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CONTENTS:

A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition In the Socialist Workers Party

by L. TROTSKY

The Crisis in the American Party

An Open Letter in Reply to Comrade Leon Trotsky
by MAX SHACHTMAN

On the History of the Left Opposition

Discussion between Comrade Crux and Comrade Johnson

*Stalin did not
UNDERSTAND
1917 rev.*

1940 I.B. vol II #7

*Trotsky article MISSING.
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it down from 12 1/2 x 9 1/4 to 8 1/2 by 11.*

Page 2
(Inside Front Cover)

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A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party

By L. Trotsky

IT IS NECESSARY to call things by their right names. Now that the positions of both factions in the struggle have become determined with complete clearness, it must be said that the minority of the National Committee are leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency. Like any petty-bourgeois group inside the socialist movement, the present opposition is characterized by the following features: a disdainful attitude towards theory and an inclination towards eclecticism; disrespect for the tradition of their own organization; anxiety for personal "independence" at the expense of anxiety for objective truth; nervousness instead of consistency; readiness to jump from one position to another; lack of understanding of revolutionary centralism and hostility toward it; and finally, inclination to substitute etiquette and personal relationships for party discipline. Not all the members of the opposition of course manifest these features with identical strength. Nevertheless, as always in a variegated bloc the tinge is given by those who are most distant from Marxism and proletarian policy. A prolonged and serious struggle is obviously before us. I make no attempt to exhaust the problem in this article, but I will endeavor to outline its general features.

Theoretical Skepticism and Eclecticism

In the January 1939 issue of the *New Internationalist* a long article was published by Comrades Burnham and Shachtman, "Intellectuals in Retreat." The article, while containing many correct ideas and apt political characterizations, was marred by a fundamental defect if not flaw. While polemicalising against opponents who consider themselves—without sufficient reason—above all as proponents of "theory," the article deliberately did not elevate the problem to a theoretical height. It was absolutely necessary to explain why the American "radical" intellectuals accept Marxism without the dialectic (a clock without a spring). The secret is simple. In no other country has there been such rejection of the class struggle as in the land of "unlimited opportunity." The denial of social contradictions as the moving force of development led to the denial of the dialectic as the logic of contradictions in the domain of theoretical thought. Just as in the sphere of politics it was thought possible everybody could be convinced of the correctness of a "just" program by means of clever syllogisms and society could be reconstructed through "rational" measures, so in the sphere of theory it was accepted as proved that Aristotelian logic, lowered to the level of "common sense" was sufficient for the solution of all questions.

Pragmatism, a mixture of rationalism and empiricism, became the national philosophy of the United States. The theoretical methodology of Max Eastman is not fundamentally different from the methodology of Henry Ford—both regard living society from the point of view of an "engineer" (Eastman—Platonically). Historically the present disdainful attitude toward the dialectic is explained simply by the fact that the grandfathers and great-grandmothers of Max Eastman and others did not need the dialectic in order to conquer territory and enrich themselves. But times have changed and the philosophy of pragmatism has entered a period of bankruptcy just as has American capitalism.

The authors of the article did not show, could not and did not care to show, this internal connection between philosophy and the material development of society, and they frankly explained why.

"The two authors of the present article," they wrote of themselves, "differ thoroughly on their estimate of the general theory of dialectical materialism, one of them accepting it and the other rejecting it. . . . There is nothing anomalous in such a situation. Though theory is doubtless always in one way or another related to practise, the relation is not invariably direct or immediate; and as we have before had occasion to remark, human beings often act inconsistently. From the point of view of each of the authors there is in the other a certain such inconsistency between 'philosophical theory' and political practise, which might on some occasion lead to decisive concrete political disagreement. But it does not now, nor has anyone yet demonstrated that agreement or disagreement on the more abstract doctrines of dialectical materialism necessarily affects today's and tomorrow's concrete political issues—and political parties, programs and struggles are based on such concrete issues. We all may hope that as we go along or when there is more leisure, agreement may also be reached on the more abstract questions. Meanwhile there is fascism and war and unemployment."

What is the meaning of this thoroughly astonishing reasoning? Inasmuch as *some* people through a bad method *sometimes* reach correct conclusions, and inasmuch as some people through a correct method *not infrequently* reach incorrect conclusions, therefore . . . the method is not of great importance. We shall meditate upon methods sometime when we have more leisure, but now we have other things to do. Imagine how a worker would react upon complaining to his foreman that his tools were bad and receiving the reply: with bad tools it is possible to turn out a good job,

and with good tools many people only waste material. I am afraid that such a worker, particularly if he is on piece-work, would respond to the foreman with an un-academic phrase. A worker is faced with refractory materials which show resistance and which because of that compel him to appreciate fine tools, whereas a petty-bourgeois intellectual—alas!—utilizes as his "tools" fugitive observations and superficial generalizations—until major events club him on the head.

To demand that every party member occupy himself with the philosophy of dialectics naturally would be lifeless pedantry. But a worker who has gone through the school of the class struggle gains from his own experience an inclination towards dialectical thinking. Even if unaware of this term, he readily accepts the method itself and its conclusions. With a petty-bourgeois it is worse. There are of course petty-bourgeois elements organically linked with the workers, who go over to the proletarian point of view without an internal revolution. But these constitute an insignificant minority. The matter is quite different with the academically trained petty-bourgeoisie. Their theoretical prejudices have already been given finished form at the school bench. Inasmuch as they succeeded in gaining a great deal of knowledge both useful and useless without the aid of the dialectic, they believe that they can continue excellently through life without it. In reality they dispense with the dialectic only to the extent they fail to check, to polish, and to sharpen theoretically their tools of thought, and to the extent that they fail to break practically from the narrow circle of their daily relationships. When thrown against great events they are easily lost and relapse again into petty-bourgeois ways of thinking.

Appealing to "inconsistency" as justification for an unprincipled theoretical bloc, signifies giving oneself bad credentials as a Marxist. Inconsistency is not accidental, and in politics it does not appear solely as an individual symptom. Inconsistency usually serves a social function. There are social groupings which cannot be consistent. Petty-bourgeois elements who have not rid themselves of hoary petty-bourgeois tendencies are systematically compelled within a workers' party to make theoretical compromises with their own conscience.

Comrade Shachtman's attitude toward the dialectic method, as manifested in the above-quoted argumentation, cannot be called anything but eclectic skepticism. It is clear that Shachtman became infected with this attitude not in the school of Marx but among the petty-bourgeois intellectuals to whom all forms of skepticism are proper.

Warning and Verification

The article astonished me to such an extent that I immediately wrote to Comrade Shachtman: "I have just read the article you and Burnham wrote on the intellectuals. Many parts are excellent. However, the section on the dialectic is the greatest blow that you, personally, as the editor of the *New International*, could have delivered to Marxist theory. Comrade Burnham says: 'I don't recognize the dialectic.' It is clear and everybody has to acknowledge it. But you say: 'I recognize the dialectic, but no matter; it does not have the slightest importance.' Re-read what you

wrote. This section is terribly misleading for the readers of the *New International* and the best of gifts to the Eastmans of all kinds. Good! We will speak about it publicly."

My letter was written January 20, some months before the present discussion. Shachtman did not reply until March 5, when he answered in effect that he couldn't understand why I was making such a stir about the matter. On March 9 I answered Shachtman in the following words: "I did not reject in the slightest degree the possibility of collaboration with the anti-dialecticians, but only the advisability of writing an article together where the question of the dialectic plays, or should play, a very important role. The polemic develops on two planes: political and theoretical. Your political criticism is OK. Your theoretical criticism is insufficient; it stops at the point at which it should just become aggressive. Namely, the task consists of showing that their mistakes (insofar as they are *theoretical* mistakes) are products of their incapacity and unwillingness to think the things through dialectically. This task could be accomplished with a very serious pedagogical success. Instead of this you declare that dialectics is a private matter and that one can be a very good fellow without dialectic thinking." By allying himself in *this* question with the anti-dialectician Burnham, Shachtman deprived himself of the possibility of showing why Eastman, Hook and many others began with a philosophical struggle against the dialectic but finished with a political struggle against the socialist revolution. That is, however, the essence of the question.

The present political discussion in the party has confirmed my apprehensions and warning in an incomparably sharper form than I could have expected, or, more correctly, feared. Shachtman's methodological skepticism bore its deplorable fruits in the question of the nature of the Soviet state. Burnham began some time ago by constructing purely empirically, on the basis of his immediate impressions, a non-proletarian and non-bourgeois state, liquidating in passing the Marxist theory of the state as the organ of class rule. Shachtman unexpectedly took an evasive position: "The question, you see, is subject to further consideration;" moreover, the sociological definition of the U.S.S.R. does not possess any direct and immediate significance for our "political tasks" in which Shachtman agrees completely with Burnham. Let the reader again refer to what these comrades wrote concerning the dialectic. Burnham rejects the dialectic. Shachtman seems to accept, but . . . the divine gift of "inconsistency" permits them to meet on common political conclusions. *The attitude of each of them towards the nature of the Soviet state reproduces point for point their attitude towards the dialectic.*

In both cases Burnham takes the leading role. This is not surprising: he possesses a method — pragmatism. Shachtman has no method. He adapts himself to Burnham. Without assuming complete responsibility for the anti-Marxian conceptions of Burnham, he defends his bloc of aggression against the Marxian conceptions with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy as well as in the sphere of sociology. In both cases Burnham appears as a pragmatist and Shachtman as an eclectic. This example has this invaluable advantage that the complete parallelism between Burnham's and Shachtman's positions upon two different

planes of thought and upon two questions of primary importance, will strike the eyes even of comrades who have had no experience in purely theoretical thinking. The method of thought can be dialectic or vulgar, conscious or unconscious, but it exists and makes itself known.

Last January we heard from our authors: "But it does not now, nor has anyone yet demonstrated that agreement on the more abstract doctrines of dialectical materialism necessarily affects today's and tomorrow's concrete political issues. . . ." Nor has anyone yet demonstrated! Not more than a few months passed before Burnham and Shachtman themselves demonstrated that their attitude toward such an "abstraction" as dialectical materialism found its precise manifestation in their attitude toward the Soviet state.

To be sure it is necessary to mention that the difference between the two instances is rather important, but it is of a political and not a theoretical character. In both cases Burnham and Shachtman formed a bloc on the basis of rejection and semi-rejection of the dialectic. But in the first instance that bloc was directed against the opponents of the proletarian party. In the second instance the bloc was concluded against the Marxist wing of their own party. The front of military operations, so to speak, has changed but the weapon remains the same.

True enough, people are often inconsistent. Human consciousness nevertheless tends toward a certain homogeneity. Philosophy and logic are compelled to rely upon this homogeneity of human consciousness and not upon what this homogeneity lacks, that is, inconsistency. Burnham does not recognize the dialectic, but the dialectic recognizes Burnham, that is, extends its sway over him. Shachtman thinks that the dialectic has no importance in political conclusions, but in the political conclusions of Shachtman himself we see the deplorable fruits of his disdainful attitude toward the dialectic. We should include this example in the textbooks on dialectical materialism.

Last year I was visited by a young British professor of political economy, a sympathizer of the Fourth International. During our conversation on the ways and means of realizing socialism, he suddenly expressed the tendencies of British utilitarianism in the spirit of Keynes and others: "It is necessary to determine a clear economic end, to choose the most reasonable means for its realization," etc. I remarked: "I see that you are an adversary of dialectics." He replied, somewhat astonished: "Yes, I don't see any use in it." "However," I replied to him, "the dialectic enabled me on the basis of a few of your observations upon economic problems to determine what category of philosophical thought you belong to—this alone shows that there is an appreciable value in the dialectic." Although I have received no word about my visitor since then, I have no doubt that this anti-dialectic professor maintains the opinion that the U.S.S.R. is not a workers' state, that unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R. is an "out-moded" opinion, that our organizational methods are bad, etc. If it is possible to place a given person's general type of thought on the basis of his relation to concrete practical problems, it is also possible to predict approximately, knowing his general type of thought, how a given individual will approach one or another practical question. That is the incomparable educational value of the dialectical method of thought.

The ABC of Materialist Dialectics

Gangrenous skeptics like Souvarine believe that "nobody knows" what the dialectic is. And there are "Marxists" who kowtow reverently before Souvarine and hope to learn something from him. And these Marxists hide not only in the *Modern Monthly*. Unfortunately a current of Souvarinism exists in the present opposition of the S.W.P. And here it is necessary to warn young comrades: beware of this malignant infection!

The dialectic is neither fiction nor mysticism, but a science of the forms of our thinking insofar as it is not limited to the daily problems of life but attempts to arrive at an understanding of more complicated and drawn-out processes. The dialectic and formal logic bear a relationship similar to that between higher and lower mathematics.

I will here attempt to sketch the substance of the problem in a very concise form. The Aristotelian logic of the simple syllogism starts from the proposition that "A" is equal to "A." This postulate is accepted as an axiom for a multitude of practical human actions and elementary generalizations. But in reality "A" is not equal to "A." This is easy to prove if we observe these two letters under a lens—they are quite different from each other. But, one can object, the question is not of the size or the form of the letters, since they are only symbols for equal quantities, for instance a pound of sugar. The objection is beside the point; in reality a pound of sugar is never equal to a pound of sugar—a more delicate scale always discloses a difference. Again one can object: but a pound of sugar is equal to itself. Neither is this true—all bodies change uninterruptedly in size, weight, color, etc. They are never equal to themselves. A sophist will respond that a pound of sugar is equal to itself "at any given moment." Aside from the extremely dubious practical value of this "axiom," it does not withstand theoretical criticism either. How should we really conceive the word "moment"? If it is an infinitesimal interval of time, then a pound of sugar is subjected during the course of that "moment" to inevitable changes. Or is the "moment" a purely mathematical abstraction, that is, a zero of time? But everything exists in time; and existence itself is an uninterrupted process of transformation; time is consequently a fundamental element of existence. Thus the axiom that "A" is equal to "A" signifies that a thing is equal to itself if it does not change, that is, if it does not exist.

