



## THE TWO TROTSKYS

### How the “Orthodox” in the 1940s buried the spirit of one Trotsky to save the ghost of another



Revolutionary socialists today must find clean political ground on which to rebuild. Seepage from many decades of Stalinism still poisons the ground of the labour movement.

During most of the 20th century, and the 21st century so far, revolutionary-socialist politics has been some form of Trotskyism. And for a long time, the interpretation of Trotskyism has been dominated by the “Orthodox Trotskyism” formed in the 1940s.

That “Orthodox Trotskyism” has been falling apart since the collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91. Its characteristic ideas — that Stalinism, in many areas, in China, Vietnam, or Korea, was after all, “objectively revolutionary”; that socialist revolution could be made by “bureaucratic impulse” or by Stalinists being “compelled” by circumstances; that what Marxists had to build and contribute, above all, was a “party” apparatus with an allegedly “finished” program — are increasingly discredited.

They cannot just be quietly shelved. We must learn the lessons. We must dig down to the roots of the decay. Here, we print one section (edited and expanded) of the introduction to a new book published by Workers' Liberty, *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*.

The book documents the fact that ideas in “Orthodox Trotskyism” often reckoned by critics to be superficial early-1950s additions to doctrine had in fact been developed within a year or so of Trotsky’s death in 1940, though it took another decade for them to develop into a locked-down system.

To find solid ground to rebuild, we must go back to 1940, and examine the flaws and unresolved contradictions in the political legacy which Trotsky left at his death.

# The Two Trotskys

By Sean Matgamna

**During World War Two the divisions between the two Trotskyist tendencies [coming out of the 1939-40 split] widened and deepened.**

The two dialects of one political language in 1940 were becoming different languages. What follows is a detailed examination of the responses of the Orthodox Trotskyists to the Russo-German war after June 1941, when Hitler launched his blitzkrieg against the USSR — of what the slogans and the polemics of the Orthodox in the 1939-40 faction fight led to in political practice during the war. The extensive quotations are used so that there is no room for serious dispute on the subject.

Rejection of the idea that Russia was or could be an oppressive empire had been a political foundation stone of the Orthodox in 1939-40. At least, it was taken as a foundation-stone by the Orthodox after June 1941. Although he tacitly agreed that the USSR was what in other powers was called imperialist — “the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues” — Trotsky refused to call the USSR an empire or its activities imperialist. He refused to use the same term for Russia’s domineering, annexationist, and plundering activities as for the capitalist empires doing the same thing<sup>1</sup>. To use the same term for the USSR as for finance-capital imperialism, he said, could only cause confusion.

Events would show that refusal to call what Stalin’s Russia did by its proper name, imperialism, and the combining of that refusal with indiscriminate “defencism”, would generate dire confusion in the Cannonite [Orthodox] groups. Trotsky had not baulked at calling the USSR a “counter-revolutionary” degenerated and degenerating workers’ state. Logically he need not have baulked at calling it an “imperialist” degenerated workers’ state. He did baulk. And his Orthodox comrades of 1939-40 would go on baulking as Russia took over half of Europe. All through the war, and after it was over, at every turn, in every seizure of territory or demand for territory, they saw only the USSR “defending” itself. They would explain the USSR’s vast post-war empire in Europe mere buffer or glacis for Russia’s defence. They would apologetically define, or even champion, Russian expansion as “defensive” actions, at root politically legitimate.

The [Heterodox] Workers Party, had already caught on to the trend of Russian development in relation to Poland (1939), Finland (1939), the Baltics (invaded by Stalin in June 1940), and eastern Romania (invaded by Stalin in June-July 1940). While the SWP was wrestling with its own self-stifling dogmas and political fantasies, the Workers Party was straightforward in registering events and commenting on them from a working-class internationalist viewpoint. The Workers Party’s commentaries were work by people who read the serious bourgeois press and thought about what was new and unexpected; those of the post-Trotsky Orthodox, the work of people who extrapolated from old resolutions about different realities; who, instead of analysing events fully, properly, and honestly, looked in them for elements that would confirm themselves, and Trotsky, as “correct” and “prophetic”. They would construe things way beyond common sense, or dialectical sense, or any sense, to make them fit old schemas. We will find ample evidence of that as we sift through their commentaries during the war.

Neither the Workers Party, the Heterodox, nor the SWP, the Orthodox, expected the USSR to survive the world war. Neither expected the USSR to expand as it did. [SWP leader] Cannon least of all. Recall that he had written: “Stalin could take the path of Napoleonic conquest... only on one condition: that the Soviet bureaucracy in reality represents a new triumphant class which is in harmony with its economic system and secure in its position at home...” When the USSR did expand, the Heterodox registered the facts, thought about their implications, and understood what Stalin was doing. They understood that what they had described as Stalinist imperialism in eastern Poland and Finland was integral to the USSR’s role in the war. The Orthodox responded by holding to the formulae which Trotsky had used, while — and this is central to the whole story — radically changing their political and class content. They moved away from Trotsky’s ideas, but by way of unacknowledged reinterpretation of for-

mulae rather than explicit rethinking. From 1943 onwards, “defence of the USSR” became defence of the Stalinist empire being built.

### THE HETERODOX ON THE USSR

**In June 1941 Hitler invaded the USSR. The Orthodox proclaimed that they were for the defence of the Soviet Union “under any circumstances and in all conditions”. They made no conditions on their support: as long as nationalised property existed in Russia, they would be for Russia no matter what it did.**

In June 1941 the Workers Party was not in principle opposed to “defending the USSR”. The majority then considered it to be a comparatively “progressive” though class-exploitative society. The Workers Party took its stand on the politics of Lenin and Trotsky during World War One, and now applied those politics to World War Two and to all the participants in the war, including the USSR.

In both world wars there were, of course, many subsidiary conflicts and wars — wars, in which, had they occurred separately, the socialists would have taken sides. For instance, with the Serbs in the Austro-Serb conflict, which had triggered the general war in 1914. Or even with Belgium: though Belgium itself possessed a large colonial empire, it had been occupied by Germany in 1914. But, so Lenin had argued, to support, say, the Serbs, meant siding against peoples similarly oppressed in the other, the UK-French, bloc. In the Second World War. Russia was first part of Hitler’s imperialist bloc (1939-1941) and then, after the Nazi invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941, of the British-American bloc. From 1943-4 it was a major imperialist power in its own right. In both periods of Russia’s alliances, the Workers Party refused to support either bloc by way of supporting the USSR. Their attitude to the USSR was a function of their attitude to the whole war.

To choose one of the blocs was, so to speak, a political “Sophie’s Choice”. “Sophie’s Choice” was first a novel and then a movie. In it, a woman is confronted with the terrible sudden demand that she choose which one of her two children will live and which will die. If she refuses to choose the Nazis will kill both of them immediately. She must choose, instantly. In her panic she shouts “Take the little girl!”; and of course it destroys her psychologically. Choosing the better of the imperialist blocs was for the Workers Party a political variant of “Sophie’s choice”<sup>2</sup>. In its own terms, the Workers Party followed, perhaps too mechanically, what since the First World War had been Leninist politics on inter-imperialist war. With them, there was no big innovation, because they recognised no difference in principle between the world wars. The self-called Orthodox were the political innovators.

### THE ORTHODOX IN THE RUSSO-GERMAN WAR: THE FIRST PHASE

**“Defence of the USSR” in all circumstances and by any method was the core policy of the Communist Parties, their guiding principle to which anything might be sacrificed and everything Marxist and communist war.**

Once the Russo-German war was on, the post-April-1940-split Cannonites too made “defence of the USSR” their highest and most urgent priority. They did not sacrifice “everything” to it. They did not, like the Stalinists, counterpose “defence” of Russia to the working-class struggle in their own countries. But a very great deal was reshaped and subordinated to the defence — in particular, their attitude to the class struggle in the USSR.

Throughout the war they failed to tell the American workers the truth about the USSR, the US ruling class’s ally and accomplice in the war. Interpreting “defence” as propagandist defence, they told lies by deed and by omission. They would never tell the full truth about the Russian empire, or about the events and issues that polarised the world after 1945. Their comments on the conflicts after 1945 between the US-led bloc and Russia were usually limited to blaming the US-led bloc alone and attributing “aggression” to it alone. Commitment to the USSR, which was now becoming Stalin’s imperial USSR, coloured, reshaped, distorted, and limited their whole body of politics.

During the six months faction fight in the SWP and in the period after the April 1940 split and before the German invasion of Russia, roughly a year, “defence of the USSR” figured relatively little in the press of the SWP, the Orthodox or “official” Trotskyists. Publicly, Trotsky’s writings represented the face of the Orthodox to the world at large, and he wholeheartedly denounced Stalin’s policy and activity in both Poland and Finland. “Defence of the Soviet Union” was then very much an internal party matter, an “orientation issue”, though one seen as of fundamental importance. In *Socialist Appeal* of 3 November 1939, for example, Felix Morrow wrote: “The AFL convention adopted a resolution for a boycott against all Soviet goods.... No revolutionist can support either the Anglo-French-American camp or the Hitler-Stalin camp in the American labor movement. The task of the revolutionist is to build and recruit into the third camp: the camp of revolutionary struggle against war. On all questions connected with the war, the third camp stands on a different program than that of the two war-camps. This is equally true of our attitude to the Soviet Union. We neither join the democratic war-mongers in their war against the Soviet Union, nor do we join the Hitler-Stalin camp in their justification of Hitler and Stalin.”

In 1940 *The Militant* welcomed the Russian annexations of the three Baltic states and of eastern Romania, without the condemnations Trotsky had hurled on the invaders of Poland and Finland [in 1939]. “Sovietisation of the Baltic step forward” was the headline on Albert Goldman’s article in *The Militant* (27 July 1940). Trotsky was silent, though this was an explicit expression of what in the faction-fight had been denounced as a matter of Trotsky and the orthodox giving credence to Stalinist “bureaucratic-proletarian revolution”. Whether he would have remained silent had he remained alive longer is not to be known.

The paper of the Orthodox (*Socialist Appeal*; from February 1941 *The Militant*) carried other reports and commentary on the USSR that were in the same root-and-branch anti-Stalinist vein as all the coverage in *Socialist Appeal* had been before September 1939 and to a great extent continued to be during the faction fight inside the Socialist Workers Party. In *Socialist Appeal* of 14 September 1940, for example, John G Wright reported on “Stalin’s new labour laws... chaining the workers to the factories like industrial serfs”.

When Nazi Germany invaded Russia on 22 June 1941, the Orthodox were electrified. They immediately elaborated politics on the war that were... a political and ideological half-capitulation to Stalinism! The first post-invasion issue of *The Militant* shouted in its front page headline: “Defend the Soviet Union!” This appeared above a Manifesto from the SWP which called, as basic Trotskyist politics did, for the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but now in a sharply qualified way. “For the sake of the Soviet Union and of the world socialist revolution, the workers’ struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy must be subordinated to the struggle against the main enemy — the armies of Hitler Germany. Everything we say or do must have as its primary object the victory of the Red Army”. Everything? Everything we say?

The ordering of priorities had also been Trotsky’s: first, defence, and, second to that, “political revolution”. But with Trotsky it referred to what the Trotskyists in the USSR would do: they would not act so as to hinder military defence against the invader. Right from the start, the Orthodox conflated and confused two distinct things: military defence, in the USSR itself, and “defence of the USSR” in the outside world, in the USA for example, by way of selective and sometimes lying accounts of Stalinist society. Where Trotsky had been among the sharpest critics of Russian Stalinist society, the Orthodox now took to asserting that the USSR gave the workers great benefits which, in the war, they were eagerly defending. That was not true, and it was not implied in the idea that nationalised property should be defended. The Trotskyists had previously identified and stigmatised lies about beneficent Stalinism as typical of the pro-Stalinist “Friends of the USSR” who were defenestrated by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* in the persons of the aged Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb (Lord and Lady Passfield)<sup>3</sup>.

On the masthead of *The Militant* of 28 June 1941 the new Orthodox printed a quotation from Trotsky, undated. “To de-

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## Champions of Peace and Democracy!



Socialist Appeal, 1 October 1939

defend the USSR, as the main fortress of the world proletariat, against all the assaults of world imperialism and of internal counter-revolution is the most important duty of every class-conscious worker". Those words were culled from an article Trotsky wrote in 1931: from before the Trotskyists decided, in 1933, that a "political" revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy had become necessary. The choice of this quotation, which they would frequently use as a motto during the war, was the first public signalling of what they were going to do — jump back eight years and episodically lop off much of the politics on Stalinism which the Trotskyists had developed over the last decade of Trotsky's life.

The manifesto in *The Militant* of 28 June 1941 advocated what appeared to be the old politics on the USSR — what Trotsky and Cannon had advocated in 1940: defend the USSR; make a political revolution against the totalitarian Stalinist oligarchy. The Orthodox did it in the quasi-sacerdotal style that would come to be one of their trade-marks: "Workers and peasants of the Soviet Union! We appeal to you in the name of our martyred leader, Comrade Trotsky. His voice would now be urging you on to revolutionary war against Hitler. This was the hour of danger which Trotsky was destined to turn into the hour of proletarian triumph — but his noble and heroic mind was crushed by Stalin's pick-axe. Since he has been denied the happiness of participating in your decisive battles and final victory, let Trotsky henceforth participate invisibly in your struggle. Let his voice, stilled by Stalin but living on in the movement which bears his name, advise you in your struggle for a better world. Avenge his death by destroying Hitler, overthrowing the Cain in the Kremlin, and reviving the Soviet democracy which in the heroic years of the October revolution made possible the victory over imperialist intervention".

The old Trotskyist politics were weakened and reshaped by a new mode of reporting. Over the next months *The Militant* ran front-page photographs issued by the Moscow

regime (workers receiving arms, workers forming guerrilla detachments, collective farmers bringing in the harvest, etc.) It proclaimed that Russia was fighting Hitler with uniquely high morale.

The Russians fought so wonderfully well (said *The Militant*) and their morale was as high as it magnificently was, because they had "something to fight for" — the nationalised property. The Russian workers knew they were defending the October Revolution. Contrast France, they said. There, the bourgeois ruling class had surrendered to Hitler<sup>4</sup>. There was no such class in the USSR. And what of the bureaucracy, what Trotsky, without contradiction from Cannon, had called "the sole privileged and commanding stratum", which "contains within itself to a tenfold degree all the vices of a possessing class"?

