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# The Politics of Desperation

## Some Notes on the Article, "A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party."

What a comfort it will prove to Max Eastman! For ten years he insisted that what separated him from us was—dialectical materialism. For ten years we replied: No, Max Eastman, you are only fooling others and yourself, and trying to fool us; what separates you from us is your unwillingness to accept the political program of the international revolution, and the practical political consequences that flow from that program. We will not permit you to evade the political issues by turning the debate aside into the abstract regions of speculative metaphysics.

But Eastman, it seems, was right all along. The real root of the matter, the ineluctable heart and core—it is now Trotsky who makes it at last clear to us—is, precisely—dialectical materialism. Burnham rejects dialectical materialism: from this original sin flow, like the conceptual links in the endless closed chain of the Hegelian universe, all the errors and crimes of the party opposition.

But, we recall, it is not today or yesterday that Burnham rejected dialectical materialism. Indeed, since he never accepted it, he can hardly be said ever to have rejected it. His opinion of dialectical materialism has been a constant: it has not been unknown in the Fourth International. A curious coincidence, and a mark of almost criminal laxity, that Trotsky waited until 1940, in the midst of a bitter factional struggle on concrete political issues, to discover its burning and all-vital importance.

The rule says: we must think things through to the end. The discovery having been made, even if so belatedly and under such exceptional circumstances, the International must draw the consequences. Trotsky must, I would feel, now propose a Special Commission to investigate and weed out all traces of anti-dialectics that have crept into the Socialist Workers Party through Burnham's activities during these years. It will, I am afraid, have plenty of work cut out for it.

It might begin, for example, with the party's Declaration of Principles, its foundation programmatic document, which was, by an oversight, written by Burnham. With the war actually started, it will have to devote particular attention to most of the pamphlets and articles on war, since most were written by Burnham. Surely it cannot overlook the political resolution for the last convention, also the product of Burnham's Aristotelian typewriter; or, for that matter, a fair percentage of all the political resolutions for conventions and conferences and plenums during the past five or six years. And not a few special articles and lead editorials in the Appeal and New International, the political document motivating the break with the Socialist Party—as well, come to think of it, as the first resolution proposing entry into the Socialist Party (the anti-entrists were, evidently, right, since the whole orientation sprang from anti-dialectics). And the Spanish resolution, around which centered the chief political fight in the Socialist Party. Let us not speak of the fact that perhaps the bulk of motions, resolutions, articles on American politics (the main enemy is, is it not, in our own country?) came from the same tainted source.

And let us above all not mention that even today, when anti-dialectics has come into the full anti-revolutionary open, the party was compelled to turn—to Burnham, in order to formulate a political plan in connection with the Congressional session (Appeal, issue of December 30th) and to ask—Burnham, to defend the policy of the party when criticized by a local branch (Rochester; unanimous PC motion, meeting of January 9), and to accept Burnham's motions (as against both Cannon and Cochran) when an important branch (Newark) asked how to handle the spreading Food Stamp Plan.

But the investigation will unearth even more curious, and ironic circumstances. It will find, to take one instance, that at the founding convention of the S.W.P., the lengthy Russian resolution itself, the resolution which defeated Burnham, was, with the sole exception of the paragraph or two repeating the dictum that "Russia is a workers' state,"—written by Burnham. All, that is, of the concrete analysis, all that dealt with origins and sources and conditions and relations and predictions and history and changes, was the product of anti-dialectics (anti-dialectics operating, true enough, largely on material unearthed by Trotsky); dialectics

contributed to the resolution—the "fixed" category ("workers' state") of "vulgar" and "Aristotelian" thinking.

The reply comes: Agreed, Burnham has done some service in his day; when, a tame petty-bourgeois journalist, he submitted himself docilely to the "proletarian element," he could reach correct Marxist conclusions in spite of his dialectical peccadilloes; now, with the war broken, he capitulates to the mighty pressure of the Hooks and Eastmans, becomes a petty-bourgeois "enraged," and all his proposals, motions, speeches, articles, are false and "absolutely stale." If he were a dialectician, he would understand how this happens. If he would recognize his heresy, confess, and re-submit, he might even live to do further service in the future. But a more central point is: not whether Burnham has done service in the past or will behave in the future (both very minor problems), but how the past illumines in its own way the sudden appearance on the scene of dialectics at just this time, at the time when Burnham is in an opposition struggling against Trotsky and Cannon over the concrete political issues of today and tomorrow.

Perhaps, however, it was only that the American comrades were naive, being only (by their own admission) "students" of dialectics rather than ordained dialecticians, and did not recognize the monster they were harboring. But then there is a new, and this time international, scandal to explain: Two years ago Max Eastman wrote in Harper's Magazine a theoretical attack on Marxism. Trotsky thereafter wrote me a personal letter requesting and proposing to me that I answer Eastman and defend the theories of the Fourth International against his attack (which, a few months later in the New International, I did). I was neither more nor less of a dialectician then than today. My views on the subject were as well known to Trotsky then as today. I therefore enquire: By what right did Trotsky make this proposal to me? By what right did he entrust the theoretical defense of the Fourth International against a theoretic opponent who was himself an anti-dialectician to—an avowed anti-dialectician? Was he ignorant then about the importance of dialectic, but suddenly wise today? Or was he light-minded and irresponsible, in giving the defense over to a theoretic enemy? Equally astounding: last June, after the article "Intellectuals in Retreat," after my review of Haldane in Partisan Review where I once more summarized flatly my point of view toward dialectics, Trotsky, through Abern, requested me to edit and cut 1,000 words from his introduction to the Longmans Green edition of "Capital"—and to do so at my own discretion. An extraordinary attitude toward one's own theoretical work: to turn it over to an irreconcilable enemy for revision!

## Dialectics and Finland

Trotsky complains that I do not take dialectics seriously, limiting myself to "rather cynical aphorisms." I have not, it seems, the proper attitude of respect toward sacred doctrine, and this is unbecoming in a Marxist. It is true that, considered as an alleged scientific theory, I do not take dialectics seriously, any more than I would take seriously, as alleged scientific theories, any other theology or metaphysics. How can I take a doctrine seriously when, during the course of an entire century, its alleged "laws" or "principles" have never even been formulated—they have only been named, given titles. How can I even say whether I agree or disagree with, for example, the "law of the change of quantity into quality," when no one yet has told me or anyone else what that law says? Of what use are all the metaphors (good and bad) and the "examples" brought forward to "illustrate" the "law" when no one has yet stated what they are supposed to be illustrating?

It would be the easiest thing in the world to make me take dialectics seriously, and to persuade me of its truth, if it is true. All that would have to be done is the following: Formulate its laws in a clear and unambiguous manner, in such a manner that the terms used in the formulation refer directly or indirectly to objects or events or procedures or operations that are publicly recognizable in the experience of any normal human being; and show what predictions can be made about the future on the basis of deductions from

these laws. Then I will grant that dialectics is significant, and will take it seriously. Show, second, that on the basis of deductions from these laws predictions about the future can be made that are verifiable and verified, and that they enable such predictions to be made as well as or better than any alternative proposed hypotheses. Then I will grant that these laws are not merely significant but true. An Open Letter to Burnham on dialectics is announced. It will give an opportunity for this enlightenment. Looking back over the hundred years' failures of the past, I am not over-optimistic about its coming this week.

I do not take dialectics seriously as a scientific doctrine, but I take very seriously indeed the uses to which dialectics is put in some political disputes, in particular by Eastman, the anti-dialectician, in his way, and by Trotsky in the current dispute. I object, and very strongly, to the substitution of theological disputation in the manner of the Council of Nicaea (which split Europe over the question of whether the Son of God was of "one substance" or "similar substance" with the Father), of loose metaphors and platitudes about science and pseudo-science in the style of the 19th century popularizers of Darwin, for—clear discussion of the genuine issues of the politics of 1939 and 1940.

Consider: the opposition raises questions with reference to the war, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the actions of the Soviet Union, the invasion of Finland. The reply is: the problem is whether or not Russia is a workers' state. The opposition demonstrates convincingly that a decision on the definition of the class character of the Soviet Union cannot answer the strategic and tactical issues posed to the movement. The reply is: the problem is the laws of dialectics. (There is a fourth stage which does not appear in written documents: the abominable personal gossip with which the Cannon clique corrupts its followers.) In an analogous manner, the opposition makes and proves concrete criticisms of the conservative and bureaucratic Cannon regime. The reply is: the problem is the alien petty-bourgeois social roots of the opposition.

Why is dialectics brought into the dispute? In the first instance, as an obvious and mechanical maneuver, which deceives no one, of "trying to drive a wedge into the ranks of the opponents." But more generally: to evade issues that cannot be and have not been answered on their own legitimate plane, to escape from an inconvenient reality to a verbal jousting ground, to confuse and turn aside the attention of the membership from the actual problems that face them, to—in the century-sanctioned way of all "authority," all "dogma," all bureaucracy—brand the critic as heretic so that his criticism will not be heard. The textbooks ("the school bench") give a name to this device: *Ignoratio Elenchi* or Irrelevant Conclusion. The remarks on it of Whately—a contemporary of Darwin, by the way—are not, however, themselves irrelevant: "Various kinds of propositions are, according to the occasion, substituted for the one of which proof is required; . . . and various are the contrivances employed to effect and to conceal this substitution, and to make the conclusion which the sophist has drawn answer, practically, the same purpose as the one he ought to have established. I say 'practically the same purpose,' because it will very often happen that some emotion will be excited—some sentiment impressed on the mind—(by a dexterous employment of this fallacy) such as shall bring men into the disposition requisite for your purpose, though they may not have assented to, or even stated distinctly in their own minds, the proposition which it was your business to establish."

Let us suppose, however, that I accept the entire first half of Trotsky's article, that I grant my errors on dialectics, and accept dialectics as the key to truth and socialism. What has changed with reference to the political issues in dispute, the problems discussed in the second half of his article? Nothing has been changed a centimeter. Everything remains just as it was when dialectics had never been mentioned. For Trotsky does not in any respect whatever establish any connection between what he says about dialectics in the first part of his article, and what he says about the defense of Russia, the Soviet-Finnish War, and the "organizational question" in the second half. Does anyone doubt this? Let him re-read the article, and see for himself. It follows therefore that the entire discussion of dialectics is totally irrelevant—as Trotsky himself presents the discussion—to the political questions. "Consciousness grew out of the unconscious, psychology out of physiology, the organic world out of the inorganic, the solar system out of nebulae. . ." Very well; let it be so. Now show us how from generalizations of that type it follows—even by the most dialectical of logics—that . . . the Red Army is introducing workers' control in Finland and we ought to defend it.

The fact that Trotsky thinks and says there is a necessary

connection between his dialectics and his politics has nothing to do with the question of whether there actually is such a connection. All through history, men have thought and said that there were connections between their scientific investigations or practical decisions on the one hand and their theologies or metaphysics on the other. Pasteur said that there was such a connection between his bacteriology and his Catholic faith; Einstein today between his field physics and his pantheistic idealism; Millikan finds God proved in his cosmic rays.

Either the dialectics is relevant or irrelevant to the empirical and practical questions in dispute. If it is irrelevant, to drag it in is scientifically useless. If it is relevant, the empirical and practical questions can in any case be settled on their own merits on the basis of the available evidence and our goals. In neither case is a decision as to dialectics required.

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Trotsky writes: "To demand that every Party member occupy himself with the philosophy of dialectics would be lifeless pedantry." I want to enquire: if it is true, as Trotsky claims, that dialectics is "the foundation of scientific socialism," if rejecting does, as he declares, define the one who rejects as an alien class influence, if dialectics is indeed the method whereby we can solve correctly political problems, then by what conceivable principle does Trotsky conclude that it would be "lifeless pedantry" for more than a few Party members to occupy themselves with it? Rather would we have to say that dialectics must be the first and last study of all party members if they wish to be consistent and clear-headed revolutionary socialists.

