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Special Aspects of the Imperialist War

REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM
AND THE REVISIONISTS

An Answer to the Schachtman Trotskyites

National Question

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"The different lines of march on defeatism flowed from the different lines of march on the road to power AND WERE MANIFESTED MOST SHARPLY IN 1917 WHEN the Mensheviks etc.

REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM AND THE REVISIONISTS

7

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INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION

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SPECIAL ASPECTS OF THE IMPERIALIST WAR

All sorts of new-fangled theories are developing throughout the revolutionary movement to "explain" the differences between the present World War and the last war. While the differences are pronounced, they nevertheless must be understood within the framework of the fundamental characteristics of imperialism, decay capitalism.

Imperialist wars are the product of decay capitalism. The epoch of imperialism represents the highest stage of capitalist development, but at the same time it also represents the final stage of decay, the beginning of the end. All the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production, and particularly the fundamental contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation of the product, reach their highest expression in the imperialist epoch. In previous periods capitalism could develop despite these contradictions. Today development is completely throttled by the internal contradictions, and the ruthless competition for profits leads backwards, not forwards.

One special characteristic of this period is the unstable economic equilibrium on a world scale. The need for greater markets has intensified the antagonism between national boundaries and the productive forces. It is clear that the first world imperialist war, caused by the struggle between imperialist powers for the division of the world, left a hopelessly unstable economic equilibrium as its fruit. Not one year has passed since then without wars and revolutionary struggles in different parts of the earth. None of these armed struggles achieved the complete disruption of world economy, because the revolutionary struggles (outside of the Soviet Union) did not succeed in the triumph of the social force of the working class; this in turn enabled the imperialist powers to temporarily settle differences within the framework of general world "peace".

But the new imperialist world war, like the first, involves the decisive factors of world economy; it springs from the most fundamental characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. Economic equilibrium is disrupted because this world war is the running surface sore, symptomatic of an economic system in

hopeless decline and decay. The capitalist mode of production is the germ; imperialist war is the fever produced.

A number of special characteristics of this world war, not present in 1914, require special analysis. If we ignore these features, we may draw the wrong conclusions from our understanding of the preceding remarks.

The most outstanding feature is the existence of the Soviet Union, a new type of economy on one sixth of the world's surface. The mere existence of a new social system, regardless of the present status, is a factor that makes the strategy and tactics of the new imperialist war entirely different from those of 1914.

1- THE SOVIET UNION IN THE IMPERIALIST CONFLICT

It was bound to be merely a matter of time until the Soviet Union became involved in the imperialist war. From the very first days of the USSR, Marxists clearly saw that unless the October Revolution were extended before the outbreak of the new war, the war would inevitably include intervention against the Soviet Union as one of its phases. If the war did not start as an attack on the Soviet Union, then the Soviet Union would be dragged in because the iron ring of capitalist encirclement draws tighter instead of relaxing, once the imperialist war has broken out. To those who stand for the defense of the workers state, despite and against Stalinism and the warping of the property relations it has brought about, the main strategical problem has always been: how to obtain the most favorable variant against all imperialist powers, against both sides in the imperialist struggle. Stalinism, on the contrary, subordinates itself to one group of imperialists against the other group. Stalinism long ago repudiated INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION. The change from the support of the Peoples Front to support of Hitler is a change in form and degree only.

The Polish invasion was a spark that might have started the conflagration of imperialist military intervention against the Soviets; but the rapid development of events shifted the scene to Finland. With the Stalinist invasion of Finland, Soviet entry into the imperialist war became a MILITARY FACT. The progress of the war will involve the USSR to an increasing extent.

From this flows another peculiarity of the war: What started as an imperialist war has become an imperialist war WITH ELEMENTS OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR INVOLVED.

How would the situation differ if a genuine Communist Party were leading the Soviet Union, rather than Stalinism? The USSR would inevitably be forced into the imperialist war, irrespective of

the leadership --- Lenin repeatedly pointed out this inevitability. The difference would consist in HOW and FOR WHAT CLASS the Soviets would function in the war. The independent action of the working class for the achievement of its own aims --- the spread of the October throughout the world --- this would be the method and the aim of a revolutionary leadership. Participation in the war would NOT be on the basis of the support of one group of imperialists against another; it would NOT be on the basis of a mere military invasion of Poland and Finland. These are suicidal steps and crimes against the interests of the working class; they are carried out by a desperate bureaucracy, chained to the service of the imperialist camp, which sees its own caste interest threatened by the constricting ring of the imperialist war. A revolutionary leadership would have aroused the masses in Poland and Finland to throw off their imperialist yoke; the use of the Red Army would have been supplementary, instead of the primary tactic. A revolutionary leadership would be working for the overthrow of the German capitalist class by the German workers, instead of aiding the Nazis in suppression of the workers. A revolutionary leadership would teach the workers on both sides REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM, instead of importing German technical experts for better co-ordination of Soviet aid to Germany.

Nevertheless, even the existent negative variants involve a multitude of complicating factors that are completely ignored both by the Stalinists and by the "ultra-lefts" who cry for the defeat of the USSR. (see the February, 1940 issue of INTERNATIONAL NEWS).

2- THE UNITED STATES, THE LEADING IMPERIALIST POWER

In 1914 the United States was only a second-rate imperialist power; but the four years of the war and the terrific post-war developments changed conditions: the United States became the most powerful nation in the world. The outbreak of the new imperialist war, the ensuing rapid exhaustion of the other important imperialist powers while the leading power avoids military participation for the time being, is of key importance. Every move made by the powers at war, every maneuver for position in dictating "peace" terms, revolves around the axis of the war aims of the United States. --- war aims at the moment being achieved without armed conflict (complete exclusion of the Germans and British from the Latin American market, weakening of British power in Asia, etc). On the other hand, the war will not reach its high tempo; will not expand to embrace the whole world directly, until the United States does enter the armed arena. The warring powers do not want to exhaust themselves until ALL the neutrals, especially the United States, are involved in the military conflict.

