

The new Russian imperialism

By Max Shachtman

THE best way of facing the facts and, thereby, answering the question "What do the Russians want in the occupied countries" is to ask "What do the Russians do in the occupied countries?"

Enough data has now been collected to establish the following outline of Russian economic policy in the occupied countries:

1. Russia strips the industries of machinery and other equipment and transports it to Russia. (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Korea and Manchuria.)

2. Russia imports large masses of slave labourers to add to the slave labour armies of Russians who make up a sizeable percentage of her labour force. (Germans, Poles and political opponents from every nation in which the GPU has a free hand.)

3. Russia expropriates the capitalists to varying degrees and establishes a state-owned industry operated by native satraps of the Russian rulers. (Poland, German zone, Czechoslovakia, Baltic states.)

4. Russia carries through "agrarian reforms" which wipe out the large landowners and seeks to establish a small peasantry whose property stake ties them to the new regime. (Poland and East Prussia.)

5. Russia forces economic concessions and spheres of influence from states that remain politically independent of her. (Oil concessions in Iran.)

6. Russia maintains commercial outposts for trade in less economically developed countries. (Manchuria.)

This listing of economic phenomena related to Russian occupation policy poses a formidable task of analysis and codification before we can definitively describe the general laws that regulate Russian economic policy beyond her own borders. However, a mere listing of these bare summations of policy permit us to conclude that in the over-all and basic aim Russia is not "different," i.e., Russian policy is motivated by the same aim of economic aggrandisement that has

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An analysis of the specific policies of Russian occupation will reveal, it is true, a considerable difference from the policies which Marxists have associated with the rule of finance capitalist imperialism. The basic economic needs out of which the imperialist policy of bureaucratic collectivism and the imperialist policy of finance capitalism spring are radically different. However, imperialism did not begin with finance capitalism.

The British Empire spread from Hudson Bay to the Ganges during the period of mercantile capitalism. Feudal Spain appropriated half of the new world and ruled the Lowlands. The imperialism of the Czarist state carried the Russian flag over the vast expanse of Siberia, across Manchuria, across the Pacific to Alaska and the coasts of California. In the South it pushed the Turks over and beyond the Caucasus, contested their hegemony over the Balkans. It swallowed up the major part of Poland and drove Sweden out of Finland.

Ancient times have known the imperialism of Rome and Carthage, based upon a slave economy. The most active imperialist force in the United States in the several decades preceding the Civil War was the land-hungry slaveocracy,

constantly pressing for annexation at the expense of Mexico. In the light of these many historical forms of imperialism, how ridiculous is the injunction that we refrain from describing Russian economic expansion as imperialism because it is different from finance capitalist imperialism!

The imperialist policy of the bureaucratic collectivist state, for all that it has in common with all historical imperialisms, is one that is peculiar to its own social order. However, what is distinctive is not the emergence of imperialist methods never before known to history but rather the combination by the Russians of phases of imperialist policy associated with all previous forms of imperialism, from that of ancient Rome to Wall Street. In this sense the exploitation of foreign resources by Russia reflect the exploitative societies, i.e., slave labour, serfdom and wage labour, yet combines them in such a manner upon the basis of a nationalised economy as to create an economic system qualitatively different than any previously known.

THE fact of Russian economic aggrandisement has created a most troublesome problem of theory for those who continue to cling to Trotsky's outlived theory that Russia is a "degenerated workers' state" merely by virtue of the existence of nationalised economy. Russian expansion into Poland and the Baltic states in 1939-40 raised this problem in the Fourth international and led to the split in the American section.

However, today we have the imposing evidence of Russian economic policy accumulated in a dozen countries under varying circumstances. The arguments of the "workers' staters" in 1939-40, particularly those which linked

Russian policy to the military-strategic exigencies of the war, still had some degree of plausibility. Today, however, in the light of the vast evidence of Russian economic policy in a dozen countries under varying circumstances, the arguments of the "workers' staters" have not only been robbed of any shred of plausibility but have emerged in full flower as a thoroughly reactionary political line. It is only the internal contradictions of the theory that permit its adherents, by means of bad logic, to save themselves from being swept openly into the position of defenders and apologists of Stalinism. (The emergence of the pro-Stalinist faction of defenders of the "bureaucratic social revolution" theory among the French Trotskyists, led by an old militant, is a warning of what happens to "workers' staters" who seek to iron out the contradictions between their theory and politics. We will comment on this phenomenon at another time).

The "workers' staters" have denied the existence of a class of exploiters in Russia by describing the bureaucracy as "privileged stratum" which lives a parasitic existence "cheating and robbing" the workers. Stories of looting and robbing still had an incidental character. But how explain the systematic appropriation of the means of production by the Russians in every country they have entered, that feature of Russian occupation policy that has been most consistent applied, whether in Berlin, Vienna, Bucharest or Harbin?

Is this mere looting carried on by the bureaucracy in the same manner in which it "cheats and robs" the Russian worker to what use do the bureaucrats intend to put this equipment? Is it merely as a trophy of the war that a lathe or forge is transported from Berlin to Moscow? Perhaps it will be placed in his cellar or his garage by some bureaucrat to be

Socialist Appeal on Stalin-Hitler pact, August 1939. When Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, Stalin switched sides again

admired by his friends along with such other booty as cameras, pianos, and billiard tables? Of course not.

It will be installed in a factory, and used in production. How does the bureaucracy benefit from such "cheating and robbing" of the occupied countries? It is not the mere possession of the lathe from which he benefits but rather that which is produced on the lathe. But who produces it? The Russian worker. So, you see, the lathe is means for the added "cheating and robbing" of the Russia working class by the "privileged stratum"! What odd language to describe the appropriation of means of production for the purpose of exploiting labour. Logic has ever taken its revenge upon those who sought to do it violence.

The ludicrous end of the attempt to describe Russian imperialism in terms of "looting" (just like they "rob and cheat at home") has forced the "workers' staters" to seek a more base explanation. They have now discovered that the

The struggle for the victory of socialism is inseparably and increasingly bound up with the struggle for national freedom in the advanced countries

economic basis of the Russian expropriations abroad is rooted in the attempt to carry through the fourth Five-Year Plan. "The regime sees no way out in the economic field save through the realisation of the fourth Five-Year Plan, which cannot be achieved by the devastated country without the resources of the 'buffer zones'." (*Fourth International*, March 1946). If the regime sees no way out except through the fourth Five-Year Plan, and if the fourth Five-Year Plan can only be achieved with the resources of the "buffer zones" (how delicate!), is this not saying that that regime sees no way out except through the resources of the "buffer zones"? The economic policy of the Russians in the occupied countries is not therefore, merely the "excesses" of the bureaucracy, not mere "looting," not the "cheating" and "robbing" by a "privileged stratum," but something which is fundamental and necessary to Russian economic operation and survival.

Yet this very fourth Five-Year Plan was hailed by the same magazine in September as evidence that Russia is... a workers' state. ("The very projection of the fourth Five-Year Plan constitutes the latest corroboration of the correctness of our analysis of the class nature of the USSR as a workers' state, although badly degenerated under Stalinist rule.") It is a workers' state because it needs a plan which requires the economic exploitation of its subject nations. How those who swallowed the "counter-revolutionary workers' state" gag over the "imperialist workers' state"!

The dilemma in the realm of theory always appears, in one form or another, sooner or later, in the realm of politics. A theory which serves no political ends, which is not a guide in politics, is pretty much of academic interest at best; at worst, it is a substitute for politics.

In the long run—it may even be said—the dispute over the class character of the Stalinist state (workers' state, degenerated workers' state, badly degenerated workers' state, workers' state which has degenerated to the point where it is no longer a workers' state, capitalist state, bureaucratic-collectivist state) can thin down to an extremely ethereal business unless it is linked up with politics—the political program and the political struggle that follows from it. Indeed, what other real test is there of theory except "praxis," the political struggle?

Let us take an example, and it is anything but an unimportant one: What political line do the "workers' staters" propose for the occupied countries? They say, with a notable lack of vigour, that they condemn the Russian occupation and looting of the means of production which leaves workers jobless and hungry and without any perspective of economic rehabilitation. From which it follows? From which—so far as they are concerned—nothing follows!

What should follow, it would be thought by anyone moderately well acquainted with Marxian politics, is the demand for the ousting of the Russian troops (as well as the Anglo-American, it goes without saying) or at least for the withdrawal of the Russian troops, and the demand that the looted machinery and the kidnapped workers be returned to their homeland.

Right here is the dilemma, however. Not only don't they make these demands, which are the elementary duty of every evolutionary socialist, but they can't make them. Give up the "buffer zones" that guarantee the success of the fourth Five Year Plan (in English: that guarantee the further exploitation of the masses and the economic consolidation of the bureaucracy)? Give back the means of production that have become part of the property of the workers' state (in English: the workers' prison)? Impossible!

