now, to mobilize the Red Army now for the defense of the Soviet Union, is precisely the way of preventing the Fascists from "drawing this martial air", of forcing them "to sing it staccato". If war is inevitable--and if Fascism wins, it is inevitable--the mobilization of the Red Army now will make it possible for the Soviets to conduct the war of defense under conditions unfavorable to Fascism which will not yet have had the opportunity of suppressing the enemy at home, i. e., the proletarian movement.

Comrade Cannon construes the warning to mean that the Red Army "must strike them down (the Fascists) before they are ready." This, too, if it has a serious significance, can only mean an immediate military attack (now or within the very next period) upon Hitlerite Germany as well as upon Pilsudski's Pol-

and which lies between the two and which, apparently, is a trifle that does not enter into comrade Cannon's calculations. As for the "defense of the German revolution", the tragedy lies precisely in the fact that this revolution has not yet even begun, and the last way to begin it is that which is implicit in Cannon's exposition.

Does this mean that the Red Army, after all, has no offensive role to play? Quite the contrary. Comrade Cannon juggles with phrases about the defense of Russia, offensive against Hitler, defense of the German revolution. Let us put it precisely. The Russo-Polish war of 1920 was forced upon the Soviets by the Pilsudski offensive; for the Soviets, it was a war of self-defense. In the course of this defensive war, and ask a part of it, (plus the fact that the vitality of the Red Army and the maturity of the Polish proletariat were overestimated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks), it was converted into an offensive war against Pilsudski. Leaving aside the false tactical estimations of the Bolsheviks, the Polish events were a demonstration of how the Red Army did and should fulfill its revolutionary internationalist role of defending the socialist fatherland and extending the proletarian revolution by coming to the assistance of the insurrectionary working class in other lands.

If the present question is concrete and specific--and it certainly is--the task of the Red Army must be put concretely and specifically. Generalities about "time" and "place" and "relations of forces" do not suffice. It is necessary to point out that the "relation of forces" actually is at the present time and in the given place. This is left entirely vague by comrade Cannon. Just what role the Red Army can play, specifically and not "in principle", must be stated clearly and unequivocally; but it is not done by comrade Cannon. It must be done in order to eliminate the confusion created. We must point out, in addition to the above-outlined, that which the Bolsheviks a decade ago explained so clearly in connection with the Georgian revolution.

(Merely to repeat here what I said in my motion, i. e., my entire agreement with the quotation from comrade Trotsky which follows, would suffice by itself, if more were needed, to give the deserved answer to "gross perversion of principle" which Cannon has discovered in my views.) "The crux of the matter," wrote Trotsky over 10 years ago, "consists in the fact that the Soviet revolution in Georgia (which was indeed brought about with the active participation of the Red Army, for we would have betrayed the workers and peasants of Georgia, if we had not assisted them by our armed forces, since we had such), took place after the experiment of three years of Georgian 'independence' and under conditions which guaranteed not merely a temporary military success, but also further political development for the revolution--that is, the extension and strengthening of the Soviet system in Georgia itself. And in this (if the thick-headed pedants of democracy will allow me to say so) our revolutionary task consists. The politicians of the Second International in unison with their mentors from their bourgeois diplomatic chancelleries, smile sardonically at our recognition of the rights of national self-determination. This they designate as a trap for simpletons--a bait held out by Russian imperialism. In reality it is history itself which is holding out these baits, instead of settling the questions in a straight-forward way. In any case we cannot be accused of turning the zigzags of historical development into traps, for, while actually recognizing the right of national self-determination, we take care to explain to the masses its limited historical significance, and we never put it above the interests of the proletarian revolution. A workers' state, in recognizing the right of self-determination, thereby recognizes that revolutionary coercion is not an all-powerful historical factor. Soviet Russia does not by any means intend to make its military power take the place of the revolutionary efforts of the

proletariats of other countries. The conquest of proletarian power must be an outcome of proletarian political experience. This does not mean that the revolutionary efforts of the workers of Georgia or any other country, must not receive any military support from outside. It is only essential that this support should come at a moment when the need for it has been created by the political development of the workers, and recognized by the class conscious revolutionary vanguard, who have won the sympathy of the majority of the workers. These are questions of revolutionary strategy and not a formal democratic ritual."

If comrade Cannon has a point of view "different from that of comrade Shachtman" and "against it"—it is against the conclusions which the Bolsheviks drew from the Polish and Georgian events that he will have to counterpose it

This is not the place to deal with the factional "appendix" which Cannon attaches to his argumentation on the Red Army. Its content will be dealt with at the proper time and in the proper place. The slanders and falsehoods against the National Committee minority which Cannon always injects into a disputed question (and he does it invariably by first raising the hue and cry about our "poisonous" methods) will be answered in full on a more fitting occasion. We will not permit this discussion, however, to be deliberately muddled up and befogged by extraneous questions, which are calculated to distract attention from the retreat on the disputed question which Cannon has been compelled to make. However, since the "appendix" is what he is principally concerned with (it is clear that all which precedes it serves merely as a preface to the factional attack), it is necessary to make the following to make the following observations.