3- THE NEW STRATEGY OF THIS WAR

One special feature of this new imperialist war is the existence of three "separate", yet co-ordinated, military conflicts: the Japanese "pacification" of China, in reality a struggle against rival powers for domination of Asia; the German--Anglo-French conflict raging on land, sea and in the air; and the Soviet-Finnish war, in which the world imperialist powers aid Finland with money, supplies and volunteers. Only Italy and the United States are not yet openly involved in the armed struggle. An inevitable early stage in the development of the world war will be the merging of these three phases into THE world war.

The replacement of large numbers of men by machinery in industry has made inevitable the increased use of machines in place of man power in war tactics. This development alters the whole strategy of the war. The use of tanks, airplanes, small mechanized units, the increased emphasis on artillery, machine guns, automatic rifles --- all serving as advance scouts for the forward thrust of the massed man-power in the near future --- these represent marked changes in method. In addition, the great defense lines, the Maginot, Siegfried and Mannerheim barriers, all held with machinery, make the full economic mobilization of the nation for war absolutely necessary. This, in the last analysis, is the real meaning of the "total" war the bourgeoisie have been threatening. Ultimately this new imperialist blood-bath will grow far worse than the war of 1914, despite the fact that the tempo on the western front has not yet developed.

A further strategic aspect rests on consideration of the weak links in world economy. The emphasis placed on one or another sphere of conflict will depend very largely on these points of weakness, which are analyzed below.

4- CAPITALIST AGENTS IN THE RANKS OF THE WORKERS

The second world war has at its disposal all the varieties of social-patriots exhibited in 1914; but it has an additional variety the Stalinists. These are the most dangerous agents of imperialism in the workers' ranks because their social base is not the structure of bourgeois democracy, but the property relations established by the Russian October, whose characteristics they have distorted to the cracking point. In 1914 the Social-Democrats took active part on both sides of the imperialist war. Today, precisely because bourgeois democracy is their social base, all the Social-Democrats support the Anglo-French and American imperialists. Fascism as the form of the capitalist state has replaced bourgeois democracy in Germany; hence the German Social-Democrats support the Anglo-French in the hope of

restoring capitalist democracy by defeating Hitler. Many of the Anarchists take this position too.

The Stalinists, in turn, are tied to the tail of German imperialism in the slaughter, in consequence of the Hitler-Stalin pacts. This division of labor within the camp of the boss agents in our ranks has sown even greater confusion than in 1914.

5- THE WEAK LINKS OF WORLD ECONOMY

It is axiomatic that we must look for the chain of world economy to break at its weakest link. Within the camp of the imperialists at war, France constitutes one of the weakest links at this moment. There the revolution was not "historically retarded" by the war; it was driven below the surface, and it continues boiling there in the same manner that it did in Russia between 1912 and 1917. A cursory view might give the impression that Germany is far weaker. But Germany is not hampered by a cumbersome feudal Austria-Hungary; she does not have to fight Italy and Russia, as in the last war. Instead these two countries are her life-line to supplies for continuing the war. Even if Germany should be forced to her knees and thus be transformed into the first weak link to snap, France could not long stand the pressure. In any case the French workers are destined to play a very important revolutionary war.

A second weak link, that of an economy subordinated to world economy despite its superior plan of organized social production, is the Soviet Union. Because of Stalinism, the Soviet Union stands on the brink of capitalist restoration in this world imperialist war.

The third aspect to be considered is the colonial empires in Asia and other parts of the world. In the first imperialist war it took years for the colonial struggles to come into the orbit of decay capitalism, on the heels of the proletarian revolution. Today, at the very outbreak of the war, the unrest in the colonies has accumulated explosive force. China is already at the breaking point; India is in the preliminary stages of the national revolution; and other colonies are rapidly moving in this direction. The danger of revolution in the colonies and at home today is far more pronounced than in 1914.

6- WHAT ARE THE DECISIVE UNDERLYING FACTORS?

In our introductory remarks we pointed to the general features of imperialist war, omitting, for the moment, the problem of class relationships. We now return to this question. Even war economy has been unable to absorb the millions of unemployed. In some countries the resultant economic dislocation of war has even increased

the number of permanently unemployed. In such an epoch of hopeless economic decay, in this period of destruction, all talk of a United States of Europe based on the capitalist mode of production, is pure hypocrisy or, at best, empty wish-fulfilment. It is only a catch-phrase (like the League of Nations) employed by the imperialists as a cloak for their hope of dominating Europe after the "victory".

The decisive factor determining the entire character of the imperialist war and every move made by the imperialists is fear of the working class, fear of the proletarian revolution. It is not the face of the revolution, but the shadow it casts in advance, which makes them hesitate and temporize, for they know that the proletarian revolution will wipe capitalism from the face of the earth and replace it with a socialized economy, with workers' control of production for use.

7- THE ECONOMY OF SCARCITY

From an economic point of view there are other differences today from the early period of the first world war. Twenty-one years of capitalist "reorganization" has resulted in greater or lesser "organized economies" in every capitalist countries, economies that are "planned" to create scarcity, rather than to increase consumers products. The great mass of accumulated capital and means of production cannot find profitable investment. The further dislocation of economy during the war, by emphasizing still more non-productive (destructive) war production, and the great rationalization that the war will inevitably bring about in industry, in order to meet war necessities as speedily as possible are laying the basis for further and greater capitalist crisis and toward revolutionary upheavals.