If it is a workers' state (of any kind), then the newly-acquired means of production, including the slave labourers, have become the chattels of the workers' state and thus

enhanced its economic strength; and how can "we" demand that anything be done to weaken the economic strength of the workers' state? Obviously, "we" cannot. If we make these demands upon the Stalinist bureaucracy, we may—God forbid—be implying that it is the state and that the property belongs to it and not in any sense to the Russian workers. Just as obviously, we cannot do that either. It conflicts, as it were, with our theory of Russia as a workers' state.

The "workers' staters" are tied by a long rope to the chariot of the "bureaucratic counter-revolutionary socialist revolution," and the faster that chariot moves the shorter the rope becomes.

Bureaucratic-collectivist imperialism, or Stalinist imperialism for short, can no longer be considered an accidental or incidental phenomenon. It is rooted in the needs of the Russian economy. It springs from Stalinist Russia's irrepressible need to remake the world in its own image as the only means of establishing security for its own social form; the need to satisfy the pressing requirements of the state economy by extending the "primitive accumulation" from the "internal" field to the "external," from the expropriation, first, of the Russian proletariat and, then, of the large "remnants" of the bourgeoisie" (i.e. kulaks), to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie of other nations (Germany, Hungary, Rumania) and of whole nations in the period of the Second World War and now of the fourth Five-Year Plan.

The existence of Stalinist imperialism, its rapacious and utterly reactionary character, are indisputable. Anyone who requires more evidence than has been supplied by the last few years, and most recently in the Baltic and Balkan countries, in Poland and Germany, in Iran and Manchuria, will probably be satisfied only if he himself is converted into a slave-labourer under the lash of the Stalinist empire.

It does not follow, in our view, that the future of this empire is in any way assured. Far from it. There has been such overwhelming evidence in our own days that this is the period of the agony and collapse of empire, that there is no warrant for the view that the Stalinist empire, based upon what is still one of the backward countries among the big powers, has the prospect of either consolidating its expansion or even of maintaining itself for long. The long overdue crisis inside Russia — broad hints of which are reluctantly revealed in Stalin's own recent speech — cannot be

repressed by state force for very much longer. Not only that. The peoples conquered by Stalinism, and they now number tens of millions, suffer under a multiplication of class oppression and exploitation by national oppression. Far from strengthening the oppressor class and nation, the establishment of this condition only serves to undermine it and in good time to destroy it.

What the bureaucracy may look upon as a conqueror's wreath around its brow will not be long in slipping down to a noose around its neck.

The "national question" — that is, the rebellion of the millions of peoples enslaved by the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo after the German conquest of Europe—proved to be just such a tightening noose around the neck of all the Hitlers. The neck of the Stalinist bureaucracy will not prove to be any stouter. The mortal blow may very well be delivered first from the outer periphery of the Stalinist empire, for substantially the same reasons that Marx so many decades ago declared that capitalism would be struck fatally from its extremities, where it is weakest.

To wait passively for this to happen is to guarantee that it will at the very least be delayed. The interests of the working class and of socialist internationalism demand an active policy of political struggle against Stalinist imperialism. To "condemn" Stalinist "expansion" without a program of demands and struggle against it, is Gandhism. To "condemn" the annexations without actively fighting for the national freedom of the subjugated lands is, as Lenin said of Luxemburg and Pyatakov in another connection, "inconsistent annexationism." That at best; at worst, it is Stalinist apologetics.

The struggle for the victory of socialism is inseparably and increasingly bound up with the struggle for national freedom in the advanced countries, as we have repeatedly argued. This profoundly important truth is no less valid in the fight against Stalinist imperialism today than it was and remains in the fight against the imperialism of finance capital.

Abridged from The New International, April 1946. The "orthodox Trotskyists" did in fact raise the call for the withdrawal of USSR troops from Eastern Europe soon after this article was written.

Freedom in equality

By Max Shachtman

THE fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution of November 7, 1917, has been celebrated all over Russia and in many other countries. The triumph of that revolution marked the most important dividing line in the history of mankind: between the end of the age of capitalism and the beginning of the age of socialism. That is how every thoughtful person judged it at the time, and the judgement remains fundamentally sound.

The forty following years have shown, it is true, that this line is not as straight and clear as we first believed. It has often been twisted and tangled up since the ten titanic days that shook the world.

It has bent back upon itself and been broken off by unforeseen detours or overlaid with rubbish. But it has not been obliterated from the consciousness and aspirations of tens of millions of people, far more in number today than there were four decades ago.

If the achievement of socialism will, as we believe, signify a great new epoch for man, there is nothing in the annals of his striving for freedom that more fully merits celebration than the first herald of the socialist age.

Yet, nowhere, least of all in Russia herself, did the official celebrations of the revolution raise the banners under which it was won or extol the programme to which it was devoted. There is no mystery about that. If the workers and peasants who carried out the revolution of 1917 would fail to see the fulfilment of its promises and hopes in 1957, it is not because the revolution has matured and flowered beyond their dreams, but because it was cut down and crushed by a counter-revolution.

It is in reality this counter-revolution that has just been celebrated under the command of its beneficiaries, just as it has been for a good quarter of a century.

The importance of this counter-revolution is hard to overstate. Indeed, it can be said, even if it sounds paradoxical, that the failure to understand this counter-revolution lies at the base of almost every misunderstanding and misjudgement of the revolution which it displaced. And those are in turn the source of most of the immense confusion that prevails today about socialism and the socialist movement both among their supporters and their opponents.

The essence of the Bolshevik Revolution was the transfer of all power in the country to the Soviets (Councils) of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies.

Russia was then being ravaged by a crisis inherited from the Czarist regime and unalleviated by its first successors. The whole people was sick and tired of the war; the peasants, who formed the bulk of the population, wanted the land for themselves; the workers wanted an end to the paralysis in industrial life which was accompanied by rampant profiteering; and almost everybody wanted a democratic regime that would wipe out all vestiges of Czarist autocracy.

The first heirs of collapsed Czarism could not even begin to solve the crisis. The genius of Lenin, and of the Bolsheviks whom he finally persuaded to follow him, lay in proposing a

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new and revolutionary solution to the problems of the crisis.

Let the peasants simply take the land they till. Let the workers themselves set the economy into rational motion by establishing their own organised control of industry, starting right in the shops and factories. Let the people as a whole end the war on the instant by proposing a democratic peace without annexations or tribute.

And who or what is to guarantee that these measures can not only be undertaken but carried out? The mass of the people themselves, not as brought together in institutions for which the Bolsheviks or anybody else had worked out a faultless blueprint in a political laboratory, but as they had already been brought together, spontaneously and naturally, of their own accord, into organisations embracing virtually all the toiling people of city and village and the military forces as well — the Soviets.

The Bolsheviks did not invent Soviets. They did not create them, not in the Revolution of 1905 or in the Revolution of 1917. These councils were the elementary form of the people's demand for self-determination and self-government.

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incisive expression to this demand in terms of the already organised life of the Russian people.

In a country where the official, although unelected, government (the "Provisional Government") showed not the slightest ability to govern, let alone to comply with the wishes of the people, the Bolshevik slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" proved to be irresistible.

Tirelessly and in language understandable by all, the Bolsheviks repeated: If the peasant to have the land, if the worker is to have control in the factory, if the people are to have peace — the Soviets which already embrace all the people must have the power to govern.

They pointed out that even the most frantic opponents of this idea, the supporters of the Kerensky Provisional Government, nevertheless always referred to the Soviets as the "revolutionary democracy". The idea that the revolutionary democracy should establish itself as the state power prevailed.

The Bolshevik Revolution thus confirmed the prediction and war cry of the Communist Manifesto seventy years earlier: "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy".

If this central characteristic of the Bolshevik Revolution is not grasped in full as the heart and soul of the revolution, of the reason why the people rallied to the Bolsheviks, and of why they all carried it through with unexampled enthusiasm and sacrificing spirit, everything of importance will be missed or misunderstood.

Lenin, who was so often plain to the point of bluntness, even harshness, was never so direct, harsh, unambiguous and unyielding as he was on this score in 1917.

He would not even list to any proposals for a peace programme, for a land reform, for reorganising the economy, for any change or promised change in the social life of the country, unless it was coupled with the proposal for all power to the people that would enable them in reality to carry out the proposals in their own interests, all power to the people already organised democratically in their Soviets.

In these muddled days, when the mere word "planning", for example, sends so many people, including socialists, into paroxysms of approval, it is instructive as well as refreshing to recall Lenin's own words just a few days before the revolution:

"The proletariat, when victorious, will act thus. It will set the economists, engineers, agricultural experts and so on to work out a 'plan' *under the control* of the workers' organisations, to test it, to seek means of saving labour by means of centralism, and of securing the most simple, cheap, convenient, general control.

"We shall pay the economists, statisticians, technicians, good money, but — but we shall not give them anything to eat unless they carry out this work honestly and entirely *in the interests of the workers*.

"We are in favour of centralism and of a 'plan', but it must be the centralism and the plan of the *proletarian* state — the proletarian regulation of production and distribution in the interests of the poor, the labouring, the exploited, *against* the exploiters".