At first glance it could seem that these "subtleties" are useless. In reality they are of decisive significance. The axiom "A" is equal to "A" on one hand is the point of departure for all the errors in our knowledge. To make use of the axiom, "A" is equal to "A" with impunity is possible only within certain limits. When quantitative changes in "A" are negligible for the task at hand then we can presume that "A" is equal to "A." This is, for example, the manner in which a buyer and a seller consider a pound of sugar. We consider the temperature of the sun likewise. Until recently we considered the buying power of the dollar in the same way. But quantitative changes beyond certain limits become converted into qualitative. A pound of sugar subjected to the action of water or kerosene ceases to be a pound of sugar. A dollar in the embrace of a president ceases to be a dollar. To determine at the right moment the

critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge including sociology.

Every worker knows that it is impossible to make two completely equal objects. In the elaboration of bearing-brass into cone bearings, a certain deviation is allowed for the cones which should not, however, go beyond certain limits (this is called tolerance). By observing the norms of tolerance, the cones are considered as being equal. ("A" is equal to "A"). When the tolerance is exceeded the quantity goes over into quality; in other words, the cone bearings become inferior or completely worthless.

Our scientific thinking is only a part of our general practice including techniques. For concepts there also exists "tolerance" which is established not by formal logic issuing from the axiom, "A" is equal to "A," but by dialectical logic issuing from the axiom that everything is always changing. "Common sense" is characterized by the fact that it systematically exceeds dialectical "tolerance."

Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers' state, etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals, etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which "A" ceases to be "A," a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state.

The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectic thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretizations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers' state in general but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc.

Dialectic thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism, but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality. Hegel in his *Logic* established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality, development through contradictions, conflict of content and form, interruption of continuity, change of possibility into inevitability, etc., which are just as important for theoretical thought as is the simple syllogism for more elementary tasks.

Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of science. But because it was only an *anticipation*, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies.

We call our dialectic materialist, since its roots are nei-

ther in heaven nor in the depths of our "free will," but in objective reality, in nature. Consciousness grew out of the unconscious, psychology out of physiology, the organic world out of the inorganic, the solar system out of nebulae. On all the rungs of this ladder of development, the quantitative changes were transformed into qualitative. Our thought, including dialectical thought, is only one of the forms of the expression of changing matter. There is place within this system for neither God, nor Devil, nor immortal soul, nor eternal norms of laws and morals. The dialectic of thinking, having grown out of the dialectic of nature, possesses consequently a thoroughly materialist character.

Darwinism, which explained the evolution of species through quantitative transformations passing into qualitative, was the highest triumph of the dialectic in the whole field of organic matter. Another great triumph was the discovery of the table of atomic weights of chemical elements and further the transformation of one element into another.

With these transformations (species, elements, etc.) is closely linked the question of classification, equally important in the natural as in the social sciences. Linnaeus' system (18th century) utilizing as its starting point the immutability of species, was limited to the description and classification of plants according to their external characteristics. The infantile period of botany is analogous to the infantile period of logic, since the forms of our thought develop like everything that lives. Only decisive repudiation of the idea of fixed species, only the study of the history of the evolution of plants and their anatomy prepared the basis for a really scientific classification.

Marx, who in distinction from Darwin was a conscious dialectician, discovered a basis for the scientific classification of human societies in the development of their productive forces and the structure of the relations of ownership which constitute the anatomy of society. Marxism substituted for the vulgar descriptive classification of societies and states, which even up to now still flourishes in the universities, a materialistic dialectical classification. Only through using the method of Marx is it possible correctly to determine both the concept of a workers' state and the moment of its downfall.

All this as we see, contains nothing "metaphysical" or "scholastic" as conceited ignorance affirms. Dialectic logic expresses the laws of motion in contemporary scientific thought. The struggle against materialist dialectics on the contrary expresses a distant past, conservatism of the petty-bourgeoisie, the self-conceit of university routinists and . . . a spark of hope for an after-life.

The Nature of the U.S.S.R.

The definition of the U.S.S.R. given by Comrade Burnham, "not a workers' and not a bourgeois state," is purely negative, wrenched from the chain of historical development, left dangling in mid-air, void of a single particle of sociology and represents simply a theoretical capitulation of pragmatism before a *contradictory* historical phenomenon.

If Burnham were a dialectical materialist, he would have probed the following three questions: (1) What is the historical origin of the U.S.S.R.? (2) What changes has this state suffered during its existence? (3) Did these

changes pass from the quantitative stage to the qualitative? that is, did they create an historically necessary domination by a new exploiting class? Answering these questions would have forced Burnham to draw the only possible conclusion—the U.S.S.R. is still a degenerated workers' state.

The dialectic is not a magic master key for all questions. It does not replace concrete scientific analysis. But it directs this analysis along the correct road, securing it against sterile wanderings in the desert of subjectivism and scholasticism.

Bruno R. places both the Soviet and fascist regimes under the category of "bureaucratic collectivism," because the U.S.S.R., Italy, and Germany are all ruled by bureaucracies; here and there are the principles of planning; in one case private property is liquidated, in another limited, etc. Thus on the basis of the relative similarity of certain external characteristics of different origin, of different specific weight, of different class significance, a fundamental identity of social regimes is constructed, completely in the spirit of bourgeois professors who construct categories of "controlled economy," "centralized state," without taking into consideration whatsoever the class nature of one or the other. Bruno R. and his followers, or semi-followers like Burnham, at best remain in the sphere of social classification on the level of Linnæus in whose justification it should be remarked however that he lived before Hegel, Darwin, and Marx.

Even worse and more dangerous, perhaps, are those eclectics who express the idea that the class character of the Soviet state "does not matter," and that the direction of our policy is determined by "the character of the war." As if the war were an independent super-social substance; as if the character of the war were not determined by the character of the ruling class, that is, by the same social factor that also determines the character of the state. Astonishing how easily some comrades forget the ABC's of Marxism under the blows of events!

It is not surprising that the theoreticians of the opposition who reject dialectic thought capitulate lamentably before the contradictory nature of the U.S.S.R. However the contradiction between the social basis laid down by the revolution, and the character of the caste which arose out of the degeneration of the revolution is not only an irrefutable historical fact but also a motor force. In our struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucracy we base ourselves on this contradiction. Meanwhile some ultra-lefts have already reached the ultimate absurdity by affirming that it is necessary to sacrifice the social structure of the U.S.S.R. in order to overthrow the Bonapartist oligarchy! They have no suspicion that the U.S.S.R. minus the social structure founded by the October revolution would be a fascist regime.

Evolution and Dialectics

Comrade Burnham will probably protest that as an evolutionist he is interested in the development of society and state forms not less than we dialecticians. We will not dispute this. Every educated person since Darwin has labeled himself an "evolutionist." But a real evolutionist must apply the idea of evolution to his own forms of thinking. Elementary logic, founded in the period when the idea of evolution

itself did not yet exist, is evidently insufficient for the analysis of evolutionary processes. Hegel's logic is the logic of evolution. Only one must not forget that the concept of "evolution" itself has been completely corrupted and emasculated by university professors and liberal writers to mean peaceful "progress." Whoever has come to understand that evolution proceeds through the struggle of antagonistic forces; that a slow accumulation of changes at a certain moment explodes the old shell and brings about a catastrophe, revolution; whoever has learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself, he is a dialectician, as distinguished from vulgar evolutionists. Dialectic training of the mind, as necessary to a revolutionary fighter as finger exercises to a pianist, demands approaching all problems as processes and not as motionless categories. Whereas vulgar evolutionists, who limit themselves generally to recognizing evolution in only certain spheres, content themselves in all other questions with the banalities of "common sense."

The American liberal, who has reconciled himself to the existence of the U.S.S.R., more precisely to the Moscow bureaucracy, believes, or at least believed until the Soviet-German pact, that the Soviet regime on the whole is a "progressive thing," that the repugnant features of the bureaucracy ("well naturally they exist!") will progressively slough away and that peaceful and painless "progress" is thus assured.

A vulgar petty-bourgeois radical is similar to a liberal "progressive" in that he takes the U.S.S.R. as a whole, failing to understand its internal contradictions and dynamics. When Stalin concluded an alliance with Hitler, invaded Poland, and now Finland, the vulgar radicals triumphed; the identity of the methods of Stalinism and fascism was proved! They found themselves in difficulties however when the new authorities invited the population to expropriate the landowners and capitalists—they had not foreseen this possibility at all! Meanwhile the social revolutionary measures, carried out via bureaucratic military means, not only did not disturb our, dialectic, definition of the U.S.S.R. as a degenerated workers' state, but gave it the most incontrovertible corroboration. Instead of utilizing this triumph of Marxian analysis for persevering agitation, the petty-bourgeois oppositionists began to shout with criminal light-mindedness that the events have refuted our prognosis, that our old formulas are no longer applicable, that new words are necessary. What words? They haven't decided yet themselves.

Defense of the U.S.S.R.

We began with philosophy and then went to sociology. It became clear that in both spheres, of the two leading personalities of the opposition, one had taken an anti-Marxian, the other an eclectic position. If we now consider politics, particularly the question of the defense of the U.S.S.R., we will find that just as great surprises await us.

The opposition discovered that our formula of "unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R.," the formula of our program, is "vague, abstract, and outmoded (!?)." Unfortunately they do not explain under what future "conditions" they are ready to defend the conquests of the revolution.

tion. In order to give at least an ounce of sense to their new formula, the opposition attempts to represent the matter as if up to now we had "unconditionally" defended the international policy of the Kremlin government with its Red Army and G.P.U. Everything is turned upside down! In reality for a long time we have not defended the Kremlin's international policy, not even conditionally, particularly since the time that we openly proclaimed the necessity of crushing the Kremlin oligarchy through insurrection! A wrong policy not only mutilates the current tasks but also compels one to represent his own past in a false light.

In the above-quoted article in the *New International*, Burnham and Shachtman cleverly labeled the group of disillusioned intellectuals "The League of Abandoned Hopes," and persistently asked what would be the position of this deplorable League in case of military conflict between a capitalistic country and the Soviet Union. "We take this occasion, therefore," they wrote, "to demand from Hook, Eastman and Lyons unambiguous declarations on the question of defense of the Soviet Union from attack by Hitler or Japan—or for that matter by England. . . ." Burnham and Shachtman did not lay down any "conditions," they did not specify any "concrete" circumstances, and at the same time they demanded an "unambiguous" reply. ". . . Would the League (of Abandoned Hopes) also refrain from taking a position or would it declare itself neutral?" they continued; "In a word, is it for the defense of the Soviet Union from imperialist attack, regardless and in spite of the Stalinist regime?" (My emphasis). A quotation to marvel at! And this is exactly what our program declares. Burnham and Shachtman in January 1939 stood in favor of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and defined the significance of unconditional defense entirely correctly as "regardless and in spite of the Stalinist regime." And yet this article was written when the experience of the Spanish revolution had already been drained to completion. Comrade Cannon is absolutely right when he says that the role of Stalinism in Spain was incomparably more criminal than in Poland or Finland. In the first case the bureaucracy through hangman's methods strangled a socialist revolution. In the second case it gives an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods. Why did Burnham and Shachtman themselves so unexpectedly shift to the position of the "League of Abandoned Hopes"? Why? We cannot consider Shachtman's super-abstract references to the "concreteness of events" as an explanation. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find an explanation. The Kremlin's participation in the Republican camp in Spain was supported by the bourgeois democrats all over the world. Stalin's work in Poland and Finland is met with frantic condemnation from the same democrats. In spite of all its noisy formulas the opposition happens to be a reflection inside the Socialist Workers Party of the moods of the "left" petty-bourgeoisie. This fact unfortunately is incontrovertible.

"Our subjects," wrote Burnham and Shachtman about the League of Abandoned Hopes, "take great pride in believing that they are contributing something 'fresh', that they are 're-evaluating in the light of new experiences', that they are 'not dogmatists' ('conservatives'?—L.T.) who refuse to re-examine their 'basic assumption', etc. What a pathetic self-deception! None of them has brought to light

any new facts, given any new understanding of the present or future." Astonishing quotation! Should we not add a new chapter to their article, "Intellectuals in Retreat"? I offer Comrade Shachtman my collaboration. . . .

How is it possible that outstanding individuals like Burnham and Shachtman, unconditionally devoted to the cause of the proletariat, could become so frightened of the not so frightening gentlemen of the League of Abandoned Hopes! On the purely theoretical plane the explanation in respect to Burnham rests in his incorrect method, in respect to Shachtman in his disregard for method. Correct method not only facilitates the attainment of a correct conclusion, but, connecting every new conclusion with the preceding conclusions in a consecutive chain, fixes the conclusions in one's memory. If political conclusions are made empirically, if inconsistency is proclaimed as a kind of advantage, then the Marxian system of politics is invariably replaced by impressionism—in so many ways characteristic of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Every new turn of events catches the empiricist-impressionist unawares, compels him to forget what he himself wrote yesterday, and produces a consuming desire for new formulas before new ideas have appeared in his head.

The Soviet-Finnish War

The resolution of the opposition upon the question of the Soviet-Finnish war is a document which could be signed, perhaps with slight changes, by the Bordigists, Vereecken, Sneevliet, Fenner Brockway, Marceau Pivert and the like, but in no case by Bolshevik-Leninists. Based exclusively on features of the Soviet bureaucracy and on the mere fact of the "invasion" the resolution is void of the slightest social content. It places Finland and the U.S.S.R. on the same level and unequivocally "condemns, rejects and opposes both governments and their armies." Having noticed, however, that something was not in order, the resolution unexpectedly and without any connection with the text adds: "In the application (!) of this perspective, the Fourth International will, of course, (how marvelous is this "of course") take into account (!) the differing economic relations in Finland and Russia." Every word is a pearl. By "concrete" circumstances our lovers of the "concrete" mean the military situation, the moods of the masses and in the third place the opposed economic regimes. As to just how these three "concrete" circumstances will be "taken into account," the resolution doesn't give the slightest inkling. If the opposition opposes equally "both governments and their armies" in relation to this war, how will it "take into account" the differences in the military situation and the social regimes? Definitely nothing of this is comprehensible.