Or must we seek another kind of explanation for Trotsky's dictum: There is one doctrine—the "secret doctrine"—for the elite, the leaders, the inner circle; and another—the vulgar doctrine—for the mass, the ranks, the followers. What is the relation of the followers to the secret doctrine? They are not to know it, to study it, to test it in their own conscious and deliberate experience: that is excluded as "lifeless pedantry." But may they then consider it unimportant, or reject it? Not on your life: then they are alien class elements. No: they must believe, they must have faith. As for the doctrine itself, it is safe in the hands of the elite; they will bring it out on appropriate occasions (a sharp factional fight, for example) to smite and confound the Enemy.

For my own part, I do not believe in Faith.

My friend and colleague Max Shachtman (may he forgive me for the reference, as I must, perforce, forgive him for what he has recently written about me) says: I do not really understand much about dialectics; I am only a humble student of the subject; of course I believe in it as all good Marxists must. This attitude is not unique in Shachtman. Whenever I have talked to any pro-dialectics party comrade about dialectics—or tried to talk about it—I have been given the same response (except, to be complete, in the case of Wright, who seems to think he understands dialectics because its words so well express the conflicts and shifts and confusions in his own attitudes and actions). We do not really understand it; we believe of course; we cannot formulate its laws; we cannot tell you how you can test them; some day we hope to get around to studying it. This response is as characteristic of pro-dialecticians in the Cannon clique as in the opposition. Few even pretend to "understand," for example, the first part of the Trotsky article which I am now discussing.

Now I ask Shachtman and all these comrades of the party: if you don't understand it, if you can't explain or prove it, why then do you "believe" it? Whence springs your faith?

Throughout the centuries, it has been characteristic of religious groups to have two doctrines: the "esoteric" doctrine of the "inner circle," the monopoly and carefully guarded secret of the high priests; and the "esoteric" doctrine of the "outer circle," for the followers. Is this not exactly the situation with dialectics—whether or not you "believe" in dialectics? And the existence of an esoteric doctrine is always potentially reactionary, anti-democratic. It is so because the esoteric doctrine is by the nature of the case irresponsible, not subject to control by the humble followers, a weapon in the hands only of the priests.

For the method which I advocate—the method of science—there is only one doctrine, available to all. And what it says is subject always to tests that can be made by any normal man. There is no revelation, and no short cut, and no prophet.

I conclude on dialectics with a challenge:

In the letter dated January 3rd it is clearly implied that my attitude toward dialectics is incompatible with my being editor of the theoretical journal of the party. In the article (p. 11) it

is stated explicitly that my rejection of dialectics represents the influence of another class.

First I want to ask: Where in the program of the Socialist Workers Party or the Fourth International is a belief in dialectics made part of the programmatic basis of our movement, the acceptance of which defines the conditions of membership? And if it is not, by what right does Trotsky or any one else attack me politically or object to my editorship of an organ of the International on the grounds of my attitude toward dialectic?

Is not our movement founded on its program, decided by conventions representing the membership? Or—do we communists hide our views, and is our real program something different from our public and adopted program?

But if Trotsky is justified in what he says about dialectics, and the conclusions he draws in connection with dialectics, I say further:

Let him propose to the forthcoming convention that this lack in our program be filled, that the convention adopt a specific clause, to be added to the Declaration of Principles, affirming acceptance of the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

If he does not make such a proposal, then only one of two conclusions is possible: either what he is now writing about dialectic is not meant seriously, is mere polemical rhetoric for the faction fight of the moment; or dialectics is indeed an esoteric doctrine, not suited for the public opinion of the party to pass upon, but a private monopoly of the priests.

If he does make the proposal, it is true that he will have only one precedent in the history of labor politics: Stalin's program adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, in which the abandonment of Marxism was consummated. I confess that I should not like to feel that our movement is ready to regard such a precedent as appropriate.

## The Finnish Invasion and the Perspective of the Third Camp

If by a "workers' state" we mean that form of society transitional from capitalism to socialism, then Russia today can be considered a workers' state only on the basis of its nationalized economy. Of those various major features of the "transitional society" described in advance (in *State and Revolution*, for example), no one, absolutely no one in any political camp except that of the Stalinists themselves, maintains that any other socialist factor remains in Russia today except the nationalized economy. Nationalized economy must, therefore, in the view of those who hold that Russia is a workers' state, be a sufficient condition for so characterizing it, and by a workers' state Marxists have always meant, from Marx on, that form of society which is transitional from capitalism to socialism.

The assumption therein involved I, of course, reject. I hold that at least one other major condition is necessary for that form of society which is transitional to socialism—namely, workers' democracy; and that therefore Russia today is incorrectly characterized as a workers' state. This was Marx' opinion; and his opinion has been entirely confirmed by the experiences of the last fifteen years of Soviet history.

Nevertheless, even if the assumption is granted, if it is thus further granted that Russia today is a workers' state, this will not at all suffice to motivate a tactic of defense of the Soviet State and the Red Army in the present war (just as, conversely, if the assumption is denied and it is thus denied that Russia is a workers' state, this will not by itself suffice to motivate a tactic of defeatism). We cannot deduce a tactic of defense from our definition of the Soviet state any more than we could deduce it from the "law of the negation of the negation." Nor are we aided further in determining our tactic by the assumption that nationalized economy, in and by itself, divorced from the concrete social and political and historical relations which form the context of the nationalized economy, is "progressive" (an assumption which is involved in the initial assumption of our "dialectical" defenders of the workers' state doctrine—an assumption which effectively eliminates all the changing actual reality which they say dialectics teaches us to take into account, and substitutes: a static, abstract category).

The general strategic aim of our movement is the world proletarian revolution (and socialism). We all hold (in words, at any rate) that this aim is now a goal not for the indefinitely remote future, but for the present period, that is, for the war and the post-war period. We concretize our goal in the statement of our "war aims"—united socialist states of Europe, the Americas, a

free Asia and Africa, a world federation of socialist republics. Presumably we mean these seriously.

Any tactic we propose, therefore, can be justified only by proof that, directly or indirectly, it is in fact the best available means for reaching our general strategic goal.

Even granted, then, Trotsky's assumptions, granted that Russia is a workers' state, the tactic of defense can be justified only if certain additional propositions are, in fact, true.

These would have to include: (a) Defense of the Red Army is in fact the best available means of defending the nationalized economy (which, for the purpose of discussion, let us assume to be in and of itself progressive); (b) Defense of the Russian nationalized economy as a primary task is the best available means, for promoting the world revolution.

But everyone grants (in words, at least) that the defense of Russia is not the only major necessary means for achieving our general strategic aim; other necessary means include, certainly: the overthrow of Stalinism; colonial revolts; the lifting of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses; the deepening of the class struggle throughout the world, in at least several major nations to the point of successful proletarian revolution. In and of itself, defense of the present (i.e., Stalinist) Russian state and the Red Army, even if 100 per cent successful, would be of not the slightest value in achieving our goal; on the contrary, would make our goal impossible, since it would mean only the continuation in power and the extension of Stalinism.

The two propositions required by Trotsky to justify the tactic of defense therefore involve a third: (c) Defense of Russia in the present war does, in fact, serve as the best available means, or as an integral part of the best available means, for promoting colonial revolts, the lifting of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses, the overthrow of Stalinism, the deepening of the class struggle throughout the world (including, naturally, Russia itself and those countries against which Russian military action is conducted), and the completion of this struggle in successful revolutions.

Unless these three propositions are true, then the tactic of defense is not justified—no matter what may be the truth about dialectics and the definition of the Russian state. Their truth can be established in one way and one way only: not by changing quantity into quality or uniting opposites, but by relating them to the relevant evidence that can be brought to bear from modern historical experience—including prominently the evidence presented by the first months of the war itself.

As soon as these propositions are formulated, it is clear that Trotsky and the Cannon clique have utterly failed to present sufficient evidence to permit us to regard them as true. Proposition (a), especially on Trotsky's premises (which include the belief in a "fundamental contradiction" between the bureaucracy and the nationalized economy) is certainly at best very doubtful, and becomes increasingly doubtful as we observe the economic program in the small Baltic countries—now Russian provinces, in the declaration of the Kuusinen government, and for that matter in Poland, or if we estimate the probable effects of increasing economic collaboration with Germany.

But it is Propositions (b) and (c) which are crucial; and any child should be able to realize that all the evidence from the beginning of the war, far from giving any remote likelihood of their truth, shows them to be undeniably false.

Trotsky, concentrated on the sociology and psychology of polemics, does not recognize explicitly the nature of the scientific problem posed in the dispute. Nevertheless he is compelled to give it implicit recognition. He seems to sense that all the thousands of words he has been writing since September on the "workers' state" and dialectics are beside the point; and he tries to introduce at last—a few hundred words out of the many, many thousands (chiefly on p. 10 of the mimeographed version of the article I am now discussing)—some evidence for the truth of the key proposition (c).

What is this alleged evidence? I will quote the central sentences:

"In the second case (Poland and Finland) it (the Stalinist bureaucracy) gave an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods. . .

". . . the resolution (of the opposition on Finland) does not mention by so much as a word that the Red Army in Finland expropriates large land-owners and introduces workers' control while preparing for the expropriation of the capitalists . . . they (the Stalinists) are giving—they are compelled to give—a tremendous impulse to the class struggle in its sharpest form. . .

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, while the Finnish army supports the owning classes, the conservative workers' bureaucracy and the Anglo-Saxon imperialists . . . in this 'concrete' civil war that is taking place on Finnish territory.

"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. . ."

Now the first thing to be observed about this alleged evidence is that the whole world—including Trotsky himself—knows it to be false. Nothing of the kind has happened or is happening. Trotsky, indeed, admits it to be false when, in the letter dated January 5th (to "Joe"), evidently replying to the qualms his statements about Finland had raised even in the stern breasts of the Cannon clique itself, he "explains" what he wrote by saying . . . that such things did happen—in Poland!—and will happen in Finland. But what he said in the article was that they had happened and were happening in Finland. (From where, by the way, Comrade Trotsky, did you borrow this method of "explanation"?)

(In passing, it was the opposition that pointed out, long ago, that an embryonic civil war began in Poland; and this fact was repeatedly denied and ridiculed by Cannon.)

What did actually happen—so far as we can learn by sifting all the reports—in Poland, Finland (and let us not forget Lithuania and her two sisters), up to now?

In Poland, important manifestations of the class struggle, including embryonic revolutionary steps, began—before the Red Army marched and independently of Russia—with the military and civil breakdown of the Polish bourgeois government. This is a normal and natural occurrence in all countries, whatever the character of the opposing army, when the home government goes to pieces. In a number of towns (including, apparently, Vilna and Warsaw itself) embryo "soviets" arose on a loose basis, with labor and other popular organizations assuming de facto many of the tasks of sovereign power; in the villages, peasants began ousting the landlords—or, more exactly, the landlords had already run away.

It is quite possible (though the evidence is far from clear) that in some sections the march of the Red Army excited certain hopes—at least hope in comparison to the fears of the advance of the Reichwehr, and even encouraged some peasants to bolder steps in occupying the land of their former masters (who were no longer there to oppose them). These hopes were in the shortest time liquidated, together with the persons of any peasants or workers hardy enough to persist in them. The regime of Stalinism—and Stalinism without completely collectivized economy—was imposed by the representatives of the G.P.U. In the Vilna region the embryo "soviet" was smashed and the militants killed, in preparation for handing the territory back to bourgeois Lithuania.

Then the Red Army took over the three small Baltic states. Anyone who thought that in that action "the Kremlin (was) forced . . . to provoke a social revolutionary movement" was rapidly undeceived. From the reports, a few underground communists began to show their heads. With public statement (released in the world press) and by police action, the Red Army joined the Baltic government in shoving those heads down again, and in reinforcing bourgeois rule and capitalist economy in those nations.

Meanwhile, it was revealed to all who had initially doubted it that Hitler and Stalin had divided Poland in complete and prior agreement.

These events were observed by the workers and peasants of the world, and above all, we may be sure, by the workers and peasants of the other nations bordering Russia—not least by the people of Finland. Not being highly skilled in sociological definition nor belonging to the inner dialectical circle, they drew nevertheless, in their humble way, certain conclusions (where they had not already drawn them from the Trials and Spain). Their conclusion, in short, was: the Red Army in this war is not our ally.

The propaganda campaign began against Finland, and then the invasion. For a number of days, the Red Army triumphantly advanced. The Kuusinen government was proclaimed, issued its program (a bourgeois, not a proletarian program, by the way, in spite of Trotsky's dialectical deduction that the Kremlin must use social revolutionary policies—bureaucratically carried out; the Kremlin did not consult Trotsky).