1. Cannon does not "poison the atmosphere" of the internal discussion in the League. Far from it. He only designates anonymous individuals or groups of individuals as semi-Stalinists. What are their names and addresses, so that the League may know who they are and be able to combat them properly instead of in the dark? Cannon, who fights in the open, is holding that "information" in reserve.

2. Cannon, who does not "hunt for deviations", has quite recently discovered a capitulationist tendency in the League. To be exact, the discovery dates back one month; the incentive to the discovery does not originate here, but to be exact again, in Germany. When the German Opposition was fighting Landau, Cannon discovered Landauism in the American League. When the French Opposition was engaged in a struggle with Naville, Cannon discovered (among the same comrades) Navillism in the American League. As soon as the news arrived of the Weel capitulation in Germany, Cannon proceeded to discover (again, among the same comrades) Wellism or capitulationism in the American League. For one brief week, these same comrades were accused of "Lacroixism" because they advocated the issuance of an internal organizational bulletin by the New York branch. Tomorrow it will be something else--all in the interests of the "international education" of the League. Comrade Cannon's method is: any stick to beat a dog.

3. In his "appendix" Cannon develops this idea or rather, this threat: The minority, starting out "without political differences" with his faction, is now trying to manufacture them in order to have a "different platform". Translated more clearly, this means: regardless of the position taken from now on by comrade Cannon on this or that question, the minority will be charged with the unprincipled manufacturing of differences if it presumes to challenge the correctness of Cannon's stand, it will be charged with Stalinism, semi-Stalinism,

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capitulation to Stalinism, etc. In politics this is commonly known as political blackmail. We will be all the less deterred by this threat when we take a position on any given question, because of the meaning of the threat.

4. The violence of the attack Cannon makes upon us in his motion would be perplexing if the fact that there is another disputed question on the agenda did not make it clear. I refer to the dispute on comrade Cannon's policy in Gillespie and in the Illinois mining situation generally. The unusual fierceness of his attack on the "Red Army question is comprehensible only as a barrage laid down to cover an opportunist position in the "miners' question". The abusive charge of "capitulation to Stalinism" will not, however, serve the purpose required by comrade Cannon. Each question will be put on its own feet and dealt with accordingly.

March 12, 1933

--Max Shachtman

NOTE ON SHACHTMAN'S STATEMENT

In his second document comrade Shachtman had the opportunity to correct the false formulations in his motion on policy with regard to the Situation in Germany and the role of the Red Army. Instead of doing that he only succeeded in demonstrating, in his lengthy statement, that his first motion is a real expression of his point of view. By that he convinces me over again that the answer I made in my resolution was the only possible answer.

The statement of comrade Shachtman that, at the meeting at the Stuyvesant Casino on February 5, "Cannon in his speech raised the slogan of mobilizing the Red Army to intervene immediately in Germany" is a lie invented after the fact, or, more correctly, borrowed from the Stalinists after he and others associated with him had felt the full force of the Stalinist pogrom agitation.

Neither Shachtman, nor anyone else in our ranks, ever said or even intimated by one word to me that such a construction could justly be placed on my remarks at the Stuyvesant meeting. Neither Shachtman, nor anyone else, ever suggested to me at any time that there was any disagreement with my treatment of the question. After the Stuyvesant meeting I spoke again in the same sense at the Bronx meeting on Feb. 12th. I repeated it again at the Brooklyn meeting a few days later. The notion of Shachtman introduced at the NC meeting on Feb. 24, nearly three weeks later, was the first intimation given to me by anybody that the Stalinist slander had made its way into our ranks. And even then I was not yet informed that the accusation was aimed at me personally. That is why I did not "deny" anything for myself in my resolution, but simply defended the fundamental internationalist standpoint against the Stalinist slanderers and perverters of principle. It was only at the NC meeting of March 1st, after I had presented my resolution, that Shachtman for the first time made the direct statement regarding my speech at the Stuyvesant meeting. Therefore I have never "denied" it before, as he maintains in his statement, and I donot "deny" it now. I simply say it is a lie, and that it is of a piece with the organized system of lying which has characterized the factional method of Shachtman since the beginning of the internal struggle and by means of which he has sought at every turn to muddle and divert attention from the real issue in dispute.

But the method of lying and then shifting the issue from a political dispute to a question of veracity--a method which we have encountered frequently enough--will not avail here. What is involved in the present instance is a radical difference of viewpoint on a fundamental question. The second statement of

Shachtman has not eliminated or modified this difference. This is the real essence of the matter. It is in no way affected by what one says or doesn't say, by what or whom one believes or doesn't believe. Those members of the League who concern themselves with political-principle ~~political-principle~~ considerations will understand this and judge the merits of the present dispute accordingly.

--James P. Cannon

P. S. The recent alarming information from comrade Trotsky about the internal condition of the Red Army, which directly affects its capacity to fulfill its proper role in the present circumstances, places an extraordinary restriction on public utterances on the question. That alone compels me to refrain from publishing my article on the Red Army in the Militant. But the fundamental question of the international tasks of the Red Army remains unaffected. From the standpoint of an internationalist the new information about the internal weakness of the Red Army--a weakness resulting from the accumulated effects of Stalinist policy--is not a reason to make concessions to the Stalinist conception of its nationally-limited role. On the contrary it is a reason to oppose it all the more firmly.

--J. P. C.