In order to punish the Stalinists for their unquestionable crimes, the resolution, following the petty-bourgeois democrats of all shadings, does not mention by so much as a word that the Red Army in Finland expropriates large landowners and introduces workers' control while preparing for the expropriation of the capitalists.

Tomorrow the Stalinists will strangle the Finnish workers. But now they are giving—they are compelled to give—a tremendous impulse to the class struggle in its sharpest form. The leaders of the opposition construct their policy not upon the "concrete" process that is taking place in Fin-

land, but upon democratic abstractions and noble sentiments.

The Soviet-Finnish war is apparently beginning to be supplemented by a civil war in which the Red Army finds itself at the given stage in the same camp as the Finnish petty peasants and the workers, while the Finnish army enjoys the support of the owning classes, the conservative labor bureaucracy and the Anglo-Saxon imperialists. The hopes which the Red Army awakens among the Finnish poor will, unless international revolution intervenes, prove to be an illusion; the collaboration of the Red Army with the poor will only be temporary; the Kremlin will soon turn its weapons against the Finnish workers and peasants. We know all this now and we say it openly as a warning. But in this "concrete" civil war that is taking place on Finnish territory, what "concrete" position must the "concrete" partisans of the Fourth International take? If they fought in Spain in the Republican camp in spite of the fact that the Stalinists were strangling the socialist revolution, all the more must they participate in Finland in that camp where the Stalinists are compelled to support the expropriation of the capitalists.

Our innovators cover the holes in their position with violent phrases. They label the policy of the U.S.S.R. "imperialist." Vast enrichment of the sciences! Beginning from now on both the foreign policy of finance-capital and the policy of exterminating finance-capital will be called imperialism. This will help significantly in the clarification and class education of the workers! But simultaneously—will shout the, let us say, very hasty Stanley—the Kremlin supports the policy of finance-capital in Germany! This objection is based on the substitution of one problem for another, in the dissolving of the concrete into the abstract (the usual mistake of vulgar thought).

If Hitler tomorrow were forced to send arms to the in-

urrectionary Indians, must the revolutionary German workers oppose this concrete action by strikes or sabotage? On the contrary they must make sure that the insurrectionists receive the arms as soon as possible. We hope that this is clear to Stanley. But this example is purely hypothetical. We used it in order to show that even a fascist government of finance-capital can under certain conditions be forced to support a national revolutionary movement (in order to attempt to strangle it the next day). Hitler would never under any circumstances support a proletarian revolution for instance in France. As for the Kremlin it is at the present time forced—and this is not a hypothetical but a real situation—to provoke a social revolutionary movement in Finland (in order to attempt to strangle it politically tomorrow). To cover a given social revolutionary movement with the all-embracing term of imperialism only because it is provoked, mutilated, and at the same time strangled by the Kremlin merely testifies to one's theoretical and political poverty.

It is necessary to add that the stretching of the concept of "imperialism" lacks even the attraction of novelty. At present not only the "democrats" but also the bourgeoisie of the democratic countries describe Soviet policy as imperialist. The aim of the bourgeoisie is transparent—to erase the social contradictions between capitalistic and soviet expansion, to hide the problem of property, and in this way to help genuine imperialism. What is the aim of Shachtman and the others? They don't know themselves. Their terminological novelty objectively leads them away from the Marxian terminology of the Fourth International and brings them close to the terminology of the "democrats." This circumstance, alas, again testifies to the opposition's extreme sensitivity to the pressure of petty-bourgeois public opinion.

"The Organizational Question"

From the ranks of the opposition one begins to hear more frequently: "The Russian question isn't of any decisive importance in and of itself; the most important task is to change the party regime." Change in regime, it is necessary to understand, means a change in leadership, or more precisely, the elimination of Cannon and his close collaborators from directing posts. These clamorous voices demonstrate that the tendency towards a struggle against "Cannon's faction" preceded that "concreteness of events" which Shachtman and others refer in explaining their change of position. At the same time these voices remind us of a whole series of past oppositional groups who took up a struggle on different occasions; and who, when the principled basis began to crumble under their feet, shifted to the so-called "organizational question"—the case was identical with Molinier, Sneevliet, Vereecken, and many others. As disagreeable as these precedents may appear, it is impossible to pass over them.

It would be incorrect, however, to believe that the shifting of the struggle to the "organizational question" represents a simple "maneuver" in the factional struggle. No, the inner feelings of the opposition tell them, in truth, however confusedly, that the issue concerns not only the "Russian problem" but rather the entire approach to political prob-

lems in general, including also the methods of building the party. And this is in a certain sense correct.

We too have attempted above to prove that the issue concerns not only the Russian problem but even more the opposition's method of thought, which has its social roots. The opposition is under the sway of petty-bourgeois moods and tendencies. This is the essence of the whole matter.

We saw quite clearly the ideological influence of another class in the instances of Burnham (pragmatism) and Shachtman (eclecticism). We did not take into consideration other leaders such as Comrade Abern because he generally does not participate in principled discussions, limiting himself to the plane of the "organizational question." This does not mean, however, that Abern has no importance. On the contrary, it is possible to say that Burnham and Shachtman are the amateurs of the opposition while Abern is the unquestionable professional. Abern, and only he, has his own traditional group which grew out of the old Communist Party and became bound together during the first period of the independent existence of the "Left Opposition." All the others who hold various reasons for criticism and discontent cling to this group.

Any serious factional fight in a party is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle. The Majority fac-

tion established from the beginning the ideological dependence of the opposition upon petty-bourgeois democracy. The opposition, on the contrary, precisely because of its petty-bourgeois character does not even attempt to look for the social roots of the hostile camp.

The opposition opened up a severe factional fight which is now paralyzing the party at a very critical moment. That such a fight could be justified and not pitilessly condemned, very serious and deep foundations would be necessary. For a Marxist such foundations can have only a class character. Before they began their bitter struggle, the leaders of the opposition were obligated to ask themselves this question: What non-proletarian class influence is reflected in the majority of the National Committee? Nevertheless, the opposition have not made the slightest attempt at such a class evaluation of the divergences. They see only "conservatism," "errors," "bad methods," and similar psychological, intellectual, and technical deficiencies. The opposition are not interested in the class nature of the opposition faction; just as they are not interested in the class nature of the U.S.S.R. This fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate the petty-bourgeois character of the opposition, with its tinge of academic pedantry and journalistic impressionism.

In order to understand what class or strata are reflected in the factional fight, it is necessary to study the fight of both factions historically. Those members of the opposition who affirm that the present fight has "nothing in common" with the old factional struggles, demonstrate once again their superficial attitude toward the life of their own party. The fundamental core of the opposition is the same which three years ago grouped itself around Muste and Spector. The fundamental core of the Majority is the same which grouped itself around Cannon. Of the leading figures only Shachtman and Burnham have shifted from one camp to the other. But these personal shifts, important though they might be, do not change the general character of the two groups. I will not go into the historical sequence of the faction fight, referring the reader to the in every respect excellent article by Joseph Hansen, "Organizational Methods and Political Principles."

If we subtract everything accidental, personal, and episodic, if we reduce the present groupings in struggle to their fundamental political types, then indubitably the struggle of Comrade Abern against Comrade Cannon has been the most consistent. In this struggle Abern represents a propagandistic group, petty-bourgeois in its social composition, united by old personal ties and having almost the character of a family. Cannon represents the proletarian party in process of formation. The historical right in this struggle—independently of what errors and mistakes might have been made—rests wholly on the side of Cannon.

When the representatives of the opposition raised the hue and cry that the "leadership is bankrupt," "the prognoses did not turn out to be correct," "the events caught us unawares," "it is necessary to change our slogans," all this without the slightest effort to think the questions through seriously, they appeared fundamentally as party defeatists. This deplorable attitude is explained by the irritation and fright of the old propagandistic circle before the new tasks and the new party relations. The sentimentality of personal ties does not want to yield to the sense of duty and discipline. The task that

stands before the party is to break up the old clique ties and to dissolve the best elements of the propagandistic past in the proletarian party. It is necessary to develop such a spirit of party patriotism that nobody dare say: "The reality of the matter is not the Russian question but that we feel more easy and comfortable under Abern's leadership than under Cannon's."

I personally did not arrive at this conclusion yesterday. I happened to have expressed it tens and hundreds of times in conversations with members of Abern's group. I invariably emphasized the petty-bourgeois composition of this group. I insistently and repeatedly proposed to transfer from membership to candidacy such petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers as proved incapable of recruiting workers for the party. Private letters, conversations, and admonitions as has been shown by subsequent events have not led to anything—people rarely learn from someone else's experience. The antagonism between the two party layers and the two periods of its development rose to the surface and took on the character of bitter factional struggle. Nothing remains but to give an opinion, clearly and definitely, to the American section and the whole International. "Friendship is friendship but duty is duty"—says a Russian proverb.

The following question can be posed: if the opposition is a petty-bourgeois tendency does that signify further unity is impossible? Then how reconcile the petty-bourgeois tendency with the proletarian? To pose the question like this means to judge one-sidedly, undialectically, and thus falsely. In the present discussion the opposition has clearly manifested its petty-bourgeois features. But this does not mean that the opposition has no other features. The majority of the members of the opposition are deeply devoted to the cause of the proletariat and are capable of learning. Tied today to a petty-bourgeois milieu they can tomorrow tie themselves to the proletariat. The inconsistent ones, under the influence of experience, can become more consistent. When the party embraces thousands of workers even the professional factionalists can re-educate themselves in the spirit of proletarian discipline. It is necessary to give them time for this. That is why Comrade Cannon's proposal to keep the discussion free from any threats of split, expulsions, etc., was absolutely correct and in place.

Nevertheless, it remains not less indubitable that if the party as a whole should take the road of the opposition it could suffer complete destruction. The present opposition is incapable of giving the party Marxian leadership. The Majority of the present National Committee expresses more consistently, seriously, and profoundly the proletarian tasks of the party than the Minority. Precisely because of this the Majority can have no interest in directing the struggle toward split—correct ideas will win. Nor can the healthy elements of the opposition wish a split—the experience of the past demonstrates very clearly that all the different kinds of improvised groups who split from the Fourth International condemned themselves to sterility and decomposition. That is why it is possible to envisage the next party convention without any fear. It will reject the anti-Marxian novelties of the opposition and guarantee party unity.

L. TROTSKY

December 15, 1939

The Crisis in the American Party

An Open Letter in Reply to Comrade Leon Trotsky

Dear Comrade Trotsky:

Your article of December 15, 1939 ("A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party") raises a number of questions which enable me, in reply, to present and elaborate the standpoint of the Minority, in general, and of myself personally. The nature of the questions raised, and the manner in which you deal with them, impose a polemical form upon the present reply, not so much because your article was directly addressed to the party but primarily because I am compelled to disagree radically and uncompromisingly with the attacks you make upon the Minority and its political position, and with the solution you advance for resolving the party crisis.

This reply, supplementing the main documents already published by the Minority, will speak with the same welcome candor and even bluntness which you employ in your article, and will try to deal with all the essential points you raise, answering all and evading none.

Dialectics, Politics, Blocs

You have discovered the class struggle, or rather its reflection, in the ranks of the party. The Cannon faction represents the proletarian wing of the party; the Minority is "incapable of giving the party Marxian leadership" because it is "leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency." As to whether it is permissible to speak of class tendencies and class struggle in the party, and the extent to which it is permissible—these questions will be dealt with further on in this document. Here let us examine the basis for your characterization of the Minority faction.

What is involved, of course, is not the pride or prestige or subjective feelings of this or that comrade in the Minority, or of the group as a whole, but the objective validity of the characterization.

At the beginning of the crisis in the party, the Cannonites characterized the Minority in various ways. Of them all, however, as is pointed out in our document on "War and Bureaucratic Conservatism," only one even pretended to be a political characterization, namely, the Minority is yielding to the pressure of bourgeois patriotism, or, as you now put it, the Minority represents a petty-bourgeois tendency.

To which we replied: Political tendencies, either inside or outside the party, do not arise overnight, nor are they the spontaneously full-fledged product of the whims or aberrations of a group of individuals. Here and there we find an individual who, unexpectedly and suddenly, "accidentally," turns into his political opposite. A man with a long record of radicalism may suddenly turn patriot at the outbreak of war; a man with a long record of opportunism may suddenly turn radical at the same time. But these are individual cases and do not represent tendencies. We speak of political tendencies precisely because it is possible to say of a group of people that over an appreciable period of time, as revealed in the record of its political words and deeds, it has tended in a certain political direction and has finally crystallized into a distinct political group, or faction, or party. An isolated instance or two does not establish a tendency (much less a "petty-bourgeois tendency" and one that is "typical," at that), but at most a mistake or a deviation. Even on this small scale, one can apply the dialectical method and inquire into whether or not a quantitative change has been transformed into a qualitative change!

Therefore—continued our reply to the Cannon faction—to maintain your characterization, it is incumbent upon you to indicate in our political record, which is available to you, wherein this tendency has manifested itself in the last year or two among the representative spokesmen of the Minority. That is, in attacking us, in characterizing us politically, please do no less than all of us together have done with reference to bourgeois political groups, to the Stalinists, to the Thomasites, to the Lovestoneites, and even to such grouplets as Oehler, etc.; or, in our own movement, than we did, for example, with the Sneevliet tendency—characterizing it

politically on the basis of its established record over a period of years.