Even if the reports of especially high morale were true, and they were not, this radical mis-reporting of — that is, lying about — the society and politics erected by the counter-revolutionary autocracy on nationalised property was no necessary part of "defence of the USSR", as the Trotskyists had it before 22 June 1941. Worse: The accounts of USSR morale repeated by the Orthodox, after

Stalin and the Stalinist-friendly bourgeois press, posed urgent questions to Trotskyists. Were there then no consequences for Russian morale of Stalinist misrule? The picture which the Orthodox gave of the war implied that the answer to this very important question was: "no"; or "not much". They said, and kept on saying throughout the war, that USSR morale was uniquely high, and it was so because the people believed they owned the state property. In that belief, *The Militant* repeatedly said, they were right: they did.

In Trotsky's time, the Trotskyists had said the opposite. They had characterised the idea that the people in the USSR owned what the state owned as "the fundamental sophism" on which vast Stalinist edifices of lies had been erected. Trotsky had written: "State property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property. And the contrary is true: the higher the Soviet state rises above the people, and the more fiercely it opposes itself as the guardian of property to the people as its squanderer, the more obviously does it testify against the socialist character of this state property". Or again: "The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy". Now the Orthodox reported the USSR very differently.

The 28 June 1941 manifesto explained the Soviet Union as follows: "The Soviet Union can be best understood as a great trade union fallen into the hands of corrupt and degenerate leaders. Our struggle against Stalinism is a struggle within the labor movement. Against the bosses we preserve the unity of the class front, we stand shoulder to shoulder with all workers. The Soviet Union is a Workers' State, although degenerated because of Stalinist rule. Just as we support strikes against the bosses even though the union conducting the strike is under the control of Stalinists, so do we support the Soviet Union against imperialism".

It is difficult to imagine an analogy stranger or more maladroitness than that one. Stalin's USSR held millions in slave

labour camps, held all workers in a totalitarian vice, routinely and frequently used mass murder as a political tool against the working people. It was a state power "more savage and unbridled" than that of pre-war Nazi Germany, as the Fourth International had said in the program of its 1938 congress. Even the worst gangster-ridden union in the USA came nowhere near the horrors inflicted on the workers in the USSR. This analogy worked only to suggest that the Stalinist totalitarian state was less terrible than in fact it was.

Indeed, the Orthodox would assert in plain words that the USSR — the whole USSR, bureaucracy as well as workers — was part of the labour movement. James P Cannon, as National Secretary of the SWP, sent a telegram to Stalin: "Trotskyists all over the world, now as always, are solidly for the defense of the Soviet Union. In this hour of grave danger to the achievements of the October revolution, we demand that you release all Trotskyist and other pro-Soviet political prisoners who are now in jails and in concentration camps, to enable them to take their proper place in the front ranks of the defenders of the Soviet Union. Your crushing of workers' democracy has increased the terrible danger to the Soviet Union. We demand the revival of Soviet democracy as the first step in strengthening the struggle against German Nazi imperialism and the capitalist world" (*The Militant*, 5 July 1941).

Cannon also said this to Stalin: "The Trotskyists in this country, in the Soviet Union and everywhere in the world say to the Soviet government: place us in the most dangerous posts, we are ready and shall unhesitatingly accept". In this parody of self-abasing "loyalty", Cannon pledged the Trotskyists to active service for a state that habitually murdered people of their political species as soon as it identified, or thought it had identified, them. Cannon knew that the American Trotskyists would of course never be asked to act on this pledge. There was a broad streak of exhibitionist political masochism in post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyism<sup>5</sup>.

Throughout the war many USSR soldiers fought bravely. The regime developed an effective nationalist, chauvinist, and Orthodox-Church-religious appeal. On the whole, though, USSR morale was worse, not better, than that of the other major powers in the war. Around one million USSR soldiers ended up fighting with the Germans. There were whole units in Hitler's armies made up of USSR deserters: two Ukrainian divisions, many units from the Baltic states, and over 250,000 in "Cossack units" (sometimes including non-Cossack, but called "Cossack" because Hitler had decided that Cossacks were not Slavs and, unlike the "sub-human" Slavs, "racially acceptable"). The German Sixth Army, fighting at Stalingrad, included at least 50,000, maybe 70,000 "Hiwis", so-called "volunteer helpers" recruited from the peoples of the USSR. Many "volunteered" because their only alternatives were forced labour or death in prisoner-of-war camps, where the Nazis treated the Slavic USSR prisoners as the sub-human "Untermenschen" that their racist zoology proclaimed them to be. Some were really prisoners of war conscripted into ancillary labour — digging trenches and latrines, running field kitchens, looking after horses, etc. But many were front-line fighters. A considerable number of Hiwis stuck with the Germans even after they were routed at Stalingrad. It is a measure of the political seriousness of the Orthodox by that point that in *The Militant* and in Fourth International there was not one word about Stalin's August 1941 decree that the family of every soldier who surrendered should be "deprived of all state allowance and assistance". In July 1942 Stalin added that every army should organise "barrier units" to be stationed behind the front line and shoot waverers and those who tried to retreat<sup>6</sup>.

### JULY 1941: A "MINIMUM PROGRAM" FOR RUSSIA AT WAR?

The subordination of the overthrow of the Stalinist autocracy to "defence of the USSR" now began to reshape and redefine the Cannonites' operational politics on Stalinism.

Inside a month of the German invasion of Russia the Orthodox issued a new manifesto which marked an enormous shift in their politics on the USSR. Under a streamer above the masthead, "For unconditional defence of the Soviet Union", they printed "A Program Of Victory For The Soviet Union". It was aimed at supporters of the Communist Party USA<sup>7</sup>.

"We stand for the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union. The Stalinist leaders try to fool their rank and file into believing that the Trotskyists do not defend the Soviet Union. The word 'unconditional' is plain enough. It means that we set

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no conditions whatsoever before we defend the Soviet Union. We do not demand that Stalin make any concessions to us before we defend the Soviet Union. We defend the Soviet Union because the foundation of socialism established by the October revolution of 1917, the nationalized property, still remains and this foundation it is necessary to defend at all costs" (*The Militant*, 19 July 1941: p.290 of this volume).

The foundation of socialism? Even under the totalitarian bureaucracy? Nationalised property alone, regardless of who "owned" the state? We have seen that Trotsky, in his last letter to the workers of the Soviet Union (May 1940), posed things very differently: for the existing nationalised property to be the foundation of socialism the working class would first have to take it out of the hands of the bureaucracy. It would only prove to be progressive if it could be taken out of the hands of the ruling autocracy.

"It is to assure victory in the struggle against Hitler that our party presents a minimum program of imperative tasks for the Soviet Union". For whom in the Soviet Union? "Whether the Stalinist bureaucracy accepts or rejects this program, we shall defend the Soviet Union. But we insist that this minimum program is vital in order to strengthen immeasurably the fighting power of the Soviet Union.

"1. Release all pro-Soviet political prisoners. Restore them to their rightful place in industry and the Red Army.... The release of this great army of pro-Soviet political prisoners, kept in jail solely because Stalin feared their opposition to his false policies, is imperative for the salvation of the Soviet Union.

"2. Revive the democratically-elected Soviets. Workers' democracy in the trade unions....

"3. Legalization of all pro-Soviet political parties. Their right to present their programs to the masses. Every political party that is for the defense of the Soviet Union must be given the right to exist as an open political organization, to present its program, and to agitate among the masses for that program. Without these rights, there can be no true democracy<sup>8</sup>.

"4. For revolutionary unity with the German working class. For the Socialist United States of Europe.... The Soviet government must call upon the workers of Germany to join hands with the Soviet Union to create the Socialist United States of Europe..." The Orthodox asked Stalin's Soviet Union to "undermine Hitler by pledging to the German workers that the defeat of Hitler will not mean a second and worse Versailles [Treaty] but will begin the creation of the Socialist United States of Europe... The imperialist states cannot possibly make this pledge to the German workers. Only the Soviet Union, the Workers' State, can thus cement revolutionary unity with the German proletariat. The Soviet Union must clearly state its peace terms — the Socialist United States of Europe, the right of all nations to self-determination".

The Workers' State could, and in 1917 had done so. The degenerated workers' state? To call Russia simply "the Workers' State", to elide the enormous and basic caveat that it was a monstrously "degenerated" workers' state, to combine that with the suggestion that because Stalin's Russia was "the Workers' State" it could generate and embody a Bolshevik program — all that had nothing in common with the Trotskyist analysis and program as the new Orthodox had had it before 22 June 1941. As a comment on reality, the suggestion that Stalin's Russia was uniquely well-placed to make a democratic and socialist proposal was absurd. A lie-bearing Stalinist absurdity. The list of desiderata was not a "minimum" but a comprehensive program, almost the whole Trotskyist program against Stalinism. Missing only was the idea of a workers' anti-Stalinist "political" revolution. In its place was an appeal to Stalin to do what for Trotsky, and for Cannon up to that point, could only be done by that new working-class "political revolution". The real imperial Stalinist Russia could not conceivably offer such peace terms. It ran and would continue to run a brutally chauvinistic and spectacularly inhumane war. At the end of the war it would try to grab as much of Germany as it could. It would capture as many German slave labourers for deportation to the USSR as it could. It would deprive many nations, including the German nation, of self-determination. All those horrors were already part of what the Stalinist bureaucracy did where it ruled.

This aberration of the Orthodox was rooted both in their denial that Russia could ever be an imperialist power, and in their translation of "defence of the nationalised property" into the idea that Stalinist society was "better" for its workers than anything else in the world. There was nothing in the pre-1941 Trotskyist policy of defending the USSR that demanded or licensed any of this fantastic quasi-Stalinist rigmarole. It would have been less absurd to demand such a

program from Winston Churchill or Franklin D Roosevelt than to express it as "demands" to Stalin.

## PROGRAM AND AGENCY

**What *The Militant* demanded could only be achieved as part of a revolution against the totalitarian autocracy. However achieved, it would amount to a revolution. Cannon and his comrades could not but know that as well as Stalin would.**

The propaganda gambit here — directed at their American audience — was made absurd by being couched as socialist demands addressed to Stalin. It was implicitly to lie about the USSR and Stalinism, to suggest that Stalin could conceivably do the things demanded, or that (because of nationalised property!) Stalin was more likely to do these things than Roosevelt or Churchill. In terms of real-world politics, it was an appeal to the Stalinist autocracy for self-reform and self-abolition. It was a wilful denial of what Trotsky and they themselves had known and said about the Stalinist regime for a decade.

What they meant when they said it was a "minimum program" was that it was the Trotskyist program without "political revolution", the Trotskyist program reduced to free-floating advice and suggestions, the program but without telling the full truth about Stalinist Russia, the program but without invoking the Russian working class as the agency that would achieve it.

The manifesto spoke of "tasks... for the Soviet Union". The key terms in any political statement, "who" and "whom", were missing. The tremendous divisions within the USSR, between the workers and working farmers on one side and the privileged bureaucratic ruling elite on the other, were glossed over or denied by talking of tasks for "the Soviet Union" as an undifferentiated whole. As late as December 1943 an official SWP policy document written by Bert Cochran would rhapsodise about "the amazing unity of the Soviet peoples".

By calling the manifesto a minimum program, the SWP meant to underline that, as people who put "defence of the USSR" first, for now they did not call on the Russian workers to make a new revolution — a "political revolution" — against the autocracy. They were splitting off the "tasks" from the question of the agency which would carry them out and from the revolutionary method it would have to use. By presenting the program as a series of "demands" on Stalin for self-reform, Cannon aimed to take the "harm" out of them for a Stalinist audience: the SWP were no longer "counter-revolutionary Trotskyites", you see, but utopian socialists! This separation of task from agency and class would for many decades be central to the politics of the new Orthodox Trotskyists.

Thus, in their day-to-day propaganda and agitational work, in deference to "defencism" and the hoped-for Communist Party audience, they suspended or neutralised their own full politics, and came to purvey reform-Stalinist politics for the USSR. And they were getting into the habit of believing what they wanted to believe, what was emotionally satisfying or likely to be organisationally fruitful for them. They were beginning to work themselves loose from the trammels of doctrine, of program, and of the centrality of the working class in revolutionary Marxist politics. To an enormous extent, they were beginning to cut themselves off from reality too.

Lenin defined the self-destroying "opportunism" that led to the collapse of the Second International in 1914 as a way of working that took the line of least resistance and greatest temporary advantage, losing sight of whether those activities were or were not consonant with the stated overall goal and purpose of the movement. [Workers Party leader Max] Shachtman and his comrades alleged that Cannon's tendencies in the labour movement were opportunist in that sense: the sacrifice of the long view to short-term considerations; the concoction of "lines" and gambits that did not fit with or advance the overall educational work and purpose of the organisation. The artificially and inorganically constructed Orthodox "lines" of the World War Two period were a giant example of that pattern. Cannon steered by instinct and political appetite, not by theory, program, history, or, too often, fact. Awkward facts could be simply ignored.

In the next issue of *The Militant*, on an inside page, a picture of captured German soldiers accompanied the headline: "Red Army Forces Still Intact. Soviet Masses Are Fighting To Defend October's Gains". Stalin and his "lackeys" were criticised for depriving the soldiers of "weapons" the October Revolution put in their hands" — a socialist appeal to the

German workers in uniform (26 July 1941). The 19 July 1941 program would in time dwindle to this "proposal": that a working-class appeal be made to the German armies by the Russian autocracy<sup>9</sup>. This was charlatan stuff. The Kremlin did "appeal" to the workers, though not, of course, in the internationalist and Marxist terms the Orthodox Trotskyists called for<sup>10</sup>; it had set the Communist Parties in Nazi-occupied Europe to organising armed resistance in many countries.

In a speech printed in *The Militant* on 30 August 1941 Cannon obliquely explained a likely origin of the comments of the Orthodox on Russian morale. "What [those who expected the collapse of the USSR] overlooked was the one most important and most fundamental element in war... [It] was elucidated by Comrade Trotsky in our last talk with him in Mexico, fourteen months ago, the element of morale. The great battle of France was raging — we asked him to give us his opinion of the military prospects of that fight. And again and again he repeated. 'It depends on the morale of the French army. If the French army really has the morale to fight, Hitler cannot win, not even if he comes as far as Paris'... The Russian workers and peasants... know better than all the renegades.... who have turned their backs on the Soviet Union in the hour of danger... Trotsky said more than once, that the beginning of a war of imperialism against the Soviet Union would. arouse [an] outburst of genuine revolutionary patriotism and fighting spirit in the Russian masses... By their tremendous demonstration of fighting heroism, the Russian masses have said once again that the revolution in Russia is still alive..."