December 28, 1939

REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM & THE REVISIONISTS

Since the outbreak of the second imperialist world war, the question of defeatism or defensism becomes the burning issue of the hour. The Leninist position of revolutionary defeatism is again posed for concrete action in the warring imperialist nations, and hence assumes prime importance as a theoretical question for determining the revolutionary Marxist line of march on a world scale. Moreover, it is organically linked up with the so-called Russian question, with the Soviet-Polish, and now, the Soviet-Finnish wars.

As in 1914-1917 the imperialist war gave the acid test to the labor movement and exposed to the hilt the opportunists who paraded as Marxists; just as then the imperialist war precipitated a deep crisis in the working class organizations --- so now, this new imperialist war, following on the heels of the Spanish defeat, has shoved the Stalinists, Socialists and the Trotskyites still deeper into the mire where they flounder in terrific internal strife and crisis. In addition, the war has already delivered heavy body blows against the small sects on a world scale, all of whom have previously left the path of Marxism --- blows which will bury them still deeper in sectarian isolation as their programmatic positions will further depart from Marxism.

In 1914 only the Bolshevik Party of Russia, with its scattered contacts in Europe, was able to weather the storm. Today only the INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION maintains its Marxist line intact and consolidates its cadres to carry the line of revolutionary defeatism into action.

The INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION and its affiliated sections in Europe and America have already presented a considerable amount of basic material on the question of revolutionary defeatism. But again, new objective developments, new forms of revisionism by the centrist organizations, necessitate a reiteration of the Leninist position. We therefore present this material, using as our starting point the position on revolutionary defeatism as presented by Max Schachtman and others (the Minority) in the Socialist Workers Party U.S. Trotskyites) internal fight. We take this form of presentation

because we believe that the stupid and utterly false concept cloaked in the phrase "revolutionary defeatism" will enable us to throw more light on the Lenin position in contrast to the variety of centrist positions, of which Schachtman's, as well as Trotsky's (from which the former flows) is an "excellent" example.

The SWP Minority has issued an internal document titled What Is At Issue in the Dispute on the Russian Question? In this document they have devoted a whole chapter to the question of "Forms of Defensism and Forms of Defeatism". A greater amount of confusion on the question of revolutionary defeatism could not be presented in such few words.

"FORMS" OF DEFEATISM

To cover up their false position on Finland, etc., the Minority Trotskyites have developed an entire schema on "forms" of revolutionary defeatism, of which they present a number of such "FORMS". The first example they deal with is the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. They point out that the "Bolsheviks (and many Mensheviks) adopted the position of revolutionary defeatism". Right here in the first sentence our friends make their first error. They fail to see a distinction between the Bolshevik position of defeatism and the Menshevik position of defeatism. (We are not speaking of individuals who found their way to Marxism, but the organization as such.) The theoretical disputes on the 1905 Revolution and the actual events that lead up to October (as well as the previous 1903 split issues) clearly revealed that there were two different concepts, two different lines of march between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks on the question of "defeatism". The different lines of march on defeatism flowed from the different lines of march on the road to power: the Mensheviks were satisfied with the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the establishment of a "democratic" capitalist state; but the Bolsheviks demanded the rule of the workers supported by the peasants through the Soviets (the destruction of the capitalist state) and the revolution in permanence over to the proletarian revolution. (This whole concept of the road to power was later concretized in the Russian Revolutions by Lenin.)

What 1905 revealed (which the Minority does not see), 1917 confirmed (which neither the Minority nor the Majority understands.) In 1917 the Menshevik concept of defeatism --- change of the government --- flowing from their concept of the road to power, showed a non-Marxian understanding of imperialism and the imperialist war, and placed the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks on different sides of the barricades.

WOODROW WILSON FOR "DEFEATISM" ???

This confusion deepens with the presentation by the Trotsky Minority of still another "form of defeatism". Schachtman says: "There is another form of defeatism which is essentially military." When Woodrow Wilson's agents during the last world war sought to finance the German Spartacists, it was not that Wilson favored a proletarian revolution in Germany, but simply because he was for the military defeat of an imperialist rival". In the first place to speak of a defeatism that is "essentially military" is to imply that there is a defeatism which is essentially non-military. But in the Marxian concept and position on revolutionary defeatism there can be no execution of the line of revolutionary defeatism that does not bring about military reversals, that does not bring about military defeats of the exploiters of "our fatherland". HOW to bring these about is a different question which we will deal with later.

But the main point involved here is the muddle-headed confusion whereby two opposing lines of march of two opposing classes are termed different "forms" of the same thing --- "defeatism". It is obvious to the blind that the imperialists in a war fight for the defeat of the enemy imperialists; and sometimes try to use the tactic of giving material support to the "left" in their enemy's country. But such aims of the imperialists and such tactics used by them, have nothing in common with the Lenin position, the CONTENT of revolutionary defeatism. To confuse the imperialist aim of defeating its enemy imperialist with the proletarian aim of defeatism (of "its own" bourgeoisie) is the same non-Marxian eclecticism as to confuse the defense of workers democratic rights with the defense of bourgeois democracy; or to confuse workers democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat with bourgeois "democracy" under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The only permissible sense in which we could say that Woodrow Wilson was for "defeatism" would be IF he had been for the revolutionary defeat of American imperialism as a step toward proletarian revolution. To use the term in any other way is to sow the worst kind of confusion on the CLASS MEANING AND CONTENT of revolutionary defeatism, to destroy the scientific precision of Marxian terminology by using the "same" word to describe two diametrically opposed class aims. This is an old trick of centrists to destroy the CONTENT of a Marxian position by reducing its FORM and (word) label to eclectic generalizations: i.e., "democracy in general" a la Kautsky, "defeatism in general" a la Trotskyism.