But that is just what the Cannonites did not do and have not done. Moreover, they did not even attempt to do it, for everybody knows that the attempt would be fruitless and doomed in advance to failure. Not because the leading comrades of the Minority have no record to look into. Quite the contrary. They have one and, as said above, it is easily available. There are the records of the Political Committee, containing the views of all the comrades on every question; there are our articles in the press; there are our programs and manifestoes; there are our brochures and speeches. Let them be cited! There has been no lack of bourgeois-patriotic, anti-Soviet, reformist pressure upon our party in the past. Show us from the record when and where any of our leading comrades yielded to this pressure! I say confidently: It cannot be done. What the record will reveal is that we were not among the last—so far as Burnham and Shachtman in particular are concerned, I say without false modesty, that we were the first—of those who constantly defended the revolutionary-internationalist position on war against all species of reformists, patriots, People's Fronters, Stalinists, centrists, left-centrists, ultra-leftists, and who constantly sought to make the party more alert to the need of combatting the war danger and all it involved in the ranks of the working class.

By what political right, then, on the basis of what facts in our record, are we charged with being a petty-bourgeois tendency?

The Cannon faction never answered this question. Its silence implied that the only "right" it exercised was the right of necessity; it needed to give this political characterization of us, whether grounded in fact or not.

You ask in your article: "Why did Burnham and Shachtman themselves so unexpectedly (the word 'unexpectedly,' Comrade Trotsky, is itself a sufficient comment upon the unassailability of our political record) shift to the position of the 'League of Abandoned Hopes'?" (that is, of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals-in-retreat). And you answer: "It is not difficult to find an explanation. The Kremlin's participation in the Republican camp in Spain was supported by the bourgeois democrats all over the world. Stalin's work in Poland and Finland is met with frantic condemnation from the same democrats. In spite of all its noisy formulas the opposition appears to be a reflection inside the SWP of the mind of the 'left' petty-bourgeoisie. This fact unfortunately is incontrovertible."

In face of what "appears to be" an "incontrovertible fact," how are we to account for the fact that the pressure of the bourgeois-democrats throughout the Spanish civil war was not reflected among us in a tendency to yield to People's Frontism and the imperialist patriotism with which it was imbued? It is true that some ultra-leftists in the party at that time accused us and Cannon and Trotsky of precisely such a tendency; but the "fact" was just as "incontrovertible" then as now.

Although the Cannonites never even sought to find in our political record a justification for their characterization of our group, you have, it is true, presented one article out of that record calculated to establish a connection between our present position and our past, and thereby to warrant your political justification. It is the article "Intellectuals in Retreat" by Burnham and Shachtman, about which we exchanged some correspondence earlier in 1939. Quoting sections of what the two authors wrote about dialectical materialism, you declare that my allegedly unprincipled bloc with Burnham in the sphere of sociology (the question of the class nature of the Soviet state) and then in the sphere of politics ("unconditional defense of the Soviet Union") followed logically from and paralleled my unprincipled "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy"—all of which adds up, in your view, to the characteristics of a typical petty-bourgeois tendency.

Comrade Trotsky, I am, as I wrote you many months ago in reply to your letter of January 20, 1939, only a student in the field of philosophy. The exigencies of party work do not always permit one to extend his knowledge and understanding of dialectical ma-

terialism to the degree really demanded of a revolutionary Marxist. I have always been greatly impressed by the fact that a generation ago Lenin took time out from the daily political struggle, so to speak, in order to devote himself to special studies and a separate volume in defense of Marxian philosophy from its bourgeois and revisionist critics. Lack of time, and a more extensive knowledge which it would make possible, have prevented me and others from venturing, however modestly, into a systematic, rounded-out and thoroughgoing defense of dialectical materialism from its modern (above all, American) critics in the public press. Whenever I can read and study what you and our great teachers have written on the subject, I do so with the greatest attention. Yet I must say:

Your accusations are entirely unwarranted and baseless. They form an arbitrary construction calculated to buttress a political conclusion which cannot be buttressed objectively. Let me indicate the grounds for this statement.

You quote from our article (New International, Jan. 1939) a section which explains how the authors, having different opinions on dialectical materialism, nevertheless write a joint article against the petty-bourgeois opponents of Bolshevism. You conclude that in the opinion of the two authors, "the method is not of great importance, we shall meditate upon methods sometime when we have more leisure, but now we have other things to do."

Excuse me! Nowhere in the article is there a word that could justify such a conclusion. In your article, you quote one paragraph of our explanation for the joint authorship. You omit from the paragraph a key sentence which I underline here. We wrote:

"The two authors of the present article differ thoroughly on their estimate of the general theory of dialectical materialism, one of them accepting it and the other rejecting it. **This has not prevented them from working for years within a single political organization toward mutually accepted objectives, nor has this required on the part of either of them any suppression of his theoretical opinions, in private or public.**"

But that is not all. The following paragraphs from our article are not less important.

"During 1907-08, Lenin was, as is well known, carrying on a philosophical dispute with the Machists and also a sharp political fight against the Mensheviks. Gorky inclined, on the philosophical questions, towards the Machists, and apparently considered that this might prevent him from making common political cause with Lenin against the Mensheviks on the concrete questions then at issue. On February 25, 1908, Lenin wrote to Gorky as follows:

"I believe I must tell you my view quite openly. A certain scrap among the Bolsheviks in the question of philosophy I now consider quite unavoidable. But to split up on that account would be stupid, in my opinion. We have formed a bloc for the carrying through of a certain tactic in the Social Democratic Labor party. This tactic we have been and are continuing to carry through **without differences of opinion** (the only difference of opinion occurred in connection with the boycott of the Third Duma), but firstly it never reached such a sharp point among us even to hint at a split; secondly, it did not correspond to the difference of opinion of the materialists and the Machists, for the Machist Bazarov, for example, was, like myself, against the boycott and wrote about it (a large feuilleton in the Proletarii [the journal then under Bolshevik direction]).

"To obstruct the cause of the carrying through of the tactic of the revolutionary social democracy in the Labor party because of disputes over materialism or Machism, would be, in my opinion, an inexcusable stupidity. We must be at loggerheads over philosophy in such a way that the Proletarii and the Bolsheviks, as a faction of the party, **are not affected by it.** And that is entirely possible."

"These wise, responsible and humane words are those, of course, of the real Lenin, not the sanctimonious Pope of the Stalinist fairy tales nor the one-party tyrant who is now being imaginatively constructed by Eastman, Hook and Harrison.

"Shortly after the time of the above letter, interestingly enough, one of the Mensheviks declared in the Neue Zeit that the philosophical dispute was identical with the political dispute. Proletarii made the following editorial statement:

"In this connection, the editorial board of Proletarii, as the ideological representative of the Bolshevik tendency, deems it necessary to present the following declaration: "In reality this philosophical dispute is not a factional dispute and, in the opinion of the editorial board, it should not be one; any attempt to represent these differences of opinion as factional is thoroughly erroneous. Among the members of both factions there are supporters of both philosophical tendencies.""

In the light of these remarks and quotations from Lenin, I still fail to see, as I wrote you months ago, wherein I was wrong in writing the joint article with Burnham and in taking, with him, the position on the dialectic quoted above. Quite the contrary. Under the same circumstances, I would do it again and again tomorrow.

You speak of my "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy." But that is precisely the sphere in which we did not make a bloc! The sub-title of our article was: "A Political Analysis of Some of the Recent Critics of Bolshevism: Sidney Hook, Max Eastman, Eugene Lyons, Ben Stolberg, and Others." The article pursued exclusively political aims: the defense of Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, the Fourth International, from the petty-bourgeois intellectual critics, and an attack upon their political program. I still consider that defense and that attack good—at least no one in our ranks has yet disagreed with it, not even Cannon (then or now).*

You say: "By allying himself in this question with the anti-dialectician Burnham, Shachtman deprived himself of the possibility of showing why Eastman, Hook, and many others began with a philosophical struggle against dialectics but finished with a political struggle against the socialist revolution." I can agree with this, more or less. On my part, it was a conscious and deliberate "self-deprivation." But it was more than compensated for, in my opinion, by the fact that I was able to defend our fundamental political principles and program from revisionist attack, and to defend it jointly with a comrade whose views on philosophy differ from mine in such a way that Eastman, Hook and Co. might be able to exploit it politically (should I attack Burnham at the same time). Burnham's opposition to dialectics is not consistent, in my view (as mine is not in his view), with his support of the revolutionary program of the Fourth International. I say about his philosophical views (as he does about mine) that, **in the long run**, they will or may have fatal effects upon his political position. Meanwhile, to the greatest possible extent, let us unite to defend that political position, which we hold in common with the rest of the Fourth International, against all its critics. If, in that connection, we have occasion to speak of philosophical questions, let us make it perfectly clear that on that subject we do not agree.

You consider that an unprincipled bloc? If it is a bloc at all, I think it is a good one. If Burnham and Shachtman were to write a joint article on philosophy, or specifically on Marxian dialectics, that would be unprincipled. To declare a temporary truce on philosophy, while the revolutionary political position is put forward—that is not unprincipled, rather it is a service to the party.

Rosa Luxemburg may have been able to write more thorough criticisms of Kautsky and Bernstein during the war if she had also attacked their revisionism in the sphere of philosophy. But in that case, Liebknecht would not have written or signed these criticisms with her, because of his well-known opposition to dialectical materialism. The philosophical front had to wait under the press of more urgent problems and disputes. My dispute with Burnham on the philosophical front will also have to wait—not because I believe, as you so unjustly write, that the dialectic does not matter, but because there are more urgent problems to settle and because Burnham is not making the dissemination of his philosophical views his main preoccupation in the party or even one of his preoccupations** and because—like virtually all the other leading members of the party who accept dialectical materialism—I do not yet feel sufficiently equipped to write the kind of defense of dialectical materialism which it deserves. Meanwhile, I repeat, I am ready to make a

*Immediately upon reading the article, Comrade Dunne sent the authors an air-mailed letter declaring that he was proud to be a member of the party that had them in it. Neither he nor any other member of the present Majority faction noticed the unprincipled bloc in the sphere of philosophy at that time. In fact, it was generally understood that this long article was not just a literary exercise against intellectuals of no account, but, through them, an exposition and defense of the Bolshevik program on the main political questions of the day.

**If Burnham will forgive me for the comparison, let me quote what Lenin wrote about priests in the party: "If a priest comes to cooperate with us in our work—if he conscientiously performs party work, and does not oppose the party program—we can accept him into the ranks of Social Democracy, for the contradictions between the spirit and principles of our program and the religious convictions of the priest could, in these circumstances, be regarded as a matter in which he contradicts himself, as one which concerns him alone. A political party cannot examine its members to see if there are any contradictions between their philosophy and the party program. Of course, such a case would be a rare exception even in Western Europe; it is hardly possible in Russia. But if, for example, a priest joined the Social Democratic party, and made it his chief and almost exclusive business to propagate religious views, then, of course, the party would have to expel him." (May 26, 1909.) Lenin would not write a joint article with a priest on religion; but he would not hesitate, I am sure, to write one with a priest-party-member in defense of the party's political position, explaining therein that he finds "the religious convictions of the priest . . . a matter in which he contradicts himself." With due respect for the difference in proportions, and in the person involved, the same applies in the case I am discussing.

"bloc" with Burnham on the defense of the revolutionary program of the Fourth International, and to make it a hundred times over.

In the same letter to Gorky (Feb. 25, 1908), Lenin writes: "Plekhanov considered Bogdanov at that time as an ally in the struggle against revisionism, but as an ally who was wrong in so far as he went along with Ostwald and further with Mach." (That is, Bogdanov was a non-Marxist, a Machist, in the sphere of philosophy.) "In the spring and summer of 1904, Bogdanov and I finally joined together as Bolsheviks and constituted that tacit bloc, the bloc which tacitly excluded philosophy as a neutral field, which lasted throughout the whole period of the revolution and gave us the possibility of carrying through jointly in the revolution that tactic of the revolutionary social democracy which, in my deepest conviction, was the only correct one." (My emphasis.—M.S.)

Wherein does what you call my "bloc with Burnham in the sphere of philosophy" differ from Lenin's bloc with Bogdanov? Why was the latter principled and ours unprincipled? I should be very much interested to know the answer to this question.

How is it possible, some comrades ask, for Burnham, whose views on philosophy are not Marxian, to come to political conclusions which are Marxian? It would be quite sufficient to answer: It is possible, as may be demonstrated by facts. Burnham's position on the dialectics of nature, for example, did not prevent him from arriving at the political conclusions embodied in the program of the Fourth International, any more than the complete ignorance of dialectics on the part of some comrades prevents them from arriving at the same political conclusions.

Does this mean that the materialistic dialectic, the dialectical method, "are not important"? It means nothing of the kind. It does mean, however, that there is a contradiction, an inconsistency, in Burnham's position. This has not prevented the party as a whole from collaborating with Burnham on innumerable political questions, from presenting him as an authorized party spokesman, from appointing him an editor of its theoretical journal. By the same token, it does not and will not prevent me from collaborating with him on all those political questions wherein we agree.

The connection between a philosophical and a programmatic position, a philosophical and a political position, holds only "in the last analysis." The connection is not always direct and immediate. Political positions are not directly deduced from philosophical positions by means of concrete and scientific analysis. Lenin could speak of "our comrades in politics and opponents in philosophy" without revealing an inconsistency anywhere except in the comrades referred to. Both Engels and Lenin, furthermore, pointed out that the modern scientist, for all his "opposition" to dialectical materialism, is compelled to one degree or another to employ the dialectical-materialist method in his concrete scientific work. The materialist theory of knowledge, Lenin wrote, is one "which natural science instinctively holds." That is often true of the science of politics, too; and I have observed it more than once not only in the case of Comrade Burnham but of others as well.

