

For Members Only

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PRICE

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ADD NO. 9 -- "AN END TO IMPERIALIST WARS!"

By Jean Blake

In the section on "Anti-War Propaganda and the Peace Slogan" of his article "Recent Tendencies in Our Party," Comrade Joyce states correctly that there are only two principled positions governing agitation on the war question: one is for the war and one is against the war.

Our position is, of course, against the war and must be clear to the masses at all times.

True, our position was made clear in the statement on the war published in the January F.I. and quoted in the MILITANT once, but that is not enough. Our position should be clear to any worker who gets the MILITANT at any time. That is not necessarily so now. Each issue of the paper does contain critical articles which more or less consistently flow from our anti-war position, but the danger does exist that without a clear, simple statement of our anti-war stand in every issue the articles may be interpreted as critical rather than oppositional.

Even the 8-point program below our masthead in each issue is subject to misinterpretation as critical support rather than opposition to the war. Each of the 8 points carried to its logical conclusion obstructs the capitalist war effort, but not one point in the program clearly states our opposition to the war as a whole.

To remedy this weakness and eliminate the possibility of misunderstanding we should add an anti-war slogan as point 9.

As for the nature of the anti-war slogan, Comrade Joyce is incorrect when he says the slogan of "Peace!" or "Stop the War!" is the natural center of propaganda and agitation of an anti-war program. Those slogans would be correct for a pacifist anti-war party at this time, not a revolutionary anti-war party.

Comrade Joyce refers to the fact that Lenin opposed the "Peace" slogan in 1914-16, but used it decisively in 1917 as a lever for turning the imperialist war into a civil war. Comrade Joyce recognizes that there was no contradiction involved because Lenin opposed the peace slogan when it fostered pacifist and utopian illusions, but was for it when it was a question of calling upon the workers and soldiers to stop the war by their own revolutionary action.

But Comrade Joyce fails to observe what the objective conditions were that made the peace slogan incorrect in 1914-16 and correct in 1917. In 1914-16 the masses were not sufficiently disillusioned with their war experience and the Russian government was not sufficiently weakened. "Peace!" was not a slogan that could rally the masses to fight the imperialists of Russia and other countries. By 1917 the revolutionary situation had developed. "Peace!" was a correct revolutionary slogan.

Similarly here today the peace slogan could only foster illusions, not call to revolution. The masses in this country have not yet been sufficiently disillusioned by their war experience, the government has not been weakened significantly. A revolutionary situation does not exist. It is not yet time for "Peace" or "Stop the War!" because those slogans would not serve as a lever for turning the imperialist war into a civil war.

Comrade Joyce's quotation from WAR AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL is enlightening but does not justify his conclusion that the convention should adopt, specifically, the slogan of "Peace" or "Stopping the War."

However, it is true that an anti-war slogan should be adopted. That slogan should be No. 9 of our program listed under the masthead of the MILITANT and should read simply "An End to Imperialist Wars!"

This does not mean that complete anti-war propaganda need be our chief or central point of agitational emphasis at this time. It simply provides additional insurance against any possible misinterpretation or misrepresentation at any time of our position towards the war.

The slogan "An End to Imperialist Wars!" has the following merits:

1. It states simply and clearly our our opposition to the war.
2. It specifies "imperialist," leaving no room for pacifist illusions.
3. It does not endanger our legal status any more than articles constantly being printed in the MILITANT.
4. The term "imperialist" brings to the minds of most workers even those with reformist illusions -- the more blatant aspects of the war.
5. It is a more correct slogan than "Turn the imperialist war into a war against fascism" because it leaves no illusions that we would turn the imperialist war only into a war against German fascism, and not against capitalism everywhere.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM

A Reply to M. Morrison

By Mark Braden

Comrade M. Morrison has presented a discussion article "On Revolutionary Defeatism" truly astonishing in its logical construction and conclusions. Even in tentative form, his line of argument is so incorrect that it is necessary to deal with the whole question in some detail.

Good Intentions -- Bad Results

There can be no doubt that Comrade Morrison's intentions are of the best: First, he wishes to combat the ultra-left distortion of the Leninist position of revolutionary defeatism, which he correctly summarizes, "a revolutionary party must take a position in favor of a defeat of its own imperialist government at the hands of an enemy imperialist government". Yes, this is a distortion of Lenin and it should be combatted. Second, he wishes to safeguard our own comrades from veering over to this position. Everyone will surely agree that it is always necessary to educate our own members against errors to the left, or to the right. Third, he is worried about vicious prosecutors distorting Lenin's position and thus inflicting blows against the party. Here too everyone will agree that, within the framework of our principled positions, we should eliminate "provocative" formulations. But if a prosecutor distorts, we label it distortion; that does not mean, however, that we surrender a single principle in the face of prosecution.