What was the effect—the actual effect that happened, not the effect that we can read about in our former theses (which coin-

cides with what Trotsky writes in the present article) or deduce from theories? The effect was, not to stimulate, but to wipe out what there had been of the class struggle (and there had been more than a trace of it) in Finland, to throw the Finnish workers and peasants into the hands of their own bourgeoisie. This is proved, first, by reports which, properly sifted, can legitimately be believed; but, second, independently, by what may be deduced from (1) the failure of the Kuusinen government to excite any favorable response and (2) the high morale of the Finnish army which is obviously supported by a huge percentage of the population. This last fact the NC majority and Trotsky explain by the shockingly Philistine argument that the Finnish army has such good supplies and training—as if the Red Army were equipped with bows and arrows.

This reaction was not surprising. Knowing the Red Army fought against their interests, and seeing no third alternative, the Finnish workers drew what seemed to them the only possible conclusion under the circumstances: to fight desperately for the bourgeois "fatherland"; with the third alternative (an independent struggle for freedom and power against the main enemy, at home, and the invading enemy) excluded, they chose what appeared to them as the "lesser evil." Those responsible for this reactionary conclusion are the imperialists on the one hand and the Stalinists on the other (and all others!) who, ruling out the third camp, posed the choice exclusively as either Mannerheim's army or Stalin's.

On the other side, according to our theses (War and the Fourth International), the Russian soldiers and workers should have been reacting as follows: "Within the U.S.S.R. war against imperialist intervention will undoubtedly provoke a veritable outburst of genuine fighting enthusiasm. All the contradictions and antagonisms will seem overcome or at any rate relegated to the background. The young generations of workers and peasants that emerged from the revolution will reveal on the field of battle colossal dynamic power." But (to paraphrase a remark of Trotsky's), "events did not recognize our theses." In the Finnish war, the Russian soldiers and workers have shown—just the opposite, as everyone knows. There is no mystery here. The soldiers fight so poorly, so unenthusiastically, because—though without benefit of dialectics—they understand clearly enough that in this war the Red Army fights not for but against their interests and the interests of workers everywhere, and of socialism.

Who is it who is closest to socialist consciousness; those Soviet soldiers and workers who recognize the reactionary character of the war, are resentful and distrustful of it, and show no enthusiasm for it; or those (notably including the G.P.U.) who are whipped up into a frenzy of Stalino-patriotism for it? We, the opposition, say: the former. Trotsky is compelled by his doctrine to say: the latter.

But, in the further course of the Finnish war, will not the class struggle re-assert itself in Finland? Certainly, as we have declared from the beginning. When the Finnish defense and the Finnish government begin to crack, just as in Poland the overt class struggle will re-appear; workers and peasants will take social revolutionary steps, will, perforce, begin moves toward independent power and sovereignty. Above all will they do so if there are revolutionists and militants among them who have not, meanwhile, been functioning as spies of the counter-revolutionary Red Army, but have made clear to them that their struggle, in the first instance directed against the main enemy at home, finds an also implacable enemy in the Kremlin and all its institutions, that the Red Army marches in not to aid them but to crush them; and if internationalists within the ranks of the Red Army have guided in a parallel manner the ranks of the Red soldiers, urging them to throw off the yoke of the Kremlin-G.P.U. and to join in common struggle against their oppressors with the Finnish workers and peasants—not to obey the orders of the Kremlin to reduce the workers and peasants of Finland to a new type of slavery.

Does the policy of the Kremlin (through "compulsion" or voluntary will, it does not matter) in reality stimulate the class struggle, the social revolution? If so, then Marxism has been wrong from the beginning, for then the struggle for socialism can be carried on by bureaucratic-military means as a substitute (good or bad) for the popular, conscious and deliberate mass struggle of the workers and peasants. To accept Trotsky's interpretation of the events of the present war is to accept the theory of the bureaucratic road to socialism. I refer the reader to Max Shachtman's excellent discussion of this point in his recent reply to this same article of Trotsky's.

But is not the Kremlin stimulating the social revolution by its new policy, both directly through its own state agencies, and by

the new line of the Comintern? If this is true—as Trotsky now holds—we cannot possibly explain intelligibly to the workers the meaning of the new line of the C.I. (and we have not done so up to now—everyone recognizes that from reading our press), we have no sufficient reason for not re-applying for admission as a faction of the C.I.

No. The present policy of the Kremlin stimulates the class struggle and is “socialist” only in the same general sense as Wilson’s policy with reference to “defeatism” in Germany in 1917-18, or Chamberlain’s policy in his broadcasts to and leaflet-droppings on Germany today, or Hitler’s similar appeals. These “revolutionary” policies—with respect to the enemy country—are all simply supplementary military-strategic devices. As a matter of fact, in this sense the most “radical” of all of them at the present time is Hitler’s, not Stalin’s: Hitler’s New Year speech was far more “socialist” than the proclamation of the Kuusinen government. True enough, the nation employing this device is always playing with social dynamite—above all in this war. Even Chamberlain’s propaganda is capable of “stimulating the class struggle” within Germany under appropriate circumstances—but we hardly support it, for that reason (though we do support the class struggle, no matter how stimulated). But the more usual effect is for it to aid in stifling the class struggle in the enemy nation, (precisely because it is not internationalist in character, and because the workers understand it as merely a maneuver of a rival oppressor). This is just what has happened in Finland, just as in Germany after the Chamberlain leaflet raids.

Cannon and Trotsky tell us: But then you want the imperialists to take over the Soviet Union. This is nothing but the standard slander which has always been directed against those who uphold the internationalist position of revolutionary defeatism. We are for the defeat of all the belligerent armies and the overthrow of all the belligerent governments; but for defeat and overthrow not by the opposing armies in the field, but by the **third camp**, by the workers of each respective country.

But Cannon and Trotsky say nothing of the meaning of their alternative in relation to the general strategic aim, to the world proletarian revolution. How, just how, will a defensive tactic with respect to the Red Army serve the development of the revolution, how in this war—not the war of our theses—where the Red Army fights, in alliance with the Reichswehr, for the defense, preservation and extension solely and simply of the power, privileges and revenues of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy? Trotsky and Cannon do not tell us, cannot tell us. And yet their position could rest only upon a clear, convincing and reasonable answer to this question.

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The position of the opposition is based upon the perspective of the collapse of existing governments, upon the optimistic expectation of mass revolt against the war. It is summed up as: **the strategy of the third camp**. In this war, the actual war which has broken out and is now going on, the revolutionists must take their stand unambiguously in the third camp, the camp of the workers and peasants, of the oppressed of the entire world, of the peoples of India and Africa, the camp of struggle against the camps of all the belligerent powers and the belligerent governments. Today the troops of the third camp are atomized, disordered and disorganized, scattered through the framework of society. Tomorrow their ranks will close; they will form in great army corps; the popular army of India, the revolting Negro divisions of Africa, the workers’ fronts of Germany and the Ukraine and France and the United States. . . . But they will do so successfully only if the troops of tomorrow can hold clearly and simply and unambiguously before themselves the firm strategic aim: the third camp, the camp of struggle against the war and the war-makers, for workers’ power and socialism.

Trotsky and Cannon, desperately clinging to a doctrine no longer adequate to meet the test of events, have abandoned the strategy of the third camp. How revealing that even the phrase (used so effectively—after being mistakenly borrowed from the opposition—in putting forward the revolutionary position in the A.L.P. controversy between Rose and the Stalinists) has dropped out of the party press and agitation! They have joined one of the belligerent camps, one of the war camps. In this can be seen the basic **defeatism** of their perspective (they, who accuse us of being defeatists!), defeatism toward the possibility of successful proletarian revolution in the course of the war. They are compelled, more and more, to argue for Stalinism as the “lesser evil” (their description): this lesser evil is the goal they place before the

workers—a fine goal indeed to inspire revolutionary struggle! They must reason in terms of the maintenance of existing governments (what if, Cannon asks in debate, Finland takes over northern Russia?). Everything is turned upside down. The strategic aim of world revolution issuing out of the war is subordinated to defense of Russia. Their whole policy becomes oriented around the tactic of defensism with respect to the Red Army—on the very best account, the part usurping the place of the whole. For the sake of a hand the head and heart are sacrificed.

Trotsky has permitted a frantic clinging to a false doctrine to drive him, in short, to a policy of defeat and desperation.

## What the Record Shows

In the article, “The War and Bureaucratic Conservatism,” we analyzed the character of the Cannon group, its regime, and its present policy. We showed that it is not a principled tendency, but a permanent clique; that its only real policy is self-maintenance; that it on all occasions subordinates political to organizational questions; that in actuality it has no genuine program, but only the substitute for a program—the substitute being usually borrowed from Trotsky.

In the present dispute, Trotsky puts forward the program which the Cannon clique appropriates, and Trotsky supports—unconditionally—the Cannon clique. It does not, however, follow that the analysis which we made of Cannon’s present policy applies also to Trotsky. I wish now to examine briefly the political record of Trotsky since August 21st with the aim of throwing some light on the problem of how Trotsky has reached his present impasse, in which he finds himself upholding an incorrect political perspective, a false analysis of events, and a sterile, cynical and rotten bureaucratic clique. I will draw only upon facts which are well known, and which can be checked at every point.

For more than a week following the first announcement of the Nazi-Soviet agreement—the most startling international shift of recent years, and obviously of the most peculiar moment to the Fourth International—Trotsky made no public statement to the press. He then gave out two short and very general statements in which he did not attempt any analysis or prediction; in fact they summed up to little more than the view that there was nothing much to be said about the agreement. Trotsky issued no statement—so far as we know—on the outbreak of the second world war, the most momentous event in the history of mankind. In fact, he has to this day made no general analysis of the war and its meaning, a lack which has been widely remarked among the general public.

Since the war began, Trotsky has made only two specific predictions of any importance. The first was when the Red Army was mobilizing on the borders of Poland, when Trotsky stated that Stalin did not know why the army was mobilizing. A short time later he was compelled to recognize that the Polish invasion had been carried out by prior agreement with Hitler. A few weeks before the Finnish invasion, Trotsky was preparing an article for a magazine. According to an outline of this article which was received in New York, he therein predicted that there would be no Finnish invasion (that year at any rate) but that the issues would be “compromised.”

The first major article written by Trotsky was the one which was published in the New International (The U.S.S.R. and the War). This did not concern itself in a single sentence with the problems and prospects of the war already started, but with the most general possible theoretic issues. The second (published in an internal bulletin) was on the class character of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile (and continuing through the present) have been numerous shorter documents dealing with the internal factional struggle, the overwhelming percentage of them concerned with such issues as the character of the groups in the party and their methods, etc. The next long document (the one here under discussion) brought in one new subject: the dialectics; and a new document (the Open Letter to me) on the same subject is now promised. The only specific statements about current events in this document (those on Finland) turn out, by Trotsky’s own admission, to be false.

So far as I am aware, he has said nothing about the taking over of the three Baltic countries. And nothing was said about the taking over of Poland and the invasion of Finland until after these events occurred.

Let us sum up the undeniable general features of this 4½ months’ picture: virtually no specific predictions, and those made disproved by events; nothing specific foreseen in advance; no

proposals or guides for action in advance; a minimum concern with the major historical action now occurring—the second world war; a maximum of energies devoted either to general theoretic questions (up to and beyond dialectics) or immediate internal polemic.

This picture has a great political-symptomatic importance. This is easily grasped when we compare it with Trotsky's almost invariable political record in connection with other major historic occurrences (none of which since the Russian revolution approaches the significance of the second world war)—such as, for example, the German events or the Trials. There, while not neglecting general theoretic concerns or internal factional struggle when necessary, Trotsky has been distinguished over all other political figures in the entire world for precisely what is absent now: for immediate and constant reaction to the events; for exact predictions, so often brilliantly confirmed; for stating at every stage guides for the action of the workers; for illuminating by specific analysis the meaning of actually occurring events. The whole world knows this.