These are, briefly, some of the reasons why I must reject not only your argument about the "unprincipled bloc" in philosophy, but also your reference to the Burnham-Shachtman article as a justification for characterizing our group as a petty-bourgeois tendency. As for the Cannon faction and the question of dialectical materialism, the less said on the subject the better for the faction. Following your article, its spokesmen may try their utmost to parade as the intransigent champions of Marxian philosophy, but the indifference to theoretical questions—to say nothing of philosophical questions—and even the contempt towards such questions which most of its representative leaders have fostered, is too notorious in the ranks of the party to require elaboration here.

The State and the Character of the War

The Burnham position on this, the second, question, is bad enough, you write, but "even worse and more dangerous, unfortunately, are those eclectics who express the idea that the class character of the Soviet state 'does not matter,' since the direction of our policy is determined by 'the character of the war.' As if the war were an independent super-social substance; as if the character of the war were not determined by the character of the ruling class, that is, by the same social factor that also determines the character of the state. Astonishing how easily some comrades forget the ABCs of Marxism under the blows of events!"

Who are the "eclectics who express the idea that the class character of the Soviet state 'does not matter' "? Who has said it? written it? and when and where? I know of no such comrade and no such document.

What then is our position? Simply this: It is impossible to deduce directly our policy towards a specific war from an abstract characterization of the class character of the state involved in the war, more particularly, from the property forms prevailing in that state. Our policy must flow from a concrete examination of the character of the war in relation to the interests of the international socialist revolution. Our fundamental position on this question has already been stated in the document on the Russian question presented by the Minority of the Political Committee. Let me elaborate some aspects of it here so that we may see how the different viewpoints are manifested in theory and in practice.

What is the position of the Cannon group, boiled down to its essentials? The nationalized property determines the class character of the Soviet Union as a workers' state. The Stalinist regime is based upon the forms of property created by the October Revolution, which are progressive and must be defended from imperialist attack. Consequently, in a war between the Soviet Union and a capitalist state, we are for the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union, for the victory of the Red Army and therefore for material and military support of the Red Army.

You add, Comrade Trotsky, that war is not "an independent super-social substance"; and its character is determined by the character of the ruling class, "that is, by the same social factor that also determines the character of the state"—the property forms, in this case, the nationalized property.

In spite of my recently-acquired bad philosophical reputation, I cannot accept the clear implication of this position because I do not consider it a **dialectical view of the problem**. That is, it is based upon abstractions and not upon material realities considered in their dialectical inter-relationships.

According to this standpoint, private property is the social factor that determines the character of the capitalist state, the same factor also determining the character of the capitalist ruling class, which in turn determines the character of the wars carried on by it. And what holds true of the capitalist state, holds true, with the necessary changes, of the workers' state.

In the first place, to speak of "capitalist state" and of "workers' state" is to speak in terms of abstractions which do not, by themselves, answer the question of the character of a given war.

The Germany of 1870 was not a feudal but a capitalist state, in which private property relations were predominant; this capitalist state conducted an historically progressive war (even under Bismarck and Wilhelm I) against Bonapartist France, its oppressor. The Germany of 1914, also a capitalist state in which private property relations were predominant, conducted a reactionary (imperialist) war against France. The same social class, based on the same property relations, was in power in the two countries both in 1870 and in 1914. If these factors alone, considered abstractly, determined the character of the war, it would be impossible for us to distinguish the progressive from the reactionary war.

The Italy of 1859 conducted a war against Austria and the Italy of 1915 conducted a war against Austria. The first war of these two wars has always been characterized as progressive by the Marxists; the second, as reactionary. What determined the characters of these wars? In the case of both countries, in both epochs, the ruling class was the same and was based on the same property relations.

The difference between the two epochs (and the two wars) lay in this: the young bourgeoisie was progressive because it fought for the establishment of national boundaries, for the establishment of the great national states of Europe, against feudal decay, particularism and atomization. The establishment of the great national (capitalist) states was progressive in its time not only because it broke down the feudal barriers to the development of the productive forces, but because it created the most favorable arena for the final struggle of an independent proletariat against the last exploiting class. With the development of imperialist decay of capitalism, the same social order with the same ruling class is capable of fighting only reactionary wars. Where it was once permissible for the Italian proletariat to support even King Victor-Emmanuel of the House of Savoy and the Italian bourgeoisie in their war for the national state (for freedom from Austrian oppression), it became impermissible for the proletariat to support the House of Savoy and the Italian bourgeoisie in their war "for the national state" against Austria in 1914. Moreover, it is impermissible for the proletariat to support the Italian ruling class today even in a war against a feudal state—Ethiopia.

If we go by abstractions alone, we cannot explain why the war of a capitalist state like Italy against a feudal (semi-feudal) monarchy like Austria was progressive in 1859 and a war of a capitalist

state like Italy against a feudal monarchy like Spain was reactionary in 1935.

The ultra-leftists, you will remember, also proceeded from such abstract deductions—"capitalist state—capitalist war"—in the case of the Spanish civil war, and therefore denied the admissibility of defending the Loyalist forces against the Fascist forces.

The character of the war fought by Bismarck in 1870 could not be determined exclusively or immanently from the character of the ruling class and its property basis, but from the social and political aims of the ruling class at that time, i.e., from its concrete historic role. From above, by bureaucratic-military (as against Jacobin-plebeian) means, it is true, Bismarck and the Junkers had as their aim the national liberation and unification of Germany from French and Russian oppression. That was historically progressive. When, at the end of the war, they aimed at expansion and annexation (the seizure of Alsace and Lorraine), the war was transformed into a reactionary war which was mercilessly condemned by Marx and Engels. But war is not an "independent, super-social substance," you say; war and the aims of war are not divorced from the social (social-economic) basis on which it is fought. That is true, of course. But the connection is not automatic, not mechanical or one-directional; it is a dialectical connection in which, very often, the political regime is the primary or immediate determining force, and the economic "regime" determines only "in the last analysis."

A most instructive (and timely) exposition of the inter-relationship between the economic base and the political superstructure is contained in Lenin's famous polemical speech on the trade union question on December 30, 1920:

"Comrade Trotsky speaks of the 'workers' state.' Permit me, that is an abstraction. When we wrote on the workers' state in 1917, that was understandable; but when one says today: 'Why defend the working class, defend it against whom, there is no longer a bourgeoisie, we have a workers' state,' one commits an obvious mistake. The joke of it is precisely this, that it is not quite a workers' state. Therein lies one of the basic mistakes of Comrade Trotsky! . . . Our state is in reality not a workers' state, but a workers' and peasants' state. From that follows a great deal. . . . But still more. From our party program the following comes out—a document which is quite familiar to the author of the ABC of Communism—from this program it comes out that our state is a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations. We had to paste this—how shall we put it?—sorry label on it. That is the result of the transition. And now, do the trade unions have nothing to defend in such a practically-arisen state, can we even do without them for the protection of the material and spiritual interests of the universally organized proletariat? That is theoretically a perfectly false consideration. That leads us into the realm of abstraction or of the ideal which we shall have attained in 15-20 years, but I am not even convinced that we shall attain it in such a short period. . . . Our present state is such that the inclusively-organized proletariat must defend itself and we must utilize these labor organizations for the protection of the workers against their state and for the protection of our state by the workers."

And later, on the same subject (Jan. 25, 1921), in speaking of "Politics and Economics, Dialectics and Eclecticism," Lenin emphasized: "Politics is the concentrated expression of economics—I repeated in my speech, for I had already heard earlier the absurd reproach, inadmissible on the lips of a Marxist, that I treat the thing 'politically.' The primacy of politics over economics must serve as the unconditional rule. To argue otherwise means to forget the ABC of Marxism. . . . The question stands only thus (and, Marxistically, cannot stand otherwise): without the correct political attitude towards the thing, the class in question cannot maintain its rule and consequently cannot fulfill its productive tasks either."

I permit myself one further quotation, from Engels' letter to Comrade Schmidt (Oct. 27, 1890): "The new independent (political) power must, of course, submit to the movement of production as a whole. But it also reacts, by virtue of the strength of its immanent, i.e., it once borrowed but gradually developed relative independence, upon the conditions and course of production. There is a reciprocity between the two unequal forces; on the one side, the economic movement; on the other, the new political power which strives for the greatest possible independence and which having once arisen is endowed with its own movement."

Engels wrote the above with reference to a capitalist state. It applies with a hundred-fold multiplied force to the Soviet Union, where the political super-structure (the Stalinist state apparatus) has acquired a degree and type of independence from its social basis without parallel, at least in modern times.

Now, what importance have these quotations from Lenin and

Engels in our present dispute? The Cannonites deduce their policy in the following simple, undialectical way: The economy is progressive, consequently the wars fought against capitalist states by the Stalinist regime, which bases itself on this economy, are also progressive. The quotation from your article, cited above, to the effect that the character of the war is determined by the character of the economy, follows the same line of thought.

It may be replied that this charge is groundless and a distortion of the position held by you and by the Cannon group. It may be pointed out that we have all spoken for years of a degenerated workers' state; that we have advocated for some time a political revolution, basing ourselves on that very contradiction between the social basis and the political regime; and that in your latest article you write directly that "in our struggle for the overthrow of the bureaucracy we base ourselves on this contradiction."

This reply is obviously based on fact. I do not for a moment intend to create a different impression. All I contend, in this connection, is that this all-important contradiction is not consistently considered and applied in the case of the wars conducted by the Stalinist regime.

Just as it was possible 20 years ago to speak of the term "workers' state" as an abstraction, so it is possible today to speak of the term "degenerated workers' state" as an abstraction. Just as it was once necessary, in connection with the trade union problem, to speak concretely of what kind of workers' state exists in the Soviet Union, so it is necessary to establish, in connection with the present war, the degree of the degeneration of the Soviet state. The dialectical method of treating such questions makes this mandatory upon us. And the degree of the degeneration of the regime cannot be established by abstract reference to the existence of nationalized property, but only by observing the realities of living events.

The Fourth International established, years ago, the fact that the Stalinist regime (even though based upon nationalized property) had degenerated to the point where it was not only capable of conducting reactionary wars against the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard, and even against colonial peoples, but did in fact conduct such wars. Now, in our opinion, on the basis of the actual course of Stalinist policy (again, even though based upon nationalized property), the Fourth International must establish the fact that the Soviet Union (i.e., the ruling bureaucracy and the armed forces serving it) has degenerated to the point where it is capable of conducting reactionary wars even against capitalist states (Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, now Finland, and tomorrow Rumania and elsewhere). This is the point which forms the nub of our difference with you and with the Cannon faction.

It is necessary to emphasize that there is a tremendous difference between the (relative) independence of the political regime in any given capitalist state and in the present Soviet state. Be it the democratic United States, constitutional-monarchical England, republican France or Fascist Germany, the political regime in each instance is the one best suited to preserve private property; in any case, that is its essential role. Even in Fascist Germany, where the bourgeoisie has been politically expropriated, we have said that the fascist regime is the only one under which capitalist private property can be preserved. In the Soviet Union, on the contrary, our program and theses point out that the political regime (the Stalinist bureaucracy) does not preserve but constantly undermines the social-economic basis of the Russian Revolution. It is not only, as Engels puts it, "endowed with its own movement," and that to an exceptionally high degree, but this movement conflicts violently with "the movement of production as a whole." Put in more plainly political terms, the interests of the bureaucracy conflict with the interests of maintaining nationalized economy as the basis for the transition to socialism—the nationalized economy which is all we can defend in the Soviet Union.

Now, it is not the nationalized economy that goes to war; it is not the economy that decides when the war should be declared or started, or against whom it should be directed, or how it should be conducted. Nor does the working class make these decisions—either directly or indirectly—for it is gagged and fettered and strait-jacketed. The decisions and direction of the war are entirely in the hands of the bureaucracy, which "is endowed with its own movement," that is, with its own social, economic and political interests, which are reactionary through and through.

Here we need not confine ourselves to theoretical speculation and argument. The invasion of Poland, the conquest of the three other Baltic states, the invasion of Finland—these make up in fact the reactionary war of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They are reactionary from a number of standpoints. They are reactionary because they drive the proletariat and peasantry into the arms of imperialist

patriotism, that is, they do not accentuate the class struggle but facilitate the submission of the proletariat to its class enemy. They are reactionary because they are not conducted for the defense of the Soviet Union (i.e., the preservation of nationalized property from imperialist conquest and colonization), but are conducted in agreement with Hitlerite imperialism. They are reactionary because they are not conducted for the defense of the Soviet Union, but are conducted for the greater glory, prestige, power, and revenue of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy. They are reactionary because they are not defensive wars (I speak not in the military-technical or diplomatic sense, but in the historical-political sense), but wars of annexation—wars of what we call Stalinist-imperialism.

Once More: Defense of the Soviet Union

We advocated and urged support of a war to defend the Soviet Union from imperialist attack. In that case, we did not insist upon democratic formalities or even democratic realities as a condition for our defense. We said—the Minority continues to say it—that if the imperialists assail the Soviet Union with the aim of crushing the last conquest of the October Revolution and reducing Russia to a bunch of colonies, we will support the Soviet Union unconditionally. That would be a progressive war, even under Stalin's command and despite Stalin's command. We would fight for a democratic All-Soviet Congress to take over the helm, but we would not demand it as a preliminary condition for our support.

We did not advocate the invasion of Poland or the Baltic countries or Finland. We did not consider such actions necessary for the defense of the Soviet Union, conceived in a revolutionary-internationalist sense. On the contrary, we condemned the invasions; you even called the invasion of Poland "criminal and shameful." To this day, I do not understand by what right of formal or dialectical logic we should, in the light of this, call upon the workers to give material and military support to the invasion, which has as its clear-cut objective that very annexation which we condemn and oppose.