From these well-meaning intentions, very bad results unfortunately seem to follow. In his anxiety to save Lenin's position from distortion, Comrade Morrison has discarded the content of Lenin's position on defeatism; he has thrown the baby out with the bath water. Combatting sectarian distortion is one thing; destroying the correct position which they wish to distort is quite another. There is only one way of demarcating your Marxist position from deviations; i.e., to restate your position and contrast it to the deviationist view. Instead of this well-tested Marxist method, Comrade Morrison tries to argue against the ultra-left distortion of Lenin by the astonishing assertion that Lenin's "formulations on defeatism add nothing to the basic revolutionary opposition to imperialist war." 100% false.

Lenin's position on defeatism (regardless of this or that "formulation") is the heart of the revolutionary opposition against imperialist war; if you purge Lenin of this, you destroy the content of revolutionary opposition to imperialist war. This I shall try to demonstrate in the course of a detailed analysis of Comrade Morrison's article.

The best proof that well-meaning intentions here lead to terrible results is that Comrade Morrison's position, far from combatting the ultra-left distortion, could become grist in their mill.

It is first necessary to summarize the content of Lenin's position on defeatism, to show wherein, on the one hand, it differs from the ultra-lefts, and on the other, from Comrade Morrison.

We could spend pages dealing with the various formulations which Lenin uses at different times. But this is hardly necessary. For Trotskyism, as the continuation of Leninism, has a clear, precise principled presentation of the question. Trotsky carefully studied this question, and as in all fundamental questions of Marxism, he has presented invaluable summaries of the Leninist position.

First I shall quote an article by the Old Man which is interesting because it is a polemic against the ultra-lefts on defeatism. It is interesting to note that he uses the method of presenting a clear-cut definition of defeatism without fear of its distortions.

#### Trotsky on Meaning of Defeatism

"To carry the class struggle to its highest form--civil war-- this is the task of defeatism. But this task can be solved only through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, that is by widening, deepening, and sharpening those revolutionary methods which constitute the content of class struggle in 'peace'-time. The proletariat does not resort to artificial methods, such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, etc., in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful on this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. Revolutionary defeatism signifies only that in its class struggle the proletarian party does not stop at any 'patriotic' considerations, since defeat of its own imperialist government, brought about, or hastened by the revolutionary movement of the masses is an incomparably lesser evil than victory gained at the price of national unity, that is, the political prostration of the proletariat. Therein lies the meaning of defeatism and this meaning is entirely sufficient". (Learn to Think, "New International", July, 1938).

Weighty words. Let everyone ponder them well.

To Comrade Morrison, Lenin's formulations "did not propose an iota more than is implied in the basic position of revolutionary socialism on war: not to support an imperialist war and to continue the class struggle". (his emphasis).

To Trotsky; "To carry the class struggle to its highest form--civil war-- this is the task of defeatism."

Clearly, there is a tremendous gulf here. To Comrade Morrison "Not to support an imperialist war (a platonic phrase indeed! -- M.B.) and to continue the class struggle" exclude and obviate Lenin's views on defeatism. A thoroughly schematic separation of carrying on the struggle and reaching the desired goal of civil war.

To Trotsky, "To carry the class struggle to its highest form -- civil war -- this is the task of defeatism". Here defeatism is the dialectical link of carrying on the class struggle to achieve the goal.

I assert that the content of Trotsky's views are in 100% identity with the views of Lenin on defeatism. It is necessary to ask Comrade Morrison the following questions: (1) Regardless of this or that "sharp formulation" of Lenin (your opinion) do you accept the identity in political content between the above statement by Trotsky which he significantly terms "the meaning of defeatism..... (which) is entirely sufficient" and the view of Lenin? (2) If there is a difference between Lenin and Trotsky (after 1917) on this fundamental question, what is it? (3) Or do you agree with this statement of Trotsky's and still feel that Lenin's formulations are so subject to distortion that they should be "shelved" in favor of this or a similar statement in the fundamental Theses of our international movement? (4) Most important, do you agree with our fundamental Theses as quoted and cited above?

From Trotsky's last quoted sentence, it is obvious that he considers this to be the most concise statement he made on the question (he also used several formulations, but like Lenin, they have the same content). Nevertheless it is necessary to point out that this statement of Trotsky's, contained in an article, runs like a red thread through every anti-war programmatic thesis which came from his pen. In order to save space, I cite references:

a) War and the 4th International, Draft Theses of the I.S., 1934 (our fundamental theses). sections 58 and 59, Page 26.

b) Death Agony of Capitalism and Tasks of 4th International, 1938. pp.34-35. (wherein the above thesis is reaffirmed, p. 31).

c) Manifesto of the 4th International on Imperialist War and Proletarian Revolution. May, 1940. pp.45-46.