In August 1941 *The Militant* revived its excited agitation about high Russian morale. "Red Army Blasts Myth of Hitler Strength", an article by "George Stern" with a picture of captured German soldiers, claimed: "The Red Army stand against Hitler's legions has come as a revelation to the rest of the world. Churchill and Roosevelt have greeted it as 'magnificent' and the press gives surprised recognition to the fact that the Red Army has exploded the myth of Nazi invincibility" (*The Militant*, 9 August 1941). Another headline in that issue, over an article by George Breitman, shouted: "Red Army Morale Astonishes Its Enemies". A subordinate headline asserted: "Soviet Soldiers Fight Bravely Because They Have Something Worth Defending". Under a crosshead, "Trotsky's predictions now come true", Breitman triumphantly told the reader that in 1934 Trotsky had written: "Within the USSR, 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 a colossal dynamic power..." Trotsky (so wrote Breitman) "was able to foresee this stubborn resistance chiefly because he understood the class character of the first workers' state and, as a result, the determination of the workers and peasants, even under the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy, to hold on to what they have". And what of events such as the great slaughter of 1934-8?

This article had some of the quality of hysteria, of a flood-tide of emotion breaking its banks. Breitman was responding to explanations given by the Nazis and others for their failure to have in Russia the quick and easy victory they had expected. "Unlike the European armies, the [Russian] soldiers have something to fight for, and they know it!" The European and American soldiers "know that it is not the people who will benefit from the results of the war, but their masters, the imperialists, and that the lives of the worker-soldiers are being thrown away in a cause that is not theirs." The broad mass of workers in Europe and the USA understood all that? Nationalism and chauvinism, or simple "defend-your-home-and-family" ideas, had vanished from among them? Breitman felt obliged to admit: "The Nazis have maintained a certain high discipline in their armies". But that was only skin deep. The German army too was made up of "men who know they are not fighting for their own interests. The Red soldiers, on the other hand, not only have something to fight against... but they also have something to fight for." German morale would collapse, therefore it need not be evaluated as something existing now.

A subtitle prepared the reader to be told "What the Red Army Defends". "The October revolution destroyed the political power and the economic power of the capitalist class... In spite of all the crimes and blunders of the Stalinist bureaucracy since then, the economic foundation established by the Russian Revolution still exists. It is this for which the Soviet troops are willing to give their lives rather than capitulate".

The Red Army soldier knew that "he is not fighting for the

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benefit of a gang of bosses who will continue to exploit him after the war just as viciously as before. He knows that he is fighting for himself and his children, to preserve what he has left of the greatest revolution of all time, the nationalized economy which must exist and be extended before society can go ahead to socialism, peace and plenty." Experience had "shown the Russian masses the superiority of living in a workers' state, even though isolated and degenerated under Stalinism". Here, "defend the nationalised economy" was translated into direct "Friends of the Soviet Union" style fantasies — and lies — about Stalinist society.

This article was crude Stalinist propaganda, utterly at odds with the realities of the USSR and with what the Trotskyists had truthfully been saying about Stalinism for most of a decade. But it was in accord with the US government, the US press, Hollywood. In politicians' speeches, in newspapers, and in a number of mainstream films, a fantastically false picture of the USA's Russian ally was being presented. The "capitulation" of the Orthodox to the Stalinist nonsense about "the Workers' State" was simultaneously a "capitulation" to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois opinion and pressure. The young George Breitman was merely following "the line". The "minimum program" printed in *The Militant* had plainly said that the Stalinist system already had "the foundation of socialism".

The people of the USSR resisted the Nazi invaders who openly called the Slavs subhuman ("Untermenschen"), and treated them accordingly, murdering, starving, and enslaving the people in areas they conquered. The Orthodox took all that the Stalinists said about high morale as good coin; ignored the evidence of widespread low morale; ignored examples of high morale during the war in other countries. They refused to see the obvious reason — apart from being driven by a murderously coercive state — for mass Russian self-defence. They substituted their own notion — the people of the USSR were "defending nationalised property". The Orthodox spun a story, rather than giving honest reports or accounting. Their political "lines" were cut loose from the basic politics and the basic Trotskyist account of the USSR.

Breitman's article was the most extreme and explicit case as yet of the substantial collapse, in the camp of the Orthodox Trotskyists, of the working class content of Trotsky's politics on Stalinism. It was still only a beginning!

## "TROTSKY'S RED ARMY" IN WORLD WAR TWO

**To keep this in perspective and in context, it needs to be underlined that the SWP continued to make vigorous propaganda against the American Stalinist party**

It argued that the American workers should prosecute their own class struggle in war time. It held consistently to the view that for US workers the "best way to help the USSR" was to fight and win the class struggle at home. It opposed the often spectacular strikebreaking, scab-herding, and shameless class collaboration which was the American-Stalinists' contribution to "defending the Soviet Union". The Orthodox denounced Stalinism in general and carried historical articles about the conflict between Trotskyism and Stalinism. When in 1943 it became known that two leaders of the Polish Bund, Wiktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, had been killed by the Russians, the SWP would join in the outcry against Stalin.

But soon they took a further large step into a world of political make-believe, in an article by John G Wright, "How Leon Trotsky Organized The Red Army" (*The Militant*, 16 August 1941). It was nothing less than an attempt to claim, on behalf of Trotsky and, therefore, for themselves, the credit that was now, for many Americans, beginning to attach to the Russian Army. They discovered that Army that existed in 1941 and after was not Stalin's Army, but "Trotsky's Red Army"! They spun off into political delirium<sup>11</sup>. A defining idea, for the Cannonites as for Trotsky, was that the statified means of production could rationally be separated out from the totalitarian state and those who controlled it. That idea was now extended to the claim that the army of that state also had a political and class character unchanged and uncorrupted by those who controlled it (and who in purges four years earlier had massacred over 15,000 of its officers). Like the statified means of production, this "Red Army" was a continuation of the October Revolution, nestling inside the Stalinist putrefaction, like the honey bees in the bible story inside the carcass of the dead lion. The Red Army of 1941, so John G Wright wrote in plain words, was a "conquest of October", and, like nationalised property, it retained the fundamental character it had had a quarter-century earlier. As late as October 1944 James P Cannon would write from his prison cell rebuking the editors of *The Militant* for allowing someone



James P Cannon in 1922

to use the expression "Stalin's Red Army". It wasn't Stalin's Red Army, but Trotsky's, Cannon insisted (letter of 22 October 1944).

John G Wright said it explicitly: "The name of Leon Trotsky is inseparably bound up with the formation, life and victories of the Red Army... No one will succeed in obscuring the connection between his role in organizing and building the Red Army and its successes, including the present heroic resistance of the Red soldiers against the Nazi onslaught." The Army too was a great "conquest of the revolution". "Long after Stalin concentrated political power in his own hands, he had to leave the command of the Army in the hands of those who commanded it under Trotsky". Stalin, said Wright, had little control over the major armed body of the totalitarian state! "It is the Army of the October Revolution and the Civil War — Trotsky's Red Army — that is now fighting so heroically".

As a critic of this thesis said: to believe that you have to believe in ghosts. In the SWP press John G Wright, Felix Morrow, and others would develop this idea all the way to imagining that the "Red" Army in the war was something other than the instrument of Stalin; that it was an instrument of working-class politics and working-class socialist revolution. Wright separated off the core of the USSR state machine, the army, from the Stalinist counter-revolution. Then had there in fact been a counter-revolution at all? One consequence of this sort of thinking would be that the Orthodox sometimes seemed to be uncertain about whether or not the bureaucratic autocracy really ruled. In late August and early September 1941, as we will see, they would write things which could only make sense if the bureaucracy were very weak or had faded away and lost control of the USSR.

Wright's idea was a radical departure from Trotsky's analysis of Stalinist Russia and from the positions held by the Fourth International at Trotsky's death. Trotsky had seen the Army as one of the prime sources of the bureaucratisation that engulfed the revolution. The habit of command, of hierarchy, had spread from the Army to the party and society. Discussing the idea that he should have organised a military coup against the bureaucracy, Trotsky replied that that would only have been another, and maybe a quicker, route to bureaucratism. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, he had written: "The restoration of officers' castes 18 years after their revolutionary abolition testifies to the gulf which separates the rulers from the ruled, to the loss by the Soviet army of the chief qualities which gave it the name of 'Red'".

**THE SECOND PHASE: THE LENINGRAD DELIRIUM**  
In *The Militant* of 30 August and 6 September 1941 — it needs to be said bluntly — the Orthodox went very close to outright political dementia. Their critical judgement, their memory and their sense of reality, were temporarily

paralysed. They came close to suggesting that the Stalinist regime in Russia had ceased, or was ceasing, to exist.

The German siege of Leningrad, which would continue for 882 days, was beginning. Workers' battalions were organised from Leningrad factories, those that had not been evacuated — on the initiative of the Stalinist autocrats and police and under their control. The people of the city were willing to resist: the Nazis declared in leaflets dropped into the city that: "We will level Leningrad to the earth and destroy Kronstadt to the waterline" (Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, pp.209-10, 208). On 30 August 1941 the front page headline of *The Militant* announced: "Workers Arm To Save Leningrad". Sub-heads: "Masses Inspired By Memories Of October 1917. Kremlin Finally Compelled To Make Appeal To Traditions Of The October Revolution As Workers Rally For Defense To The Death".

"In the hour of gravest danger to Leningrad, birth-place of the October Revolution, its proletarian inhabitants are mobilizing arms in hand to defend their city to the death against the German army. A tremendous revolutionary resurgence is sweeping the masses. Leningrad today is witness to scenes having their only parallel in the heroic days of the civil war, when, in October 1919, Yudenich's army was crushed by the aroused might of the armed Leningrad proletariat....

"In tremendous mass meetings the workers are shouting forth their defiance of the imperialist enemy. From every factory and shop, picked units of workers are joining the regular troops to help hold the battle lines and are filtering through to the enemy's rear to aid the guerilla detachments."

In fact the "units of workers" were "picked", organised and controlled by the Stalinist state apparatus. *The Militant* drew and coloured the picture as if the workers were no longer under the physical or political control of the bureaucracy's murdering political police, the GPU. The Kremlin, said *The Militant*, had been "compelled" to play a positive role in rousing the working class: "Up to the last moment, the Kremlin had held back the mobilization of the workers. Up to the last moment, Stalin suppressed the traditions of the October Revolution, appealing instead to the traditions of the Napoleonic era.... Today, however, a Voroshilov is compelled to proclaim to the workers of Leningrad... 'Leningrad was and is and shall forever remain the city or the great October Revolution.'" Everything was changed!

*The Militant* writers operated by seizing on reports in the bourgeois press, reports filtered through the Stalinist censorship, that would fit their "theses", their hopes, and their desires, and then, like a space rocket escaping its scaffolding as it rises, wildly extrapolated from that. From a mere 4,000 miles away, they knew themselves to be able with certainty and precision to judge the ideas in the heads of Russian workers — who would have been shot for speaking their minds about Russia and its rulers. "The masses of Leningrad are demonstrating that that is the appeal for which they have been waiting" (!) "Once again, as in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, they are surging forward, ready to die in defense of the conquests of the October Revolution".

All this was false, arbitrary, political self-projection — self-indulgent foolishness. *The Militant* did everything that could be done by excited words, the flashing of romantic revolutionary images and reminiscences, and the arbitrary assignment of motives — the people defended nationalised property — to paint a picture of revolutionary workers acting outside the political control of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They substituted their own concerns and fantasies for the likely concerns of Leningrad workers facing Nazi enslavement. They wrapped up Russian-Stalinist realities in ideological red ribbons, appealing political mirages, fantasies mistaken for hard fact, and blissful self-induced partial political amnesia.

That 30 August 1941 issue of *The Militant* editorialised in the same vein: "Leningrad is in danger. The imperialist wolf-pack is closing in upon the city. Workers, understand what this means. Leningrad is the hearth of the October Revolution. The most glorious traditions of revolutionary struggle cluster around this proletarian center. Despite the degeneration of the workers' state under the Stalinist regime, these glorious traditions inspire the working class of Leningrad. Once again, as in 1905 and 1917, the Leningrad workers are rising and arming themselves to cope with their class enemy. Barricades are going up. The factory workers who constituted the Red Guard of Lenin's day are practising armed drill..." The same factory workers? The leading Bolshevik workers of the revolution had survived the civil war and Stalin's butcherings?

"This mass rising" — who have they risen against? what

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resistance did they meet with? what was the political result of their rising? — “is the supreme manifestation to date of the resurgence of the revolutionary spirit of 1905 and 1917. The proletarian power that created the USSR now springs forth to save it from destruction”. Power? For Marxists the term usually denotes state power, and they had already, through John G Wright (sponsored and backed, certainly, by Cannon), claimed that Stalin did not “really” control the army, the military core of the state machine. But *The Militant* may here have just meant energy or strength.

Lack of political self-appraisal and self-criticism, a fondness for easy demagogy, too-loose and loosening ties to the theoretical and programmatic moorings of their starting-point politics, and the absence of an independent-minded opposition in the post-1940-split party, here reduced them to political raving<sup>12</sup>. Where the Trotskyists in Trotsky’s time had seen the nationalised industry as the sole, albeit large, survival from the October Revolution, submerged in the totalitarian filth, and Stalinist society as an exceptionally vicious parody of a class-exploitative system, Trotsky’s self-named “disciples” now saw a survival of the workers’ revolution itself in the whole society.