To the present picture, we must, unfortunately, add further elements: Trotsky not merely supports the Cannon regime, but whitewashes it 100%—an attitude which even its most ardent follower in the party could not even pretend to justify by objective reference. Trotsky not merely condemns the opposition, but slanders it, mis-states and distorts not merely its views but its very words. Trotsky (for example, in the sheaf of letters of the first days of January) indulges in absurd exaggerations.

Now Trotsky has amply proved by his entire career that he above all takes ideas, doctrine, principles seriously, that he bases himself upon and operates from principles. When we keep this in mind, the picture of these months falls into a classic and often-repeated pattern: the pattern of one who proceeds from a theory, who is motivated in his actions by that theory, but where the theory itself is false. Clinging to the theory becomes under these circumstances an act of desperation; and the desperation communicates itself to the actions, even to the very style.

The theory, the doctrine, at all costs. But the doctrine is not in accord with events. Then, refusing to abandon the doctrine,

there are only two solutions: to evade events (by treating, say, of very general theoretic questions or of dialectics), and to falsify events to bring them into accord with the (false) doctrine. No intent to deceive is involved in this: it follows almost automatically when one clings desperately to a false doctrine.

Therefore also the opposition must be smashed at any cost. The only vehicle for the doctrine is Cannon (who will accept any doctrine that suits his clique purpose). Therefore complete support for Cannon. But here, too, just as in treating international events, Trotsky must pay a heavy price—and the price, alas, is assessed not merely against Trotsky but against the International and indeed in the last analysis against the workers everywhere—for his false doctrine. To implement his (false) doctrine he finds he can utilize only a rotten bureaucratic clique; but by supporting this clique he becomes an accomplice in and defender of its crimes against the movement.

If we realize that Trotsky proceeds seriously and firmly from theory, and that his theory with relation to the war is false, his present political position, and the manner of his political and organizational intervention in the party dispute—so puzzling and often shocking to many comrades—become at once intelligible. (This of course is not that "class analysis" which Trotsky demands from all Marxists. All that such analysis could mean in this case would be: what social group is aided by the effects of Trotsky's present policy? The answer is perfectly evident: the Russian bureaucracy. His present policy is a deviation from the direction of the international proletarian struggle for socialism, toward Stalinism.)

The party and the International face in the immediate future the most serious decision of many years. We will either be dragged by a false doctrine, a distorted perspective, and a bankrupt regime into a blind gulf where the waves of the war will leave us floundering and finally drown us; or we will, with however painful a wrench, break out onto the high road, the best soldiers in the one army to which we can give our loyalty; the army of the third camp.

JAMES BURNHAM

January 10, 1940.

## Seeds of Bureaucracy

by Hiram Eifenbein

The first question that should concern the S.W.P. is how the socialist revolution can be brought about. The S.W.P. is not a reformist organization, hence it does not rely solely on progressive steps to inch the finance-capitalists out of control of the means of production. The S.W.P. claims to be a revolutionary Marxist group and as such, because of its scientific analysis of capitalism is positive of the ultimate failure of our present economic system in one nation or another.

In order to assure that at that moment of collapse the revolution will proceed towards socialism upon the failure of capitalism, the S.W.P. program depends upon an informed body of trained revolutionists, prepared in all respects at the instant of crisis to lead the way ahead for the masses. In the light of this objective we should first evaluate the S.W.P. itself.

Is it a party of trained revolutionists?

### The Membership

In the absence of statistical information on the subject and for lack of a mandatory routine controlling the admission of members into the party, the only course remaining is that of personal experience and observation. From those of the writer he can state positively that until the present moment he has not seen in practise or theory any attempt made to plumb the understanding, knowledge or intelligence of new members upon their admission to the party. In fact, a large part—half, at least—of the present membership is composed of men and women who not only have no intellectual grasp of capitalism which is a factual prerequisite to a comprehension of socialism, just as counting must necessarily precede arithmetic, but they also fail to know what socialism means, let alone why it is a necessary development of an industrial society.

Furthermore, in bestowing membership, the S.W.P. rests content and secure on some vague assurance that it is enough to

require of new adherents only a sympathetic interest and intention, sometimes termed a militant class-consciousness, a sort of crusading spirit to wipe out the evil of the present system derived from their own private realization of injustice and insecurity. With such a test for admission almost any one is accepted and acceptable into the ranks of the party. Thereafter the S.W.P. prays that the newcomer will learn and understand and believe and cooperate.

So much for the nature of the personnel itself. The question now arises, however, what kind of revolutionary party can and will emerge from such a composition?

It seems inevitable that it can produce only an organization with classes of an intellectual character. The person who is taken into the organization, admitting himself to be and accepted as an ignoramus in economics and politics, must of necessity be relegated to an inferior role in party deliberations and activities. Some one, or some group, must lead him. He can function only by attaching himself as the tail to somebody's kite. But his vote, his comments, his actions are not of his own independent intellectual motivation. In a desire to take part in party decisions and undertakings only one basis remains for such members, not understanding, knowledge, intelligence, but loyalty, sympathy, instinct.

But to whom and to what can he be loyal? Not to the intellectual meaning of a step proposed—but only loyal to one side or another in advocating or opposing that step. Thus, an ignorant member, faced with the embarrassing alternative of voting for or against a measure whose ramifications he does not comprehend, must apply a second-hand test, not any logical analysis of an issue, but the question of who favors and who opposes the proposition under consideration. Without the intellectual equipment and preparation to weigh the matter in his own mind, such a decision is the unavoidable outcome of his own ignorance.

But the men who are conversant with the policies of the

party, who understand capitalism and socialism, are not unaware of these psychological as distinguished from intellectual forces that are at work in influencing the votes of an uninformed membership. And being zealous, they will either consciously or unconsciously appeal to such shortcomings, some time or other, in seeking to win a decision not on logical grounds but on personal grounds. Such a heterogeneous mixture of illiterate, uninformed, sentimental, sympathetically class-conscious, and desperately militant elements as preponderate in the S.W.P. with a mere minority of intellectual socialists must in one phase or another, at this stage or a later one, cause the degeneration of any party where members have to meet no criterion for membership but signing a membership card.

## The Literature

Out of this intellectual disparity endless ramifications develop. The irresistible tendency, for example, to make our press and publications intellectual and educational flows from both a need and a cause which are almost identical. The need, of course, is to educate our own ranks sadly lacking in knowledge and understanding. Yet with the right sort of membership this would be no need as far as its own composition is concerned. On the other hand, there is the cause of the highly educational tone of our periodicals. This, I am convinced, is the natural result of the higher intellectual layer of our membership rising to the top and becoming then impressed with its own superiority and therefore feeling the urge to express that superiority by writing the literature of the party.

This is done at double expense. First, our uninformed members do not understand. Second, the power of leadership is squandered not in organizing the masses, but in expressing their own academic talent. Outgrowths from this condition are undue efforts (based on a subjective assumption of the intellectual layer of our party that our literature is important because they write it and not for the influence it has) to cause the ranks (not to organize the workers, but) to increase the circulation of uncomprehended newspapers and pamphlets. Members are continuously driven in futile campaigns to sell and distribute publications to other workers who lack even their own thin smatterings of scientific socialism.

The result is failure, discouragement. First, the desired circulation is not attained. Second, the influence of our paper, externally and internally, is insignificant. Third, our members feel frustrated. All this leads to apathy, shirking, lack of discipline, resignations, disorganization. Meanwhile both our intellectual leadership and our still loyal membership neglect the real work of organizing the masses in the main.

As a group of scientific socialists the S.W.P. has failed utterly in being objective about its thinking.

## The Organization

Aside from the composition of the party, we must consider its organization. The most important feature of this is the actual mechanics of operation. This is expressed by the national convention. I am none too familiar with this phase because it has been inconvenient for me to engage those few who know the details in full discussion. From my observations and impressions at and before the last convention this is the method of operation.

The national executive committee called the convention, as required by the rules and regulations, no doubt. The national executive committee then planned the convention. And last the national executive committee ran the convention.

First was the open session of long speeches by the intellectual leadership. This was pure waste of time and money for both the S.W.P. and the financially hampered delegates.

Next was the convention proper with the long-winded reports and speeches of the same intellectual leadership all of which was equally unnecessary.

After this were the resolutions, long documents themselves and introduced or followed by longer speeches of the intellectual leadership, most of which could be eliminated.

It seemed also that time and discussion were unlimited for the intellectual leadership in all these matters until an issue reached the floor for debate when immediately, symptomatically, a time limit was promptly placed on remarks of the delegate of the rank and file, usually at the instance of the leadership. Any one who has ever tried to argue against a proposition in whole or part can appreciate the futility of trying to tear down a long, carefully prepared, one-hour moving or seconding speech by a few random extemporaneous remarks in five or ten minutes. Yet

this is the procedure. Even where a dissenting minority report or resolution from a split leadership is given this is bad practise because even the lesser half may be wrong.

But the important thing is quite something else than the particular ability of the opponent of an officially presented proposition. It is this. The existing intellectual leadership usually utilizes its own numbers for the presentation of these carefully thought out and delivered arguments. The opposition, if any, is scattered, sporadic and generally conflicting. The result is generally the adoption of the leadership's proposals. At least this is the probability and tendency.

But more than that, the official reporters and introducers of resolutions have other unconsciously subtle and often insuperable advantages. First, they speak from a platform; this is a forum of importance in the eyes of any audience. Second, they have a position naturally selected for audibility and impressiveness. Third, they are already chosen by the S.W.P. itself to speak and already thereby wear an aura of everything that goes to give them attention and consideration. Fourth, they are fully prepared. And fifth, they have all the time they want.

Simply to mention these is enough to state the utter disadvantage of a person speaking in opposition or criticism inconspicuously, inaudibly often, and always unimpressively from between tables and chairs on the floor, without preparation and no official stamp of approval, but in fact already labeled as a dissident or a would-be spotlight seeker, not to mention the handicap of lack of time to express and coordinate his thoughts.

No wonder, under such circumstances, the reigning body maintains its prestige more or less intact for succeeding terms when the capable leaders from the ranks remain obscure and impotent in the face of barriers they cannot overcome. While these attending circumstances cannot yet be termed devices for perpetuation of a ruling clique, it is obvious they can easily be utilized for such a purpose. The more difficult the machinery for the membership to make itself heard the more facile for the superimposed ideology of a domineering leadership, when it comes. Why pave the way?

The greatest danger our party has to avoid is the bureaucracy that developed in the Third International. To prevent this it is imperative that a real freedom, and not a mere formal, freedom of discussion be established—free even from the imposing benefits that the reigning leadership automatically acquires from the mere fact of its being the leadership.

Instead of wasting time and money in public sessions at a national convention these should be devoted to the real business of the party. Instead of consuming time with long-winded oral reports of the leadership they should be printed or mimeographed before the convention so that they can be fully weighed beforehand in the name of economy and common sense. Instead of giving priority and privilege in debate to the existing administration, there should be unlimited equal opportunity to discuss from the floor.

Only by removing the glamor from the position a man holds in the S.W.P., only by making it a party of ideas and not of men, or of a group of men, or of one man, can we make the party safe from moral degeneration. Any degeneration that comes must come from within the party. We must eliminate the conditions that breed that degeneracy. The first step is to make our leadership less hallowed, to recognize they are men. The second step is to organize a party of ideas and of actions flowing from those ideas and to build solidarity by a homogeneous intelligent membership without upper and lower layers of intellectuality.

Already the seeds of a future possible bureaucracy seem to this writer to be planted in a superior domineering officialdom which is unavoidable in a party of our present composition. Already the signs of personal politics and the desire to be nominal head have appeared. With a thoroughly trained rank and file of scientific socialists, as distinguished from socialists by instinct, such degeneration is made considerably less probable. Without it it is inevitable.

Thus far, this writer has not found a satisfactory explanation of the reason for the degeneration of the Third International. The Shachtman theory, no doubt supported by other leaders, that it came from without, that it was caused by the Second International's failure to spread the revolution to other more advanced countries than Russia, is untenable. At any rate it is not demonstrable. But by the same token, it should follow that there should never have been a Russian revolution to begin with.

Far more plausible is the theory that the party allowed hordes

of men to be admitted without intellectual understanding of economics and politics, members who subsequently became clay in the hands of an unscrupulous leadership.