Everywhere the emphasised words are Lenin's, and they give us a far truer idea of his own conception of the essential features of the socialist revolution and the reconstruction of

society on socialist foundations than is to be found in a thousand books by his successors or his adversaries. They give us also a true idea of what the Russian workers wanted at that time, and found in the programme of the revolution.

This is not the place to set forth all the reasons why the idea of the revolution could not be maintained for long in the isolation of an economically backward land, harassed for years of its infancy by hostile forces at home and abroad. It may suffice to say that there were few problems the revolutionary leaders were more keenly aware of than that of remaining in isolation, that is, of the revolution failing to extend its frontiers to the advanced countries of Europe.

In that event — and they did not hesitate to proclaim this view over and over again — the counter-revolution would triumph and the revolution would perish. In this, they proved to be only too tragically correct. They did not, to be sure, foresee the unique form and nature that the counter-revolution would have, but then neither did anyone else.

At first, the curbs were imposed by the rigours of the civil war and the war against foreign intervention, and, on the whole, no working-class government could or would have acted otherwise. But when, after the civil war ended, the curbs were not only maintained and extended but were even exalted as principles for a normal development of socialism, the revolutionary ideal, the essential characteristic of working-class self-administration, starting in the factories and running all the way up to the highest governmental institutions, was undermined more and more gravely.

Without the increasingly conscious self-administration of society by the producers — for which the constant expansion, not restriction, of democracy is a synonym — socialism is a fraud, or in any case unrealisable.

And to the extent that the architects of the revolution restricted democracy, in the Soviets, in the trade unions, and even in the Bolshevik party itself in the first few years of the revolution, they contributed to the undermining of the socialist revolution itself, to enfeebling the resistive capacity of the socialist organism.

In that sense, they themselves unwittingly facilitated the work of the counter-revolution in completely destroying the organism. Once this is said — and the wisdom which hindsight makes so much easier dictates that it be said — the distinction must nevertheless be maintained. The main who unthinkingly neglects to maintain the fireproofing qualities of the home cannot, regardless of justified criticism, be equated with the arsonist whose work of destroying the home utterly has been made easier.

The essence of the Stalinist counter-revolution lies in the destruction, root and branch, of every form, institution and right of democracy. Perhaps worse even than this sinister achievement is the fact that it has destroyed, as it had to, the socialist thought of an entire generation of revolutionists who were drawn to the Russian Revolution: those it has not corrupted intellectually it has demoralised, those it has not demoralised it has disoriented, those it has not disoriented it has reduced to cynical courtesans.

The whole conception of the socialist society and the road to it, the whole conception of a political movement having socialism as its goal — all this has been hideously distorted beyond recognition or resemblance to what it always was in the past. There is not a single element in the defence of the Stalinist regime by ardent advocate or mild

The first all-Russian Congress of Soviets

apologist that is not an abominably discrediting abuse of socialism.

The fact that the gulf between producer and director of production is greater in Russia than in any modern country of the world, is never even mentioned by defenders of Stalinist "socialism". The fact that the Russian worker (and peasant) has less to say about determining the conditions of production than has the worker in any other modern country, is of no importance to this "socialism" — even though Marx so rightly emphasises that the rule of society lies in the hands of those who determine the conditions of production.

The fact that there are not and for decades have not been any workers' or peasants' or soldiers' Soviets in Russia — or that where the people establish such councils, as in Hungary last year, it is Russian tanks and cannon that blast them out of existence — may or may not be of importance "in itself", but it is of no relevance to the reality of this "socialism".

The fact that literally millions of people, guilty of the crime of having different political views or even innocent of the crime, were slaughtered by the Russian regime with a cold-bloodedness and callousness excelled, if at all, only by Hitler's regime, is, belatedly, deplored, but does not change the "socialist" character of the regime.

The fact that the people as a whole, even including the

The Russian Revolution had as one of its achievements the reinvigoration of international socialism which was so deeply discredited by the blood and filth of the First World War

members of what is supposed to be the ruling party, do not have the right to speak, to meet, to publish, to vote, to worship (if they wish to), is of no fundamental consequence to this "socialism" — it might be better, conceded some apologists, if they had these rights, but it is not fatal to socialism if they do not have them.

What, then, is important to socialism? Planning? But that is a commonplace to capitalism in every crisis, particularly the crisis of war, when production is organised according to plan, instead of being left to "free enterprise" and the regulation of the capitalist market.

The overcoming of illiteracy? That is almost a commonplace, also, under capitalism; indeed, the highest development of capitalism is increasingly impossible without the elimination of illiteracy.

The stratification of the means of production and exchange, a formula which has a hypnotically numbing effect on the thinking of some socialists? And the enormous development of the productive forces with which the Stalinist regime has so greatly awed the entire world?

There is no private ownership of property under Stalinism, it is true, and the development of the productive forces is likewise a fact. But it is a terrible mark of the deformation of socialist thinking that these two facts are somehow equated with socialism or the organic development toward socialism.

Without democracy, without complete political and administrative control by the producers, the centralisation of all economic power, all the means of production and distribution, in the hands of the state combined with the expansion of the means of production, signify not the development of socialism but the establishment of the most potent tyranny of modern times — exceeding, not exceeded by, the tyranny of capitalist exploitation.

Here indeed has Stalinism wrought its destruction of the socialist mind as well as the socialist goal.

A concrete foundation is essential to a good home, just like the nationalisation of the means of production and distribution is essential to the construction of a socialist society. But on the same foundation of concrete can be built a prison (in fact, the foundations of most prisons are supposed to be stronger than of most homes).

Very few people, however, speak of prisons as "imperfect homes" the way the Stalinist states are sometimes called, by affable apologists, "imperfect socialism". And even fewer people are ready to call upon the prisoners for "unconditional defence" of their prison because the concrete foundations on which it rests might some day be used to build a happy home on.

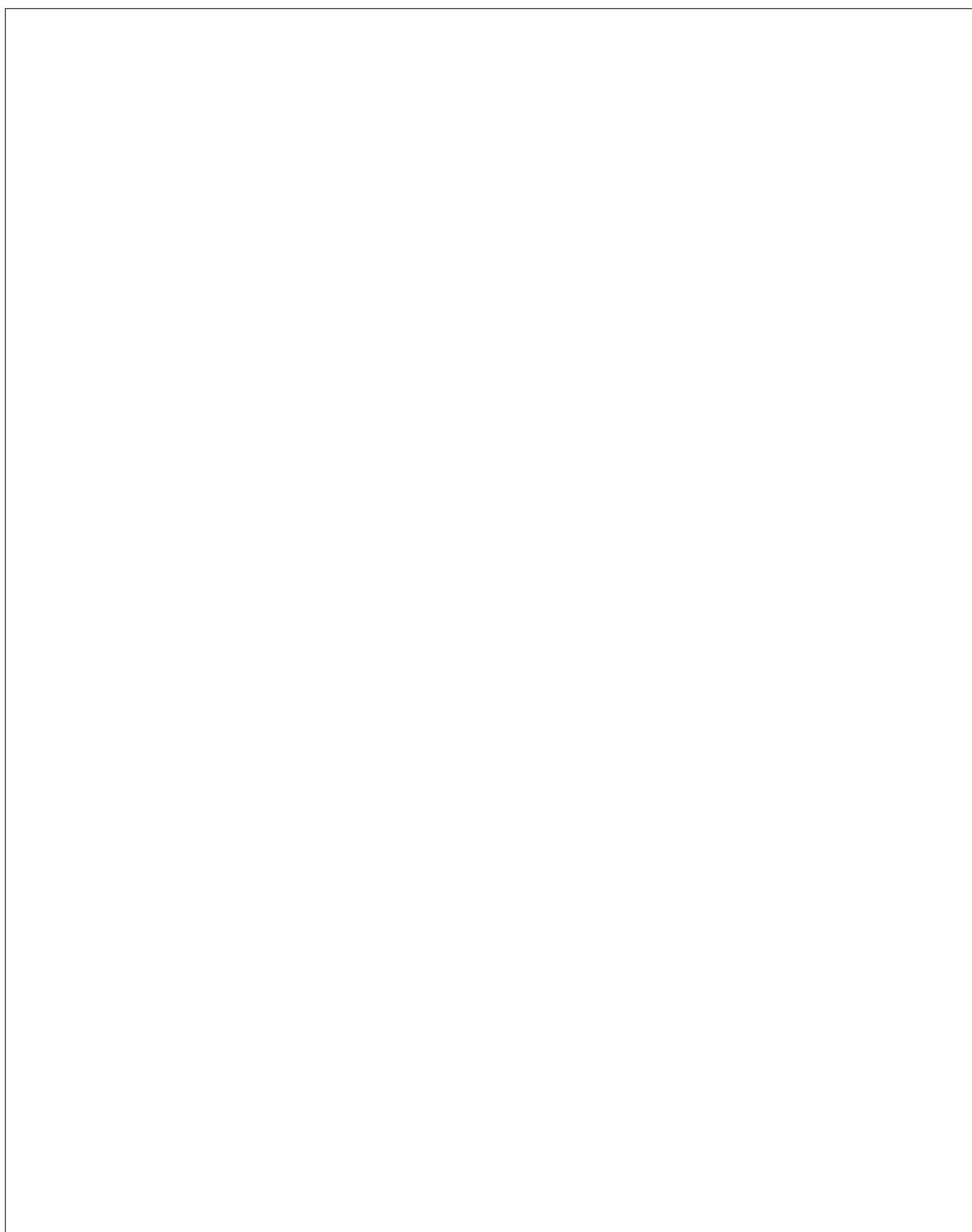
Of all the known societies based on class exploitation, our socialist teacher, Frederick Engels, once wrote:

"It is not the producers who control the means of production, but the means of production which control the producers. In such a society each new lever of production is necessarily transformed into a new means for the subjection of the producers to the means of production".