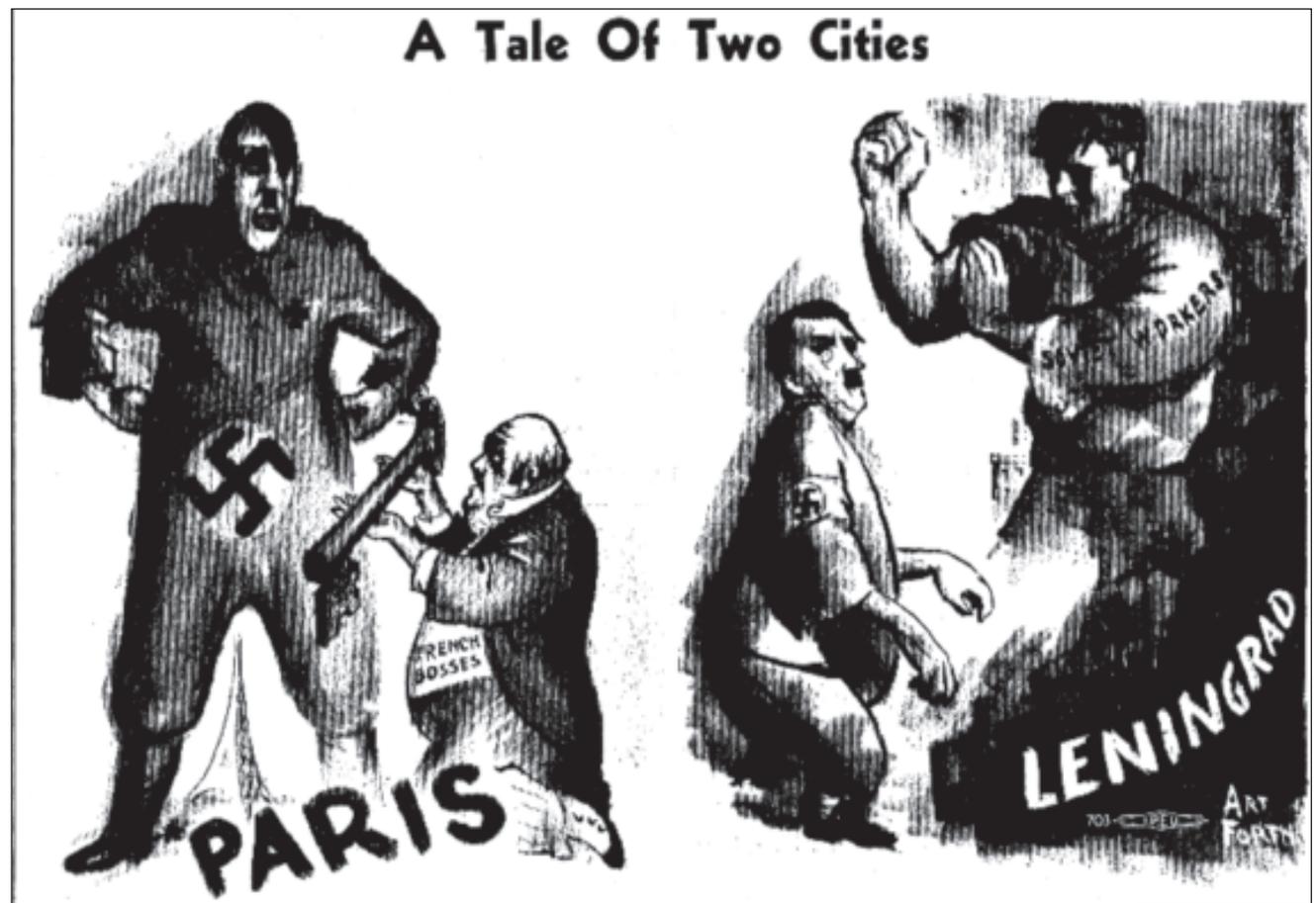
“The proletarian revolution within the Soviet Union exhibits irrepressible vitality. Despite the injuries laid by Stalin’s regime upon the revolutionary proletariat, its living forces well up in a mighty stream. Stalin, who disarmed the workers years ago, is now compelled to rearm them. The Stalinist bureaucracy takes this step with misgivings, at the most critical hour of its existence, in order to save its own skin. But that does not lessen the objective significance of the act. The arming of the people gives testimony that the workers’ state endures... Leningrad is not, like Paris and Brussels, ruled by a powerful capitalist clique which could oppose the arming of the people and their fight to the death against the fascists.” And the Stalinist autocracy? The Nazis too, in 1944-5, “armed the people” in the Volksturm, and hundreds of thousands of them died resisting the Allies in the last months of the war. There was no capitalist clique in Berlin either? Or in Britain? In Britain, and not under a totalitarian state but as part of a functioning bourgeois-democratic political system, the government armed the people, creating the “Home Guard”.

When Trotsky (and Cannon after him) said the bureaucratic autocracy had all the vices of all the ruling classes and seized a proportionately greater share of the social product in Russia than the rich in the advanced capitalist countries, that it deprived the workers even of the basic necessities of life, they were wrong? It wasn’t true? It had ceased to be true? The Russian workers hadn’t noticed? Politically serious people would feel obliged to say how all that fitted into the picture they were now drawing of Russian Stalinist society. In this vein, the Orthodox were not being serious political people; they were being irresponsible demagogues and fantasists.

“The workers have no selfish private property interests to protect at the expense of others”. The workers rule? They decide? “The readiness of the Leningrad workers to offer up their lives to save their city demonstrates that they know they are defending, not the privileges of Stalinist bureaucrats, but the nationalized property and other remaining conquests of the revolution”. If they withstood the siege, the nationalised property would be in the hands of the workers and not of the autocracy and its state?

“The Stalinist regime fears the people in arms as the forerunner of new revolutionary struggles. But even more do they fear the loss of Leningrad and further victories for the fascists, which would endanger their rule from within and from without. Under these compelling circumstances they have been obliged to approve the arming of the masses. But they did not permit the people to take arms until the danger was poised at their heart. Now suddenly they sound the alarm and call upon the workers to save them from the consequences of their own ruinous policies.” The Stalinist bureaucracy was projecting a roughly revolutionary orientation...

*The Militant* continued: “The Stalinist propaganda machine strives to conceal the real character of this mass uprising... The masses of the USSR lack the necessary class organs through which to exercise their creative energies and mobilize their maximum forces. The Soviets, the trade-unions, Lenin’s Bolshevik Party, the Young Communist League — all these indispensable class agencies have been destroyed by the Stalinist regime... These institutions must be reborn and resume their commanding place in Soviet life. The arming of the people [by the Stalinist regime] is the first step in this direction. The class in arms possesses power to demand and to win the restoration of its political rights and its democratic



The Leningrad delirium. *The Militant*, 6 September 1961

institutions. The Soviet proletariat is in a position to move forward and regain all that has been taken from it by the Stalinist reaction”. The workers, or “the masses”, shared “dual power”, or something not far from it?<sup>12</sup>

And even in its ecstatic delirium, *The Militant* did not forget denunciations, damnings, and fatwas against the Heterodox Trotskyists: “The Russian workers exhibit no signs of defeatism. Such renegade belongs to the petty-bourgeois radicals in the capitalist countries. The independent revolutionary proletariat is moving to the forefront in the Soviet Union on the wave of a resurgent revolutionary tide. This class movement imparts a new dynamic force to the defense of the workers’ state. This can be the beginning of the renewal of the Russian Revolution”.

They recalled their “minimum program”, and now addressed it to “the masses”. “The program for victory presented by our party can be realized in life through the action of the Soviet masses themselves”. Here at least the proposals were aimed in the right direction — at the workers and the other “masses”. “We urge the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack as the elementary duty of the working class. The stubborn resistance of the Red Army and the mass rising of the urban proletariat demonstrate how both recognize the necessity for defending to the last ditch the remaining achievements of their revolution.” Not only the urban proletariat, but also the “Red Army”, is a political force independent, or becoming independent, of the bureaucracy?

“Down with Stalin’s ruinous policies!” — defined as “faith in imperialist alliances”, instead of appealing to the German workers — and “drive out the Stalinist bureaucracy”. Those phrases were surely better than silence on the bureaucracy, but a very long way from a plain reiteration of the necessity for working-class revolution against Stalin and the autocracy.

The front page headlines of *The Militant* of 6 September 1941, the second number issued under the imprimatur of political bedlam, told its readers: “Masses Defend Soviet Cities. Hold Nazi Army At Odessa, Kiev And Leningrad. Traditions Of October 1917 Inspire Masses To Fight To Death Against Imperialists”. This outdid the previous issue in at least one respect. It carried a straightforwardly Stalinist cartoon on the front page, headed “A Tale of Two Cities”. It had two panels, labelled “Paris” and “Leningrad”. In “Paris” we see a bourgeois on his knees, representing the French bosses, offering a giant key to a big thug stamped with a swastika, Hitler. In “Leningrad” we see the Hitler figure crouching, almost on his knees, and looming above him, much larger, is a muscular worker grimly rolling up his sleeves. The Stalinist autocracy is no part of the picture.

They were still working on their translation of the idea that Russia remained a degenerated workers’ state because of the nationalised economy rooted in the 1917 revolution into the idea that the class character given to the “workers’ state” by nationalised economy pervaded everything and made it a state equipped with “the foundation of socialism”, one where “the masses” — the slave-driven masses — knew by experience “the superiority of living in a workers’ state”.

“Surrounded by vast, heavily mechanized Nazi force, the armed workers of Odessa, side by side with the Red Army are holding the invaders at bay”. The misreporting here, as if the workers were the independent protagonist on the Russian side, could only be deliberate. They were, and would be throughout the war, above all experts on Russian morale. “As in Leningrad and Kiev, the proletarian masses of Odessa are rallying to the defense of the Soviet Union, spurred on by the memories and traditions of the October Revolution. Eye-witness reports from the beleaguered Ukrainian city relate the tremendous effect produced on the workers’ morale last week when a unit of Black Sea Marines paraded through the city’s streets singing the Kablochka, famous fighting song of the Civil War of 1918-1921. Stirred by this revolutionary song, the populace danced in the streets and morale soared to a high pitch”. It would have been well to remind the readers and themselves that all reports coming out of Russia had passed through the Stalinist censorship. In fact Odessa fell to Romanian troops a few weeks later. Russia’s Black Sea fleet evacuated the Russian troops in Odessa, but not the Jewish population, some 75,000 to 80,000 of whom were murdered by the invaders after the city fell.

“In Leningrad... workers at the end of their factory shifts engage in vast defense drills... In mortal fear for its own existence, the Stalinist bureaucracy is finally forced to rally the workers by appeals to the real tradition of the Soviet Union — the October Revolution... All evidence points to the one inspiring fact: the October Revolution still lives and fights on”. Their gratitude for and satisfaction with a few words — Voroshilov’s reference to Leningrad as “the city of the Great October Revolution” — was not only pitiable but also evidence of their deep political demoralisation.

Someone reading all this without knowing what happened next would have thought that the SWP was going over to a species of critical Stalinism, on the basis of out-of-control fantasy and self-delusion. In fact that’s what, politically speaking, they did. Then they backtracked, recalled to something like sense by Natalia Sedova Trotsky and by their own better political selves. Episodes of similar delirium would be a recurrent feature of the Orthodox over the decades to come.

This, I think, was the first appearance in the history of the

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Natalia Sedova

Trotskyist movement of this sort of wilful, knowing or half-knowing, misrepresentation and downright falsification of reality in order to spin consoling fantasy. Of course mistakes had been made before then — recently, about Russia's Stalinist armies in Poland and Finland. But there is no just comparison of Trotsky's mistaken view of Poland and Finland and the Stalinist invasion with this wilful cutting loose from reality and the Marxist — notionally their own — program. There is no such thing, it has been observed, as a "sincerometer" in politics. That Cannon sincerely lost his sense of reality at different points in World War Two, is, I think, a matter of recorded fact. That he calculated and postured and assumed positions for organisational advantage is, I think, a certainty. Where calculation started and sincere delusion, whipped up among themselves by a small group of like-minded people, ended, is impossible to know. As we will see, in late 1941, in the Leningrad delirium, and again in 1944, Cannon would back down from positions in which he seemingly had a great emotional investment, in face of rebukes from Natalia Sedova Trotsky.

## THE THIRD PHASE: NATALIA SEDOVA'S FIRST "INTERVENTION"

**The wide-eyed credulity and fantasy was abruptly turned off in the next issue of *The Militant*, 13 September 1941. Someone had poured a bucket of political ice water over the too-heated Orthodox — Natalia Sedova Trotsky. So too, perhaps, had the unfolding events in Russia.**

The Nazis had completely surrounded Leningrad on 8 September, starting a siege which would last for two and a half years. Kiev would surrender on 19 September. Now there was a dramatic shift in *The Militant's* coverage of the war and the USSR. No explanation for the shift was offered. No explanation would ever be offered for the two weeks of delirious triumphalism in August-September 1941.

"Catastrophe faces USSR as result of Stalin's rule. Stalin's Purges Beheaded Red Army", *The Militant* told its readers in its 4 October 1941 front-page headline, over an article by Natalia Sedova Trotsky. "The German army keeps advancing deeper and deeper into the Soviet Union. The fascists have seized Kiev, they are marching on Kharkov, Rostov, the

Donets Basin. They are in a position to occupy Crimea. They can occupy Leningrad. The heroic Red Army is not attaining its goal despite its high morale, despite its frightful sacrifices, despite the millions of fighters who perish... It is necessary to undertake a resolute campaign against the criminals responsible for the defeats. Irrefutable facts are now confirming with invincible force the diagnosis made by Leon Trotsky on the basis of an all-sided analysis of the general political and economic conditions in the USSR. It is necessary by means of the merciless blows of fact to lay bare unceasingly, with all our energy, the causes for the defeats of the Red Army. The time has come to remind all workers daily, hourly, of the crimes of the Kremlin regime and its chieftain. The questions I raise are questions of the greatest importance. Everything must be concentrated on them, everything else must be subordinated to them. For the fate of the Soviet Union is now being decided."

Sedova angrily dismissed the idea exulted over and rhapsodised upon by *The Militant* that the use of guerrillas by the regime constituted independent working-class intervention in Russian political life and military affairs. She related it to old intra-Bolshevik disputes of the Civil War period. "What is the truth about guerrilla warfare? Stalin has come back to it, he has returned to the guerrillaism against which Lenin and Trotsky fought so relentlessly during the civil war in the revolutionary Soviet Union. Stalin needs guerrillaism as a facade, as something to show, something to fool the people with. By guerrillaism he tries to cover up the absence of strategists, the absence of a genuine revolutionary and planned leadership of the war; he distracts public opinion by means of the heroes of guerrilla warfare. But in a correctly conducted war there is no need at all of guerrillas; they can only be a hindrance and incur disproportionate sacrifices. Who benefits by this?"