The Fourth International is now fettered by a dogmatic interpretation of the formula "Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union"—which means in practice (see the resolutions of the Cannon group! see our party press!) that our policies are determined for us by the reactionary interests (and the secret treaties, no doubt!) of the Stalinist bureaucracy. When it decides to launch a war, we say, in effect: We do not agree with the timing of the war, with the aims it pursues; but now that Stalin has launched it, we must give it unconditional support, material and military aid.

You will say that this is a distortion of the views of the Fourth International? Let us see.

In your article, you write: "In order to give at least an ounce of sense to their new formula, the opposition attempts to represent the matter as if up to now we had 'unconditionally' defended the international policy of the Kremlin government with its Red Army and G.P.U. Everything is turned upside down! In reality for a long time we have not defended the Kremlin's international policy, not even conditionally, particularly since the time that we openly proclaimed the necessity of crushing the Kremlin oligarchy through insurrection! A wrong policy not only mutilates the current tasks but also compels one to represent his own past in a false light."

And in your letter to me, dated Nov. 6, 1939, you write: "You interpret our past policy as unconditional support of the diplomatic and military activities of Stalin! Permit me to say that this is a horrible deformation of our whole position not only since the creation of the Fourth International but since the very beginning of the Left Opposition. Unconditional defense of the U.S.S.R. signifies, namely, that our policy is not determined by the deeds, maneuvers or crimes of the Kremlin bureaucracy but only by our conception of the interests of the Soviet state and world revolution."

I pass over my "horrible deformation" and my "representation of our own past in a false light," for I am conscious of no such crime. I have never said that our position was unconditional or any other kind of support of Stalin's international policy, and I must therefore set down this charge too as gratuitous and polemical.

Let me accept, then, your characterization of our traditional position. We have never defended, not even conditionally, Stalin's international policy; we give no unconditional support to the Kremlin's diplomatic and military activities. Our policy is not determined by the Kremlin's deeds and crimes. Good!

We have never supported the Kremlin's international policy, I repeat with you. Concretely, for example, we did not support the Kremlin's policy toward bourgeois Finland (or Poland, etc.). But

what is war? War is the continuation of politics by other means. Then why should we support the war which is the continuation of the international policy which we did not and do not support? The Fourth International also told the Russian proletariat not to support the Kremlin's foreign policy. Then why should we now tell the Soviet workers to support a war which is the continuation of that policy? According to the resolution on Finland of the Cannon faction (which you support), the Fourth International tells the Russian workers not only to be Soviet patriots in general, but to give material and military support to Stalin's army in Stalin's war (what attitude the Finnish proletariat should take toward the Red Army—our fearless "unconditional defensists" do not indicate by a single syllable). On what conceivable basis can we advocate such a policy to the Russian working class? How can we defend it before the American working class, or even its vanguard elements?

Perhaps the Red Army should be supported on the grounds that in Poland, for example, "the new authorities invited the population to expropriate the landowners and capitalists," as you put it in your new article. I have heard the Cannon group spokesmen, following your line, argue that this demonstrates the essentially progressive character of Stalin's war and that it is a significant reflection of the fundamental fact that the Kremlin is based upon state property, which determines the character of its wars.

This argument, in my opinion, is wrong on two counts.

In so far as it is calculated to prove that the wars of the bureaucracy are automatically determined by the existence of state property in the Soviet Union, the calculation runs directly counter to our previous political analysis, yours in particular, and to the recently established facts.

1. Two years ago you wrote in a polemic against Burnham and Carter: "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, i.e., on the soil of a bourgeois regime, executes the function of Hitler (in their political methods they generally differ little from one another). The juxtaposition of the different social roles of the one and the same Stalin in the U.S.S.R. and in Spain equally well demonstrate that the bureaucracy is not an independent class but the tool of classes. . . ." (Internal Bulletin, Dec. 1937, p. 5) In other words, there is no automatism of state property in the Soviet Union that forces the Kremlin bureaucracy to establish or even seek to establish similar property forms outside the Soviet Union. Quite the contrary, outside the Soviet Union, it follows in most cases the policy of preserving capitalist private property and massacring those who seek to abolish it (Spain!).

2. How account for the fact that in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania capitalist private property has remained intact under the rule of the Red Army? If the automatism of state property is so direct that it not only determines the character of Stalin's wars but also its own extension to the capitalist countries invaded by Stalin (i.e., "social-revolutionary measures, carried out via bureaucratic-military means," as you call it), why hasn't this been the case in the three Baltic countries? Also, why does the program of the Kuusinen "government" insist so explicitly not only on its non-Soviet, bourgeois-democratic political character, but on the fact that it does not propose to expropriate and nationalize property? You wrote in "U.S.S.R. in War" the following words: "Let us for a moment conceive that in accordance with the treaty with Hitler, the Moscow government leaves untouched the rights of private property in the occupied areas and limits itself to 'control' after the fascist pattern. Such a concession would have a deep-going principled character and could become the starting point for a new chapter in the Soviet regime and consequently for a new evaluation on our part of the nature of the Soviet state." The Kuusinen program, I repeat, proposes only such a "control" over the banks and industries of Finland. Would you consider this "new chapter in the Soviet regime" a basis for revising our slogan of unconditional defense?

The second count deals with the "progressive aspect" of the Stalinist invasion. In the article "U.S.S.R. in War" you said: "The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another section of the territory, no matter how important these may be by themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and the organization of the world proletariat, the raising of its capacity for defending the old conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive, standpoint the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, preserve completely their reactionary character and remain the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution." (My emphasis—M.S.)

War is a continuation of politics, and if Stalinist policy, even in the occupied territory where property has been statified, preserves completely its reactionary character, then the war it is conducting is

reactionary. In that case, the revolutionary proletariat must refuse to give the Kremlin and its army material and military aid. It must concentrate all efforts on overturning the Stalinist regime. That is not our war! Our war is against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy at the present time!

In other words, I propose, in the present war, a policy of revolutionary defeatism in the Soviet Union, as explained in the statement of the Minority on the Russian question—and in making this proposal I do not feel myself one whit less a **revolutionary class patriot** than I have always been.

You find our resolution on Finland ridiculous because it says that in applying the strategy of revolutionary defeatism on both sides, "the Fourth International will, of course, take into account concrete circumstances—the military situation, the moods of the masses and also the differing economic relations in Finland and Russia." Your comment is: "Definitely, nothing of this is comprehensible." Let me try to make it somewhat more comprehensible and less ridiculous.

In any country, whether we are defeatists or defensists, the **application** in the concrete of our strategical perspectives or slogans must take many things into consideration. For example, even under Kerensky, Lenin stood for the slogan of "transforming the imperialist war into a civil war." At one time, in the middle of 1917, he proposed the withdrawal of the slogan in that form. Why? Because of the military situation in the country and because of the moods of the masses. Moreover, taking into account precisely these moods—the fact that the masses were tired of the war and of fighting "in general"—the Bolsheviks concretized their perspective of civil war in the slogan of "peace." Again, taking into account the "military situation" during the Kornilov attack, the Bolsheviks again adapted their "civil war" perspective to the concrete situation. The sentence in our resolution which you ridicule so much was included mainly for the purpose of guarding against the vulgar misinterpretation of our position to mean that from now on, day in and day out, all we propose to do in Finland and in the Soviet Union is to repeat the phrase "revolutionary defeatism." As for taking into account the "differing economic relations"—this really speaks for itself. In Russia we tell the workers that they must establish their control over already nationalized property. In Finland we tell the workers that they must first nationalize property after seizing power. When I write a resolution not about war but about the world socialist revolution, I shall take care, there too, to point out that in China and in the United States the Fourth International must take into account the differing economic relations, even though it is for the proletarian-socialist revolution in both lands. By the same token I will agitate for a political revolution throughout the Soviet Union, but in the Ukraine I will take into account the differing national element and there I will advocate, particularly, separation from the Kremlin.

The whole point seems to me to be quite self-evident.

The Bureaucratic Revolution

I cannot leave unmentioned your references to the "revolutionary" role of Stalinism in its recent invasions. "In the first case (Spain), the bureaucracy through hangman's methods strangled a socialist revolution. In the second case (Poland) it gave an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods."

Here again, I find myself compelled to disagree with you. The bureaucratic bourgeois revolution—that I know of. I know of Napoleon's "revolution from above" in Poland over a hundred years ago. I know of Alexander's emancipation of the serfs "from above"—out of fear of peasant uprisings. I know of Bismarck's "revolution from above." I know that Hitler and Mussolini play with the idea of an Arab "national revolution" in Palestine out of purely imperialist and military reasons—directed against their rival, England. But the bureaucratic proletarian revolution—that I do not know of and I do not believe in it. I do not believe that it took place in Poland even for a day—or that it is taking place or is about to take place in Finland.

If Stalin "established" state property in the conquered territory in Poland, it was not at all because, as you imply elsewhere, he was "compelled" to do so on account of the irresistible force of state property in the Soviet Union. Stalin was perfectly willing to "share the power" with the Polish bourgeoisie, as he is doing it with the bourgeoisie of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and on this basis: I will preserve intact your private property and you will turn over to me your political power, which I will assure with my army. This is what the Kremlin proposed during the negotiations with Anglo-French imperialism. The Polish bourgeoisie and landlords refused

this "generous" offer for a division of power. The three Baltic countries had the offer imposed upon them by force.

When the regime of the Polish Colonels collapsed under the blows of the German army, the bourgeoisie fled in every direction. In the Polish Ukraine and White Russia, where class exploitation was intensified by national oppression (the bourgeoisie of those territories was predominantly Polish), the peasants began to take over the land themselves, to drive off the landlords who were already half-in-flight. Even the garbled and censored reports of those days permit us to see that the workers were beginning to act similarly. In Vilna, a spontaneously formed "Soviet" was reported. The Red Army, entering Poland, encountered no resistance from the Polish bourgeoisie and its Army because there wasn't any to speak of. The Red Army came in as a counter-revolutionary force. Far from "giving an impulse to the socialist revolution," it strangled it (the Vilna "Soviet" was of course violently suppressed). Just what has since then been "nationalized," how it has been "nationalized"—I do not know and no one has yet been able to say exactly. In any case, I repeat with you that the nationalization, real or alleged, cannot be the **decisive criterion** for us. The Stalinist bureaucracy is capable **only of strangling revolutions, not making them or giving an impulsion to them.** To prove the contrary, some evidence must be produced, and I find none in your article.

I find even less for you—how shall I put it?—astonishing remarks about Finland. You say that we do not "mention by so much as a word that the Red Army in Finland expropriates large landowners and introduces workers' control while preparing for the expropriation of the capitalists."

True, not by so much as a word. Why? Because the first anyone has heard in our party—**anyone!**—of the expropriation of the large landowners and the introduction of workers' control in Finland by the Red Army, is in your article. Where is this taking place? On what reports do you base yourself? There is no trace of workers' control in the Soviet Union today; there is even less than that in Finland. That at least so far as my knowledge goes, and on this point I have questioned unavailingly many Cannonites.

You continue: "Tomorrow the Stalinists will strangle the Finnish workers. But now they are giving—they are compelled to give (why? why in Finland and not in Spain or Estonia?—M.S.)—a tremendous impulse to the class struggle in its sharpest form. The leaders of the opposition construct their policy not upon the 'concrete' process that is taking place in Finland, but upon democratic abstractions and noble sentiments."

Where is this "tremendous impulse to the class struggle" in Finland—and "in its sharpest form," to boot? We base our policy on "abstractions." Let us grant that. On what do you base your statement about the tremendous impulse to the class struggle? No one—no one, I repeat—in our party has seen the slightest sign of it as yet. Perhaps you have seen credible reports about it; in which case such important news should appear in our press.

Again, you write: "The Soviet-Finnish war is evidently (?) already beginning to be completed with a civil war in which the Red Army finds itself at the given stage in the same camp as the Finnish petty peasants and the workers." You write a little further that the Stalinist policy is "the policy of exterminating finance-capital." And finally, you write: "As for the Kremlin it is at the present time forced—and this is not a hypothetical but a real situation—to provoke a social revolutionary movement in Finland (in order to attempt to strangle it politically tomorrow)."

Where is the civil war in Finland which is "evidently already beginning"? Unless you refer to the government of the idiotic scoundrel Kuusinen, we have not yet seen the first traces of that civil war—regardless of how much we should like to see it, no matter how anxious we are to develop a policy that will promote it, no matter how firmly we count upon its eventual materialization. Do you deduce this "civil war" from an abstract and false theoretical estimation of the role of the Kremlin bureaucracy, or is there some objective evidence that this "concrete" process is taking place in Finland?

Where is the "social revolutionary movement in Finland" that the Kremlin is "forced to provoke"? Is it perhaps the program of the Kuusinen "Democratic People's" government that is provoking it? That program is, formally, the program of a bourgeois "democracy." Since the beginning of the war, one of the reasons why we condemned the Finnish invasion as reactionary was precisely the fact that by it Stalin was driving the Finnish workers and peasants into a bourgeois-patriotic frenzy, into the arms of the Mannerheims, into the "sacred union" and "national unity." What evidence is there that this has changed? We repeat: we know of none, not a scintilla! It is possible and even likely that, as the Finnish bourgeois regime

begins to crumble, the workers and peasants will separate from it and take the first steps on the road to independent class action. But there is every reason to believe that they will not take the road to the Stalinist camp, that they will not, as Cannon tells the Russian workers to do, give "material and military support" to the annexationist invaders. If they did, their tragedy would be no less than that which they are suffering today as the pawns of bourgeois-patriotism.

You speak of the Stalinists representing "the policy of exterminating finance-capital." I find it difficult to believe that you mean this literally. No, the role the Stalinists have played, above all outside the borders of the Soviet Union, has been that of conservative prop of the rule of finance-capital. The Kremlin agency of finance-capital has not become overnight the latter's exterminator. It does not play a revolutionary role—any more than the Chinese national bourgeoisie played a revolutionary role, any more than Gutchkov played a revolutionary role in March, 1917 in Russia; the role of the Stalinist bureaucracy is counter-revolutionary.