These are the fundamental documents of our movement which solidly incorporate the Leninist position on revolutionary defeatism. He who attempts to dismiss Lenin's position with the reason that his "sharp formulations" are open to distortion, is treading on dangerous ground.

#### The Ultra-left Distortions

Trotsky's statement is an implicit rejection of Comrade Morrison's position; similarly it shows the fallaciousness of the ultra-left position. Since Comrade Morrison is so worried about the "lefts", perhaps it is well to amplify the Leninist position as distinct from theirs.

Generally speaking, there are two ultra-left tendencies on this question: a "pro-Leninist" position derived from Anarchism which bases itself on sabotage and the "artificial methods" against

which Trotsky here polemicizes. Lenin is equally explicit in rejecting these concepts (cf., Imperialist War, p. 74, p. 197). Like all anarchist ideas, this is a substitution of individual actions in counter-distinction to the Marxist position of mobilizing the proletariat for independent class action against the main enemy at home. Like all anarchist ideas it leads to the same sad results, the strengthening of the bourgeoisie (or one of its warring camps) against the proletariat, or a capitulation to the bourgeoisie. Clearly, there is a fundamental distinction between this and the Marxist position (and nobody can claim to derive this position from Lenin no matter how great his powers of distortion might be.).

The other ultra-left tendency "derives" from Lenin in the sense that its exponents claim to be "Leninists" and assert that we Trotskyists have "capitulated to centrism". (Having spent two years in the top committee of the Ochlerites, I can, to say the least, speak with some degree of familiarity about this position). There were numerous formulations of the "errors of Trotskyism" by the numerous sectarian grouplets; but just when the imperialist war became a reality and it was incumbent to translate formulas into activity, most of these people gave proof to Trotsky's contention that ultra-leftism is an inverted form of opportunism by "liquidating" their groups; the war swept most of these phrase-mongers away like so much chaff in the wind (just as Trotsky predicted). Those sectarians had many auxiliary objections to Trotsky's developments of defeatism; e.g., his position of sabotage of the military machine of imperialist countries at war with the Soviet Union, as an auxiliary military measure subordinate to independent revolutionary action. (cf. Learn to Think, from which I quoted; also Cannon, Defense Policy in the Minneapolis Trial, p. 57.). etc.

But their chief mistake is a totally mechanical separation of the relation between the front and the rear. In its "puristic" form, it is the idea that the revolutionary party should stand for the military defeat of "its own" imperialists at the hands of the enemy imperialists in order to weaken the enemy at home and thus facilitate the growth of revolution.

This is a complete inversion of the Leninist position: to carry on the class struggle against the main enemy at home regardless of its consequences on the military front; (for it is a matter of fact that the intensification of the class struggle by the proletariat will have an adverse effect on the front; but that is a contradiction imposed by the very conditions of imperialist war); there is a world of difference between the mechanical idea of wishing for defeat at the hands of the enemy imperialists in order to facilitate revolutionary action -- and our position of implacable struggle against the home enemy on the road of revolution (civil war) regardless of its consequences on the military front, and, indeed, taking advantage of such consequences to intensify the struggle against the main enemy at home.

### The Primary Consideration

It is a question of which is primary: the enemy imperialists delivering blows at your imperialists, and your taking advantage of it -- or delivering proletarian blows against your own imperialists and taking advantage of the auxiliary effects which these blows have on the front in order to punch still harder. The social patriot is for the victory of "his own" imperialists and the defeat of the enemy. The mechanical military defeatist is for the defeat of "his own" imperialists at the hands of the enemy; the revolutionary Marxists are for civil war, the victory of the proletariat through independent class struggle, and then, if necessary, a revolutionary war against the opposing imperialists. In other words, it is not a question of the victory (or defeat) of one gang of imperialists over the other -- but of the victory of the proletarian revolution over imperialism.

Thus the ultra-left warps and distorts Lenin's idea about wishing for defeat; Comrade Morrison wants to surrender Lenin to them; but our fundamental Theses are derived from Lenin and clearly refute this distortion:

"Lenin's formulation 'defeat is the lesser evil' means not that defeat of one's own country is the lesser evil as compared with the defeat of the enemy country; but that a military defeat resulting from the growth of the revolutionary movement is infinitely more beneficial to the proletariat and to the whole people than military victory assured by 'civil peace'. Karl Liebknecht gave an unsurpassed formula of proletarian policy in time of war: 'The chief enemy of the people is in its own country'. The victorious proletarian revolution will not only rectify the evils caused by defeat but will also create the final guarantee against future wars and defeats. This dialectic attitude toward war is the most important element of revolutionary training and therefore also of the struggle against war." (1934 Thesis, p. 26). (It goes without saying that in the above pages, we have been dealing with the political content of a highly theoretical question, and not with the subordinate tactical aspects of the form of our popular propaganda.)