MILITARY VS. REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM ???

The Trotskyites continue reeling off "forms of defeatism" and state: "There is still a third form of defeatism, which is at

once military and revolutionary." Again we have this separation of military and revolutionary. But from the Marxian point of view, we repeat, revolutionary defeatism, which is the only KIND of defeatism we are for, has its military, political, and other sides: but they are aspects of one question. These centrists continue: "In a war between China and Japan, we are for the unconditional defense of China. If the defeat of Japan can be accomplished by revolutionary political means employed by the Japanese proletariat (revolutionary defeatism), so much the better. But even if this is not possible at a given time, the defeat of Japan accomplished by military means alone (military defeatism) would signify the accomplishment of his class duty."

These last two sentences plumb the depths of ignorance regarding the Lenin position of revolutionary defeatism.

As we have stated time and again in opposition to the Trotskyites, their concept of revolutionary defeatism is that the revolutionists defeat their imperialists. Here Schachtman presents this false position in all its nakedness. But this is not revolutionary defeatism. This is a centrist jumble of words that have no relation to the material conditions and relationship of forces in an imperialist war.

For the defeat of the Japanese imperialists in the Chinese campaign, the revolutionists in Japan must WORK for the military defeat of their own exploiters, through revolutionary means. The Japanese revolutionists will be able to overthrow the Japanese imperialists through mass working class action only by working for military defeat. To mechanically divide this question into two separate ones, to speak of the revolutionists through revolutionary defeatism (?) defeating their exploiters WITHOUT WORKING FOR MILITARY DEFEATS in the campaign being conducted, is the worst kind of centrism.

Revolutionary defeatism is the line of march and the CONCRETE APPLICATION of the class struggle in the direction of the social revolution during the period of imperialist war. It is a line of march against "OUR OWN" IMPERIALIST EXPLOITERS. It is applied in an imperialist war by workers on both sides, with equal force, regardless of the "democratic" or "reactionary" nature of the imperialist states. In an imperialist attack on a colonial country, the concrete application of the class struggle is the line of march of the defense of the national revolution, which cannot be separated from the struggle for the social revolution. This means revolutionary defeatism by the workers in the imperialist country; but this most definitely does NOT mean unconditional defense for China, although it does not mean defeatism for China. Here again, where the Trotskyites speak of "forms of defeatism" they seriously confuse several fundamental strategical problems under "defeatism". In this concrete case,

the Trotskyites present a false position on defeatism for Japan, and they have always presented a false position of unconditional defense for China.

UNCONDITIONAL DEFENSE

For the sake of argument we will use the slogan: "For the Unconditional Defense of China Against Japanese Imperialism." But what is the CONTENT of this slogan?? The Trotskyites give it the content of SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLES GOVERNMENT (CHIANG-KAI-SHEK) OF CHINA, of material aid to the Chinese nationalist government, the puppet of imperialism. To thus give support to an agent of imperialism (even though not a Japanese agent) is not the CONTENT of unconditional defense (support) of China.

The unconditional defense of China from a MARXIST standpoint can only mean the defense of the Chinese masses and their interests against ALL IMPERIALISTS AND AGAINST ALL IMPERIALIST AGENTS. But to give material aid to one group of imperialist agents is "conditional" support of the Chinese masses which can only lead to their defeat and continued oppression by imperialism and its agents.

To march separately and to strike together with the Chinese nationalists against Japanese imperialism, and to give material aid to the national exploiters are two different policies. To give material aid, as we have said many times before, is a FORM of political aid, is to subordinate the workers' forces to the imperialist agents, and negate the line of march of independent working class action against ALL the imperialists and their agents. To give material aid means to march with, not to march separately. The Trotskyites should change the Lenin formula to read march with and strike together instead of march separately and strike together.

CANNON AND SCHACHTMAN BOTH WRONG

In summarizing their position the Minority Trotskyites state: "The slogan of 'unconditional defense of the Soviet Union' as understood and interpreted by the Fourth Internationalists (read Trotskyites) up to now, as still understood and interpreted by the Cannon group, makes it impossible for us to adopt officially the position which has been elaborated in this document. Our past slogan must be revised". Here is a two-fold error on the part of the Minority -- an error which flows, not from the concrete social relations, but from their EVALUATION of these relations. First, they attempt to reject the "old" position of "unconditional defense" (read, material support to Stalinism) without recognizing that it was wrong yesterday. They see an "error" only today, but their attempt to correct it through revolutionary defeatism for the Soviet Union is an error just as bad, if not worse. Moreover, it should be noted that their rejection of their past interpretation of "unconditional defense" is a rejection from the RIGHT, which will lead to further right steps in

China, the United States, etc. As stated above, we reject FROM THE LEFT the Trotsky position of unconditional defense, and we have presented consistently the correct CONTENT of unconditional defense of the workers and oppressed masses in any such country, be it a degenerated workers state, a country where there is a struggle between Fascism and the social revolution, or a colonial country. (march separately, strike together.)

WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE?

The Trotskyite PC Minority (which probably has a majority in the membership) now advocates defeatism for the Red Army in the Finnish campaign. They state: "This is the mumbo-jumbo to which we have been brought by the slogan of 'unconditional defense' and it is sanctified in the eyes of its authors by the fact that they make the sign of the cross before the formula: 'Russia is a workers state.' Naturally, since ALL of the Trotskyites filled the formula of 'unconditional defense with a false content yesterday, it is understandable that some of them today swing to the other extreme, make the 180 degree turn from material support to Stalinism to revolutionary defeatism. In both cases they confuse the role of the Soviet Union with the role of Stalinism, they cannot evaluate what is progressive and what is reactionary.