Natalia Sedova's article, dated 25 September 1941, was a tacit reprimand to the Orthodox. They accepted it meekly. It is probable that there had been an exchange of letters before Sedova's article appeared. A front-page editorial, "Trotsky showed Road for the Victory of the Soviet Union", once again proclaimed the immediate "minimum program", as demands on "the Soviet government": "release pro-Soviet political prisoners; revive the democratically-elected Soviets; legalise all pro-Soviet political parties; seek revolutionary unity with the German working class. For the Socialist United States of Europe".

After 4 October 1941, for about a year, during which the war went badly for the USSR, *The Militant* repeated the themes of Natalia's angry article. Why such defeats? Stalin had beheaded the "Red" Army by purging most of its top commanders shortly before the war. The idea of the overthrow of the bureaucracy reappeared occasionally, though in an addled form in which the "Red" Army, as it was, as a whole, or more or less as a whole, was to rank equal to the working class as the agency for this "political revolution".

"The Soviet masses and the Red Army must rid the country of the bureaucratic regime which constitutes the chief internal obstacle to the victorious defence of the workers' state" (*The Militant*, 25 October 1941). Correlated with reality, this would be a call for a military coup!

## "RESURGENCE OF THE SOVIET MASSES"

**In the magazine *Fourth International*, January 1942, John G Wright published a "think-piece" on "The USSR in War". A cross-head sums up the article: "Resurgence of the Soviet masses". Wright wrote of the "enthusiastic response" to the decree of "universal military training" from October 1941.**

In many cities workers were "arming and drilling" even before the official decree. "There is considerable evidence that the initiative for this measure did not originate at the top". Evidence from where? Wright did not tell his readers. The "worker detachments", wrote Wright, were "not... guerrillas fighting behind enemy lines". They "coordinate their activities with those of the regular army". Moscow, wrote Wright, "kept silent about the role of these proletarian militias". So how did Wright come to know better? "The bureaucracy is not enthused by the prospect of an armed and trained population". (In fact, three battalions of Leningrad civilians were formed and sent into battle with little training. The third such battalion had only one day's training). All through the piece, Wright implied, without saying it, that the "worker detachments" were politically independent working-class groups, or becoming independent.

He wrote of "the trade unions", as if the Stalinist labour-front organisations for controlling the workers were real

trade unions. A "section of the trade union activists and trade union organisers" had gone into the army. Activists? Organisers?

"The contradiction between the political needs of the regime and the military tasks of the country is being brought to the breaking point". The Communist Party of the Soviet Union "holds no meetings, conducts no political agitation, accepts no new members... The party has been a hollow shell for many years. The war has cracked the shell". There is "growing pressure from below... Under the hammer blows of events the ranks of the bureaucracy are being shattered". Workers' control, not stifling bureaucratism, was necessary in the factories to maximise production. There was "rising confidence and self-action among the Soviet masses". Wright's basic idea was that the contradiction between the needs of war and bureaucratic rule was an absolute one — the bureaucrats could conduct no war effort — and the contradiction was shattering the Stalin regime. It was impossible for the bureaucracy to adjust and survive. The Stalinist structures in Russian society were crumbling.

In the early 30s Trotsky had believed that the mechanisms of Stalinist rule were falling apart under the stresses of forced-march collectivisation and industrialisation. Something like that was in Wright's mind now, and of course the Orthodox "knew" that the bureaucracy was in no degree a ruling class, but only a flimsy encrustation on Russian society: it could be easily sloughed off. Even in the period when defence of the USSR was downplayed, the idea, theorised by Wright, that the "Red" Army was a proletarian force autonomous or semi-autonomous from the bureaucracy would be kept alive and developed. A front-page cartoon in *The Militant* of 15 August 1942 claimed that it was "Trotsky's Red Army".

## 1941-2: TAKING STOCK

**For about a year, up to the turn of the tide in Russia's favour at Stalingrad after 19 November 1942, the Orthodox expected Russia to be overwhelmed. Coverage of Russia lessened.**

The fluctuating moods of the Orthodox were registered in *The Militant's* use of the 1931 quotation from Trotsky as a heading for its editorial page. It was there, then it wasn't, then it was again. It ran from 9 August 1941 to 13 December 1941, then it was dropped for a year, reappearing only from 19 December 1942 until 31 March 1945. On 25 October 1941 *The Militant* spoke out against the Stalinist regime in renewedly sharp terms. "Stalin Orders GPU Rule For Moscow. Turns To Open GPU Terror To Bolster Regime. Edict Aimed at Silencing All Those Who Criticize Or Oppose Kremlin's War Policy", it reported on page one — as if "GPU rule" in the USSR were startling news. *The Militant* did not report the background of a new order by Stalin, which was that the Germans had taken the important city of Rostov almost without a fight. The USSR troops had panicked and fled. That defeat, and the bureaucracy's visible measures to move government operations from Moscow to Kuibyshev (further east), created panic and flight from Moscow. Stalin responded by moving up the GPU from its usual second-line role to front-line policing in Moscow, with powers to shoot there and then anyone whose talk they overheard and did not like.

John G Wright wrote on Stalin's decree that it was "only the latest link" in a series of decrees (all of European Russia under martial law, 22 June; GPU-controlled political commissars in the army, 16 July, and in the navy, 21 July) instituting "the investment of the GPU with open and sweeping powers not only over the population, but over the Red Army itself".

Wright thought the overthrow of Stalin was now very close. "Stalin's monstrous bureaucratic apparatus of repression began crumbling on the eve of World War Two. The war has violently speeded up this process of disintegration. We are now witnessing the final stages of the death agony of Stalinism... Every day, every hour of the struggle brings additional overwhelming proof that the Soviet Union can be successfully defended only by the reconstitution of the Soviets and the return to the policies of Bolshevism" (*The Militant*, 8 November 1941). The Soviet Union could only be defended after a "political" revolution? A revolution whose achievement was ruled out in deference to the priority of defence? Therefore, in reality, it couldn't be defended at all? Essentially, that's what they still thought.

On 1 November *The Militant* issued advice to "the masses" living under GPU terror. "The Soviet masses, while they continue the military struggle against the fascists, must take steps to provide a leadership for the fronts that is qualified, trained and capable of leading them to victory... While the

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struggle against Stalinism, the chief internal obstacle to the successful defense of the USSR and the organizer of its defeats, must be subordinated to the defense of the military front against the imperialists, the Soviet masses must take the first favorable opportunity, without weakening the front against the imperialists, to remove the bureaucratic regime..."

This new formulation had the merit of pointing once again toward the need for a working-class revolution against Stalin and the autocracy. But the idea that the "Soviet masses" could change the army leadership while Stalin still held power (or did he? remember that his power was "crumbling") was another bizarritty to add to the growing collection. The Proletarian Military Policy for the USA may have infected their thinking here — the idea that the trade unions, without taking power or at least achieving "dual power", could take over the training of the US armed forces.

The Socialist Workers Party held a Plenum-Conference on 11 October 1941, in Chicago (this volume, p.304).

"Only our analysis of the anti-revolutionary character of Stalinism explains to the workers why the Kremlin has refused to arouse the masses of Europe and undermine Hitler in Germany". The Heterodox Trotskyists were never far from Cannon's concerns. "Our program for the revolutionary defense of the Soviet Union has been confirmed not only against the Stalinists, but also against all the petty-bourgeois renegades who denied the Soviet Union its character as a workers' state and who refused to defend it." Cannon had a new "proof" that the USSR was a workers' state: "The unparalleled morale with which the Red Army and the Soviet Union masses rallied to the defense of the workers' state can only be explained by our analysis of the class character of the Soviet Union. The Soviet masses, despite the oppression which they are under from the Kremlin bureaucracy, proved to be wiser politically than the 'cultured' petty-bourgeois snobs who abandoned the Soviet Union; the masses were able to distinguish between the Soviet Union and Stalinism" (*The Militant*, 18 October 1941). In fact, of course, Stalin and his GPU were absolutely inseparable from the reality of the USSR.

Cannon told the conference: "From all indications, Stalin and his gang are carrying their work to its predestined end. Stalin and Hitler together are dealing the Soviet Union what appears now to be its most catastrophic blow. The bitter truth can no longer be concealed by any blustering. The reality is too glaringly obvious now". He was plain about his organisational calculations: "We should intensify our work among the Stalinists; try to reach them at all costs; fix the responsibility for the catastrophe of the Soviet Union where it really belongs — on the shoulders of Stalin and his gang; and try to win over every possible Stalinist worker to the movement of the Fourth International". And again he did not forget to curse, damn, and anathematise the Shachtmanites. "In such an hour as this, we see again how absolutely right were Trotsky and the majority of our party and the International in defending the Soviet Union to the very end; in establishing such a clear record that if we have now come to the catastrophe... nobody can justly say that one iota of responsibility clings to the Fourth International. We remain loyal to the Soviet Union in spite of everything, and that gives us the political and moral right to approach the disillusioned Stalinist workers. It is not so with the petty-bourgeois elements who deserted our ranks on account of the Russian question. What position are they in to approach a sincere Stalinist worker who in his heart believed, and believed with justice, that the Soviet Union was a great fortress of the proletariat?..." (*The Militant*, 15 November 1941). Self-righteous bragging was never absent for long. Typically, Cannon here judged, and urged his comrades to judge, the rightness or otherwise of an analysis or a programmatic position by how it would "play" to an audience, not by whether it was true to reality or not.

The SWP summed up again a year later, in an October 1942 convention resolution. "We are proud of our record on the Russian question... Not one stain of dishonour will fall upon the banner of the Fourth International... The Fourth International [never] failed in its duty of defending the Russian revolution to the very end. That is one of the proudest assets of our movement".

The October 1942 convention still believed that "unless the revolution rises and conquers in the capitalist world and the Soviet workers throw the Stalinist usurpers off their back, the Soviet Union will inevitably be crushed". No one else but themselves understood the USSR and therefore no one else but themselves understood world politics. "The events affecting the Soviet Union... are incomprehensible except to those who are guided by the Trotskyist analysis of the character of the Soviet Union. We alone have accurately explained the

course of the USSR, we alone do not have to conceal what we said yesterday... Petty-bourgeois deserters turned their back on the USSR which they suddenly termed 'imperialist', but we... explained that by the seizures of the Finnish, Polish and Baltic territories, the Kremlin bureaucracy was not pursuing imperialist aims but was in its own bureaucratic and reactionary way seeking to safeguard the defences of the Soviet Union" (*The Militant*, 17 October 1942). Trotsky, course, had said a great deal more about the Kremlin in Poland and Finland.

Here was another leitmotif for the decades ahead: Everything imperialistic-seeming the USSR did or would do, was done only for purposes of the legitimate defence of the Soviet Union.

Cannon and his comrades let their "Soviet patriotism", as SWP resolutions called it, lead them into very strange territory. Lauding nationalised property, they slipped into lauding Stalinist totalitarianism.

The resolution said: "The Red Army and war production were free from the fetters which private property imposes upon 'national defense' even in wartime; no profiteers existed to limit war orders to monopoly corporations. The 'scorched earth' policy could be applied by a land without private property with a determination and planfulness which are impossible to capitalist countries. The moving of industrial plants from endangered areas to places deep in the interior, the building of a second railroad across Siberia — such gigantic economic actions in wartime were made possible only by the system of nationalised property".

This rodomontade about the superior efficiency of nationalised economy in the war was entirely Stalinist. The nationalised economy did not run itself. People made the decisions, decisions about other people. The Stalinist bureaucracy made the decisions. The "second railroad across Siberia", presumably the Baikal-Amur mainline, was constructed by captive slave labour of 100,000 German prisoners-of-war. Only 10% would survive to be repatriated. All that was faded out in order to present a picture of the pure glories of nationalised property.

What they hailed here was the totalitarian power, ruthlessness, and inhumanity of the bureaucracy. Not nationalised property permitted that ruthlessness, but the totalitarian concentration of power in the hands of people who had the strength, imperviousness, and ruthlessness casually to kill off millions of "their own" people. Even the picture they painted of the capitalist states for contrast with the USSR was false and in substance a senseless glorification of Stalinist totalitarianism: the governments in both Britain and the USA had taken direct political control of industry, and they ran, as in World War One, effective capitalist war economies. The bluster here contrasted Stalin's system of totalitarian slave-driving favourably with the capitalist state-directed war economy in states that essentially preserved most of the bourgeois-democratic rights and liberties.

The program for democratisation was there too in the resolution, but how it all fitted together was still far from clear. In truth, it did not fit together. The October 1942 resolution did not explain the sudden collapse after two weeks of their wild fit of enthusiasm in August-September 1941. It "processed" it into a smooth "story-line". "After five months of terrible defeats, workers from the factories joined the heroic Red Army warriors at the gates of Leningrad and Moscow and helped recover Rostov... in an outburst of proletarian revolutionary endeavour". Why was it revolutionary? In relation to what was it revolutionary? Because they "defended nationalised property", and doing so was ipso facto "revolutionary"? That is not how they had presented things in August-September 1941.

All this specious pseudo-explanation and demagogy depended on forceful assertion, misrepresentation, political dishonesty, bluster — and on a party system which made it very difficult for anybody to challenge the incumbent leaders. Such self-righteous demagogy could not but smother political discussion and dissent in the SWP, and any attempt at honest accounting. Thus the first fruit of the "tightening-up" of 1940, James P Cannon's "Bolshevisation" of Trotskyism, was to make possible this flood of irresponsible, capricious, and self-indulgent "apparatus politics" and "apparatus story-lining".

## THE FOURTH PHASE: AFTER STALINGRAD

**A fourth phase in the responses of the Orthodox came with Russia's successes in the war, as the third phase had come with its defeats.**

In November 1942 the Russian army encircled the German

army at Stalingrad. It was the turning point in the war. Russian strength, success, and territory began steadily to increase. The new cycle of enthusiasm and delusional politics on Russia was signalled with a front page headline on 5 December 1942: "Red Army's Offensive Staggers Germans At Stalingrad And Rzhev". And they knew what to do next, and what "tasks" they should set for Stalin's Russia: "The Task Now Is To Arouse German Revolt". And the "tasks" in the USSR? "The military victories of the Red Army can be extended and turned into decisive victories. The ferment in Germany" — in response to a hypothetical Russian appeal to the German workers — "can completely disrupt Hitler's rear and facilitate Soviet victory. But for this a correct revolutionary policy is necessary. The Soviet masses, while fighting with all their energy against Hitler's attack, must convince their German brothers that they are allies who will fight with them against the imposition of a new Versailles [Treaty] and for the creation of a workers' government in Germany". Unless "Soviet masses" included the Stalinist regime, that was nonsense, with no grip on any reality."