There is not a capitalist country where each "new lever of production", where every expansion of the productive forces, has more effectively subjected the producers than it has those who are under the rule of the class that owns and controls the means of production through its monopoly of state power in the Stalinist states.

It is not socialism we see there, but its brutal denial in the name of socialism.

The Russian Revolution had as one of its achievements the



Socialist Appeal cartoon showing the death of the Third International and the advent of the 4th — the bayonet reads "Stalinism" (Oct 1938)

reinvigoration of international socialism which was so deeply discredited by the blood and filth of the First World War which most of the European socialist parties supported with chauvinistic enthusiasm. The new movement drew its inspiration from the socialist idea which was being transformed into reality by the Russian working class.

The promise which it bore, despite all its primitive and infantile errors, was as completely smashed by the Stalinist counter-revolution as was the Russian revolution itself.

When one of the leaders of the Bolsheviks said at a party congress in 1919 that it would not be a bad thing if all the Communist parties of the world were subordinated to the Central Committee of the Russian party, Lenin was horrified

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to the point of the rebuke:

"If there were anything like this in the programme, there would not even be any need to criticise it: the authors of such a proposal would have dug their own graves".

When the Stalinist regime finally succeeded in reducing all the Communist parties to vassals of the Russian party Secretariat, it dug the grave of the Communist movement as a working-class or socialist movement.

The international socialist movement today, too, requires reinvigoration and reorientation. In our eyes, the aim of the socialist movement remains, or must again become, the establishment of a working-class government, the winning of the battle of democracy, as the road to the socialist reorgani-

sation of society.

But all that has happened in the last quarter of a century — the rise of fascism, on the one side, and the rise of Stalinist totalitarianism masked as socialism, on the other side — emphasises the urgent and indispensable need of once more identifying, not just associating but identifying, the fight for socialism with the fight for democracy in every part of the world and in every sphere of social life — not in Russia alone, but in Algeria too, not in Hungary alone but in Guatemala and Okinawa as well, not in parliamentary reforms alone but in the foundations of society, the factories, as well; not in bureaucratic arbitrariness in the Kremlin alone but in the United States as a whole and in our trade unions in particular.

In the very first periodical published in England by the German Communists of the time of Marx and Engels, with whom they were associated, the *Communist Journal* of London, in September 1847, we find these remarkably timely words:

"We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse.

"There are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality.

"We are convinced, and we intended to return to the matter in subsequent issues, that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society based upon communal ownership".

The socialist movement which maintains the divorce between socialism and democracy, between socialism and freedom, will never succeed in establishing socialism, but only in discrediting it. The socialist movement which champions, in word and in deed, the identity of the two, which realises in the social flesh the idea of the Russian Revolution of freedom in equality, will be irresistible. The future belongs to it.

From Labor Action, 18 November 1957

The working class is central

By Max Shachtman

WHE the comrades of the Independent Socialist League, the comrades of the Socialist Youth League, the comrades who are with us in solidarity in our work, consider ourselves as heirs of the Trotskyist movement when it was a living movement in the full sense of the word, when it represented the imperishable tradition of revolutionary Marxism. And today, 25 years after the founding of that movement, looking backward with a minimum of maudlin sentimentality and a maximum of calm, objective and reasoned analysis — what do we celebrate on this 25th anniversary?

What do we seek to represent in the working class movement as a whole, of which we are an inseparable part? What fundamentally justifies our independent and separate existence, our stiff-necked obduracy in maintaining that existence, in refusing to give up in insisting not only that we will hold on to what we have but get more and more until our ideas infuse the bloodstream of the whole working class movement?

It is the essence of revolutionary Marxism — that respect in which it always differed, as it differs today, from every other social and political tendency, from every other movement, from every other mode of thought in society.

And that essence can be summed up in these four words: Marxism is proletarian socialism.

They say — by “they” I mean professors former professors, aspirant professors — that there are as many schools of socialism as there are socialists. Every Princeton student bursts his seams when he hears this: “There are other socialisms, and which of the 57 varieties are you referring to?”

I, who like a joke as well as the next man, would be the last man in the world to dream of depraving these poor, intellectually poverty-stricken apologists for a decaying capitalist social order of their little joke. And you will admit it is little.

So I will say: Yes, historically and actually — if it will make you happy, and after all we socialists are for the extension of happiness — there are 57 and even a greater number of socialisms.

When Marx came on the intellectual scene, in Germany, in France, in Belgium and in England, there were any number of socialisms; and there were socialisms before Marx was born; and there were socialisms promulgated after he died. Marx mentioned a few in his deathless *Communist Manifesto*. There were the “True Socialists”, the Christian socialists, the reformer socialists, cooperative socialists, the reformer socialists, cooperative socialists, bourgeois socialists, feudal socialists, agrarian socialists, royal and imperial Prussian socialists. They existed and continue to exist. In our time we had “National-Socialists”; we have had if I may say so “Stalinist socialism”. Stalinist socialism — I don’t like to say that, but we do have all sorts of “socialisms”.

But even if it gives the professors and the Vassar students another burst seam, I say there is one socialism that we adhere to. Even if we will not say that this is the “true” socialism, that it is the “right” socialism, that it is the “genuine” socialism — we will say that it is our socialism.

If you don’t find it “true” you can become a royal and imperial Prussian socialist, you can become a Stalinist “socialist”, you can become (every man is entitled to his joke) a “Sidney Hook socialist”. For we believe in everybody having the right to be any kind of socialist, or anti-socialist, he wants. We claim no more for our socialism, than the fact that it is ours.

Marxian socialism is distinguished from all the others, not in the fact that it holds to the so-called labour theory of value, and not even in the fact that it developed the ideas of dialectical materialism, and not even in the fact that it participates in and prosecutes the class struggle. Its fundamental and irreconcilable difference with all the others is this: Marxism is proletarian socialism.

The great discovery of Marxism — what distinguished it as a new socialism in its day, what distinguished the great discovery of Karl Marx in his search for a “bearer of philosophy” as he used to say in his early days, in his search for a “carrier” out of the contradictions of capitalism — the great discovery of Marxism was the revolutionary character of the modern proletariat.

That is the essence, that is the durable characteristic, of Marxian socialism. Proletarian socialism, scientific socialism as distinct from all other socialist schools, from utopian socialism, dates from that great discovery — the social revolutionary character of the modern proletariat.

WHEN speaking of socialism and socialist revolution we seek “no condescending saviours” as our great battle hymn, the International, so ably says. We do not believe that well-wishing reforms — and there are well-wishing reformers — will solve the problems of society, let alone bring socialism.

We are distinguished from them all in this one respect above all others — we believe that task belongs to the prole-

tariat, only the proletariat itself. That is a world-shattering idea. It overshadows all social thought.

The most profound, important and lasting thought in Marxism, the most pregnant thought in Marxism is contained in Marx’s phrase that the emancipation of the proletariat is the task of the proletariat itself. It is clearly the most revolutionary idea very conceived, if you understand it in all of its great implications.

That is why we are in the tradition of the Paris Commune, for example, the first great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself. That is why we are in the tradition of the great revolution in Russia — the Bolshevik revolution — the second great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself. That’s why we defend it from its detractors. That’s why we are so passionate about it. That’s why we are, if you will, so “dogmatic”. We know what we are defending even if they do not always know what they are attacking.

And that is what we learn all over again from Trotskyists what we have begun to forget, what we have begun to ignore, what we have begun to take for granted.

If I may speak for myself, I can tell you I will never forget the explosion in my Communist smugness when for the first time I read Trotsky’s criticism of the draft programme of the Comintern, written when he had already been banished to Alma-Ata in 1928, written for the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. What a commentary it is on the Communist movement in 1928 that, so far back, that precious Marxian document, which is so fresh to this hour, had to be written in exile in Russian in 1928 — in exile! It had to be transmitted by theft; Cannon had to steal his copy in Moscow

The great discovery of Marxism — what distinguished it as a new socialism in its day — the great discovery of Marxism was the revolutionary character of the modern proletariat.

from the Comintern secretariat and smuggle it into the US. It had to be disseminated here in the Communist Party illicitly, to three or four people who would read it behind locked doors — because if the leaders of the CP found out that we had it (let alone that we were reading it, let alone that we were favourably influenced by it) they would put us on trial and expel us, and they did.