That is, they confuse the objective situation (which is often progressive) with the subjective factor (the labor lieutenants of the bourgeoisie), the leadership which is there to disorganize, to stem the tide, which can only be reactionary. In the Spanish Civil war, the Minority says: "Bourgeois democracy was conducting a progressive war against fascism". This formulation is totally false; and from it naturally they present the false position of material aid and support, but with "political criticism" (!) to the democratic bourgeoisie. But if one has the FACTS of history and the concrete struggle correctly, then one knows that the order of the day in Spain was a struggle between fascism and the proletarian revolution, that this struggle against fascism (the general objective conditions) was progressive; but that the Peoples Front as the democratic bourgeois agent of the Anglo-French imperialists could ONLY play a reactionary role, even though it was forced by the working class to take up arms against fascism. Hence, in this situation, the correct line of march was the fight on two fronts.

Similarly --- bourgeois democracy in decay capitalism cannot play a progressive role, cannot by its very nature play such. This is also true for Stalinism, for the colonial bourgeoisie, as well as for such labor fakirs as Lewis and such --- for ALL AGENTS OF THE IMPERIALISTS, no matter where they are, no matter under what false cloak they conceal their treachery. To redraft the above quotation on Spain in order that it would be correct, the Minority would have to state: "In the PROGRESSIVE struggle of the WORKING CLASS against fascism, bourgeois democracy (Peoples Front) played a

REACTIONARY ROLE. With such confusion, no wonder the Trotskyites first kiss the agents of the imperialists (Peoples Front, Stalinism, colonial exploiters, the Labor Party, Lewis and Co., etc.) and when they get their fingers burned, as they now have on the Russian question since the outbreak of the war, they swing to the opposite equally false position -- for the defeat of what is REALLY progressive, the Workers State.

THE SOVIET UNION

And Schachtman and Co. definitely show that they have learned nothing, that they still confuse what is progressive, that they will repeat yesterday's errors when the time ripens.

Let us again quote him: "...if the character of the war really changes (!) into a war of imperialist attack upon the Soviet Union, we shall take a clear cut position of defensism --- not the shamefaced defensism of the Cannonites in the present war, but unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" (read, subordination to Stalinism). In other words, they want revolutionary defeatism for the Red Army in Finland because they don't understand the nature of the Finnish war; but tomorrow, if the imperialists OPENLY invade the Soviet Union, then Schachtman will revert right back to the "old position", be a "good soldier", give material support to Stalinism, just as they did to the Peoples Front. For they still believe, as Trotsky stated in an Internal Bulletin of December, 1939, that under certain circumstances, Stalinism can play a progressive role!

Let us go into detail on the question of the defense or the defeat of the Soviet Union. Long before the second imperialist war as declared, the INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION stated that once the war begins, no matter how it starts, no matter what its form, sooner or later, and long before the war is in full swing, the Soviet Union will be drawn into the conflict. This was based upon an analysis of world economy and the relation of the capitalist sector to the degenerating Transition Economy of the warped workers state. We pointed out that the iron ring of capitalism was tightening around the Soviet Union. We further pointed out that with the warped character of the Soviet Union under Stalinism, which we characterized as an agent of the imperialists, the USSR's participation in the war would also take on warped forms. In other words it would take on the form of an ally and a tail to one imperialist group against the other.

The developments of its further degeneration and the defeat in Spain caused it to take its WORST form, the Hitler-Stalin pact and the invasions that followed.

Most of the Trotskyites agreed, at least in words, with our analysis; in fact, they could not understand where a difference existed. But now we see that they did not understand this analysis, much less the strategical line of defense which flows from it. The sharp faction fight in their ranks may possibly enable some of them to find their way to Marxism.

If the above analysis is correct (and no one is disputing it) then it is a secondary question (although of an important strategical nature) to decide if the Soviet Union (under Marxist leadership) should wait until it is attacked by the imperialists, or that it defend itself by taking the offensive. We think, depending on the given situation, that the best defense is offense.

But this has absolutely nothing in common with the Stalinist position. The actions of Stalinism which it terms an offensive, we declare to be deeds that weaken rather than strengthen the DEFENSE OF THE SOVIET UNION. The dispute with Stalinism, however, cannot be settled on this level. As important as this is, the real issue is of much greater theoretical and political import --- the basic principled questions of Marxism on the question of world revolution vs. the theory of socialism in one country and the social patriotic and tail-endism-to-imperialism-deeds which flow from the Stalinist position.

The Minority states that the Soviet Union is waging a "reactionary war even against a capitalist country". This is almost like weeping for "poor little Finland". They think Stalin attacked Finland solely for the aggrandizement of the bureaucracy. They fail abysmally to understand that the Soviet Union is fighting the imperialists in Finland, and that Finland is the FIRST battleground of the imperialists against the Soviet Union. Tomorrow if the imperialist army drives the Soviets out of Finland and fight on Soviet soil, the character of the war will NOT have changed. The only change will be in the military aspects of the SAME WAR. Under these circumstances, when only the military form of the war changes, only muddle-heads can argue for a change from defeatism to defensism (or vice versa).

The above amply indicates this swamp of confusion. Schachtman, who was yesterday for material aid to Stalinism, today is for revolutionary defeatism, and tomorrow will again be for material aid to Stalinism! (Cannon remains "consistently" for material aid to Stalinism.) And --- if matters could be worse --- neither understands the Lenin position of revolutionary defeatism.

DEFEATISM IN AN IMPERIALIST WAR

To show that they do not only not understand WHEN TO APPLY revolutionary defeatism, but that they do not understand WHAT IT IS,

we quote Schachtman's definition presented for a war between two imperialist camps: "Does revolutionary defeatism mean the defeat of 'our' army by the 'enemy' army --- the American army by the Japanese, the British army by the German, the Italian army by the French? Not at all. IT MEANS THE DEFEAT OF ONE'S "OWN" GOVERNMENT BY ONE'S OWN PROLETARIAT" (our emphasis).