"As in 1918-19, today [a revolutionary appeal] can not only save the Soviet Union but can lead to the emancipation of all the workers of Europe". This line made even less sense now that the "Red" Army was beginning to advance. They saw no contradiction between the emancipation of the workers — of Europe or of Russia — and Russian military victory. Such talk as there had been about the overthrow of the bureaucracy subsided again.

On 5 December 1942 the SWP added "Defence of the USSR" as a ninth point to the previously eight-point policy platform in *The Militant*, and on 19 December 1942 they restored the 1931 quotation from Trotsky to the editorial page. It would remain there until 31 March 1945. In mid-December 1942, they brought out, under the title *In Defence of Marxism*, a very one-sided selection of Trotsky's articles on Poland and Finland from 1939-40 (omitting the articles he had written for the public press to condemn Stalin's invasions, and those he wrote after April 1940).

By that time much of the content of the book, Trotsky's polemics against the "petty-bourgeois" who would capitulate to US public opinion in the war, had been disproved by events, and its reproduction without comment on that disproof was therefore wilful libel on the Workers Party. A proper collection of what Trotsky wrote on Russia between, say, the USSR's turn to Germany in March 1939, or from the Hitler Stalin pact in August 1939 to his death in August 1940, including his articles and drafts for the public press, would have been very valuable politically. Instead, the SWP produced a "cut out" Trotsky, limited to his internal polemics, to back up their own current politics. *In Defence of Marxism* was the first big example of "Apparatus Marxism" in the Trotskyist movement.

The introduction to the first edition of *In Defence of Marxism*, written by Joseph Hansen and William F Warde (George Novack), acting as Cannon's amanuenses, was an important document in the history of the Fourth International. It enshrined the Orthodox myth that the origin of the two Trotskyisms lay in the "renegacy" of "petty-bourgeois traitors". The introduction asserted, as allegedly bedrock Trotskyist principle, ideas flatly contradicted by the two major articles by Trotsky in the book, *The USSR in War and Again And Once More*. Hansen and Novack held forth on 'dialectics'; but, in asserting that the "workers' state" characterisation of the USSR and commitment in all circumstances to its defence were fixed parts of the "program of the Fourth International" they were utterly undialectical. Trotsky's point was the changeability of the USSR and therefore of Marxist assessments of it. What in Trotsky was a matter of ongoing investigation and successive approximations, in Hansen and Novack became a matter of barebones dogma. The Orthodox experts on "dialectics" were creaking old-fashioned metaphysicians in their own attitudes to the USSR. In August 1943 the SWP followed up *In Defence of Marxism* with a book of Cannon's writings during the 1939-40 dispute, entitled *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. For decades, those two books would be international pillars of the Orthodox version of Trotskyism. As the question of "defending the USSR" receded in military terms with the successes of the Russian army, it became more prominent in the weekly and monthly publications of the Orthodox.

According to what they had said in 1939-40, in the first place Trotsky and in the second place Cannon, it was now time to reassess the "degenerated workers' state" characterisation of Russia in the light of the survival of and imperialist expansion by Stalin's regime in the war. Instead, they veered off on a binge of vicarious proto-Stalinist triumphalism.

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Albert Goldman

The emotions proper for revolutionary socialists in relation to the October Revolution and working-class movements in general were unleashed full-blast in support of Stalin's Russia. Russian military successes were successes of "Trotsky's Red Army"; of the October Revolution; of nationalised and planned industry; of the absence (thanks to the workers' revolution) of capitalists to hinder success, act as a fifth-column, or be a sell-out leadership such as the bourgeoisie in France had been when facing Hitler. A regular contributor to *The Militant* in those years, Louis Jacobs, would comment in a document distributed at the 16-19 November 1944 SWP convention that calls for the overthrow of Stalin were there when things were going badly for Stalin's army, and absent when it was doing well. That was just.

## THE "CLASS SIGNIFICANCE" OF RUSSIA'S VICTORIES

**The strange idea of claiming the "Red" Army for Trotskyism had started in Wright's article in 1941 and was epitomised in a front-page cartoon published in *The Militant* of 15 August 1942, before the turn of the tide in the war. Their use of the term "Trotsky's Red Army" for the Russian military helped the Orthodox ride the floodwaters of mass popular enthusiasm in the USA for the "Red Army" and "Uncle Joe" Stalin's Russia.**

The idea of "Trotsky's Red Army" had an ideological function in addition to its usefulness in a labour movement in which the "Red" Army was extremely popular. The USSR's army had survived Hitler's onslaught and was now scoring military successes against the Germans. It was doing deeds that the Orthodox had not believed it capable of. They explained the successes by conjuring up the idea that this pillar of Stalin's state was not "really" Stalinist or Stalinism. Splitting off the "Red" Army (in their heads) from the Stalin regime had an extra daftness of its own; but the method and pattern was the same as with the splitting-off of the nationalised economy as a thing-in-itself separable from the people who ran and served it and from the social relations they set up within it. This method would play a very great role with the post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyists as, between the end of World War Two and the outbreak of the Korean war five years later, they struggled to comprehend a world they had never expected and the role in it of Stalin and Stalinism.

In 1939-40 Trotsky had written about the Russian Army in Poland and Finland evoking revolutionary mass activity:

Stalin would use it and then strangle it. The facts proved to be different, and in the Fourth International Manifesto of May 1940, Trotsky acknowledged that "Stalin did not find any support whatever in Finland... the invasion of the Red Army assumed the character of direct and open military violence". In 1943-4 the Orthodox took Trotsky's previous ideas about the Russian army evoking revolutionary activity, and applied them to the "Red" Army advancing on Europe. There would be an "impetus inevitably imparted by the Red Army advances to the revolutionary moods and movements of the masses and to an overturn in political and property relations", so they said as the Army entered Poland (*The Militant*, 8 January 1944); and the victorious Red Army, Trotsky's Red Army, would not let itself be used for Stalinist repression, or not all of it would.

Felix Morrow in *The Militant* of 20 February 1943: "Even before the Nazis are beaten, the fundamental class attitude of the capitalists toward the Soviet Union is revealing itself. They know that behind the Soviet victories and making them possible is the nationalized property system created by the October revolution. They are not too sure — and with good reason! — that the bureaucratic regime of Stalin will last long after a definitive Soviet victory over the Nazis. They fear that in place of Stalin... there will arise again the democratic Soviets in the spirit of Lenin and Trotsky — the spirit of the world socialist revolution. That's what capitalist reaction fears will be the outcome of Soviet victory. For exactly the same reason all workers truly loyal to their class are fervent supporters of the Soviet Union, knowing that its victory is also the victory of workers everywhere". The front-page headline the next week, 27 February 1943, warned: "New anti-Soviet manoeuvres reported. USSR Menaced By Finnish 'Peace' Move, Polish Plan, Vatican Plots". *The Militant* would worry much about things like that from now on. The Orthodox would back Russia's claims to the borders Stalin desired.

Two questions were confused and entangled here: the likely behaviour of Russia as a burgeoning military-imperialist power, and the "class character" of the USSR and of the areas it seemed now to be able to take under its control. The reasonable expectation that Russia would take what it could was mixed up with the notion that Russia, as a workers' state, would impart a "workers'" or "workers' state" character to a large part of Europe. The idea was sometimes that the "Red" Army would inspire working-class revolution and maybe help it along, and sometimes of the Army (which, remember, for the Orthodox, was not Stalin's) not letting itself be used against the workers.

Albert Goldman, in his column in *The Militant*, would explain "Why The Reactionaries Are Worried About Soviet Gains" (27 February 1943). "The magnificent victories achieved by the Red Army in recent months have inspired all the defenders of the Soviet Union with new hope... What worries some of the big capitalists is the possibility that the Red Army will reach Berlin before the British and American armies [and] of the Soviet Union extending its influence to Germany and to all of Central Europe... It is almost impossible to conceive of the Red Army's marching into Germany without a social revolution following". Whose social revolution? "They are worried that regardless of Stalin a social revolution will come as a result of a defeat of Hitler by the Soviet armies..." The ghosts of Finland and Poland, 1939-40, could be seen dancing wildly inside this and the many similar assessments.

What did all this mean in the SWP branches? The same issue of *The Militant* carried a report that answers that question: "Speaking on 'The Class Meaning of the Soviet Victories' to an intensely interested New York audience of well over a hundred, Felix Morrow, editor of *Fourth International*, stated that the first victories of the Red Army have already revealed the fundamental hostility between the capitalist states and the workers' state. Listing a series of anti-Soviet moves by the capitalist 'friends' of the USSR, he quoted [British cabinet member] Lord Beaverbrook's admission that the Red Army had captured in two months more equipment from the Nazis than they had received from England and the US since the start of the war. The victories of the Red Army have caused panic not only amongst the Nazis but among the reactionaries in the United Nations who fear that the new confidence and high morale of the Red Army bodes ill for their plans to make a deal with Stalin guaranteeing them against a Socialist Europe".

The delusions and fantasies that ran riot in *The Militant* for two or three weeks in August-September 1941 had revived in a lower key. "The stranglehold of the Stalin bureaucracy has progressively weakened with every new Red Army vic-

tory and its consequent rise of morale among the Soviet masses. The Red Army is fighting for a Socialist Europe as well as a Socialist Russia, Morrow declared, and they will never submit to any underhanded deal to preserve capitalism in Europe for the benefit of the very same imperialist powers that attempted to overthrow the October 1917 Revolution".

[Workers' Party leader] Max Shachtman's response in *Labor Action* (15 March 1943) will serve as an interim summing up. "Felix Morrow... says: 'The stranglehold of the Stalin bureaucracy has progressively weakened with every Red Army victory'. Where, when, how? Nowhere, thus far, not even in the pages of *The Militant*, have we read of a single important (or for that matter, unimportant) fact to support this absurd contention. A weakening of the stranglehold of the bureaucracy would manifest itself in any number of concrete ways... a moderation of the terror regime, increased independent class activity of the workers, etc. Will such things, especially the last-named, take place? They will... As yet, there is no sign, no evidence, for Morrow's assertion. A totalitarian regime is weakened in wartime when it suffers military setbacks. To speak now, especially now, of a weakening of the bureaucracy's stranglehold on the country and its people is, at the very best, wishful thinking. Rise of morale among the Soviet masses? If by 'morale' Morrow is referring in general to the readiness of the masses to fight, to make sacrifices, then substantially the same thing could be said about the 'morale' of the Germans and the Japanese. Didn't their morale hold up, and rise, with the big victories of their armies? And isn't it still pretty high, according to most reports? What does this fact, by itself, prove about Russia that it does not prove about Germany or Japan?

"There is no evidence — again we emphasise, as yet — of any rise in the class morale of the Russian workers. Such a rise would show itself in the development of organised opposition, however primitive, to the counter-revolutionary regime; in the development of an independent class movement, of a socialist consciousness, of internationalist spirit. That will come. But where is there a single sign of it now?"

"According to Morrow, not only is the 'Red' Army fighting for a socialist Russia (which does not exist except in the lying propaganda of the Kremlin) but also for a socialist Europe. With all deference to the delicate eardrums of our readers, we say again: Nonsense! But this time, especially dangerous nonsense. There is no such thing today as a Red Army. It once existed. It was organised by Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. It was the army of the workers, of the people, of the socialist revolution. But Stalinism destroyed that army! Hasn't Morrow heard? He can find the whole story told and analysed in Trotsky's writings. What is 'Red' (that is, socialist, internationalist, democratic) in the Russian army today?... The Stalinist army is the army of the Bonapartist counter-revolution. Does Morrow get this? — the army of Bonapartist counter-revolution, not the army of socialism!...

"What Morrow says is, at the best, apologetics for Stalinism. If it is 'fighting for a socialist Europe as well as a socialist Russia', that is welcome news. It would be a miracle — and we don't believe in miracles. The Russian masses will really be fighting for a socialist Russia and Europe when they have first destroyed the rule of bureaucratic totalitarianism, rid themselves of the poison of Stalinist chauvinism, and taken control. Not before! To disseminate the idea that the Stalinist army is fighting for a 'socialist Europe as well as a socialist Russia' is to disseminate the most vicious pro-Stalinist propaganda, and thereby help destroy the prospects of a truly socialist Russia and Europe. Morrow evidently does not know that the rule of Stalinism is the rule of slavery. Morrow evidently does not read Trotsky, who wrote that the victory of the 'Red' Army in Poland (which it divided with the Hitlerite pirates in 1939) meant the subjugation of the 'liberated' masses to Stalinist slavery.

"Because of the dangerous illusions created among some workers here and in Europe by the 'victories of the Red Army', the revolutionary socialist should and will emphasise: The extension of Stalinist rule means the extension of a new slavery. Call it bureaucratic collectivism, as we do, or 'degenerated, counter-revolutionary workers' state', as Trotsky did, it is nevertheless a totalitarian slavery that Stalinist rule represents, a slave-master oppression which crushes everything that is noble, progressive, democratic, socialist and internationalist in the working class that comes under its heel. Be irreconcilable toward imperialism, be it in the form of fascism or 'democracy'. But be no less irreconcilable to Stalinism. Whoever teaches differently is either an outright enemy of socialism, or a well-meaning obstacle in its path".

# The Two Trotskyisms

**THE ORTHODOX DEFEND THE VICTORIOUS USSR**  
At the start of January 1944 18 SWP leaders and Trotskyist leaders of the trade unions in Minneapolis went to jail, some for a year, some for 16 months.

The FBI had raided the party headquarters in Minneapolis just as Hitler's invasion of the USSR started, and the defendants, convicted of "advocating the overthrow of the government" were sentenced the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. Now, after two years of appeals, they went to jail. The court decisions included an instruction from a judge that the books and other such material seized in the FBI raid of 1941 should be burned. Among those jailed were James P Cannon, Felix Morrow, and Albert Goldman. A serious political dispute had already developed between them.