To read that work and to know what was really going on in that fight of Trotskyism, that it was always a question of international socialism versus national socialism, the coordinative efforts to bring about socialism of the entire working class of the world as against the messianic, nationalistic utopian idea that it could be established in one country alone by the efforts of a benevolent bureaucracy of the working class — that had a shattering effect upon our thinking.

We learned then from Trotskyism what we hold so firmly to now: There can be no socialism without the working class of the world, no socialism without the working class of Russia. Twenty-five years later we see the results of building socialism without the international working class — without the Russian working class and against the Russian working class. No matter how many books you leaf through, no matter how old they are, where will you find the story of such an unendurable tyranny as has been established in the Stalinist countries, where “socialism” has been built without the working class and against the working class?

We are the living carriers and embodiment of the ideas to be learned from these events. We are its living teachers, for those whom we can get to listen in these days of darkness, confusion and cowardice.

In this country we have learned far more about the meaning of the idea of an American labour party, a labour party based on the trade unions, than we ever dreamed was represented by that idea when we first put it forward in 1922 in the American Communist movement, than when we put it forward again and again later in the Trotskyists movement. To us it represents a declaration of independence of the working class, its first great step in the country toward self-emancipation, and also to us it represents the remedy for that series of tragedies, calamities, misunderstandings and frustrations represented by New Dealism — that is, collaboration of the working class with a benevolent liberal bourgeoisie.

And what it represents runs through everything we say and everything we do and everything we want others to do in the United States and elsewhere: Not with them — not under

them — you yourselves are the masters not only of your own fate but the masters of the fate of all society if you but take control of society into your own hands! That is your destiny! That is the hope of us all.

We are optimistic because that will remain our hope in the greatest hours of adversity, while everywhere else lies pessimism. Our role is to teach Marxism, that Marxism which is proletarian socialism, Marxist politics, socialist politics. Our idea of politics boil down to this revolutionary idea — to teach the working class to rely upon itself, upon its own organisation, upon its own programme, upon its own leadership. Upon its own ideas and need for democracy, and to subordinate itself at any time to the interest, the needs, the leadership, the programme, the movement, the organisation, or the ideas of any other class.

We regret that in other branches of the socialist movement or what is called the socialist movement, that idea does not dominate every thought. We are proud that in our section of the socialist movement it does dominate every thought. We are proud that in our section of the socialist movement it does dominate every thought and every deed. That’s why we are Marxists; that’s what we learned all over again in many intellectual and political battles under that peerless teacher and peerless revolutionary Trotsky.

And we start by teaching socialists to rely upon themselves.

WHEN we read for the first time the New Course by Trotsky, his work directed against the first big and dangerous manifestations of bureaucratism in the Russian Soviet state, another explosion took place in our smugness. I venture to call it — it’s an awkward phrase and I hope it’s not too badly misunderstood — a bible of working class democracy. This was Trotsky’s brilliant simple overwhelming pamphlet on how a socialist movement should act inside and outside, how a socialist state should act, how socialist leaders and socialist ranks, the socialist elders and the socialist youth, should act toward themselves and one another...

What we have learned more sturdily than every before, what is more completely a part of our Marxian idea of proletarian socialism, is that there is no socialism and no progress to socialism without the working class, without the working class revolution, without the working class in power, without the working class having been lifted to “political supremacy” (as Marx called it) to their “victory of democracy” (as Marx also calls it). No socialism and no advance to socialism without it! That is our rock. That is what we build the fight for the socialist future on. That is what we’re unshakably committed to.

Look at what has happened — I hold them up as horrible examples — to all and singly who have renounced this struggle after having known its meaning. They have no confidence in the social-revolutionary power of the proletariat — that is the alpha and omega of them all. One will embroider it with colour thread and another with another, but at bottom that is it.

I claim to know whereof I speak because I know so many of them and know them so intimately — excuse me, knew them so intimately and know also what caused their renunciation of the struggle. They have been corrupted by that most ancient of corrupt ideas: that as for the lower class, there must always be one; that the lower class must always be exploited and oppressed; that there is not other way. That’s their real feeling and that’s what caused their renunciation of the struggle.

They are the Stalinists in reverse. They have lost their faith in the socialist faith for that reason and for that reason primarily and fundamentally.

They have lost their respect for the working class because for so long a period of time it can, and it has, and it does, lie dormant and stagnant and seems to be absolutely passive, immobilised in permanence. In other words, they have doomed it — this working class which has shown itself so capable of so many miracles in the past hundred and two hundred years of its struggle against the bourgeoisie and against oppression in general — doomed it to eternal servitude. That’s why they are not Trotskyists; that’s why they’re not socialists; that’s why they’re not democrats; that’s why they’re not people with human integrity any longer.

Ask any of them point-blank (if you’re on sufficiently good terms with them): do you believe that the working class can every rule society and usher in a classless socialist regime? Do you believe that the working class has that capacity innate within it? Not one of them, if he is honest, will admit agreeing with it. You will notice everyone of them beginning to hedge and to hem and to haw and to talk about 25 other subjects — because in all of them the corrupt idea has taken sound and firm roots that the working class will always be oppressed and exploited by someone or another.

Look at Burnham and his “Machiavellians” — the whole theory is there, the whole snobbish bourgeois theory that goes back to feudalism and goes back to slavery before that: there have to be exploited workers and the best they can hope

for is that the rulers fight among themselves and that in the interstices of this fight they may be able to promote their own interests just a little bit without ever changing their exploited status.

What is this at bottom but a variety of that notorious philosophy which the Stalinoid intellectuals and apologists used to whisper to us in justification of their support of the Kremlin: "You don't mean to say that you really believe that the working class can emancipate themselves, can themselves take power?... They need a strong hand over them..."

These people can't absorb the idea that the workers can free themselves. Take that diluted variety of these sceptics, the pro-war socialists (if you can call them socialists):

We would be for a Third Camp you see, if it existed. Show us a Third Camp and we would be the first ones to be for it — if it were big and powerful and had lots of dues-paying members. But there is no Third Camp now, so why be for it? But the minute it comes into being — we don't believe that it will ever happen, of course, but if despite our scepticism it should come into being against capitalism (which were are not really for) and against Stalinism (which we detest), we will support it with all the power of speech and pen at our command. But until then allow us to be the snobs and careerists that we are.

Those who swoon with delight at being accepted nowadays in respectable society (of which, alas, we are not a part) have lost all respect for themselves — that's what it is with the cynics, with the somewhat milder version, the sceptics, the climbers, the turncoats and the veterans who never saw combat in the class struggle and who nevertheless have the effrontery to live off pensions from the bourgeoisie today in various institutions reserved for them exclusively.

For us who have nothing in common with such people and want nothing in common with such people, in all their 57 schools, the 25th anniversary comes after a quarter century of defeats and setbacks, yes, but defeats and setbacks accumulated only because men and movements left the working class in the lurch.

But although it is silent so often, and silent for so longer, and although it is disoriented, this proletariat — today's proletariat, or tomorrow's like yesterday's — will outlast this trial as it will outlast its old leaders and resume its iron march to socialist freedom. Our confidence in it, maintained these 25 years, is undiminished 25 years after we took up the banner of renewed faith in it and renewed willingness to learn from it, as well as to teach it what we know.

For the man who lives for himself, alone like a clod of mud in a ditch, like a solitary animal in a savage forest, 25 years of dedication to socialism is an incomprehensible as it is unendurable. But we are, thank god, not like the clods of mud, the careerists and the opportunists, the philistines of all sorts and varieties who have specially strong fountains of strength in this last trench of world capitalism, the United States. We are people who have been intellectually and spiritually emancipated by the great philosophical and cultural revolution in thought that Marx began and Trotsky so richly expanded. We are the fortunate ones who are not resigned and know that they need no resign ourselves, to the inevitability of advancing barbarism, to the decay and disintegration of society.

We know with scientific sureness that no reaction — not matter how strong at the moment, no matter how prolonged — can destroy that social force whose very conditions of existence force it into a revolutionary struggle against the conditions of its existence, the proletariat.

We know with scientific sureness that no matter how dark and powerful reaction may be at any given time, it not only generates but regenerates its gravedigger — that same proletariat, the only social force which class society has endowed with infinite capacity for recuperation from temporary defeat.

And we know with scientific sureness that the achievement of the fullest development of democracy which is socialism, is in safe hands when entrusted to the proletariat and in safe hands only when it is in its charge, for it alone must have democracy for its existence and it alone can realise it in full by its irrepressible aspiration for socialism and its unceasing fight for it.

For the man to whom the debasement and oppression of others is a mortal offence to himself, who cannot live as a free man while others are unfree, who understands that without resisting the decay of society there is no life worth living — for him the informed struggle against exploitation and social iniquity is the blood-stream of life. It is indispensable to the self-realisation of humanity and therefore to the attainment of his own dignity. It is the mark of his respect for his fellow man, of his yearning to gain the respect of others, and therewith to assure his respect for himself.