This "left" bombastic phrase about the proletariat defeating its own bourgeoisie in reality a reactionary concept. Under the cloak of "revolutionary defeatism" these centrist word-mongers are clever enough to conceal the open door to social patriotism.

Does history bear out the Trotskyites on this definition? Did the workers of Paris defeat their own army, or was it the defeat of the French army by the Germans that TRANSFORMED the war into a revolutionary situation in which the Parisian workers were able to establish the Commune?

In 1905, did the Russian workers defeat the Czarist army, or was it the defeat of the Russian army by the Japanese army that TRANSFORMED the imperialist war into civil war. It was the military defeat that brought about a revolutionary situation.

The same applies in 1917.

But the Trotskyites, like the Stalinists, must rewrite history to suit their false theories on this question, just as they do on the Lenin-Kerensky-Kornilov three cornered fight, etc.

A revolutionary situation is created by the objective conditions, although of course, the party plays its role in the development of these conditions. But without the subjective factor, without the REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, the revolutionary situation cannot be transformed into a successful revolution.

THE MARXIAN POSITION OF REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM

This holds true in the period of imperialist war. The objective conditions of military reversals and defeats must be present to create a revolutionary situation; the subjective factor --- WORK FOR THE DEFEAT.

We here reiterate the Marxist position of revolutionary defeatism in contrast to the Trotsky position quoted above.

Revolutionary defeatism is the policy of WORKING for the defeat of "one's own" imperialist government and ARMED FORCES, through REVOLUTIONARY CLASS ACTION, even if this means the momentary "victory" of the "enemy" army.

This is the Lenin concept of a THREE cornered struggle even though two of the three are in one category (the two camps of the bourgeoisie). It is the INDEPENDENT LINE OF MARCH OF THE PROLETARIAT against ALL sections of the exploiters.

Let us repeat these points and amplify them:

The revolutionists WORK for the defeat, but their influence is not sufficient for them to defeat the government. To talk of the revolutionists defeating the government, instead of working for the defeat, is evading the question and opens the door for a social patriotic position, that "since we aren't strong enough to defeat the government, then there is nothing we can do".

How do we WORK for defeat? By helping the enemy army? No, for this would be a two cornered fight, and we workers would then become an agent of one of the imperialist camps. We work for the defeat by revolutionary means, by independent working class action at the front and in the rear in the day to day struggles.

Are we only working for the defeat of the government? No, we are working for the MILITARY DEFEAT of "our" government. Proper revolutionary action along this line even though it leads to the momentary "victory" of the "enemy", will lay the base for civil war. The fear of the proletarian revolution creates the basis for UNITY of the two opposing armies at the TOP. Revolutionary defeatism and correct strategy in the civil war will break this unity AT THE BOTTOM in the armies. The third, working class force will become the new crystallizing force and win the workers in uniform to the struggle for workers' power.

This is our position. But Schachtman, Abern, Bern, Burnham, etc. who signed the Minority document, who presented the above-quoted position on "defeatism", open the door for social patriotism, even though the form is different than that of open reformists, just as Kautsky's form of social patriotism was different than that of Sudekum, Haas, etc.

Oh no, defeatism does not mean the defeat of OUR army by the enemy army. No, no, never that. Defeatism means the defeat of our own bourgeoisie (not government, not military defeats) by our own proletariat. These eclectics have not the slightest concept of the REAL opposite forces that materially exist; rather they mechanically invert these in their minds, pose one against the other without understanding their inter-relationship; the result is their false position. Concretely, they can only say: "Workers, defeat the bourgeoisie". This blurs the whole issue, for in working for the defeat of "our own" imperialists, in getting the masses into motion, military defeats of "our own" government are essential. The relation of the motion of the masses to the military defeats is ONE PROBLEM having two aspects, and without the latter aspect (defeats) the former is impossible. This relation is not two separate contradictory

conditions as presented by our Trotskyite "leaders".

We again refer our readers to the basic material of the INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION, and above all a re-reading of Lenin on this question.

Again dealing with the FORMS of defeatism that the Trotskyites present, in a struggle between the imperialist invaders and the colonies, we apply defeatism against the imperialists, but we do NOT support the colonial bourgeoisie. Instead we march separately and strike together thus presenting an independent third position.

Likewise, in a maturing social revolution, where the fascists take the initiative against the proletariat, and where an armed struggle develops in the camp of the "democratic" and "reactionary" exploiters, we again apply defeatism for the fascists, but do not support the bourgeois democrats; we again apply the strategy of marching separately and striking together TOWARD THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION.

Where the revolutionists work toward a POLITICAL REVOLUTION, as is the case in the Soviet Union, one does not apply DEFEATISM. One applies the strategy of defense, but with an INDEPENDENT THIRD POSITION.

January 31, 1940

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

One of the most complicated questions confronting the revolutionary Marxists is the question of national revolution. Capitalism in its decay stage no longer plays a progressive role, as it did in its birth and development, in its struggle to overcome feudal decentralization, in its fight for the creation of the national state to further develop and centralize the capitalist mode of production.

Today we have the historically unique situation of the existence, in the backward orbits of world economy of unfulfilled national revolutions which mature with every crisis; and at the same time the existence of a class, the national bourgeoisie of the oppressed nationalities, whom history has already relegated to the dump heap, a national capitalist class that can only play a REACTIONARY role as agent of one imperialist country or group against another.

Despite this reactionary national bourgeoisie, however, the impact of the decay of capitalism creates REVOLUTIONARY SITUATIONS in these backward links, and incites the masses to revolt against these feudal carryovers.