Would I tell the Finnish workers to accept arms and ammunition from Stalin? Would I tell the Hindu workers and peasants to accept arms and ammunition from Hitler? That is how you pose the question. My answer is: Of course I would! I would take arms for the revolution from Hitler, or Mussolini, or Stalin, or Daladier, or from a Caucasian mountain bandit! If I get them free of charge, so much the better. But it would not follow for me that just because I welcome arms smuggled in to me in Palestine by Hitler, that I would welcome Hitler if he sent his army to Palestine, or that I would urge anybody to give that army "material and military support." The "character" of Hitler's intervention in Palestine would have changed. By the same token, when Stalin is conducting a reactionary, annexationist war in Finland, I would readily accept arms from him if I were a revolutionist in Finland (although, in that case, nine chances out of ten I would receive his "armed aid" in the form of a bullet in the heart or a bayonet in the throat); and under certain conditions, given a favorable relationship of forces between his army and the Finnish revolutionary movement, I would even seek a practical military working agreement with him; but it does not follow from this that I call upon anyone now to give him "material and military support" in his reactionary war.

I repeat, I do not believe in the bureaucratic proletarian (socialist) revolution. I do not mean by this merely that I "have no faith" in it—no one in our movement has. I mean that I do not consider it possible. I reject the concept not out of "sentimental" reasons or a Tolstoyan "faith in the people" but because I believe it to be scientifically correct to repeat with Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. The bourgeois revolution, for a series of historical and social reasons, could be made and was made by other classes and social strata; the bourgeoisie could be liberated from feudal rule and establish its social dictatorship under the aegis of other social groups. But the proletarian revolution cannot be made by others than the proletariat acting as a mass; therein, among other things, it is distinguished from all preceding revolutions. No one else can free it—not even for a day.

The Factions in the Party

You support the Cannon faction as the proletarian, Marxist group; you condemn the Minority as the petty-bourgeois group, and propose that it be disposed of accordingly. Reading your arguments, I involuntarily ask myself: How can the theoretical, political and practical leader of the struggle against the "troika" in Russia and then against Stalinism, come to such conclusions?

Comrade Trotsky, I have always been as close a student of the history of the revolutionary movement as possible. I have never considered such a study to be a substitute for active participation in the making of revolutionary history, but rather as a guide for such participation. My interest in this history is not so much for its own sake, but above all in order to learn how to avoid mistakes of the past and to emulate that which was worthy. In my own way, I have tried to keep unforgotten and to live up to the best traditions of a hundred years of revolutionary Marxism. So little do I ignore the traditions of our movement that I am sometimes perhaps rightly accused of "archivistic" extremes. In extenuation for this sin I have always pleaded the need of keeping alive in this generation of revolutionists—my generation—the best traditions of the past generations, to establish the idea and spirit of revolutionary continuity. If my comrades sometimes jokingly chide me for my predilection for "precedents"—they have some reason for it. In good and tested precedents, I often seek and find a "short-cut" in revolutionary pol-

itics. A "short-cut" in this sense, that I do not believe every single problem must be approached from the very beginning, as something brand new, as something which past experience of the movement cannot guide us in solving.

If, therefore, I refer in this section of my letter to experiences of the past, you will understand that it is not done in a brittle polemical sense, but rather in the sense of helping myself and the movement find the right road with the help of illumination from that past.

Burnham says it is not a workers' state; Abern says it is; Shachtman represents, as Hansen* so tellingly puts it, the Doubtist faction. Their bloc on the question of "defense" and on the "organizational" question is therefore unprincipled, and typically petty bourgeois. Let us grant for the moment that the "bloc" is as described. How many times have you been attacked by the Stalinists on the same grounds?

You made a bloc with the Zinovievist (Leningrad) Opposition in 1926. The Platform of the Opposition Bloc "evaded" the fundamental question of the theory of the permanent revolution. Why? The Stalinists insisted that the basic principled differences between Leninism (their "Leninism"!) and "Trotskyism" (revolutionary Marxism) revolved around the theory of the permanent revolution. The Zinovievists, who agreed basically with the Stalinist conception of the theory, agreed with you (that is, the Moscow, 1923, Opposition) to say that the theory was not at issue, and this was written into the documents of the Bloc. Was it unprincipled? I do not think so. The Bloc was united on the main political tasks before the Soviet Union and the International.

In the Bloc, at least for a considerable period of time, were not only you and the Zinovievists, who of course considered the Soviet Union a workers' state, but also the Democratic Centralists, who considered that it was not a workers' state. Yet, though you were formally closer to the Stalin-Bukharin group on that question, the Democratic Centralists supported the Opposition platform. Was that unprincipled? Again, I do not think so. In reply to one of the D.C. group comrades, Borodai, who asked you why steps should not be taken to reconsolidate the "forces of the Bolshevik guard," you wrote in 1928: "Unfortunately the question is not rightly posed by you. It was not I who separated myself from the D.C., but the D.C. group, which belonged to the general Opposition, separated itself from us. . . . The initiative for the unification (into the Bloc) came from the D.C. The first conferences with the Zinoviev people took place under the chairmanship of Comrade Sapronov (D.C. leader). I say this absolutely not as a reproach. For the Bloc was necessary and was a step forward."

You made a bloc—rather, you were in one faction—with Radek, who characterized the famous Canton bourgeois government as a "peasants and workers government." The Zinovievists were for the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" in China; you were for the proletarian revolution supported by the peasantry. The United Opposition, by the way, adopted the essential Zinovievist formula. The Stalinists sought to exploit these differences to the full. Yet the Bloc there too, except for mistakes that cannot be characterized as fundamental in my opinion, was principled; all its members agreed (more or less) on the basic and immediate political tasks in China. Suppose one were to say: on the fundamental principled question of the class nature of the Chinese revolution, Zinoviev had the Stalinist (i.e., petty bourgeois) position (democratic dictatorship), while Trotsky said "it does not matter." Wherein would such a reproach differ from the one you direct at us today?

We say in our resolution that we, the Minority, are united on the basic and immediate tasks of the Fourth International in the Soviet Union and the other belligerents. To the extent that we differ among ourselves on the "terminological" or "sociological" question—the class nature of the Soviet state—each comrade will vote on this question, if it is put, as he has voted in the past, according to conviction. Do you find that unprincipled? You wrote me on December 10, 1930 (the letter is to be found in my introduction to your book, "Problems of the Chinese Revolution") that though Radek was always with Zinoviev on the question of the Chinese Communist Party withdrawing from the Kuomintang, "up to 1926, I always voted independently in the Political Bureau on this question, against all the others." When the Bloc was formed, the majority was against you on this point. "But since it was a question of splitting with the Zinovievists, it was the general decision that I must submit publicly in this question and acquaint the Opposition in writing with my standpoint. . . . Now I can say with certainty that I made a mistake by submitting formally in this question." Let me then ask if that

*The questions raised by Hansen's article, and referred to by you, will be dealt with amply in another document.

made the Opposition Bloc unprincipled or that an error was merely made.

You make a number of additional and minor points against us which are hardly meritorious. You say our resolution "could be signed, perhaps with slight changes, by the Bordigists, Vereecken, Sneeveliet, Fenner Brockway, Marceau Pivert and the like. . . ." I assure you that also "perhaps with slight changes," Cannon's resolution would be signed by Oehler, Stamm, Marlen, and to the best of my knowledge, Molinier. You say that our criticisms, our "terminology" in particular, is copied from the bourgeois press. With as much reason, I could reply, that such terms as "Thermidor," "Bonapartism" and "totalitarian"—applied by us to the Stalinist regime, were used much earlier by the bourgeois and Menshevik press. With different connotations? different aims? Yes, but that is true in both cases.

You raise the question of Comrade Abern. It would have been preferable if that were dealt with by Cannon. You write: "Abern, and only he, has his own traditional group which grew out of the old Communist Party and became bound together during the first period of the independent existence of the Left Opposition." On what do you base this—permit me to say it—fantastic charge? Of the comrades in our party today who "grew out of the old Communist Party" and who have been associated more or less consistently on the same side as Comrade Abern, and are with the Minority today, I can think of only one name. I would be interested in hearing at least a couple of more names! What is the basis of your information, Comrade Trotsky?

I have no intention of evading the famous "Abern question." I have had in the past many sharp disputes with the old Weber-Abern group in general, and with Comrade Abern in particular. Indeed, I once wrote a very harsh and bitter polemical document against that group which Cannon flatteringly calls a "Marxist classic." If a historical study-circle were to be formed tomorrow to consider that period in our party history, there is much in that document I would repeat, much I would moderate, much I would discard. Abern, I suppose, would act in kind. But we are not discussing that period, and I find it impossible to shape my politics on the basis of outlived disputes.

You know that before the fight against the Weber-Abern faction, there had been a sharp dispute between Cannon's faction and one led by me, a dispute lasting several years. One of the reasons I broke with many of the members of my then faction was because I insisted against them that the issues in the fight against Cannon had either lost their urgency or had the possibility of becoming moderated. Consequently, it was necessary to collaborate fraternally with the Cannon group on a new basis, and not continue a die-hard struggle on outlived or vague issues, or reminiscences.

I am against political feuds which go on endlessly like Kentucky feuds. I was against them when directed at Cannon. I am against them when directed at Abern.

Cannon knows how spurious it is to inject into the present dispute the "Abern question." He knows what every informed party leader, and many members, know, namely, that for the past several years at least there has been no such thing as an "Abern group." So true is this that at the Chicago convention of the party, two years ago, the slate for the Political Committee presented by Cannon and me had on it four ex-"Abernites" out of a total of seven members, i.e., a majority! So true is this that since that time Comrade Abern has been entrusted with some of the most responsible and even confidential tasks that the Political Committee could assign to him (a party-public document prevents me from going into detail on this point). At the last convention, in July, 1939, when the dispute arose over the "organization document" and later over the composition of the National Committee, Comrade Abern was in neither of the two contending groups, for which Cannon, in the debate, went out of his way to praise the "objectivity" and "organizational intelligence" of Abern!

I know what the Cannonites mean with their campaign against Abern. Abern is all right so long as he "comes along." However, the minute Abern expresses a different view from the Cannon leadership on an important question, then the campaign is launched against him not on the basis of any views he now defends but on the basis of a fight which is I-don't-know-how-many years old. Here, too, I must remind you that you too joined with groups or "remnants" of groups against which you had fought vigorously in earlier years, which you and Lenin had even severely condemned—Workers Oppositionists, Democratic Centralists, to say nothing of the Zinovievists. You will surely recall how the bureaucracy sought to concentrate the discussion not on the platform of the Opposition Bloc, but on what Zinoviev had written about Trotsky at one time, and

vice versa, and about the "unprincipled mutual amnesty" they had extended each other.

You say that you and the Cannon group give a class characterization of the Minority, whereas "the opposition, on the contrary, precisely because of its petty-bourgeois character does not even attempt to look for the social roots of the hostile camp." I could answer this, in the first place, by emphasizing part of the preceding sentence: "Any serious factional fight in a party is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle." Yes, generally and in the final analysis, but not at every given moment or with every factional grouping. I have no doubt of my ability to give many examples from the history of the Russian party after the revolution in which sharp factional fights took place; I think that it is doubtful if a clear class characterization could be given of all the factions involved. I could say, in the second and more important place, it is first necessary to prove (a) that the Minority represents a deviation from the proletarian Marxian line, (b) that this deviation is typically petty-bourgeois, and (c) that it is more than an isolated deviation—it is a tendency. That is precisely what has not been proved.

But is it true that the Minority gives no political characterization of the Cannon faction? It is somewhat surprising to read your article, to see in it reference to the allegedly long-lived Abern group, and to see not a single word about the **only permanent faction** in the party—the Cannon clique, the group of comrades you refer to euphemistically as "Cannon and his collaborators." When we speak of it as a permanent faction we do not confine ourselves to mere assertion. We are able to prove it from the records of the party, and we do prove it in our document on "The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism." How do you explain the existence of this faction-in-permanence, in season and out, during political disputes and during peace-times in the party?

We characterize this faction with the political designation: "bureaucratic conservatism." Your comment on this is that we "see only 'conservatism', 'errors', 'bad methods' and similar psychological, intellectual and technical deficiencies." You consider our characterization of the Cannon faction to be "psychological." Excuse me, but I fail to understand. Let me quote from your polemic against the bureaucracy in the Russian party in 1923: "The heterogeneous political ideology that now rises against bureaucratism can be controlled all the better, and it can be cleansed of all alien and harmful elements, if we take more seriously the road of the 'new course'. But that is impossible without a serious turn-about in the mentality and the intentions of the party apparatus. But on the contrary, we are now witnessing a new offensive of the latter, which eliminates all criticism of the 'old course', formally condemned but not yet liquidated, by treating it as a manifestation of factional spirit. If factions are dangerous—and they are—it is criminal to close one's eyes to the danger represented by the **bureaucratic conservative faction.**" (The New Course, p. 43.) Was that characterization of the then leadership of the party "psychological," "technical," "intellectual" and devoid of political or class significance? No more so than our present characterization of the Cannon faction!

You ask us to support this faction, or at least to subordinate ourselves to it. You declare that this is necessary because we are the petty-bourgeois revisionist tendency—Cannon the proletarian Marxist tendency. If your class characterizations of the two groups were correct, your proposed solution of the party crisis might have validity. In that case, and in accordance with our class doctrine, the petty bourgeoisie must follow the proletariat, and not lead it or even be joint leader of the party with it. The petty bourgeoisie, if it is admitted into the party as an **organized group**, should properly be given a "second-class" status. If it threatens to take over the leadership of the party, the proletarian wing has no other choice before it save to declare its organizational independence immediately, or in any case to have a split perspective precisely in view of the war situation. That is the political meaning I get from the concluding paragraphs of your article.