## Measures

Obviously this criticism will offend the majority of the present membership because its very tenor disqualifies them from passing judgment competently. It is hoped, however, that among the sincere informed sections of the party this will stimulate serious consideration.

We are groping in the dark like blindfolded men looking for a ray of light. It is time we opened our eyes objectively to appraise our situation, our goal, our present direction and our past efforts.

An intelligent way to approach this knowledge would be:

- (1) To conduct discussions (not lectures) with records or minutes taken to be carefully weighed and analyzed.
- (2) To conduct polls of members by questionnaires, seeking information as to the shortcomings and experiences of our party in respect to membership, activity, literature, organization, publicity, etc.

Out of such surveys tangible information ought to come in answer to these questions:

- (1) Should the party have an admission requirement as to an applicant's knowledge of socialism?
- (2) How should the lack of this knowledge be remedied in the present members?
- (3) What should be done with members that fail to overcome the defect?
- (4) Should the party have a separate organization for less uninformed sympathizers or workers?
- (5) Is our party press and literature effective in its professed purpose to win over followers?
- (6) How many members have been acquired from our efforts at selling literature?
- (7) How were all the present members induced to join the party?
- (8) How were former members led into the party?
- (9) Why did they drop out?

It should be clear to any one who pretends to be an adherent of one science or another that such analytical and statistical information is a necessary prelude to any campaign of great extent. Especially is this true where from a comparatively few men and women tests can be conducted which in the long run are sufficiently accurate to be a guide to the public at large.

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# Questions To Comrade Trotsky

by M. Morris, (Down Town Branch, Manhattan)

These questions are asked in connection with your article "A Petty Bourgeois Opposition In The Socialist Workers' Party".

1. "In the second case (Finland) it (Stalinism) gave an impulse to the socialist revolution through bureaucratic methods."

Where is the evidence for this statement? If it is true why has it not been published in the Appeal which is controlled by the Cannon Faction?

2. "In order to punish the Stalinists for their unquestionable crimes, the resolution, (of the Minority) 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 land-owners and introduces workers' control while preparing for the expropriation of the capitalists."

Have you read the Majority resolution (Socialist Appeal, Dec. 9, 1939)? It also "does not mention by so much as a word" what you condemn the Minority resolution for not mentioning. Is the Majority "following the petty-bourgeois democrats of all shadings"?

3. "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."

Again where is the evidence? How is it the Appeal has stated that the Stalinist action has driven the workers into the arms of the Finnish bourgeoisie? Of course there is no need of proof that the Stalinists "will strangle the Finnish workers."

4. "The Soviet Finnish War is evidently 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. . . ."

Where is the proof? Why hasn't the Majority resolution included this point? Why hasn't the Appeal reported this "civil war"?

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Trotsky states in his latest document (Dec. 15) that the present dispute in the party between the minority and the majority of the political committee represents the struggle between the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Since: "Any serious factional fight is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle." Therefore, I would like to ask the following questions.

1. What class interests did Trotsky and Lenin represent when they differed on the question of the first world war?
2. What class interests did Lenin and Trotsky represent when they differed over the Brest-Litovsk question?
3. What class interests did Lenin and Trotsky represent when they differed on the Trade Union question in the Soviet Union in 1920-1921? Did Lenin say in that connection that Trotsky did not understand the Dialectic?

January 3, 1940.

# An Open Letter to Comrade Burnham

Dear Comrade,

You have expressed as your reaction to my article on the petty-bourgeois opposition, I have been informed, that you do not intend to argue over the dialectic with me and that you will discuss only the "concrete questions." "I stopped arguing about religion long ago," you added ironically. I once heard Max Eastman voice this same sentiment.

## Is There Logic in Identifying Logic with Religion?

As I understand this, your words imply that the dialectic of Marx, Engels and Lenin belongs to the sphere of religion. What does this assertion signify? The dialectic, permit me to recall once again, is the logic of evolution. Just as a machine shop in a plant supplies instruments for all departments, so logic is indispensable for all spheres of human knowledge. If you do not consider logic in general to be a religious prejudice (sad to say, the self-contradictory writings of the opposition incline one more and more toward this lamentable idea), then just which logic do you accept? I know of two systems of logic worthy of attention: the logic of Aristotle (formal logic) and the logic of Hegel (the dialectic). Aristotelian logic takes as its starting point immutable objects and phenomena. The scientific thought of our epoch studies all phenomena in their origin, change, and disintegration. Do you hold that the progress of the sciences, including Darwinism, Marxism, modern physics, chemistry, etc. have not influenced in any way the forms of our thought? In other words, do you hold that in a world where everything changes, the syllogism alone remains unchanging and eternal? The Gospel according to St. John begins with the words: "In the beginning was the Word," i.e., in the beginning was Reason or the Word (reason expressed in the word, namely, the syllogism). To St. John the syllogism is one of the literary pseudonyms for God. If you consider that the syllogism is immutable, i.e., has neither origin nor development then it signifies that to you it is the product of divine revelation. But if you acknowledge that the logical forms of our thought develop in the process of our adaptation to nature, then please take the trouble to inform us just who following Aristotle analyzed and systematized the subsequent progress of logic. So long as you do not clarify this point, I shall take the liberty of asserting that to identify logic (the dialectic) with religion reveals utter ignorance and superficiality in the basic questions of human thought.

## Is the Revolutionist Not Obligated to Fight Against Religion?

Let us grant however that your more than presumptuous innuendo is correct. But this does not improve affairs to your advantage. Religion, as I hope you will agree, diverts attention away from real to fictitious knowledge, away from the struggle for a better life to false hopes for reward in the Hereafter. Religion is the opium of the people. Whoever fails to struggle against religion is unworthy of bearing the name of revolutionist. On what grounds then do you justify your refusal to fight against the dialectic if you deem it one of the varieties of religion?

You stopped bothering yourself long ago, as you say, about the question of religion. But you stopped only for yourself. In addition to you, there exist all the others. Quite a few of them. We revolutionists never "stop" bothering ourselves about religious questions, inasmuch as our task consists in emancipating from the influence of religion not only ourselves but also the masses. If the dialectic is a religion, how is it possible to renounce the struggle against this opium within one's own party?

Or perhaps you intended to imply that religion is of no political importance? That it is possible to be religious and at the same time a consistent communist and revolutionary fighter? You will hardly venture so rash an assertion. Naturally, we maintain the most considerate attitude toward the religious prejudices of a backward worker. Should he desire to fight for our program,

we would accept him as a party member; but at the same time, our party would persistently educate him in the spirit of materialism and atheism. If you agree with this, how can you refuse to struggle against a "religion," held, to my knowledge, by the overwhelming majority of those members of your own party who are interested in theoretical questions? You have obviously overlooked this most important aspect of the question.

Among the educated bourgeoisie there are not a few who have broken personally with religion, but whose atheism is solely for their own private consumption; they keep thoughts like these to themselves but in public often maintain that it is well the people have a religion. Is it possible that you hold such a point of view toward your own party? Is it possible that this explains your refusal to discuss with us the philosophic foundations of Marxism? If that is the case, under your scorn for the dialectic rings a note of contempt for the party.

Please do not make the objection that I have based myself on a phrase expressed by you in private conversation, and that you are not concerned with publicly refuting dialectic materialism. This is not true. Your winged phrase serves only as an illustration. Whenever there has been an occasion, for various reasons you have proclaimed your negative attitude toward the doctrine which constitutes the theoretical foundation of our program. This is well-known to everyone in the party. In the article "Intellectuals in Retreat," written by you in collaboration with Shachtman and published in the party's theoretical organ, it is categorically affirmed that you reject dialectic materialism. Doesn't the party have the right after all to know just why? Do you really assume that in the Fourth International an editor of a theoretical organ can confine himself to the bare declaration: "I decisively reject dialectical materialism"—as if it were a question of a proffered cigarette: "Thank you, I don't smoke." The question of a correct philosophical doctrine, that is, a correct method of thought, is of decisive significance to a revolutionary party just as a good machine shop is of decisive significance to production. It is still possible to defend the old society with the material and intellectual methods inherited from the past. It is absolutely unthinkable that this old society can be overthrown and a new one constructed without first critically analyzing the current methods. If the party errs in the very foundations of its thinking it is your elementary duty to point out the correct road. Otherwise your conduct will be interpreted inevitably as the cavalier attitude of an academician toward a proletarian organization which, after all, is incapable of grasping a real "scientific" doctrine. What could be worse than that?

## Instructive Examples

Anyone acquainted with the history of the struggles of tendencies within workers' parties knows that desertions to the camp of opportunism and even to the camp of bourgeois reaction began not infrequently with rejection of the dialectic. Petty bourgeois intellectuals consider the dialectic the most vulnerable point in Marxism and at the same time they take advantage of the fact that it is much more difficult for workers to verify differences on the philosophical than on the political plane. This long known fact is backed by all the evidence of experience. Again, it is impermissible to discount an even more important fact, namely, that all the great and outstanding revolutionists—first and foremost, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Franz Mehring—stood on the ground of dialectic materialism. Can it be assumed that all of them were incapable of distinguishing between science and religion? Isn't there too much presumptuousness on your part Comrade Burnham? The examples of Bernstein, Kautsky and Franz Mehring are extremely instructive. Bernstein categorically rejected the dialectic as "scholasticism" and "mysticism." Kautsky maintained indifference toward the question of the dialectic, somewhat like Comrade Shachtman. Mehring was a tireless propagandist and defender of dialectic materialism. For decades he followed all the innovations of philosophy and literature, indefatigably exposing the reactionary essence of idealism, neo-Kantianism, utilitarianism, all forms of mysticism, etc. The political fate of these three individuals is very well known. Bernstein ended his life as a smug petty-bourgeois democrat, Kautsky, from a centrist,

became a vulgar opportunist. As for Mehring, he died a revolutionary communist.

In Russia three very prominent academic Marxists, Struve, Bulgakov and Berdyayev began by rejecting the philosophic doctrine of Marxism and ended in the camp of reaction and the orthodox church. In the United States, Eastman, Sidney Hook and their friends utilized opposition to the dialectic as cover for their transformation from fellow travelers of the proletariat to fellow travelers of the bourgeoisie. Similar examples by the score could be cited from other countries. The example of Plekhanov which appears to be an exception, in reality only proves the rule. Plekhanov was a remarkable propagandist of dialectic materialism, but during his whole life he never had the opportunity of participating in the actual class struggle. His thinking was divorced from practice. The revolution of 1905 and subsequently the world war flung him into the camp of petty-bourgeois democracy and forced him in actuality to renounce dialectic materialism. During the world war Plekhanov came forward openly as the protagonist of the Kantian categorical imperative in the sphere of international relations: "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." The example of Plekhanov only proves that dialectic materialism in and of itself still does not make a man a revolutionist.

Shachtman on the other hand argues that Liebknecht left a posthumous work against dialectic materialism which he had written in prison. Many ideas enter a person's mind while in prison which cannot be checked by association with other people. Liebknecht, whom nobody, least of all himself, considered a theoretician, became a symbol of heroism in the world labor movement. Should any of the American opponents of the dialectic display similar self-sacrifice and independence from patriotism during war, we shall render what is due him as a revolutionist. But that will not thereby resolve the question of the dialectic method.

It is impossible to say what Liebknecht's own final conclusions would have been had he remained at liberty. In any case before publishing his work, undoubtedly he would have shown it to his more competent friends, namely Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg. It is quite probable that on their advice he would have simply tossed the manuscript into the fire. Let us grant however that against the advice of people far excelling him in the sphere of theory he nevertheless had decided to publish his work. Mehring, Luxemburg, Lenin and others would not of course have proposed that he be expelled for this from the party; on the contrary, they would have intervened decisively in his behalf had anyone made such a foolish proposal. But at the same time they would not have formed a philosophical bloc with him, but rather would have differentiated themselves decisively from his theoretical mistakes.