The proletariat, as the only progressive class in the present period must formulate its line of march toward socialism, in such a way as to UTILIZE TO THE HIGHEST degree this contradiction, and at the same time, to avoid the pitfall of becoming a tool of the REACTIONARY national bourgeoisie, who "fight" imperialism (one section of the imperialists) as AGENTS of another section of imperialism.

THE DECAY OF CAPITALISM AND THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION

From the standpoint of the interests of the working class the national question is an AUXILIARY question. The interests of the proletariat on a world scale call for the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION. But as an auxiliary, in those backward economic units where there exists an economic base of the unfulfilled agrarian and democratic tasks of the national revolution, it is strategically advantageous to win as ALLIES on the road to proletarian power the backward oppressed masses. If this problem is not understood it will become a pitfall from two opposite angles: First there is the danger that the leadership of the working class ignore the national question and thereby enable reaction and counter-revolution to utilize as allies these forces against the working class. Next there is the opposite error of creating a "national" problem, of supporting a "national" revolution where objective conditions, where history has passed beyond this stage; thereby resulting in becoming a tool to the reactionary national interests of the

ruling class in their fight against other exploiters. If we were to ignore the genuine national question in India we would be doing a service to British imperialism and doing harm to the oppressed millions of India, as well as to the world proletariat. On the other hand, if we were to call for a national revolution, for national and social emancipation in Germany before Hitler took power (or if, for instance, a victorious France would incorporate Germany into her bonds) as the Stalinists did, it would be false. Germany is a country where the national revolution is historically fulfilled as much as it ever will be, it is a country where the order of the day is the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION, where, contrary to the previous example (India) we would do a great service to Fascism, as the Stalinists revealed when they called for national emancipation instead of the social revolution.

THE UNITED STATES OF SOVIET EUROPE

If we consider the national question from the point of view of Europe as compared to the majority of the rest of the capitalist world, we must present a different strategy in the solution of the problem than in more backward areas, Africa, Asia, etc. In Europe the advanced stage of decay capitalism has intensified all of the nationalism and hate in worse forms than that of yesterday. Nations are constantly being conquered, divided and oppressed. But these cases have nothing in common with the NATIONAL QUESTION in the backward countries where the remnants of feudalism still weigh heavy. In spite of the feudal carryovers in Europe it has long ago passed beyond the stage of the NATIONAL revolution. The order of the day in Europe is everywhere the PROLETARIAN revolution. Where there are carryovers in sections of eastern Europe, Spain, etc., there does not even exist a base for the national REVOLUTION, there exists only a phase of the national revolution as a part of the proletarian revolution. In Europe the solution of the working class and oppressed masses, the solution of mankind, is the UNITED STATES OF SOVIET EUROPE. This is not possible on the basis of a series of successful proletarian revolution that will sweep imperialism (capitalism) and its wars from the face of Europe.

Such a line of march calls for centralization of European economy, of a gigantic step toward the international division of labor, for production for use. The attempt to break up Europe into "national" liberated states is an attempt to turn the wheels of history backward.

NATIONALISM AND CLASS RELATIONS

The national question in the majority of European countries is different from the national question in backward countries. More precisely the national question in developed capitalist nations oppressed by other capitalist nations (i.e., Bohemia by Germany) is dif-

ferent from the national question in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. In the colonial and semi-colonial countries the national question reflects the class relations between developing capitalism and feudal carryovers, which are caught in the trap of decay capitalism.-- an oppressed nation under finance capitalism, under imperialism. The national question in countries that are developed capitalist nations, where the national revolution was fulfilled to its fullest extent under capitalism even though it left warped forms, where the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION is the order of the day, is merely part of the inner-capitalist fight under decay capitalism where productive forces of the dominant nations must ruthlessly suppress the productive forces of the weaker capitalist nations (national oppression, etc.) in order to survive.

It is true that the imperialists also carry through this same pressure against the backward nations, the colonies and semi-colonies. But here there are different economic conditions and relations. The national question in the backward countries reflect UNFULFILLED AGRARIAN AND DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS of the NATIONAL REVOLUTION (land to the peasants, parliament, suffrage, etc.) now caught in the orbit of decay capitalism. The national question in the weak capitalist nations, on the other hand, represent the decay of capitalist economy and with it, the DECAY OF BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY as historically outdated.

In the backward countries the economic and class relations reveal a phase of the "bourgeois democratic" revolution (national revolution) as a step toward the proletarian revolution. In the oppressed capitalist nation the economic and class relations represent a struggle between the right arm of capitalism (Fascism, etc.) and the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION, with an attempt of the democratic capitalists and their agents in the workers ranks, the social reformists, to turn the wheels of history backward, to utilize national sentiment to gain or to keep power. This inevitably results in the democratic capitalist forces objectively aiding the FASCISTS against the working class.

It is just as fatal in these countries where the decay forms bring out a "new" nationalism, to advocate a national revolution as it is to advocate a return to bourgeois democracy, instead of onward to Socialism. Neither is a step toward Socialism. Both are steps BACKWARDS.

Upon this economic basis we present the strategical aspects of the national question in relation to the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION:

IN COLONIAL AND SEMI-COLONIAL COUNTRIES

In the backward countries where the national revolution or a phase of the national revolution is on the order of the day toward the proletarian revolution, the revolutionists, in order to win

oppressed nationals as allies, advocate the right of self-determination including separation, for the independence of the country from the imperialist nation. The workers of these nations are to be won as workers, the other layers that can be utilized against imperialism are won as allies. But at no time do the workers give up their CLASS INDEPENDENCE and at no time do they support their national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie, even in these backward countries, can only play a REACTIONARY ROLE, even though the objective factors of completing (as much as possible) the unfulfilled agrarian and democratic demands represents a historically progressive step. History has already proven time and again that the motor force of these "national" revolutions is the proletariat; while the national bourgeoisie can only be agents of one group of imperialists vs. another (e.g. China, 1925-1927, etc.).