This solution we cannot and will not accept, Comrade Trotsky. We do not believe Cannon represents the proletarian, Marxist tendency—he represents the tendency of bureaucratic conservatism. And against this tendency, and particularly against its position on the Russian question (which represents an increasingly clear political capitulation to Stalinism), we must continue our struggle until our views triumph.

Your support of the Cannon faction is very firm, Comrade Trotsky; but it is very wrong. This time, I am unable to support your standpoint, a fact I establish with regret and even reluctance. I can only hope that the divergences narrow down in the period to come. But to expect me or my associates to support the Cannon fac-

tion and its position, is to expect what we cannot and will not give. Several years ago, you stood insistently, even against widespread opposition, in support of the Molinier group in France. It, too, you represented as the revolutionary proletarian Marxist tendency. I do not hold that the opponents of Molinier represented—all of them, or on all questions—the best elements in the French or European movement. But in the end you declared openly that Molinier had nothing in common with the Fourth International or with the working class movement.

It goes without saying that Cannon is not Molinier, and it would be useless to try to make me appear to say so. But I believe that just as you were mistaken in your judgement of Molinier, so you are mistaken in our present dispute in your judgement of Cannon and his clique. Just as you later acknowledged your wrong estimate of Molinier, I am firmly convinced that you will be obliged to make a similar acknowledgement about the Cannon faction in time to come. Some six years ago, if my memory serves me rightly, you wrote a comment on the factional fight in the American section between the Cannon and Shachtman groups. In it you said that the party leadership (Cannon faction) represented a tendency toward Stalinist bureaucracy. You will be obliged, I am convinced, to reiterate that

characterization in more elaborate, up-to-date form in the future.

In your personal letter to me, dated Dec. 20, 1939, which I permit myself to quote from, you write: "I believe that you are on the wrong side of the barricade, my dear friend." I should like to believe that this is a polemical metaphor. You add: "I don't hope to convince you with these lines, but I do express the prognosis that if you refuse now to find a way towards collaboration with the Marxist wing against the petty-bourgeois revisionists, you will inevitably deplore for years and years the greatest error of your life."

From all that I have said in this document you will understand why I find it impossible to accept your recommendation. For my part, I can only hope that your prognosis is wrong. In return, I can only say in a spirit which I believe you will understand to be animated by the objective interests of the cause and with a due sense of proportion: The support you are now giving to the Cannon faction leadership and its political position, you will have occasion in the not distant future to consider as one of the most serious mistakes in the history of the Bolshevik-Leninist movement.

With revolutionary greetings,

Max Shachtman

January 1, 1940.

On the History of the Left Opposition

Discussion on the History of the Left Opposition as Summarized by J. R. Johnson

(Comrade Crux was unable to check the summary)

COMRADE CRUX: Comrade Johnson has studied this subject with the greatest attention and the numerous annotations I have made are evidence of the care with which I have read his memorandum. It is important for all our comrades to see our past with insistence on revolutionary clarity. In parts the MS is very perspicacious, but I have noticed here the same fault that I have noticed in *World Revolution*—a very good book—and that is a lack of dialectical approach, Anglo-Saxon empiricism and formalism which is only the reverse of empiricism.

Comrade James makes his whole approach to the subject depend on one date the appearance of Stalin's theory of Socialism in a single country, April 1924. But the theory appeared in October 1924. This makes the whole structure false.

In April 1924 it was not clear whether the German revolution was going forward or back. In November '23 I asked that all the Russian comrades in Germany should be recalled. New strata might lift the revolution to a higher stage. On the other the revolution might decline. If it declined, the first step of the reaction would be to arrest the Russians as foreign agents of disorder. Stalin opposed me: "You are always too hasty. In August you said the revolution was near; now you say that it is over already." I didn't say that it was over, but suggested that this precautionary step should be taken. By the summer of 1924 Stalin had convinced himself that the German revolution was defeated. He then asked the red professors to find him something from Lenin to tell the people. They searched and found two or three quotations and Stalin changed the passage in his book. The German revolution had more influence on Stalin than Stalin on the German revolution. In 1923 the whole party was in a fever over the coming revolution. Stalin would not have dared to oppose me on this question at the C.C. The Left opposition was very much to the fore on this question.

COMRADE JOHNSON: Brandler went to Moscow convinced of the success of the revolution. What changed him?

COMRADE CRUX: I had many interviews with Brandler. He told me that what was troubling him was not the seizure of power, but what to do after. I told him "Look here, Brandler, you say that the prospects are good, but the bourgeois are in power in control of the state, the army, police, etc. The question is to break that power. . . ." Brandler took many notes during many discussions with me. But this very boldness of his was only a cover for his secret fears. It is not easy to lead a struggle against bourgeois society. He went to Chemnitz and there met the leaders of the social democracy, a collection of little Brandlers. He communicated to them in his speech his secret fears by the very way he spoke to them. Naturally they drew back and this mood of defeatism permeated to the workers.

In the 1905 Russian revolution there was a dispute in the

Soviet as to whether we should challenge the Tsarist power with a demonstration on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. To this day I do not know for certain whether it was the correct thing to do at that time or not. The committee could not decide so we consulted the Soviet. I made the speech, putting the two alternatives in an objective manner and the Soviet decided by an overwhelming majority not to demonstrate. But I am certain that if I had said it was necessary to demonstrate and spoken accordingly we would have had a great majority in favor. It was the same with Brandler. What was wanted in Germany in 1923 was a revolutionary party. . . .

You accuse me also of degeneration when you quote Fischer. But why did I give that interview? In revolution it is always wise to throw on the enemy the responsibility. Thus in 1917 they asked me at the Soviet: "Are the Bolsheviks preparing an insurrection?" What could I say? I said, "No, we are defending the revolution, but if you provoke us . . . !" It was the same thing here. Poland and France were using the Russian Bolsheviks as a pretext for preparing intervention and reactionary moves. With the full consent of the German comrades I gave this interview, while the German comrades explained the situation to the German workers. Meanwhile I had a cavalry detachment under Dybenko ready on the Polish border.

COMRADE JOHNSON: You would not agree with Victor Serge that the bureaucracy sabotaged the Chinese Revolution, in other words, that its attitude to the Chinese Revolution was the same as its attitude toward the Spanish?

COMRADE CRUX: Not at all. Why should they sabotage it?

I was on a committee (with Chicherin, Voroshilov, and some others) on the Chinese Revolution. They were even opposed to my attitude, which was considered pessimistic. They were anxious for its success.

COMRADE JOHNSON: For the success of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Wasn't their opposition to the proletarian revolution the opposition of a bureaucracy which was quite prepared to support a bourgeois-democratic revolution, but from the fact of its being a bureaucracy could not support a proletarian revolution?

COMRADE CRUX: Formalism. We had the greatest revolutionary party in the world in 1917. In 1936 it strangles the revolution in Spain. How did it develop from 1917 to 1936? That is the question. According to your argument, the degeneration would have started in October 1917. In my view it started in the first years of the N.E.P. But even in 1927 the whole party was eagerly awaiting the issue of the Chinese revolution. What happened was that the bureaucracy acquired certain bureaucratic habits of thinking. It proposed to restrain the peasants today

so as not to frighten the generals. It thought it would push the bourgeoisie to the left. It saw the Kuomintang as a body of office-holders and thought it could put Communists into the offices and so change the direction of events. . . . And how would you account for the change which demanded a Canton Commune?

COMRADE JOHNSON: Victor Serge says that it was only for the sake of the Sixth World Congress that they wanted the Commune "if only for a quarter of an hour."

COMRADE CRUX: It was more for the party internally than for the International. The party was excited over the Chinese Revolution. Only during 1923 had it reached a higher pitch of intensity.

No, you want to begin with the degeneration complete. Stalin and Co. genuinely believed that the Chinese revolution was a bourgeois-democratic revolution and sought to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.

COMRADE JOHNSON: You mean that Stalin, Bucharin, Tomsky, Rykov, and the rest did not understand the course of the Russian revolution?

COMRADE CRUX: They did not. They took part and events overwhelmed them. Their position on China was the same they had in March 1917 until Lenin came. In different writings of theirs you will see passages which show that they never understood. A different form of existence, their bureaucratic habits affected their thinking and they reverted to their previous position. They even enshrined it in the programme of the Comintern, Proletarian Revolution for Germany, dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry for semi-colonial countries, etc. (Comrade Crux here asks Van to get a copy of the Draft Programme and the extract is read.) I condemned it in my "Critique of the Draft Programme". . . .

COMRADE JOHNSON: What about Bucharin's statement in 1925 that if war came revolutionists should support the bourgeois-soviet bloc?

COMRADE CRUX: After Lenin's Testament Bucharin wanted to show that he was a real dialectician. He studied Hegel and on every occasion tried to show that he was a realist. Hence, "Enrich yourselves." "Socialism at a snail's pace." Etc. And not only Bucharin, but I and all of us at various times wrote absurd things. I will grant you that.

COMRADE JOHNSON: And Germany 1930-1933?

COMRADE CRUX: I cannot agree that the policy of the International was only a materialization of the commands of Moscow. It is necessary to see the policy as a whole, from the internal and the international point of view, from all sides. The foreign policy of Moscow, and the orientation of the Social-Democracy to Geneva could play a role. But there was also the necessity of a turn owing to the disastrous effect of the previous policy on the party inside Russia. After all the bureaucracy is dealing with 160 million people who have been through three revolutions. What they are saying and thinking is collected and classified. Stalin wanted to show that he was no Menshevik. Hence this violent turn to the left. We must see it as a whole, in all its aspects.

COMRADE JOHNSON: But the British Stalinist, Campbell, writes that when the British delegation in 1928 was presented with the theory of Social-Fascism it opposed the idea, but soon was convinced that it was correct. . . .

(It was agreed to continue the discussion. During the interval Comrade Johnson submitted a document. Discussion continues:)

COMRADE CRUX: I have read your document claiming to clarify the position, but it does not clarify it. You state that you accept my view of 1923, but later in the document I see that you do not really accept it. . . . I find it strange that on the Negro question you should be so realistic and on this be so undialectical. (I suspect that you are just a little opportunistic on the Negro question, but I am not quite sure.)

In 1924, Stalin's slogan (Socialism in a single country) corresponded to the mood of the young intellectuals, without training, without tradition. . . .

But despite that, when Stalin wanted to strangle the Spanish revolution openly, he had to wipe out thousands of old Bolsheviks. The first struggle started on the Permanent Revolution, the bureaucracy seeking peace and quiet. Then into this came

the German revolution of 1923. Stalin dared not even oppose me openly then. We never knew until afterwards that he had secretly written the letter to Bucharin saying that the revolution should be held back. Then, after the German defeat, came the struggle over equality. It was in defence of the privileges of the bureaucracy that Stalin became its undisputed leader. . . .

Russia was a backward country. These leaders had Marxist conceptions, but after October they soon returned to their old ideas. Voroshilov and others used to ask me, "But how do you think it possible that the Chinese masses, so backward, could establish the dictatorship of the proletariat?"

In Germany they hoped now for a miracle to break the backbone of the Social-Democracy; their politics had failed utterly to detach the masses from it. Hence this new attempt to get rid of it. . . .

Stalin hoped that the German CP would win a victory and to think that he had a "plan" to allow Fascism to come into power is absurd. It is a deification of Stalin.

COMRADE JOHNSON: He made them cease their opposition to the Red Referendum, he made Remmele say, "After Hitler our turn," he made them stop fighting the Fascists in the streets.

COMRADE CRUX: "After Hitler our turn," was a boast, a confession of bankruptcy. You pay too much attention to it.

FISCHER: (German) They stopped fighting in the streets because their detachments were small CP detachments. Good comrades were constantly being shot, and inasmuch as workers as a whole were not taking part, they called it off. It was a part of their zig-zags.

COMRADE CRUX: There you are! They did all sorts of things. They even offered the united front sometimes.

COMRADE JOHNSON: Duranty said in 1931 that they did not want the revolution in Spain.

COMRADE CRUX: Do not take what Duranty says at face value. Litvinov wanted to say that they were not responsible for what was happening in Spain. He could not say that himself so he said it through Duranty. Perhaps even they did not want to be bothered about Spain, being in difficulties at home. . . . But I would say that Stalin sincerely wished the triumph of the German CP in Germany 1930-1933. . . .

Also you cannot think of the Comintern as being merely an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy.

In France in 1934 the CP had declined from 80,000 to 30,000. It was necessary to have a new policy. We do not know the archives of the Comintern, what correspondence passed, etc. At the same time Stalin is seeking a new foreign policy. From one side and the other we have these tendencies which go to make the new turn. They are different sides of the same process. . . . The French CP is not only an agency of Moscow, but a national organization with members of parliament, etc.

All that however is not very dangerous, although it shows a great lack of proportion to say that our whole propaganda has been meaningless. If that is so, we are bankrupt. What is much more dangerous is the sectarian approach to the Labor Party.

You say that I put forward the slogan of Blum-Cachin without reservations. Then you remember, "All power to the Soviet!" and you say that the united front was no Soviet. It is the same sectarian approach.

COMRADE JOHNSON: We have had difficulty in England with advocating a Labour Government with the necessary reservations.

COMRADE CRUX: In France in all our press, in our archives and propaganda, we regularly made all the necessary reservations. Your failure in England is due to lack of ability; also lack of flexibility, due to the long domination of bourgeois thought in England. I would say to the English workers, "You refuse to accept my point of view. Well perhaps I did not explain well enough. Perhaps you are stupid. Anyway I have failed. But now, you believe in your party. Why allow Chamberlain to hold the power? Put your party in power. I will help you all I can. I know that they will not do what you think. But as you don't agree with me and we are small, I will help you to put them in. . . ."

In Conclusion:

But it is very important to bring up these questions periodically. I would suggest that you write an article discussing these points and publish it in our press.

Comrade Johnson agreed that he would.