Comrade Shachtman's behaviour, we note, is quite otherwise. "You will observe," he says—and this to teach the youth!—"that Plekhanov was an outstanding theoretician of dialectic materialism but ended up an opportunist; Liebknecht was a remarkable revolutionist but he had his doubts about dialectic materialism." This argument if it means anything at all signifies that dialectic materialism is of no use whatsoever to a revolutionist. With these examples of Liebknecht and Plekhanov, artificially torn out of history, Shachtman reinforces and "deepens" the idea of his last year's article, namely, that politics does not depend on method, inasmuch as method is divorced from politics through the divine gift of inconsistency. By falsely interpreting two "exceptions," Shachtman seeks to overthrow the rule. If this is the argument of a "supporter" of Marxism, what can we expect from an opponent? The revision of Marxism passes here into its downright liquidation; more than that, into the liquidation of every doctrine and every method.

## What Do You Propose Instead?

Dialectic materialism is not of course an eternal and immutable philosophy. To think otherwise is to contradict the spirit of the dialectic. Further development of scientific thought will undoubtedly create a more profound doctrine into which dialectical materialism will enter merely as structural material. However, there is no basis for expecting that this philosophic revolution will be accomplished under the decaying bourgeois regime, without mentioning the fact that a Marx is not born every year or every decade. The life-and-death task of the proletariat now consists not in interpreting the world anew but in remaking it from top to bottom. In the next epoch we can expect great revolutionists of action but hardly a new Marx. Only on the basis of social-

ist culture will mankind feel the need to review the ideological heritage of the past and undoubtedly will far surpass us not only in the sphere of economy but also in the sphere of intellectual creation. The regime of the Bonapartist bureaucracy in the U.S.S.R. is criminal not only because it creates an ever growing inequality in all the spheres of life but also because it degrades the intellectual activity of the country to the depths of the unbridled blockheads of the G.P.U.

Let us grant however that contrary to our supposition the proletariat is so fortunate during the present epoch of wars and revolutions as to produce a new theoretician or a new constellation of theoreticians who will surpass Marxism and in particular advance logic beyond the materialist dialectics. It goes without saying that all the advanced workers will learn from the new teachers and the old men will have to reeducate themselves again. But in the meantime this remains the music of the future. Or am I mistaken? Perhaps you will call my attention to those works which should supplant the system of dialectic materialism for the proletariat? Were these at hand surely you would not have refused to conduct a struggle against the opium of the dialectic. But none exist. While attempting to discredit the philosophy of Marxism you do not propose anything with which to replace it.

Picture to yourself a young amateur physician who proceeds to argue with a surgeon using a scalpel that modern anatomy, neurology, etc. are worthless, that much in them remains unclear and incomplete and that only "conservative bureaucrats" could set to work with a scalpel on the basis of these pseudo-sciences, etc. I believe that the surgeon would ask his irresponsible colleague to leave the operating room. We too, Comrade Burnham, cannot yield to cheap innuendos about the philosophy of scientific socialism. On the contrary, since in the course of the factional struggle the question has been posed point blank, we shall say, turning to all members of the party, especially the youth: Beware of the infiltration of bourgeois scepticism into your ranks. Remember that socialism to this day has not found higher scientific expression than Marxism. Bear in mind that the method of scientific socialism is dialectic materialism. Occupy yourselves with serious study! Study Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Franz Mehring. This is a hundred times more important for you than the study of tendentious, sterile, and slightly ludicrous treatises on the conservatism of Cannon. Let the present discussion produce at least this positive result that the youth attempt to imbed in their minds a serious theoretical foundation for revolutionary struggle!

## False Political "Realism"

In your case, however, the question is not confined to the dialectic. The remarks in your resolution to the effect that you do not now pose for the decision of the party the question of the nature of the Soviet State signify in reality that you do pose this question, if not juridically then theoretically and politically. Only infants can fail to understand this. This very statement likewise has another meaning, far more outrageous and pernicious. It means that you divorce politics from Marxist sociology. Yet for us the crux of the matter lies precisely in this. If it is possible to give a correct definition of a state without utilizing the method of dialectic materialism; if it is possible correctly to determine politics without giving a class analysis of the state then the question arises: Is there any need whatsoever for Marxism?

Disagreeing among themselves on the class nature of the Soviet state, the leaders of the opposition agree on this, that the foreign policy of the Kremlin must be labelled "imperialist" and that the U.S.S.R. cannot be supported "unconditionally." (Vastly substantial platform!) When the opposing "clique" raises the question of the nature of the Soviet State point blank at the convention (what a crime!) you have in advance agreed . . . to disagree, i.e., to vote differently. In the British "national" government this precedent occurs of Ministers who "agree to disagree," i.e., to vote differently. But His Majesty's Ministers enjoy this advantage that they are well aware of the nature of their state and can afford the luxury of disagreement on secondary questions. The leaders of the opposition are far less favorably situated. They permit themselves the luxury of differing on the fundamental question in order to solidarize on secondary questions. If this is Marxism and principled politics then I don't know what unprincipled combinationism means.

You seem to consider apparently that by refusing to discuss dialectic materialism and the class nature of the Soviet State and by sticking to "concrete" questions you are acting the part of a realistic politician. This self-deception is a result of your inade-

quate acquaintance with the history of the past fifty years of factional struggles in the labor movement. In every principled conflict, without a single exception, the Marxists invariably sought to face the party squarely with the fundamental problems of doctrine and program, considering that only under this condition could the "concrete" questions find their proper place and proportion. On the other hand the opportunists of every shade, especially those who had already suffered a few defeats in the sphere of principled discussion invariably counterposed to the Marxist class analysis "concrete" conjunctural appraisals which they, as is the custom, formulated under the pressure of bourgeois democracy. Through decades of factional struggle this division of roles has persisted. The opposition, permit me to assure you, has invented nothing new. It is continuing the tradition of revisionism in theory, and opportunism in politics.

Toward the close of the last century the revisionist attempts of Bernstein, who in England came under the influence of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and utilitarianism—the most wretched of philosophies!—were mercilessly repulsed. Whereupon the German opportunists suddenly recoiled from philosophy and sociology. At conventions and in the press they did not cease to berate the Marxist "pedants," who replaced the "concrete political questions" with general principled considerations. Read over the records of the German social democracy towards the close of the last and the beginning of the present century—and you will be astonished yourself at the degree to which, as the French say, *le mort saisit le vif* (the dead grip the living)!

You are not unacquainted with the great role played by Iskra in the development of Russian Marxism. Iskra began with the struggle against so-called "Economism" in the labor movement and against the Narodniki (Party of the Social Revolutionists). The chief argument of the "Economists" was that Iskra floats in the sphere of theory while they, the "Economists," propose leading the concrete labor movement. The main argument of the Social Revolutionists was as follows: Iskra wants to found a school of dialectic materialism while we want to overthrow czarist autocracy. It must be said that the Narodnik terrorists took their own words very seriously: bomb in hand they sacrificed their lives. We argued with them: "Under certain circumstances a bomb is an excellent thing but we should first clarify our own minds." It is historical experience that the greatest revolution in all history was not led by the party which started out with bombs but by the party which started out with dialectic materialism.

When the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks were still members of the same party, the pre-convention periods and the convention itself invariably witnessed an embittered struggle over the agenda. Lenin used to propose as first on the agenda such questions as clarification of the nature of the Czarist monarchy, the analysis of the class character of the revolution, the appraisal of the stages of the revolution we were passing through, etc. Martov and Dan, the leaders of the Mensheviks, invariably objected: we are not a sociological club but a political party; we must come to an agreement not on the class nature of Czarist economy but on the "concrete political tasks." I cite this from memory but I do not run any risk of error since these disputes were repeated from year to year and became stereotyped in character. I might add that I personally committed not a few sins on this score myself. But I have learned something since then.

To those enamoured with "concrete political questions" Lenin invariably explained that our politics are not of conjunctural but of principled character; that tactics are subordinate to strategy; that for us the primary concern of every political campaign is that it guide the workers from the particular questions to the general, that it teach them the nature of modern society and the character of its fundamental forces. The Mensheviks always felt the need urgently to slur over principled differences in their unstable conglomeration by means of evasions whereas Lenin on the contrary posed principled questions point blank. The current arguments of the opposition against philosophy and sociology in favor of "concrete political questions" is a belated repetition of Dan's arguments. Not a single new word! How sad it is that Shachtman respects the principled politics of Marxism only when it has aged long enough for the archives.

Especially awkward and inappropriate does the appeal to shift from Marxist theory to "concrete political questions" sound on your lips, Comrade Burnham, for it was not I but you who raised the question of the character of the U.S.S.R., thereby forcing me to pose the question of the method through which the class character of the state is determined. True enough, you withdrew your resolution. But this factional maneuver has no objective meaning

whatsoever. You draw your political conclusions from your sociological premise, even if you have temporarily slipped it into your brief-case. Shachtman draws exactly the same political conclusions without a sociological premise: he adapts himself to you. Abern seeks to profit equally both from the hidden premise and the absence of a premise for his "organizational" combinations. This is the real and not the diplomatic situation in the camp of the opposition. You proceed as an anti-Marxist; Shachtman and Abern—as Platonic Marxists. Who is worse, it is not easy to determine.

## The Dialectic of the Present Discussion

When confronted with the diplomatic front covering the hidden premises and lack of premises of our opponents, we, the "conservatives," naturally reply: A fruitful dispute over "concrete questions" is possible only if you clearly specify what class premises you take as your starting point. We are not compelled to confine ourselves to those topics in this dispute which you have selected artificially. Should someone propose that we discuss as "concrete" questions the invasion of Switzerland by the Soviet fleet or the length of the tail of a Bronx witch, then I am justified in posing in advance such questions as does Switzerland have a sea coast? are there witches at all?

Every serious discussion develops from the particular and even the accidental to the general and fundamental. The immediate causes and motives of a discussion are of interest, in most cases, only symptomatically. Of actual political significance are only those problems which the discussion raises in its development. To certain intellectuals, anxious to indict "bureaucratic conservatism" and to display their "dynamic spirit," it might seem that questions concerning the dialectic, Marxism, the nature of the state, centralism are raised "artificially" and that the discussion has taken a "false" direction. The nub of the matter however consists in this, that discussion has its own objective logic which does not coincide at all with the subjective logic of individuals and groupings. The dialectic character of the discussion proceeds from the fact that its objective course is determined by the living conflict of opposing tendencies and not by a preconceived logical plan. The materialist basis of the discussion consists in its reflecting the pressure of different classes. Thus, the present discussion in the S.W.P., like the historic process as a whole, develops—with or without your permission, Comrade Burnham—according to the laws of dialectical materialism. There is no escape from these laws.

## "Science" Against Marxism and "Experiments" Against Program

Accusing your opponents of "bureaucratic conservatism" (a bare psychological abstraction insofar as no specific social interests are shown underlying this "conservatism"), you demand in your document that conservative politics be replaced by "critical and experimental politics—in a word, scientific politics." (p. 32). This statement at first glance so innocent and meaningless with all its pompousness, is in itself a complete exposure. You don't speak of Marxist politics. You don't speak of proletarian politics. You speak of "experimental," "critical," "scientific" politics. Why this pretentious and deliberately abstruse terminology so unusual in our ranks? I shall tell you. It is the product of your adaptation, Comrade Burnham, to bourgeois public opinion, and the adaptation of Shachtman and Abern to your adaptation. Marxism is no longer fashionable among the broad circles of bourgeois intellectuals. Moreover if one should mention Marxism, God forbid, he might be taken for a dialectic materialist. It is better to avoid this discredited word. What to replace it with? Why, of course, with "science," even with Science capitalized. And science, as everybody knows is based on "criticism" and "experiments." It has its own ring; so solid, so tolerant, so unsectarian, so professorial! With this formula one can enter any democratic salon.

Reread, please, your own statement once again: "In place of conservative politics, we must put bold, flexible, critical and experimental politics—in a word, scientific politics." You couldn't have improved it! But this is precisely the formula which all petty-bourgeois empiricists, all revisionists and, last but not least, all political adventurers have counterposed to "narrow," "limited," "dogmatic," and "conservative" Marxism.

Buffon once said: the style is the man. Political terminology is not only the man but the party. Terminology is one of the elements of the class struggle. Only lifeless pedants can fail to under-

stand this. In your document you painstakingly expunge—yes, no one else but you, Comrade Burnham—not only such terms as the dialectic and materialism but also Marxism. You are above all this. You are a man of “critical,” “experimental” science. For exactly the same reason you culled the label “imperialism” to describe the foreign policy of the Kremlin. This innovation differentiates you from the too embarrassing terminology of the Fourth International by creating less “sectarian,” less “religious,” less rigorous formulas, common to you and—oh happy coincidence!—bourgeois democracy.