So much for the ultra-lefts. (Though perhaps in the future it may be necessary to devote more attentions to their mistakes.)

### Schematic Abstractions

If our fundamental Theses are derived from Lenin, then Comrade Morrison's first conclusion has already been demonstrated as completely erroneous. But every mistake has its lessons. It is worthwhile seeing the method whereby Comrade Morrison arrived at such a conclusion.

He employs formal logic in the most schematic sense of the term. "...in the first instance to state the basic position of a revolutionary Marxist party on imperialist war and then to see if the formulation of Lenin on revolutionary defeatism adds anything to that position" (my emphasis-M.B.)

Comrade Morrison proceeds to state what he considers the basic position of the party. Everything here is a beautiful abstraction, summarized by the last sentence: "In a general way however, it is correct to state that the position of the party with reference to the imperialist war is that it does not support it and carries on the struggle for socialism".

But this is so "general" that it tells us absolutely nothing about HOW to "carry on the struggle for socialism". Far from being our "basic position" it is only an abstraction which can be applied to every question, viz., how to fight Fascism; "carry on the struggle for Socialism"; how to defend the Soviet Union; "carry on, etc". If this is the basic position on these questions, where are our principled differences with the Stalinists or Socialists who also will verbally "carry on the struggle for Socialism"? Both the Stalinist theory of "social fascism" or of "democracy against fascism" and the Trotskyist position against fascism can be advanced in the name of carrying on the struggle for Socialism -- only one leads to the victory of fascism, ours to its defeat. Socialism in one country vs. the permanent revolution were both advanced in the interests of "carrying on the struggle for socialism"; is it necessary to state that the Stalinists road is diametrically opposite to ours?

To be sure, Comrade Morrison points out that we do not support the war -- which of course separates us from all chauvinists. But for us "not to support" means to -- oppose. HOW? Comrade Morrison's answer, "carry out the struggle for Socialism" still leaves us in the realm of abstraction. In war as in peace, that is our aim, but the principled methods to achieve this aim are found only in the content of Lenin's position;

But if one "first" states as a "basic position" an abstract aim, and "then" discards the "sharp formulations" which expedite the realization of this "aim" -- you are left with no "basic position", no revolutionary opposition to imperialist war, your "aim" floats in the clouds as a beautiful abstraction. This is not the method of revolutionary Marxism; it is the substitution of formal logic, of schematic separation of means and ends, from the dialectical method of the inter-relation between the means and method of struggling against the imperialist war and the desired end.

There can be no talk about "advocating the continuance of the struggle for Socialism" in time of war without adopting Lenin's principled method: to use this abstraction "continuance of the struggle for socialism" as our "basic position" and artificially separate Lenin's defeatism which is the core of such a struggle in time of imperialist war, can only be termed a sophistry.

We shall not deal with Comrade Morrison's quotations from Lenin, except to say that he has taken two written immediately after the outbreak of the war when Lenin had not yet advanced defeatism for all the imperialist countries, but only for Russia (Marxism does not fall like manna from the heavens; but is developed by applying theory to real conditions).

Moreover, Comrade Morrison's choice of quotations serves to strengthen the ultra-left idea which he is trying so hard to combat; but it is not now necessary to get involved in a lengthy discussion of quotations from Lenin.

Nor shall we quarrel with Comrade Morrison's reasons for the sharpness of Lenin's formulations; he is correct that "the sharpest formulations were justified". But it is necessary to add: today, to the degree that there is perceptible backsliding from the content of Lenin's position, or failure to understand it, precise formulations which cut beneath propaganda generalities or legal sophisms are also justified.

Then Comrade Morrison proceeds to several more errors: (1) separation of the political position of the party from that of its individual members on defeatism (2) advocacy of the old formula of "neither victory nor defeat" as counter-posed to revolutionary defeatism. (3) the idea (related to (1) that a revolutionist "can have different opinions with reference to (the defeat of) different imperialist governments."

#### The Program, The Party and Its Members

We have already seen how falacious is Comrade Morrison's idea that a revolutionary party as such should ignore the question (of wanting the defeat of his own imperialist government). From his standpoint, this should settle the matter; but no, the "bogey" of defeatism still troubles him; "It would be silly to ignore or deny Lenin's formulations on this question", he says. Then he proceeds to deal with the question of individuals thinking about the military defeat of this or that imperialist.