For such men, and we count ourselves as such these turbulent 25 years are a long episode that has given richer and stouter meaning to the moral life of all who passed through it with their loyalties unimpaired, and it is in this life, the life of freedom, that the founder of our contemporary movement Leon Trotsky was a startling example.

It is to the grand vindication of this life that lies ahead that we renew our bond tonight — the oldest and noblest bond in history, the bond that will be redeemed only on the day when the last chain has been struck from the body and mind of man, so that he may walk for the first time among his equals erect.

• From Max Shachtman's speech on "25 years of Trotskyism in America", delivered on 18 November 1953.

October was a true working class revolution

By Max Shachtman

THE Independent Socialist League does not subscribe to any doctrine called Leninism. It does not have an official position on the subject and I am pretty certain that nobody could get the League to commit itself officially on a term which has been so varying and conflictingly defined as to make discussion of it more often semantic than ideological or political.

To me, and surely to most of our comrades, Leninism is a question primarily of historical importance in our time. Most often what is in people's minds is the Russian Revolution and democracy as the road and aim of socialism. In our view the Russian revolution has long ago been crushed. What is the fundamental and urgent political question is the relation between democracy and socialism. These questions concern socialists today and I want to outline my views on them.

We regard the Russian revolution of 1917, which Lenin led, as a socialist revolution that established a genuine workers' government. I have always defended this proposition and so have our comrades. You yourself have often in the past taken a similar view. I think it worth while here to note the fact that four years after the revolution, Morris Hillquit, a pretty severe critic of the Bolsheviks, wrote these interesting words: "It is pretty idle cavilling to dispute the Socialist character of the Russian revolution... The Russian revolution has taken possession of the government in the name of the workers. It has effectively expropriated capitalist owners and nationalised the greater part of the industries. It has also written into its program the socialisation of the land. Measured by all practical tests it is therefore a Socialist revolution in character as well as intent. If it has not come as a result of the course of historic and economic development outlined by Marx, it has occurred through the working of another set of social conditions and forces, which have proved potent enough to create and maintain it. Its continued existence, year after year, in the face of almost incredible domestic difficulties and embittered foreign attacks, prove that we are not dealing with a mere freakish episode, but with a monumental historic event. This will remain true even if the Soviet government should not prove able to maintain itself indefinitely and should yield to another and substantially different form of government."

Now, I believe that the Soviet government finally yielded to "another and substantially different form of government" under the rise and consolidation of Stalin's power. I believe it to be as different as counter-revolution is from revolution, as different as the destruction of socialism is from the movement toward socialism. When you say that one grew out of the other "by natural processes," I would agree with that it means "as a result of objective material forces." To that, I believe it important to add that Stalinism based itself to a considerable extent upon some of the ideas and institutions defended by Lenin. These it exploited or distorted to serve its own totalitarian and anti-socialist ends. Plainly, they were put forth originally in the desperate, groping attempt to get out of the blind alley formed around the revolution by the walls of the terrible backwardness of the country and the isolation of the republic.

I have in mind, most particularly, the decision of the Tenth Bolshevik Congress to prohibit factions inside the party, which played an enormous role in facilitating the rise of totalitarianism; and the point of view which became a principle defended by the Bolshevik leaders that all parties must be outlawed and kept outlawed. I must say that I unthinkingly accepted this proposition for years in the Communist and Trotskyist movements. But the grim realities of Stalinism forced a reconsideration of many questions. This one was not the least important. Fourteen years ago, I tried to re-examine this vital question, and I hope you will bear with a quotation from the article of 1943:

"The idea of one party in power is one thing, and not at all in violation of either bourgeois or workers' democracy. The idea that all other parties must be, not in opposition, with the rights of oppositions, but in prison, violates both bourgeois and workers' democracy, and it is with the latter that we are concerned here. Even if every non-Bolshevik group, without exception, had resorted to armed struggle against the Soviet power, it was a disastrous mistake to outlaw them in perpetuity..."

"The whole Bolshevik party was politically miseducated and ideologically intimidated against the very idea of more than one party in the country, and for this miseducation none of its leaders can escape his share of the responsibility..."

"The revolutionary Marxists must learn, and then must teach, that the struggle for democratic rights is not just a clever device for embarrassing the undemocratic bourgeoisie,

that the struggle is not confined to the days of capitalism. On the contrary, it is precisely when the new revolutionary power is set up that the struggle for democratic rights and democracy acquires its fullest meaning and its first opportunity for complete realisation.

"The revolutionists after the overturn of capitalism differ from revolutionists before that overturn not in that they no longer demand them, but in the fact that they are for the first time really and fully able to promulgate them and to see to it that they are preserved from all infringement, including infringement by the new state or the bureaucrats in it. The right of free speech, press and assembly, the right to organise and the right to strike, are not less necessary under the dictatorship of the proletariat, but more necessary and more possible.

"Socialism can and will be attained by only the fullest realisation of democracy... That is what the revolutionary Marxists should teach. But first of all they must learn it, and thoroughly. It is one of the most important lessons of the Russian revolution and its decay."

In the past fourteen years, I have expressed these views with increasing insistence and emphasis. I consider them today to be of fundamental importance to the coexistence and cooperation of all socialists whatever other matters they may differ on. It is from this socialist standpoint that I want to fight against the Stalinist regime, the Communist movement, their supporters, defenders and apologists. I am completely agreed that the regime is not just a "mistaken form of socialism" or any kind of socialism, but its betrayal and negation. And as you know, for years I defended the view that far from being some kind of socialism, the Russian regime represents a new form of totalitarian exploitation dominated by a new ruling class.

But I cannot see the political wisdom, or the factual foundation, for considering such an anti-socialist regime as the logical, inevitable and authentic continuation of a socialist revolution. This in precisely the main claim to socialist justification and legitimacy made by the Stalinists. I want to be able to say in any polemic it is necessary to conduct against them: You have not carried out the ideal and principles of the socialist revolution to a logical conclusion — you have betrayed and destroyed it. And I believe that the basic and relevant facts enable me to make that assertion honestly and sincerely. By defending everything that was said and done by Lenin or the other leaders of the revolution? Certainly not, but by emphasising the radical differences between the revolution and the present regime.

I have looked back on some of your own writings of fairly recent times and find them highly relevant to my point. You have written: "In Lenin's time the Communist Party was itself democratic." And: "Everybody knows that Lenin started with an extreme approach to equalitarianism." And: "It is true that in the very early days of the revolution the degree of workers' control in the factories was very great." And more along similar lines.

Now: I want to be able to say, in such debates as I have mentioned, that the Stalinist regimes have wiped out and betrayed all of that. To me, this is dictated by good political sense and is justified by ascertainable facts. I consider it of high political value and significance to say, as you do in your letter to me: "... if Lenin had lived, he might have repudiated Stalinism or been repudiated by it."

If anything, I would put it more emphatically, for it is my deep conviction. I say this without any thought of absolving Lenin or any other Bolshevik leader from their own responsibilities, excesses in the revolution, or of mistakes afterward. But also without any thought of making it mandatory upon all members of a democratic socialist party what you called "absolute identity of opinion" on a subject that is primarily of historical importance, and on which a pretty wide diversity of view exists — as it should — in every part of the socialist international with which I am familiar.

Only a sterile sect demands uniformity of opinion on all questions, historical, theoretical, philosophical, political and tactical. A political movement should and can be built only upon the degree of agreement that is necessary for its to carry out its political tasks effectively. Organisations like the Socialist Labour Party or the Socialist Workers Party are sorry examples of the former. I would like to see the SP-SDF as an encouraging model of the latter.

• From the internal bulletin of the Independent Socialist League, September 1957. This is from a letter to Norman Thomas in the negotiations about the entry of Max Shachtman and his co-thinkers to the Socialist Party. In fact, Shachtman went over very quickly to social democracy, though as far as we know he never repudiated the 1917 revolution. See introduction.

Trotsky taught us class action

By Max Shachtman

TWO years ago, an assassin in the employ of the Stalinist camarilla that rules Russia drove a pickaxe into the head of Leon Trotsky and killed him.

The way of the assassin, Jackson-Morand, was typical of the way of his masters. Even before the fight between them and Trotsky broke out in the Communist Party of Russia, they never faced him in fair and square debate or struggle.

They always operated best from behind the scenes, skulking in the corridors and the dark corners, for the weapons they employed to crush the revolutionary ideas and socialist ideals represented by Trotsky were not of a kind that anybody displays or boasts about openly. They were the weapons of the lie, of deception, of forgery and misrepresentation, of hypocrisy, of frame-up, of ambush, of the stab in the back.

What other weapons can reaction bring to bear against the ideas of revolutionary socialism, the ideas of working class freedom, which nobody represented more brilliantly, more single-mindedly, more honourably in his time than Leon Trotsky? How else can the banner-bearers of truth be stopped or delayed in their advance than by disloyal trickery, skulduggery and the foul stab in the dark?

That is how Trotsky was disposed of by the gang of cut-throats who saw in him the living combination of conscience and brain of the great Russian Revolution which they had destroyed in order to establish their own reactionary sway. But hard as it was to dispose of Trotsky, it is a hundred thousand times harder to dispose of the ideas he represented and the truths he taught because they rest upon the irrepressible needs of the working class and all the oppressed.