You want to experiment? But permit me to remind you that the workers' movement possesses a long history with no lack of experience and, if you prefer, experiments. This experience so dearly bought has been crystallized in the shape of a definite doctrine, the very Marxism whose name you so carefully avoid. Before giving you the right to experiment, the party has the right to ask: what method will you use? Henry Ford would scarcely permit a man to experiment in his plant who had not assimilated the requisite conclusions of the past development of industry and the innumerable experiments already carried out. Furthermore experimental laboratories in factories are carefully segregated from mass production. Far more impermissible even are witch doctor experiments in the sphere of the labor movement—even though conducted under the banner of anonymous “science.” For us the science of the workers' movement is Marxism. Nameless social science, Science with a capital letter, we leave these completely at the disposal of Eastman and his ilk.

I know that you have engaged in disputes with Eastman and in some questions you have argued very well. But you debate with him as a representative of your own circle and not as an agent of the class enemy. You revealed this conspicuously in your joint article with Shachtman when you ended up with the unexpected invitation to Eastman, Hook, Lyons and the rest that they take advantage of the pages of the *New International* to promulgate their views. It did not even concern you that they might pose the question of the dialectic and thus drive you out of your diplomatic silence.

On January 20 of last year, hence long prior to this discussion, in a letter to Comrade Shachtman I insisted on the urgent necessity of attentively following the internal developments of the Stalinist party. I wrote: “It would be a thousand times more important than inviting Eastman, Lyons and the others to present their personal sweatings. I was wondering a bit why you gave space to Eastman's last insignificant and arrogant article. He has at his disposal Harper's Magazine, the *Modern Monthly*, *Common Sense*, etc. But I am absolutely perplexed that you personally invited these people to besmirch the not-so-numerous pages of the *New International*. The perpetuation of this polemic can interest some petty-bourgeois intellectuals but not the revolutionary elements. It is my firm conviction that a certain reorganization of the *New International* and the *Socialist Appeal* is necessary: more distance from Eastman, Lyons, etc.; and nearer to the workers and, in this sense, to the Stalinist party.”

As always in such cases Shachtman replied inattentively and carelessly. In actuality, the question was resolved by the fact that the enemies of Marxism whom you invited refused to accept your invitation. This episode, however, deserves closer attention. On the one hand, you Comrade Burnham, bolstered by Shachtman, invite bourgeois democrats to send in friendly explanations to be printed in the pages of our party organ. On the other hand, you, bolstered by this same Shachtman, refuse to engage in a debate with me over the dialectic and the class nature of the Soviet State. Doesn't this signify that you, together with your ally Shachtman, have turned your faces somewhat towards the bourgeois semi-opponents and your backs toward your own party? A long time ago came to the conclusion that Marxism is a doctrine to be honored but a good oppositional combination is something far more substantial. Meanwhile, Shachtman slips and slides downward, consoling himself with wise-cracks. I feel, however, that his heart is a trifle heavy. Upon reaching a certain point, Shachtman will, I hope, pull himself together and begin the upward climb again. Here is the hope that his “experimental” factional politics will at least turn out to the profit of “Science.”

### “An Unconscious Dialectician”

Using as his text my remark concerning Darwin, Shachtman has stated, I have been informed, that you are an “unconscious dialectician.” This ambiguous compliment contains an iota of truth. Every individual is a dialectician to some extent or other, in most cases, unconsciously. A housewife knows that a certain amount of

salt flavors soup agreeably, but that added salt makes the soup unpalatable. Consequently, an illiterate peasant woman guides herself in cooking soup by the Hegelian law of the transformation of quantity into quality. Similar examples from daily life could be cited without end. Even animals arrive at their practical conclusions not only on the basis of the Aristotelian syllogism but also on the basis of the Hegelian dialectic. Thus a fox is aware that quadrupeds and birds are nutritious and tasty. On sighting a hare, a rabbit, or a hen, a fox concludes: this particular creature belongs to the tasty and nutritive type, and—chases after the prey. We have here a complete syllogism, although the fox, we may suppose, never read Aristotle. When the same fox, however, encounters the first animal which exceeds it in size, for example, a wolf, it quickly concludes that quantity passes into quality, and turns to flee. Clearly, the legs of a fox are equipped with Hegelian tendencies, even if not fully conscious ones. All this demonstrates, in passing, that our methods of thought, both formal logic and the dialectic, are not arbitrary constructions of our reason but rather expressions of the actual inter-relationships in nature itself. In this sense, the universe throughout is permeated with “unconscious” dialectics. But nature did not stop there. No little development occurred before nature's inner relationships were converted into the language of the consciousness of foxes and men, and man was then enabled to generalize these forms of consciousness and transform them into logical (dialectical) categories, thus creating the possibility for probing more deeply into the world about us.

The most finished expression to date of the laws of the dialectic which prevail in nature and in society has been given by Hegel and Marx. Despite the fact that Darwin was not interested in verifying his logical methods, his empiricism—that of a genius—in the sphere of natural science reached the highest dialectic generalizations. In this sense, Darwin was, as I stated in my previous article, an “unconscious dialectician.” We do not, however, value Darwin for his inability to rise to the dialectic, but for having, despite his philosophical backwardness, explained to us the origin of species. Engels was, it might be pointed out, exasperated by the narrow empiricism of the Darwinian method, although he, like Marx, immediately appreciated the greatness of the theory of natural selection. Darwin, on the contrary, remained, alas, ignorant of the meaning of Marx's sociology to the end of his life. Had Darwin come out in the press against the dialectic or materialism, Marx and Engels would have attacked him with redoubled force so as not to allow his authority to cloak ideological reaction.

In the attorney's plea of Shachtman to the effect that you are an “unconscious dialectician,” the stress must be laid on the word unconscious. Shachtman's aim (also partly unconscious) is to defend his bloc with you by degrading dialectic materialism. For in reality, Shachtman is saying: The difference between a “conscious” and an “unconscious” dialectician is not so great that one must quarrel about it. Shachtman thus attempts to discredit the Marxist method.

But the evil goes beyond even this. Very many unconscious or semi-unconscious dialecticians exist in this world. Some of them apply the materialist dialectic excellently to politics, even though they have never concerned themselves with questions of method. It would obviously be pedantic blockheadedness to attack such comrades. But it is otherwise with you, Comrade Burnham. You are an editor of the theoretical organ whose task it is to educate the party in the spirit of the Marxist method. Yet you are a conscious opponent of the dialectic and not at all an unconscious dialectician. Even if you had, as Shachtman insists, successfully followed the dialectic in political questions, i.e., even if you were endowed with a dialectic “instinct,” we would still be compelled to begin a struggle against you, because your dialectic instinct, like other individual qualities, cannot be transmitted to others, whereas the conscious dialectic method can, to one degree or another, be made accessible to the entire party.

### The Dialectic and Mr. Dies

Even if you have a dialectic instinct—and I do not undertake to judge this—it is well-nigh stifled by academic routine and intellectual hauteur. What we term the class instinct of the worker, with relative ease accepts the dialectic approach to questions. There can be no talk of such a class instinct in a bourgeois intellectual. Only by consciously surmounting his petty bourgeois spirit can an intellectual divorced from the proletariat rise to Marxist politics. Unfortunately, Shachtman and Abern are doing everything in their power to bar this road to you. By their support they render you a very bad service, Comrade Burnham.

Bolstered by your bloc, which might be designated as the "League of Factional Abandon," you commit one blunder after another: in philosophy, in sociology, in politics, in the organizational sphere. Your errors are not accidental. You approach each question by isolating it, by splitting it away from its connection with other questions, away from its connection with social factors, and—independently of international experience. You lack the dialectic method. Despite all your education, in politics you proceed like a witch-doctor.

In the question of the Dies Committee your mumbo-jumbo manifested itself no less glaringly than in the question of Finland. To my arguments in favor of utilizing this parliamentary body, you replied that the question should be decided not by principled considerations but by some special circumstances known to you alone but which you refrained from specifying. Permit me to tell you what these circumstances were: Your ideological dependence on bourgeois public opinion. Although bourgeois democracy, in all its sections, bears full responsibility for the capitalist regime, including the Dies Committee, it is compelled, in the interests of this very same capitalism, shamefacedly to distract attention away from the too naked organs of the regime. A simple division of labor! An old fraud which still continues, however, to operate effectively! As for the workers, to whom you refer vaguely, a section of them, and a very considerable section, is like yourself under the influence of bourgeois democracy. But the average worker, not infected with the prejudices of the labor aristocracy, would joyfully welcome every bold revolutionary word thrown in the very face of the class enemy. And the more reactionary the institution, which serves as the arena for the combat, all the more complete is the satisfaction of the worker. This has been proved by historical experience. Dies himself, becoming frightened and jumping back in time, demonstrated how false your position was. It is always better to compel the enemy to beat a retreat than to hide oneself without a battle.

But at this point I see the irate figure of Shachtman rising to stop me with a gesture of protest: "The opposition bears no responsibility for Burnham's views on the Dies Committee. This question did not assume a factional character," and so forth and so on. I know all this. As if the only thing that lacked was for the entire opposition to express itself in favor of the tactic of boycott, so utterly senseless in this instance! It is sufficient that the leader of the opposition, who has views and openly expressed them, came out in favor of boycott. If you happened to have outgrown the age when one argues about "religion," then, let me confess, I had considered that the entire Fourth International had outgrown the age when abstentionism is accounted the most revolutionary of policies. Aside from your lack of method, you revealed in this instance an obvious lack of political sagacity. In the given situation, a revolutionist would not have needed to discuss long before springing through a door flung open by the enemy and making the most of the opportunity. For those members of the opposition who together with you spoke against participation in the Dies Committee—and their number is not so small—it is necessary in my opinion to arrange special elementary courses in order to explain to them the elementary truths of revolutionary tactics which have nothing in common with the pseudo-radical abstentionism of the intellectual circles.

## "Concrete Political Questions"

The opposition is weakest precisely in the sphere where it imagines itself especially strong—the sphere of day-to-day revolutionary politics. This applies above all to you, Comrade Burnham. Impotence in the face of great events manifested itself in you as well as in the entire opposition most glaringly in the questions of Poland, the Baltic states, and Finland. Shachtman began by discovering a philosopher's stone: the achievement of a simultaneous insurrection against Hitler and Stalin in occupied Poland. The idea was splendid; it is only too bad that Shachtman was deprived of the opportunity of putting it into practice. The advanced workers in Eastern Poland could justifiably say: "A simultaneous insurrection against Hitler and Stalin in a country occupied by troops might perhaps be arranged very conveniently from the Bronx; but here, locally, it is more difficult. We should like to hear Burnham's and Shachtman's answer to a 'concrete political question': What shall we do between now and the coming insurrection?" In the meantime, the commanding staff of the Soviet army called upon the peasants and workers to seize the land and the factories. This call, supported by armed force, played an enormous role in the life of the occupied country. Moscow papers were

filled to overflowing with reports of the boundless "enthusiasm" of workers and poor peasants. We should and must approach these reports with justifiable distrust: there is no lack of lies. But it is nevertheless impermissible to close one's eyes to facts. The call to settle accounts with the landlords and to drive out the capitalists could not have failed to rouse the spirit of the hounded and crushed Ukrainian and Byelo-Russian peasants and workers who saw in the Polish landlord a double enemy.

In the Parisian organ of the Mensheviks, who are in solidarity with the bourgeois democracy of France and not the Fourth International, it was stated categorically that the advance of the Red Army was accompanied by a wave of revolutionary upsurge, echoes of which penetrated even the peasant masses of Rumania. What adds special weight to the dispatches of this organ is the close connection with the Mensheviks and the leaders of the Jewish Bund, the Polish Socialist Party and other organizations who are hostile to the Kremlin and who fled from Poland. We were therefore completely correct when we said to the Bolsheviks in Eastern Poland: "Together with the workers and peasants, and in the forefront, you must conduct a struggle against the landlords and the capitalists; do not tear yourself away from the masses, despite all their illusions, just as the Russian revolutionists did not tear themselves away from the masses who had not yet freed themselves from their hopes in the Czar (Bloody Sunday, January 22, 1905); educate the masses in the course of the struggle, warn them against naive hopes in Moscow, but do not tear yourself away from them, fight in their camp, try to extend and deepen their struggle, and to give it the greatest possible independence. Only in this way will you prepare the coming insurrection against Stalin." The course of events in Poland has completely confirmed this directive which was a continuation and a development of all our previous policies, particularly in Spain.