Above all the workers of the oppressed nation must stress their solidarity with the workers of the oppressor nation. But not solidarity with its national bourgeoisie; that would be patriotism and capitulation. It would be action against the class struggle. To march separately (from the national bourgeoisie) and to strike together against the imperialists can be carried out ONLY upon the basis of the INDEPENDENCE of the working class.

The workers of the oppressor nation (in relation to the colonial countries) must emphasize the right of self-determination and the right of separation. They must work for defeatism in their own country in a struggle for colonial liberation.

IN THE OPPRESSED CAPITALIST NATIONS

In the oppressed capitalist nations, where the question is not a national revolution or a phase of the national revolution, but where the proletarian revolution is the order of the day, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. a different strategy must be used.

In propaganda work in their respective countries the workers carry on different emphasis in their day to day action toward the proletarian revolution. In the oppressor nation the workers, in order to burn out any signs of social-patriotism advocate the right of self-determination of the oppressed nation and the RIGHT of separation. On the other hand the workers in the oppressed nation, in order to separate themselves from their own exploiters emphasize UNITY with the workers and armed forces of the oppressed nation.

In the past we more than once used a most clumsy term. We spoke of the bourgeois democratic revolution. As the Third Congress of the Communist International already pointed out, this formulation is outdated. The question today should always be referred to as the NATIONAL revolution, because of the decay stage of capitalism.

OPPRESSED MINORITIES BUT NOT NATIONAL MINORITIES

The International Contact Commission and the United States section has already issued material presenting the difference between oppressed minorities and national minorities. Not every oppressed minority is a NATIONAL minority. The term national is here used as a political definition meaning a people that has all the economic, political and social attributes to become a national unit and obtain statehood. Those peoples, who may have racial, national, cultural ties; but who at the same time lack the economic and political relations because of the combined development and the DECAY of capitalism cannot be classified as NATIONAL oppressed groups. (It makes no difference if it is a question of a majority or minority in relation to the oppressor nation.)

The Jewish people represent such a peculiar social development. The Negroes of the United States (not Negroes in some other countries) also represent an oppressed minority but not a NATIONAL minority. In both cases these peoples are an integral part of their respective countries, economically, politically and socially. The drive here is for economic, social and political EQUALITY. To attempt to carry through a national revolution with the Negro in the United States (and similar oppressed groups) is an attempt to turn history backward again.

SELF DETERMINATION AND THE RIGHT OF SELF DETERMINATION

As Marxists we do not advocate separation in ALL instances of oppressed nations or national minorities, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, we oppose the concept first advanced by Rosa Luxemburg against either separation or the right of separation. We are for the RIGHT of self-determination EVEN to the point of SECESSION. Under certain circumstances, where the interests of the proletariat can be advanced, we are for not only the right but the actual separation. Under other conditions (Versailles Treaty yesterday and Hitler today) we are for the RIGHT but we do not advocate the actual separation.

NATIONAL MINORITIES UNDER THE SOVIETS

The warping of the Soviet Union under Stalinism and the decline of Transition Economy has again strengthened nationalist sentiments in certain areas of Russia. The national question today is part of the problem of the political revolution against Stalinism, where yesterday under Lenin with developing Transition Economy, the question was on the road to being solved as a part of the movement TOWARDS socialism.

In a workers state the proletariat is for the RIGHT of self-determination. Under Lenin this point appeared in the constitution and was strictly adhered to. The right is advanced in order to consolidate backward peoples behind the Soviet regime. But, since a new

mode of production is being introduced, a higher mode than the capitalist, a mode which is eliminating all feudal carryovers --- because of this economic fact, the revolutionists at all times oppose actual separation of any national minority from the centralized Workers State (even though cultural and other national rights are respected).

This does not mean, of course, that if a national minority asks for separation, the Workers State will refuse it. It merely means the workers in both the area of the national minority and of the rest of the Workers State will agitate for unity of their respective peoples and against separation, even though they are for the RIGHT of self-determination.

This line of action holds true even under a warped Workers State. The INTERNATIONAL CONTACT COMMISSION rejects Trotsky's position for separation of the Ukraine from the rest of the Soviet Union, today. The revolutionists in the Ukraine and all other national minorities in the Soviet Union must agitate for political revolution and Workers Democracy --- including the RIGHT of self-determination. Should they gain control of an area of a national minority they must not separate, but use this area as a base to complete the political revolution against Stalinism.

SUMMARY

1- The support of the national revolution against imperialism in the colonies and semi-colonies (with complete class independence at all times and with no support to the REACTIONARY nationalist bourgeoisie) is a disruptive action to help smash the rule of imperialism and to utilize the mass revolt of the people TOWARDS the proletarian revolution.

2- The support of the slogan of the "Right of Self-Determination" in a large imperialist nation, which has under it other advanced and oppressed capitalist nations, aids in the exposure of imperialism and in solidifying the masses of the oppressed nation with those of the oppressor. For the workers in the oppressed nation, however, to demand SEPARATION would be reactionary, turning the wheels of history backwards. They must stress the unity of workers in oppressor and oppressed country for the proletarian revolution, not for any national revolution.

3- Under a Workers State the position of the workers is to eliminate the national antagonisms that are carried over through economic development and its higher mode of production. Toward that end we agitate against the nationalist desire to separate, although we are for the right of their self-determination. Even under a warped Workers State, under Stalinism, the line is the same but the strategical application of this auxiliary question is different.

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