The only conclusion that one can draw is that Comrade Morrison has got himself so mixed up that he has temporarily adopted the ultra-left position (for an individual) in order to try to "explain" Lenin's formulations. Everything he says in this section is from the standpoint of "whether or not a defeat would lead to a revolution and whether a particular government is more reactionary". But this is the ultra-left idea, not Lenin's, not the Party's. Everything in this section is a pragmatic hypothesis from the standpoint of military defeat and then the possibility of revolution, rather than what Trotsky termed our "dialectical attitude toward war".

His concept of defeatism here is wrong, but right or wrong, since when, on fundamental questions of this kind, does the party not have a position while an individual member does. The implications of this concept are dangerous indeed. If the majority of individual members of a party in a given country adopted the position of favoring the defeat of their own imperialists at the hands of the enemy, they would have a wrong position, but if they were serious political people, they would certainly adopt the majority viewpoint as a party position. The opposite is equally true; our party holds a correct position on defeatism as an integral motive lever of revolutionary opposition to war; he who wishes to discard

this concept for the party, even though he gives individuals the right to hold it (more precisely, Comrade Morrison gives them the right to hold the incorrect position) is establishing a dangerous precedent.

The Party must categorically reject the idea that on any fundamental political question, the party "abstains" while individual members can have any position they wish.

### "Neither Victory Nor Defeat"

"The correct attitude for a party is that historically victory or defeat of one or the other capitalist camp leaves the masses in the same position -- slaves to capitalism and, at the present period, to fascist capitalism." Yes, but only if you exclude the possibility of proletarian revolution, only if you do not believe that the "task of defeatism is to carry the class struggle to its highest form -- civil war". In other words, no! This is the position which Trotsky, Luxemburg and other internationalists held in 1915-16 in opposition to Lenin's position of revolutionary defeatism. (cf. Lenin, V.18 pp.197-202. V.19, p.212 n.) Trotsky learned from Lenin, learned well. That is why we have such a clear-cut principled position on defeatism from his pen. In 1915-16, Trotsky and Luxemburg were moving to the left, toward Lenin's position; today Comrade Morrison advances this position, 26 years after Lenin's position was given historical confirmation not alone as theory but as a guide to action, in the civil war and successful proletarian October. (There is, of course, a difference between the historical idea of victory or defeat, and the advocacy of their idea as an anti-war slogan in opposition to revolutionary defeatism. Comrade Morrison does not make clear how he advances it.)

### Reaffirming Fundamentals

Comrade Morrison spends two pages speculating about what an individual revolutionist should think in a given country about military defeat of his own bourgeoisie. These speculations are advanced from the wrong concept of defeatism.

It is urgently necessary to say:

1- The Party does have a position on defeatism as stated in our fundamental Theses. Party members either agree, or do not agree with the Party position.

2- The Party position on defeatism mutually excludes the "neither victory nor defeat" position. The Party position on defeatism, is identical in content with Lenin's position and is an integral part of its revolutionary opposition (not non-support) to imperialist war.

3- The idea advanced by Comrade Morrison that a "revolutionary Marxist can have different opinions with reference to (the military defeat of) different imperialist governments" is incorrect, and must not be confused with the Party position that the revolutionist and

his party are for revolutionary defeat of "its own" bourgeoisie through class struggle culminating in civil war; and that military defeats which would be the result of such class action are the "lesser evil" as contrasted to the political shackling of the proletariat through "civil peace" or "national unity." If the former position were to be counterposed to the latter (party) position, then the former position would become an unjustifiable concession to social-patriotism; (because it would then signify that a revolutionist in the U.S. could "wish" for the military defeat of Germany at the hands of the "democratic" imperialists, in contrast to the Party position that revolutionists in both warring camps work for revolutionary defeat of their respective bourgeoisie.)

(Apropos of his first sentence) we can say: Yes, revolutionary defeatism will always be with us until we achieve socialism; not as something to be "afraid of", but as a powerful lever of revolutionary anti-war struggle. Upon the revolutionary proletariat's ability to throw that lever into action hinges the outcome of the imperialist war.

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P.S. Having had only two days to reply to Comrade Morrison since his article appeared, I have written in a hurry without regard to style; any seemingly harsh expressions are consequently unavoidable. Moreover, in order to concentrate on the basic theoretical issues involved, I have not dealt with propaganda aspects of the question, nor with a number of relevant points, e.g., "wishing" and "working" for defeat, attempts at legal presentation of such questions, etc. (M.B.)