For that reason, Trotsky's ideas will never be forgotten so long as there are exploited and oppressed people fighting for victory. For the same reason, Trotsky will be forever enshrined in history after that victory has been won.

What were his ideas? What do they mean for the American working class today?

Over and over again Trotsky showed by logic arguments derived from the rich experience of social struggles throughout the world that there is only one class left in modern society capable of leading the world out of the multitude of contradictions and conflicts that continue to tear it to pieces at the expense of the toiling masses. That class is the working class.

Be it in a backward country like Russia or an advanced state like England; a fascist country like Germany, a semi-feudal militarist dictatorship like Japan, or a democratic country like the United States; a colony like Ceylon, a half-colony like China, a modern imperialist metropolis like England — the working class alone is the consistently progressive class. Any social task that it does not solve

by its own independent action will either not be solved at all, or else will be solved in a most reactionary and harmful way.

You can spot a scoundrel and a fraud a hundred miles off by the scientific test provided for us by Trotsky (and by his own great teachers before him, Lenin, Marx and Engels). You can detect the agent or apologist of any type or variety of exploiter — on the big scale of a monopoly capitalist or the small scale of a trade union bureaucrat — by what he says about the role of the working class.

He will always say, in one set of worlds or another, that the working class must follow the leadership of somebody else; that the working class is composed of a fine bunch of fellows, especially fine for working hard, but that it really is not suited for leadership of society; that the working class is composed of splendid fighters, but they need a clever boss over themselves, preferably one working for the capitalists and their social system.

Watch them like hawks, warned Trotsky. Watch them, be their name Stalin or Hitler, Churchill or Roosevelt, Chiang Kai Shek or Gandhi, Ley or Bevin, or Lozovsky or Green. For all the great differences among them, they have at least this in common: they teach the workers not to rely on their own class strength, not to rely on their own class organisation, not to rely on their own class leadership.

"The emancipation of the working class is the work of the working class itself", said Karl Marx. Trotsky showed how true this was in a hundred different cases. But not merely by professorial argument. He showed it right in the heat of the struggle in every part of the globe, in a dozen different varieties of situations.

No social or political movement can advance progressively, can bring the people to an improved position in any respect, and do it in a durable, consistent way, unless it is led by the working class and spearheaded by the revolutionary working-class party.

The Russian Revolution cannot be kept alive and consolidated unless the working class is at the helm, taught Trotsky. Oh no, said the mob of upstart bureaucrats, that's not at all necessary. We're not theoreticians like Trotsky, we're not utopians like Trotsky, we're clever and practical people.

We'll take care of everything by kicking the workers out of power and taking control ourselves.

We'll take care of the rest of the world by making the international labour movement a tool in our hands for manoeuvring cunningly among the imperialists abroad. The result of the work of the "practical" bureaucrats was the assassination of the Russian Revolution and its great achievements.

The Chinese people can gain their national freedom and emancipate themselves from the yoke of foreign imperialism only if the Chinese workers establish their own power with the aid of the working peasants, taught Trotsky. Oh no, replied all the smart, ever-so-practical politicians.

You can't do that in such a backward country as China. In the first

place, the imperialists will be very angry with you. In the second place, the Chinese capitalists will run right over to the imperialists. We must prevent that at all costs, even if it means that we ourselves keep the workers and peasants under heel. They are excellent for fighting purposes, but they're either too stupid or too dangerous to take over power.

The result of the policy of the "practical" people is visible the world over today. China is further from national freedom than she was fifteen years ago. The workers are suffering the most intense misery and oppression under Japanese imperialist rule on the one side, and are being used as cannon fodder for the plans of opposing imperialism on the other side.

You can't fight the plague of fascism unless the workers unite and take the leadership, unless they are organised and trained for fighting instead of whining, unless they take the road to independent class power, taught Trotsky. You can't bring all humanity out of the abyss of barbarism into which it is being pushed down, you can't take the high road to a society of free and equal human beings, you can't replace the putrefying, stinking older order with the new order of socialism unless the proletariat is freed, first, from its dependence on other classes and other leadership, unless the proletariat is first organised as an independent class, with its own programme, army and leadership.

The failure of the working class everywhere to follow the teachings of Leon Trotsky has produced the heavy defeats it has suffered. Its most recent product is the slaughter of the peoples in the war, and pounding blows being delivered labour in one country after another, the United States included.

Of all that Trotsky taught, this fundamental idea of the complete independence and need of self-reliance of the working class is the one upon which all the others rest. Of all that Trotsky taught, including those ideas and tactics which in our judgement were erroneous and with which we found it our duty to disagree, nothing could possibly weaken the power of this fundamental idea.

In this sign we shall conquer, says the old motto. If the working class is to emerge from the dreadful crisis in which it finds itself today, especially in this country where it is so vastly powerful and uses this power so poorly; if the working class is to conquer in spite of all — and conquer it must and will — it will do so in the sign of Trotsky's wise and tested teachings.

It will conquer as the sworn foe of the capitalist class everywhere; as the foe of all its attorneys and pillars, be they social-democratic, trade-union bureaucrats or Stalinist exploiters; as the foe of imperialist war; as the foe of colonial oppression; as the foe of fascist barbarism. It will conquer as the champion of internationalism, of world-wide brotherhood of the peoples, as the trailblazer of proletarian revolution and socialist freedom.

• From *Labour Action*, August 1942

Our fragmented tradition

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eminence of second power in the world with accurate reporting and sober assessment of its meaning for socialist theory and the implications for socialist working-class programme.

It can be argued (as I have argued, in detail and at length, elsewhere*) that this "other Trotskyist" current in fact, despite its episodic dispute with Trotsky in 1939-40, continued the politics of Trotsky and applied them to the world, and specifically to Stalinism, in the way that Trotsky would have done if he had survived into the 1940s. Be that as it may, they evolved a distinctive Trotskyist tradition and gave it life.

For a whole epoch of world history, they produced a powerful literature that has for that period no equal, nor any near relative or rival.

Ultimately, from the end of the 1950s, this tendency fell apart. Its best-known and ablest representatives, Max Shachtman and his close friends, abandoned the socialist programme of independent working class politics, of the "third camp" and sided with bourgeois-democratic capitalist USA against the Stalinist bloc, seeing the US and its allies as the only viable alternative to Stalinism. They took that course for reasons similar to those which led the "orthodox Trotskyists" to back the Stalinist bloc (critically — but the Shachtmanites too were critical of "their" bloc).

The "orthodox Trotskyists" saw the Stalinist states, which expropriated capitalism, as the advancing ("deformed") world revolution; the "other Trotskyists" saw what was happening and, accurately, identified what to the US the "orthodox Trotskyists" was the world revolution as the totalitarian slavery it was.

What they had in common, the two basic strains of post-Trotsky "Trotskyists", was the belief that capitalism was collapsing and dying.

For the "orthodox", that gave them confidence that History was (sort of, in a "deformed" way), on their side.

To the Shachtmanites, the choice or replacement for capitalism — and it was sure to be replaced soon, one way or another — was either Stalinism or socialism. In the capitalist prosperity of the 1950s and 60s, they saw only a respite in the disintegration and death-decline of capitalism: it could not last, and, therefore, so it sometimes seems in their writings, it did not really exist in terms of the long-term perspectives. This skews their

perception in the articles reprinted here.

Stalinism was expanding, and it would continue to expand for some years after Shachtman's death in 1972. Following through the line of thought that under bourgeois democracy the working-class movement could function, and could prepare itself to create a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, Shachtman and his co-thinkers went over to the US-led bloc.

It was within that bloc, they thought, that working-class independent socialism could emerge. Meanwhile, it was the only viable alternative to Stalinism.

Shachtman became mired in the dirty politics of the Democratic Party. As a tendency, his co-thinkers evolved into born-again social-democrats.

Shachtman never abjured support for the October Revolution, though some of his co-thinkers would (see Al Glotzer in *Workers' Liberty* 16).

Others in the "other Trotskyist" tendency — most notably Hal Draper, Phyllis and Julius Jacobson and a few others, who started the magazine *New Politics* in the early 1960s — rejected Shachtman's course and maintained independent socialist politics.

The truth, however is, that in their own particular way they too moved very far from the politics of the tendency in its heroic days of the 40s and most of the 50s. They rejected the project of building a revolutionary socialist party. Draper repudiated and rejected what he called the "micro-sect" project, i.e. of organisation-building, uniting theory and practice. They became mere propagandists — with propaganda of a very high order, to be sure.

Today, we live in conditions where the tradition of revolutionary Marxism that "flowed" through Trotsky and the Trotskyism of his time is highly fragmented, its elements disassembled and sometimes, needlessly counterposed to each other as fetish objections, dogmatic overemphasised what should be one integrated movement. This situation has much in common with the state of revolutionary socialism before the Communist International, after the October Revolution, began to reintegrate the contributions of the Social-Democratic left, the revolutionary syndicalists, and the best of the anarchists.