Goldman was the SWP's attorney. His summing-up speech in the Minneapolis courtroom had been issued by the SWP as a pamphlet, a companion to the pamphlet *Socialism on Trial* which comprised the courtroom question-and-answer sessions between Goldman, as attorney, and Cannon, as defendant, about the politics of the SWP. Felix Morrow was the editor of the SWP's monthly magazine, *Fourth International*. The 1940 split had taken out of the SWP those who had been the party's leading intellectuals and most qualified theorists. Shachtman, in an analogy with factory workers and perhaps seriously, described James Burnham as a "skilled" intellectual and himself as "semi-skilled". After the split, Goldman and Morrow replaced them as the leading party intellectuals. Goldman had been the main speaker for the Cannon faction at the conference in April 1940.

Goldman and Morrow had been in favour of allowing the minority to put out a public bulletin that would express their views on Russia. (Cannon's refusal to agree to that was the immediate cause of the 1940 split). They had also been among the most sure and vehement of the Orthodox. Goldman had at first proposed that the SWP "approve" the Russian invasion of eastern Poland. He had written in *The Militant* approving the annexation of the Baltic states in June 1940. In many of the journalistic skirmishes between the SWP and the Workers' Party after the split, it was either Goldman or Morrow who defended the SWP viewpoint. Morrow had been editor of *The Militant* during the August-September 1941 Leningrad delirium. He had written some of the worst and most disorienting nonsense about the "class meaning" of Russian successes in the war. But he was an honest man. He learned from his mistakes. By 1946 he would have abandoned the "degenerated workers' state" account of Russia in favour of a very rudimentary state-capitalist account, as would Goldman.

Goldman was a downright and candid man. For instance, early in 1943 the Nazis had revealed their discovery of the bodies of 10,000 Polish officers, massacred in April-May 1940 and buried in the Katyn forest, in Russia near the Polish border. It is reckoned that in total the Stalinists killed about 22,000 captured Polish officers at that time. Stalin claimed that the story was a Nazi fabrication, and that the Nazis themselves had killed the Polish officers. Though the SWP was still in full "Soviet patriot" mode, and Goldman too, he weighed the evidence in *The Militant* (8 May 1943), including the record of Stalin in such matters, and concluded that it was at least a serious possibility that the Katyn massacre was the work of the Russians.

On current politics, Goldman and Morrow had begun to differ from Cannon and others in the latter half of 1943, over how the prospects of socialist revolution in Europe had to be seen after the experience of the "Italian revolution" of July 1943. The Fascist Grand Council had voted out Mussolini and installed a new government, which switched to the Allied side in the war. *The Militant* (and Goldman and Morrow) had hailed this as "the revolution", a working-class revolt. After a while Goldman and Morrow felt obliged to record that it had been a palace coup, not a revolution, though great crowds had come out to welcome it.

From the experience of Italy they began to argue that a series of democratic slogans — against the monarchy, for the republic, for restoration of parliamentary democracy, etc. — would play an important part in preparing the European labour movements to take power. The SWP leaders responded, and would continue for years to respond: "Roosevelt and Churchill are absolutely right when they calculate that the choice is either a Franco-type dictatorship [i.e. like the fascist regime in Spain, with which the USA and the UK had friendly relations] or the socialist revolution. There is no alternative. There exists no middle-of-the-road program" (*The Militant*, 4 December 1943). There was no space at all for

democratic demands. In this epoch of working-class revolution such democratic demands were no longer a proper and necessary part of their program as they had been for the 1938 Fourth International. At the SWP National Committee plenum (effectively, a small national conference) in October 1943 Goldman and Morrow moved amendments to the resolution on Europe. It seems to have been the bureaucratic chicanery with which the central administration of the SWP met the resolution that, at that point, brought them into sharp conflict with the party regime.

In jail, from January 1944, two groups formed among the Trotskyists, one around Goldman and Morrow, the other around Cannon. Out of jail, in early 1945, a Goldman-Morrow minority took shape, arguing against what they saw as the ultra-left and sectarian politics for Europe of the SWP and the European Trotskyists who, effectively, followed the SWP. They were heavily influenced by the Workers Party on those political questions, and in their experience-born views on the bureaucratic nature of the Cannon regime in the SWP. They were also, perhaps, influenced by Natalia Sedova's criticism of the SWP leaders and their attitude to Stalinist Russia. They would soon begin to champion reunification between the SWP and the Workers Party<sup>13</sup>.

**THE WARSAW RISING AND JAMES P CANNON**  
One of the things that the critics inside the SWP may have learned from was the strange episode of Cannon's letters from prison on policy towards the advancing "Red" Army. The interim SWP leaders while the 18 were in jail veered a little, in response to events, from the "Trotsky's Red Army" and automatic "Soviet patriot" line, and they came into conflict with the jailed James P Cannon.

As the Russian Army approached Warsaw in August 1944, Polish nationalists and others, including a large part of the workers of Warsaw, rose in rebellion against the Nazis in anticipation of the Russian entry into the city. They wanted to assert Polish self-liberation, as also did the French who rose in August 1944 as the Americans approached Paris, French self-liberation. The Russian Army ceased to advance. For nine weeks the Warsaw insurgents fought magnificently and were slowly destroyed by the Nazis. 150,000 Poles died.

The Russian Army did not budge. Eventually it occupied the corpse-strewn ruins of the city. Stalin later expressed his view of the rising: a "criminal act of an anti-Soviet policy". The interim SWP leaders editorialised in *The Militant* and the magazine *Fourth International* that the Russians had betrayed the Warsaw fighters. When he read the editorials, Cannon came close to denouncing the SWP leaders as traitors — to the "Red" Army.

"The editorial again fails to put explicitly and unmistakably our slogan 'Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union' against all imperialists... The Moscow charge that the London

'Polish government in exile' ordered the uprising without consulting the Red Army command is brushed aside without being clearly stated, much less analyzed in the light of the current Soviet-Polish negotiations.

"No consideration is given to the question of whether or not the Red Army was able at the moment to launch an all-out attack on Warsaw in view of its long-sustained offensive, the Nazi defensive preparations along the Vistula, the necessity to regroup forces and mass for new attacks after the not inconsiderable expenditure of men and material in reaching the outskirts of Warsaw, the fact that there was a lull along virtually the entire Eastern front concurrent with the halt before Warsaw, etc.

"Nor does the editorial take up the question of the duty of guerrilla forces — and in the circumstances that is what the Warsaw detachments are — to subordinate themselves to the high command of the main army, the Red Army, in timing such an important battle as the siege of Warsaw..."

Cannon was vibrantly aware of his responsibilities: "Great care should be taken in treating the Polish and similar questions... We must never forget that our party statements and editorials are now regarded as programmatic documents and taken with the greatest seriousness by the revolutionary workers of the entire world... [Our] carefulness... has given all our resolutions since the death of the Old Man their thought-out character and made them stand up from year to year as supplements logically flowing from one unchanging program, and, like the program itself, needing no fundamental revision".

**NATALIA'S SECOND INTERVENTION**  
Natalia Sedova wrote to the SWP endorsing the editorial Cannon complained of and declaring:

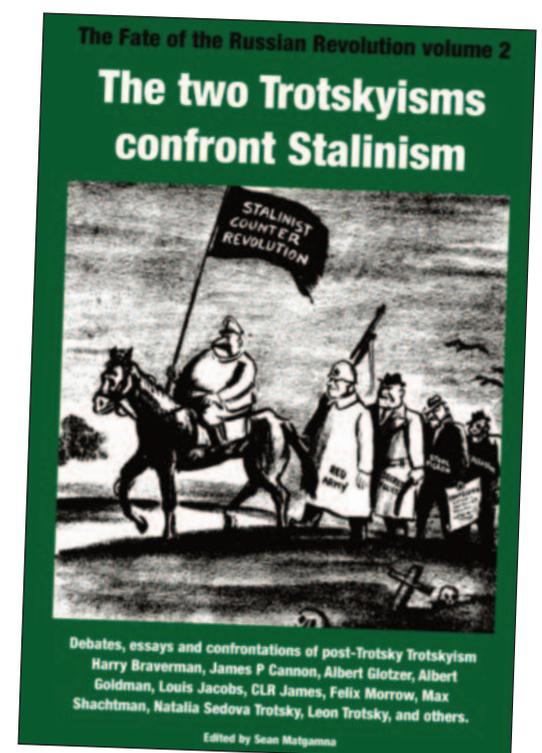
"You seem to be hypnotized by the slogan of the 'defense of the USSR' and in the meantime profound changes, political as well as moral-psychological, have taken place in its social structure. In his articles, especially the last ones, L.D. [Trotsky] wrote of the USSR as a degenerating workers' state and in view of this outlined two possible paths of further social evolution of the first workers' state: revolutionary and reactionary. The last four years have shown us that the reactionary landslide has assumed monstrous proportions within the USSR... The Red Army, at the basis of whose organization were lodged the principles of the October overturn, and whose (the Red Army's) goal was the struggle for the world revolution, has become transformed into a nationalist-patriotic organization, defending the fatherland, and not against its bureaucratic regime but together with its regime as it has taken shape in the last decade. Do you recall the answer of L.D. to the question put to him in the Politburo in 1927: whether the Opposition would defend the USSR in case of war? 'The socialist fatherland — yes; Stalin's regime — no'....

"At the present time there is only one danger threatening

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# The Two Trotskys

the Soviet Union — that is the further development of black reaction, the further betrayal of the international proletariat. This is precisely the direction in which it is necessary to sound the alarm...

“It is necessary to hammer away at one point: to warn against the consequences of Russian victories; to warn, to sound the alarm on the basis of the elements that have already been disclosed with complete clarity...” (This volume, pp.335ff).

Cannon retreated. He wrote a letter from jail proposing a shift in “emphasis” to “defence of the European revolution against Stalin”. That letter was published inside the SWP so as to make it seem that he was independently proposing the same sort of shift as that advocated by Sedova. As we’ve seen, he had in fact just written to the opposite effect.

The SWP decided at its November 1944 conference to drop the 1931 quotation from Trotsky about defending the USSR which had been in its editorial masthead most of the time since June 1941, and to substitute another quotation from Trotsky, this time from the May 1940 manifesto: “Only the world revolution can save the USSR for socialism. But the world revolution carries with it the inescapable blotting out of the Kremlin oligarchy”. Despite the conference decision, the 1931 slogan continued on the masthead, most likely because Cannon wanted it, until the end of March 1945. The cutting edge of its replacement was still concern with defence of the USSR, and the new quotation was still far too far from a plain statement that the Russian bureaucracy should be overthrown by a new working-class “political” revolution; it was, nonetheless, progress of sorts.

## THE FIFTH PHASE: FREE-SWIRLING CONFUSION

**Leaving aside all other questions for the moment, it was already plain from experience that Russia would expand into as much territory as it could and hold as much as it could, for as long as it could.**

Britain and Russia had jointly occupied Iran in August-September 1941. After the end of the war, in 1946, when Britain had evacuated Iran, Russia stayed on for some months in its northern part of the country. Stalin withdrew from Iran only under intense US pressure. At the end of the war he had laid claim to Italy’s ex-colony Libya. Stalin’s oligarchy had immense and growing power. After looting and pillaging the countries they occupied, they would want to assimilate property forms in those countries to Russia’s. In any case, much of the means of production in the countries Russia occupied was already state property. In Czechoslovakia, the most industrially advanced of the territories being occupied by “Trotsky’s Red Army”, the Nazis had expropriated around 70% of industry, putting it into the hands of the German state or German companies.

In August 1945, a coalition government under the bourgeois liberal Edvard Benes decreed the nationalisation of two-thirds of industry. The question was not whether or not industry would be nationalised, but whether this nationalisation constituted in any sense, no matter how limited, a workers’ revolution. The problem many of the Orthodox had in registering the plain facts and trends arose out of the idea that nationalised property akin to Russia’s in and of itself might define a species of Stalin-made bureaucratic “workers’” revolutions. Certainly replicas of the Stalinist system created by the activity of the Russian Stalinist state would have the same characteristics that the “degenerated workers’ state” formula cherished and defined as the essential remaining “workers’” element in the “degenerated workers’ state”<sup>14</sup>. Either Stalin could carry through revolutions — from above — to make workers’ states, or the whole “degenerated workers’ state” notion for the USSR was wrong. This dilemma paralysed them politically for a long time. They would not cut themselves out of it in the only way possible: by redefining the USSR<sup>15</sup>. In an SWP Political Committee discussion on 2 August 1949, Cannon would say:

“I don’t think that you can change the class character of a state by manipulation at the top. It can only be done by revolution which is followed by fundamental change in property relations. That is what I understand by a change of the class character of a state. That is what happened in the Soviet Union... I don’t think there has been a social revolution in the buffer countries and I don’t think Stalinism carried out a revolution... The role of Stalinism is not revolutionary at all. It gave an impulse to the revolution in this sense, that the victories of the Red Army stimulated the revolutionary movement. But the actual role of Stalinism was to strangle that revolution, to suppress the mass movement of the workers and to re-stabilize the capitalist state and capitalist property

relations. The fundamental role they played there was counter-revolutionary...

“If you once begin to play with the idea that class character of a state can be changed by manipulations in top circles, you open the door to all kinds of revision of basic theory... Nationalization plus the [state monopoly of] foreign trade, is not the criterion of a workers’ state. That is what remains of the workers’ state created by the Russian Revolution. That is the remnants of the Russian Revolution. That is why the Soviet state is called ‘degenerate’. There is a tremendous difference whether a state has nationalized property relations as a result of a proletarian revolution, or whether there are certain progressive moves toward nationalization, by the Stalinists in one case or by English reformists in the other...”

The whole political tragedy of Orthodox Trotskyism is there, dissected and laid out. Cannon said it clearly: “Nationalised property... is not the criterion of a workers’ state”. A working-class revolution is necessary for the class character of a state to go from “bourgeois” to “working-class”. Cannon was clear, and in terms of Trotsky’s theory of the USSR as we have discussed it in this introduction, entirely corrected. But the nationalised property was held to be what empirically linked Stalinist Russia back to the revolution. Stalin was creating in a number of countries as much as “remained” of the October revolution. To judge things according to which class held political power would destroy the position that Russia remained a degenerated workers’ state because of nationalised property. In Russia, nationalised property was held to define who held power. Either the whole Russian question had to be rethought, or nationalised property in Russia’s satellites defined them as some sort of workers’ states. (Not degenerated workers’ states: a new term would eventually emerge, “deformed workers’ states”). If you made it a “programmatic” dogma that the USSR was a degenerated workers’ state, and would remain so as long as nationalised property survived, then an inexorable logic pushed you to a similar position for the satellites.