Since there is no principled difference between the Polish and Finnish situations, we can have no grounds for changing our directive. But the opposition, who failed to understand the meaning of the Polish events, now tries to clutch at Finland as a new anchor of salvation. "Where is the civil war in Finland? Trotsky talks of a civil war. We have seen nothing about it in the press," and so on. The question of Finland appears to the opposition as in principle different from the question of Western Ukraine and Byelo-Russia. Each question is isolated and viewed aside and apart from the general course of development. Confounded by the course of events, the opposition seeks each time to support itself on some accidental, secondary, temporary and conjunctural circumstances.

Do these cries about the absence of civil war in Finland signify that the opposition would adopt our policy if civil war were actually to unfold in Finland? Yes or no? If yes, then the opposition thereby condemns its own policy in relation to Poland, since there, despite the civil war, they limited themselves to refusal to participate in the events, while they waited for a simultaneous uprising against Stalin and Hitler. It is obvious, Comrade Burnham, that you and your allies have not thought this question through to the end.

What about my assertion concerning a civil war in Finland? At the very inception of military hostilities, one might have conjectured that Moscow was seeking through a "small" punitive expedition to bring about a change of government in Helsingfors and to establish the same relations with Finland as with the other Baltic states. But the appointment of the Kuusinen government in Terrijoki demonstrated that Moscow had other plans and aims. Dispatches then reported the creation of a Finnish "red army." Naturally, it was only a question of small formations set up from above. The program of Kuusinen was issued. Next the dispatches appeared of the division of large estates among poor peasants. In their totality, these dispatches signified an attempt on the part of Moscow to organize a civil war. Naturally, this is a civil war of a special type. It does not arise spontaneously from the depths of the popular masses. It is not conducted under the leadership of the Finnish revolutionary party based on mass support. It is introduced on bayonets from without. It is controlled by the Moscow bureaucracy. All this we know, and we dealt with all this in discussing Poland. Nevertheless, it is precisely a question of civil war, of an appeal to the lowly, to the poor, a call to them to expropriate the rich, drive them out, arrest them, etc. I know of no other name for these actions except civil war.

"But, after all, the civil war in Finland did not unfold," object the leaders of the opposition. "This means that your predictions did not materialize." With the defeat and the retreat of the Red Army, I reply, the civil war in Finland cannot, of course, unfold

under the bayonets of Mannerheim. This fact is an argument not against me but against Shachtman; since it demonstrates that in the first stages of war at a time when discipline in armies is still strong, it is much easier to organize insurrection, and on two fronts to boot, from the Bronx than from Terrijoki.

We did not foresee the defeats of the first detachments of the Red Army. We could not have foreseen the extent to which stupidity and demoralization reign in the Kremlin and in the tops of the army beheaded by the Kremlin. Nevertheless, what is involved is only a military episode, which cannot determine our political line. Should Moscow, after its first unsuccessful attempt, refrain entirely from any further offensive against Finland, then the very question which today obscures the entire world situation to the eyes of the opposition would be removed from the order of the day. But there is little chance for this. On the other hand, if England, France, and the United States, basing themselves on Scandinavia, were to aid Finland with military force, then the Finnish question would be submerged in a war between the U.S.S.R. and the imperialist countries. In this case, we must assume that even a majority of the oppositionists would remind themselves of the program of the Fourth International.

At the present time, however, the opposition is not interested in these two variants: either the suspension of the offensive on the part of the U.S.S.R., or the outbreak of hostilities between the U.S.S.R. and the imperialist democracies. The opposition is interested only in the isolated question of the U.S.S.R.'s invasion of Finland. Very well, let us take this as our starting point. If the second offensive, as may be assumed, is better prepared and conducted, then the advance of the Red Army into the country will again place the question of civil war on the order of the day, and moreover on a much broader scale than during the first and ignominiously unsuccessful attempt. Our directive, consequently, remains completely valid so long as the question itself remains on the agenda. But what does the opposition propose in the event the Red Army successfully advances into Finland and civil war unfolds there? The opposition apparently doesn't think about this at all, for they live from one day to the next, from one incident to another, clutching at episodes, clinging to isolated phrases in an editorial, feeding on sympathies and antipathies, and thus creating for themselves the semblance of a platform. The weakness of empiricists and impressionists is always revealed most glaringly in their approach to "concrete political questions."

## Theoretical Bewilderment and Political Abstentionism

Throughout all the vacillations and convulsions of the opposition, contradictory though they may be, two general features run like a guiding thread from the pinnacles of theory down to the most trifling political episodes. The first general feature is the absence of a unified conception. The opposition leaders split sociology from dialectical materialism. They split politics from sociology. In the sphere of politics they split our tasks in Poland from our experience in Spain—our tasks in Finland from our position on Poland. History becomes transformed into a series of exceptional incidents; politics becomes transformed into a series of improvisations. We have here in the full sense of the term, the disintegration of Marxism, the disintegration of theoretical thought, the disintegration of politics into its constituent elements. Empiricism and its foster-brother, impressionism, dominate from top to bottom. That is why the ideological leadership, Comrade Burnham, rests with you as an opponent of the dialectic, as an empiricist, unabashed by his empiricism.

Throughout the vacillations and convulsions of the opposition, there is a second general feature intimately bound to the first, namely, a tendency to refrain from active participation, a tendency to self-elimination, to abstentionism, naturally, under cover of ultra-radical phrases. You are in favor of overthrowing Hitler and Stalin in Poland; Stalin and Mannerheim in Finland. And until then, you reject both sides equally, in other words, you withdraw from the struggle, including the civil war. Your citing the absence of civil war in Finland is only an accidental conjunctural argument. Should the civil war unfold, the opposition will attempt not to notice it, as they tried not to notice it in Poland, or they will declare that inasmuch as the policy of the Moscow bureaucracy is "imperialist" in character "we" do not take part in this filthy business. Hot on the trail of "concrete" political tasks in words, the opposition actually places itself outside the historical process. Your position, Comrade Burnham, in relation to the Dies Commit-

tee merits attention precisely because it is a graphic expression of this same tendency of abstentionism and bewilderment. Your guiding principle still remains the same: "Thank you, I don't smoke."

Naturally, any man, any party, and even any class can become bewildered. But with the petty-bourgeoisie, bewilderment, especially in the face of great events, is an inescapable, and so to speak, congenital condition. The intellectuals attempt to express their state of bewilderment in the language of "science." The contradictory platform of the opposition reflects petty-bourgeois bewilderment expressed in the bombastic language of the intellectuals. There is nothing proletarian about it.

## The Petty-Bourgeoisie and Centralism

In the organizational sphere, your views are just as schematic, empiric, non-revolutionary as in the sphere of theory and politics. A Stolberg, lantern in hand, chases after an ideal revolution, unaccompanied by any excesses, and guaranteed against Thermidor and counter-revolution; you, likewise, seek an ideal party democracy which would secure forever and for everybody the possibility of saying and doing whatever popped into his head, and which would insure the party against bureaucratic degeneration. You overlook a trifle; namely, that the party is not an arena for the assertion of free individuality, but an instrument of the proletarian revolution; that only a victorious revolution is capable of preventing the degeneration not only of the party but of the proletariat itself and of modern civilization as a whole. You do not see that our American section is not sick from too much centralism—it is laughable even to talk about it—but from a monstrous abuse and distortion of democracy on the part of petty-bourgeois elements. This is at the root of the present crisis.

A worker spends his day at the factory. He has comparatively few hours left for the party. At the meetings he is interested in learning the most important things: the correct evaluation of the situation and the political conclusions. He values those leaders who do this in the clearest and the most precise form and who keep in step with events. Petty-bourgeois, and especially declassed elements, divorced from the proletariat, vegetate in an artificial and shut-in environment. They have ample time to dabble in politics or its substitute. They pick out faults, exchange all sorts of titbits and gossip concerning happenings among the party "tops." They always locate a leader who initiates them into all the "secrets." Discussion is their native element. No amount of democracy is ever enough for them. For their war of words they seek the fourth dimension. They become jittery, they revolve in a vicious circle, and they quench their thirst with salt water. Do you want to know the organizational program of the opposition? It consists of a mad hunt for the fourth dimension of party democracy. In practise this means burying politics beneath discussion; and burying centralism beneath the anarchy of the intellectual circles. When a few thousand workers join the party, they will call the petty-bourgeois anarchists severely to order. The sooner, the better.

## Conclusions

Why do I address you and not the other leaders of the opposition? Because you are the ideological leader of the bloc. Comrade Abern's faction, destitute of a program and a banner, is ever in need of cover. At one time Shachtman served as cover, then came Muste with Spector, and now you, with Shachtman adapting himself to you. Your ideology I consider the expression of bourgeois influence in the proletariat.

To some comrades, the tone of this letter may perhaps seem too sharp. Yet, let me confess, I did everything in my power to restrain myself. For, after all, it is a question of nothing more nor less than an attempt to reject, disqualify, and overthrow the theoretical foundations, the political principles, and organizational methods of our movement.

In reaction to my previous article, Comrade Abern, it has been reported, remarked: "This means split." Such a response merely demonstrates that Abern lacks devotion to the party and the Fourth International; he is a circle man. In any case, threats of split will not deter us from presenting a Marxist analysis of the differences. For us Marxists, it is a question not of split but of educating the party. It is my firm hope that the coming convention will ruthlessly repulse the revisionists.

The convention, in my opinion, must declare categorically that in their attempts to divorce sociology from dialectic materialism

and politics from sociology, the leaders of the opposition have broken from Marxism and become the transmitting mechanism for petty bourgeois empiricism. While reaffirming, decisively and completely, its loyalty to the Marxist doctrine and the political and organizational methods of Bolshevism, while binding the editorial boards of its official publications to promulgate and defend this doctrine and these methods, the party will, of course, extend the pages of its publications in the future to those of its members who consider themselves capable of adding something new to the doctrine of Marxism. But it will not permit a game of hide-and-seek with Marxism and light-minded gibes concerning it.

The politics of a party has a class character. Without a class analysis of the state, the parties, and ideological tendencies, it is impossible to arrive at a correct political orientation. The party must condemn as vulgar opportunism the attempt to determine policies in relation to the U.S.S.R. from incident to incident and independently of the class nature of the Soviet state.

The disintegration of capitalism, which engenders sharp dissatisfaction among the petty-bourgeoisie and drives its bottom layers to the left, opens up broad possibilities but it also contains grave dangers. The Fourth International needs only those emigrants from the petty-bourgeoisie who have broken completely with their social past and who have come over decisively to the standpoint of the proletariat.

This theoretical and political transit must be accompanied by an actual break with the old environment and the establishment of intimate ties with workers, in particular, by participation in the recruitment and education of proletarians for their party. Emi-

grants from the petty-bourgeois milieu who prove incapable of settling in the proletarian milieu must after the lapse of a certain period of time be transferred from membership in the party to the status of sympathizers.

Members of the party untested in the class struggle must not be placed in responsible positions. No matter how talented and devoted to socialism an emigrant from the bourgeois milieu may be, before becoming a teacher, he must first go to school in the working class. Young intellectuals must not be placed at the head of the intellectual youth but sent out into the provinces for a few years, into the purely proletarian centers, for hard practical work.

The class composition of the party must correspond to its class program. The American section of the Fourth International will either become proletarian or it will cease to exist.

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Comrade Burnham! If we can arrive at an agreement with you on the basis of these principles, then without difficulty we shall find a correct policy in relation to Poland, Finland, and even India. At the same time, I pledge myself to help you conduct a struggle against any manifestations whatsoever of bureaucratism and conservatism. These in my opinion are the conditions necessary to end the present crisis.

With Bolshevik greetings,

L. TROTSKY

January 7, 1940  
Coyoacan, D. F.