In times of adversity, one-sided "sects" can sometimes play a positive role, by preserving valuable ideas, even in desiccated form.

The "orthodox Trotskyists" did that, and so in their different ways did the others. AWL, over decades, has evolved its own political tradition out of the "orthodox Trotskyism" of James P Cannon. We then learned much from the "other Trotskyists" and from attempting to reintegrate the positive contributions of others — the revolutionary syndicalists, for example — into our work.

The revolutionary movement is, in Trotsky's words, "the memory of the working class". The bourgeoisie has a vast educational apparatus which teaches its history, its values, its outlook, and glorifies its system. It tells the young that capitalism and bourgeois democracy are the culmination of history. It also has social and political institutions which "socialise" people into the values, the outlook, and the tradition which expresses its interests.

The working class exists in a bourgeois world, dominated by commerce, which inculcates bourgeois values, is constantly under bombardment by the bourgeois media, which do the same.

Against all that we have our under-resourced educational and propaganda work; and a large part of that depends on the written residues of the socialist past.

You cannot at will take the working class through the enlightening experience of a general strike. You can teach workers about the general strikes of history, like Britain 1926 and France 1936 and 1968, and about such half-buried events as the British general strike of 1842 (in bourgeois histories, the "Plug Riots").

Our traditions are immensely important. They embody our history, our collective codified experience spanning generations. They exemplify our Marxist methodology, our models of how to analyse and think.

We live in a situation where the aspects of our living tradition are dislocated, and embedded in partly alien traditions, like that of the "orthodox Trotskyists". Therefore in striving to integrate the sundered elements of the Trotskyism of Trotskyists we face the danger of vapid eclecticism.

Avoiding that is a question of striving for consistency, critical understanding of what we take as our "tradition", and above all in living by the cardinal rule of Marxist politics — to be guided always by the logic of the class struggle, and within that by the interests of the working class, including its "interest" in learning socialist and consistently democratic lessons from its own experience. The work of the "other Trotskyist" political current, some of whose writings we present in this pamphlet issue of *Workers' Liberty*, can help us greatly in this work.

* *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*.
See www.workersliberty.org/node/5678

What is Trotskyism?

By Max Shachtman

Our criticism of Trotsky's later theory of the "workers' state" introduces into it an indispensable correction. Far from "demolishing" Trotskyism, it eliminates from it a distorting element of contradiction and restores its essential inner harmony and continuity. The writer considers himself a follower of Trotsky, as of Lenin before him, and of Marx and Engels in the earlier generation. Such has been the intellectual havoc wrought in the revolutionary movement by the manners and standards of Stalinism, that "follower" has come to mean serf, worshipper, or parrot. We have no desire to be this kind of "follower." Trotsky was not, and we learned much of what we know from him. In *The New Course* he wrote these jewelled words, which are worth repeating a hundred times:

If there is one thing likely to strike a mortal blow to the spiritual life of the party and to the doctrinal training of the youth, it is certainly the transformation of Leninism from a method demanding for its application initiative, critical thinking and ideological courage into a canon which demands nothing more than interpreters appointed for good and aye.

Leninism cannot be conceived of without theoretical breadth, without a critical analysis of the material bases of the political process. The weapon of Marxian investigation must be constantly sharpened and applied. It is precisely in this that tradition consists, and not in the substitution of a formal reference or of an accidental quotation. Least of all can Leninism be reconciled with ideological superficiality and theoretical slovenliness.

Lenin cannot be chopped up into quotations suited for every possible case, because for Lenin the formula never stands higher than the reality; it is always the tool that makes it possible to grasp the reality and to dominate it. It would not be hard to find in Lenin dozens and hundreds of passages which, formally speaking, seem to be contradictory. But what must be seen is not the formal relationship of one passage to another, but the real relationship of each of them to the concrete reality in which the formula was introduced as a lever. The Leninist truth is always concrete! ...

Leninism is orthodox, obdurate, irreducible, but it does not contain so much as a hint of formalism, canon, nor bureaucratism. In the struggle it takes the bull by the horns. To make out of the traditions of Leninism a supra-theoretical guarantee of the infallibility of all the words and thoughts of the interpreters of these traditions, is to scoff at genuine revolutionary tradition and transform it into official bureaucratism. It is ridiculous and pathetic to try to hypnotise a great revolutionary party by the repetition of the same formula, according to which the right line should be sought not in the essence of each question, not in the methods of posing, and solving this question, but in information ... of a biographical character.

There are "followers" who seem to think that the whole of Trotskyism (that is, the revolutionary Marxism of our time) is contained in the theory that Russia is still a workers' state and in the slogan of "unconditional defence of the Soviet Union." They merely prove that they have retired from a life of active and critical thought, and from the realities of life in general, and confine themselves to memorising by heart two pages of an otherwise uncut and unread book. They would be the first to deny, by the way, that the whole of Leninism is contained in Lenin's theory of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" or in his strictures against Trotsky and the theory of the permanent revolution.

The whole of Trotsky, for the new generation of Marxists that must be trained up and organised, does not lie in his contradictory theory of the class character of Russia; it is not even a decisively important part of the whole. Trotskyism is all of Marx, Engels and Lenin that has withstood the test of time and struggle — and that is a good deal! Trotskyism is its leader's magnificent development and amplification of the theory of the permanent revolution. Trotskyism is the defence of the great and fundamental principles of the Russian Bolshevik revolution and the Communist International, which it brought into existence. Trotskyism is the principle of workers' democracy, of the struggle for democracy and socialism.

In this sense — and it is the only one worth talking about — *The New Course* is a Trotskyist classic. It was not only a weapon hitting at the very heart of decaying bureaucratism in revolutionary Russia. It was and is a guide for the struggle against the vices of bureaucratism throughout the labour and revolutionary movements.

Bureaucratism is not simply a direct product of certain economic privileges acquired by the officialdom of the labour movement. It is also an ideology, a concept of leadership and of its relationship to the masses, which is absorbed even by labour and revolutionary officialdoms who enjoy no economic privileges at all. It is an ideology that reeks of its bourgeois origin. Boiled down to its most vicious essence, it is the kind of thinking and living and leading which says to the rank and file, in the words Trotsky once used to describe the language of Stalinism: "No thinking! Those at the top have more brains than you."

We see this ideology reflected in the every-day conduct of our own American trade union bureaucracy: "We will handle everything. Leave things to us. You stay where you are, and keep still." We see it reflected throughout the big social-democratic (to say nothing of the Stalinist) parties: "We will negotiate things. We will arrange everything. We will manoeuvre cleverly with the enemy, and get what you want without struggle. You sit still until

further orders. That is all you are fit for." We even see it in those smaller revolutionary groups which are outside the reformist and Stalinist movements and which consider that this fact alone immunises them from bureaucratism. We repeat, it is a bourgeois ideology through and through. It is part of the ideas that the bourgeoisie, through all its agencies for moulding the mind of the masses, seeks to have prevail: "Whatever criticism you may have to make of us, remember this: The masses are stupid. It is no accident that they are at the bottom of the social ladder. They are incapable of rising to the top. They need a ruler over them; they cannot rule themselves. For their own good, they must be kept where they are."

The New Course does more than dismiss this odious ideology that fertilises the mind of the labour bureaucracy. It analyses its source and its nature. It diagnoses the evil to perfection. It indicates the operation needed to remove it, and the tools with which to perform the operation. It is the same tool needed by the proletariat for its emancipation everywhere. Its name is the democratically organised and controlled, self-acting, dynamic, critical, revolutionary political party of the working class.

The counter-revolution in Russia was made possible only because Stalinism blunted, then wore down, then smashed to bits this indispensable tool of the proletariat. The bureaucracy won. "If Trotsky had been right," says the official iconographer of Stalin, Henri Barbusse, "he would have won." How simple! What a flattering compliment to ... Hitler. The bureaucracy not only won, but consolidated its power on a scale unknown in any country of the world throughout all history. Stalin himself is now the Pope-Czar of the Russian Empire.

But that is only how it seems on the surface; that is how it is only for a very short while, as history counts. "Any imbecile can rule with a state of siege," said Rochefort. Only the really powerful and confident can rule by establishing peaceful relations in the country. That, the new bureaucracy, without a past and without a future, cannot do. The combined efforts of world capitalism cannot do that nowadays, still less the efforts of the Stalinist nobility. The latter has succeeded in establishing "socialism," for itself and "in a single country." It will not live long to enjoy it. Together with all modern rulers, it is doomed to perish in the unrelenting world crisis that it cannot solve, or to perish at the hands of an avenging socialist proletariat.

Cromwell's Roundheads marched with Bibles in their hands. The militant proletariat needs no divine revelations or scriptural injunctions, no Bibles or saviours. But it will march to victory only if its conscious vanguard has assimilated the rich and now-more-timely-than-ever lessons to be learned from the classic work of the organiser of the first great proletarian revolution.

• From *The Struggle for the New Course*, preface to an edition of Trotsky's *The New Course*, 1943.

Left Opposition in the Gulag