Cannon would have to change his 1949 position, shared with John G Wright, and go with those who called the satellites “deformed workers’ states”. The alternative was to conclude that he had been wrong in 1940 and in the war years that followed. The self-destroying method was there on display too. “The victories of the Red Army stimulated the revolutionary movement”. The wartime dogma was recycled, processed, and slipped in as one part of a “story”. It was dealt with, as the Leningrad delirium of August-September 1941 had been dealt with in its time, by inserting a smoothed version into a fabricated storyline. Cannon would not say that he, and the others on the SWP Political Committee, were wrong in their expectations in 1943-5. If there really had been Russian-army-stimulated “revolutionary movements” in the areas conquered by Stalin, then *The Militant* and *Fourth International* had been seriously remiss in not reporting them...

Thanks in part to the remonstrations of Natalia Sedova Trotsky and in part to experience, the Orthodox recoiled in late 1944 from their ideas about “Trotsky’s Red Army” and Stalinism being “objectively revolutionary”, from about late 1944. Then they lurched back in 1945-6: assertions by the SWP that war against Russia was imminent (a judgement few in the world shared) licensed keeping “defence of the USSR” at high tension.

In 1946 two members of the SWP-USA made a detailed analysis of *The Militant*’s response to news concerning the USSR between the end of war in Europe, May 1945, and June 1946. They published it in the Internal Bulletin of the SWP. On the large-scale pillaging and removal of industrial equipment by the Russians from areas they had conquered, in 56 issues, there appeared two articles by Morrow, one by Goldman, and only four other brief items. Millions of women and men in “enemy” countries were deported to forced labour in the USSR. In 56 issues *The Militant*, except in the Morrow and Goldman articles just mentioned, carried no reference (though the deportations were very graphically depicted in a cartoon by Laura Gray).

The USSR had seized large numbers of countries and territories: the mentions of that in *The Militant* were very few, and tended to explain away the expansion as being “defensive”. An SWP resolution in February 1946 advocated that workers in Eastern Europe “tolerate the presence of the Red Army” in the name of its alleged help in “the fulfilment of agrarian reform and the state-isation of the means of production” — with the proviso that they should rethink if the Russian Army “hindered in any way whatsoever the free development of the working-class movement”. That encapsulated the de facto pro-Stalinist policy of the Orthodox.

They lurched again to a more anti-Stalinist policy. A resolution calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the countries they occupied was adopted by the Fourth International in June 1946 and published by the SWP in August 1946. But they never made an explicit self-correction. After 1948 and the Tito-Stalin split, they lurched again. “Objectively revolutionary” Stalinism, which they would criticise and condemn but nevertheless felt compelled to support, would dominate their picture of the world for decades after that.

## HOW THE WAR RE-SHAPED ORTHODOX TROTSKYISM

**We need to sum up what the war period did to Orthodox Trotskyism, as embodied in James P Cannon and his close circle.**

In the responses of the Orthodox Trotskyists to the USSR at war, the Trotskyism of Trotsky was pulped and pulverised, mashed up, deconstructed and reconstructed, reduced to detached and recombinable segments. A bit like the horse in Picasso’s *Guernica*: you can see that in straightforward terms it is a horse, yet in naturalistic terms it is also not a horse. The limbs are all higgledy-piggledy.

They slid back years to outlived Trotskyist attitudes, before the Trotskyists decided for “political revolution”, and let much of the further development of Trotskyist thinking on the USSR in the mid and late 1930s fade to the background. They detached their agitation and propaganda from their own theory as they had it before June 1941, and sometimes designed agitation according to whatever selection from the old Trotskyist ideas would “play” best with the mass of Stalinist-inclined workers in the USA. In most of their day-to-day comments they dispensed with “degenerated” and called the USSR simply “the workers’ state”.

They ascribed to Stalin’s “workers’ state” qualities and possibilities that both Trotsky at the end, and the Cannon of 1940, would have dismissed as either weak-minded fantasy or downright lies.

They based much of their commentary on the USSR at war on what Trotsky had called “the fundamental sophism of the bureaucracy”, the idea that the people owned what the Stalinist state owned. They embraced the Stalinist idea that just by having nationalised property the USSR embodied “the foundation of socialism”. They wrote that the USSR workers were defending that foundation because they knew from experience that it was the best place in the world for workers to live. (Breitman: experience had “shown the Russian masses the superiority of living in a workers’ state”).

They patched together unreliable reports of high morale in the USSR so as to erect “morale” into a criterion for determining the class character of the USSR.

They related to the USSR of the bureaucrats as if major social elements of the revolution — not just, as in Trotsky, the nationalised property — had survived, or had revived.

They used the “trade union analogy” to pretend to readers of *The Militant* that the USSR bureaucracy was no worse than the worst trade-union bureaucracy in a bourgeois-democratic society. They said that the USSR was part of the working-class movement, bureaucratic autocracy, slave-labour camp guards, and all.

They denounced the USSR’s ruling autocracy, but would also glory in the “unity” of the people of the USSR. Most of their adverse comments on Russian Stalinism during the war were solely-political criticism, most importantly of Stalin’s failure to issue a “class appeal” to German workers and to assure them that at the end of the war there would be no repetition of the Versailles Treaty of 1919. By making their proposals “demands” on the bureaucracy, they cut the political criticism off from the Trotskyist social criticism.

They deployed the absurd claim that the “Red” Army, a central part of the Stalinist state apparatus, was not Stalinist, had not “really” experienced the Stalinist counter-revolution. They wrote of this “Red” Army bringing socialist revolution with it, and not, as Trotsky had described it for eastern Poland, bringing “semi-slavery” on its bayonets and tanks. In this “Trotsky’s Red Army” make-believe, they pioneered a technique they would later use to pretend and half-pretend that Tito’s Yugoslavia and Mao’s China were not really Stalinist. At some points, notably August-September 1941, they implied that the power and control of the bureaucracy were being sloughed off, implicitly begging the question: had there really been a Stalinist counter-revolution at all? And the question: hadn’t Trotsky’s and their own denunciations of Stalinism been exaggerated and false to reality? What they said about the USSR’s high morale implied that yes, they had.

They turned “defence” of the USSR into defence of Stalin’s

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imperial Russia. They presented every Russian demand for territory, or for conquest and occupation by Stalin's army, as a legitimate or at any rate an arguably defensive measure by the USSR. Thus, in the war and after, they translated "defence of the USSR" into pixelated partisanship for the Stalinist bureaucratic empire that was spreading into east and central Europe and the Balkans.

The subordination of "political revolution" to "defence", for the Orthodox, sometimes came to mean couching their politics in the form of a program of reforms of the existing USSR system. Such an approach, promoting the idea that the bureaucracy could do this, might do that, could not but radically inhibit workers influenced by the Communist Party in drawing the conclusions that Trotskyists had already drawn about the USSR from the early mid-1930s. (It was also a prefiguration of the later "defencism" of the Orthodox for Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, etc.)

Episodically they detached the policy planks of Trotsky's program for "political revolution" against Stalinist totalitarianism from the working class as its agent and reduced it to a series of "demands" on Stalin (and later on Tito, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, or Fidel Castro), implying the autocrats could conceivably carry them out. From a working-class program, they transformed it into a species of utopian socialist advice to the rulers.

They pretended, by "demanding" it of them, that Stalin's USSR might conceivably wage an internationalist working-class war.

They pushed the whole notion of "defence of the USSR" towards an interpretation (which did not emerge fully until the mid-1950s) that the Stalinist socio-economic formation was a stabilised system which could develop from the existing "foundation of socialism" to something near socialism itself. Ideologically, that was a giant step towards "socialism in one country".

These traits, which I have isolated here, the better to see and define them, were not of course the whole face of the Orthodox. *The Militant* carried routine anti-Stalinist commentary, especially against Stalinism in history. But its telling silences at crucial times and on very important issues added more or less heavy qualifications. The focus and the emphasis of the Orthodox oscillated, but within a narrow circle. The totality of their Orthodox "Trotskyism" combined elements of Trotsky's Trotskyism with their own accommodation to the bureaucracy by way of "defending the USSR". They were compelled, in the general picture they gave of the USSR, to invent more virtues for it than that nationalised property remained and was historically progressive. And the qualification that Trotsky had added from late 1939, that the nationalised property was only potentially progressive, and would be really progressive only on condition that the workers overthrew the bureaucracy, disappeared from their picture.

They filled the yawning gap between the reality of the totalitarian state, and the high-morale-inducing society they portrayed, by misreporting and fantasising about the USSR. In an important sense, it all flowed from the stark contradictions in their politics on the USSR. The state which represented the progressive survival of the October Revolution was also the agency for enslaving and half-enslaving those whom it conquered. The complex theoretical and historical reasons for Trotskyist "defencism", as Trotsky had them in 1939-40, were impossible to explain in agitation and propaganda aimed at non-political, or superficially or newly political, people.

That problem had at the time of the 1939-40 dispute been resolved by Trotsky's public denunciation of Stalin in Poland and Finland, coupled with "defencism" mostly confined to esoteric reasoning inside the Trotskyist organisation. The war and the US-Russian alliance made "defencism" now the public focus. Why? became an imperative immediate question. The US state was now for the "defence of the USSR" too. Stark condemnation of Stalinism would have pitted the Orthodox against bourgeois public opinion and the massive pro-Russian sentiment in the labour movement. Cannon boldly solved this dilemma. He deployed as reasons for "defending" the USSR a large chunk of the lies the CP-USA and the "Friends of the Soviet Union" deployed: workers defended the USSR because they knew the advantages of living in a "workers' state". Then the Orthodox added a big element of pseudo-Trotskyist fantasy.

The Orthodox combined trimming their political sails to the winds and moods around them with bombast about their "finished program", their disciplined organisation, their firmness against "revisionism", and their "class loyalty" to



Leon Trotsky

the USSR. "And after twenty years of hard work, of study, of struggle, the Fourth International, the movement of living Bolshevism, has hammered out a finished program, has welded together a tested cadre, has created a firm organizational structure. It stands today, just as Lenin's small band of Bolshevik internationalists during the last war, unyielding, intransigent, confident of its destiny to lead the working class in the next great revolutionary offensive, confident of its future successes and its final triumph" (editorial in the magazine *Fourth International*, January 1945). The result was what a critic inside their own ranks, Louis Jacobs, called "apparatus politics".

Apparatus politics and "Apparatus Marxism" could and did combine strident Orthodoxy about verbal formulae with flat opportunism and never acknowledged or accounted-for fumbling in real political tests. It had a long future before it.

All this anticipated and cleared the way for the political transmogrification that would overcome the Orthodox Trotskyists at the end of the 1940s, and be codified by the "Third World Congress" (in fact the first congress of a new Trotskyist movement) in 1951. All that would unfold in the decades after World War Two was there already, not always fully explored or fully developed, in the "positions", makeshifts, political and theoretical self-editing, and Trotsky-selecting and Trotsky-editing, of the Orthodox during the war.

In a 1946 polemic against C L R James and others in the Workers Party who were moving towards rejoining the SWP — they would do so in July 1947 — Irving Howe neatly summed up the records of the Orthodox and the Heterodox in the war: "When the SWP hailed the advancing Stalinist army as 'the liberating Red army', when the SWP national secretary called upon the workers of Warsaw to subordinate their struggle to the oncoming Stalinist army — was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage' over us, their means of espousing the 'full Trotskyist tradition'? When the SWP press discovered that the workers in Russia 'owned' the factories and the land and that that was the cause of their determined resistance — was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage'?"

"When the SWP the week after the [USA's entry into] war [in December 1941] responded by printing a learned dissertation on criminal syndical laws while we of the 'Menshevik' WP responded by printing a bold declaration against the imperialist war — was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage'? When the SWP played ostrich in the trade unions and finagled with bureaucrats while our comrades boldly and with some success pursued a class struggle line in the unions — was that their 'inestimable advantage' over us?"

**"When the SWP national secretary spoke of 'telescoping' the struggle for socialism with defense of country — was that their 'inestimable advantage'?" (Workers Party Internal Bulletin, 28 March 1946).**

## Notes

1. In fact the policy adopted on Trotsky's initiative in mid 1939 of championing the independence of a "Soviet Ukraine" against Moscow rule implied that the USSR was an empire in the sense that pre-World-War-One Austro-Hungary was, and in the 1930s the Trotskyists defined Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia as imperialist states — states with national minorities held against their will. Ukraine vanished from the SWP press during the war.

2. On the lines of Lenin's and Trotsky's arguments in World War One, the strongest argument against "defending" or siding with Britain — the Britain of the labour movement and the trade unions — against the Nazis would be Britain's alliance with the USSR, the real Stalinist USSR, not the imaginary one that still for Cannon and his comrades shone with the glow of the October Revolution.

3. It is a strange fact of history that the serious and detailed critical accounts of Stalinist society available in the west in the 1930s were mostly limited to the works of Trotsky and his comrade, and those of disillusioned ex-sympathisers of the CP. In Britain, it was a "Right Book Club", run by the publisher Hutchinson's, a weak parallel to the very strong "Left Book Club" of Victor Gollancz and the Communist Party, that published Victor Serge's book on Russia and *I Was A Soviet Worker* by Andrew Smith (a sympathiser who went to the USSR). In the era of the great capitalist slump, there was eager sympathy for "the Russian experiment" among liberals and reform-socialists, and even some aristocratic Tories. There was a tremendous wide credulity for the Stalinist account of USSR society. *The New Statesman* and *Tribune*, like *The Nation* and *The New Republic* in the USA, were Stalinist propaganda sheets on everything connected with Russia.

4. The post-Hitler-Stalin-pact pro-German defeatism of the strong French Communist Party had, of course, been a factor in that.

5. The open letter, too — the appeal to Stalin as if to an errant comrade-in-arms — was a precedent. Similar appeals to Stalinists in power — in Yugoslavia, the USSR, China, etc. — would punctuate the later political history of the Orthodox like interjections from a victim of political Tourette syndrome.

6. Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, chapter 5; Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad*, pp.184-5, 385, 84-5; Antony Beevor, *Berlin*, p.113.

7. During World War Two the Communist Party USA would have over 100,000 members at its peak, and great strength in the trade unions.

9. And what of communists who want to overthrow the autocracy, but might not be willing to subordinate themselves meekly to Stalin in the war or join the Orthodox in their pledges of loyalty? If the Cannonites ruled in Russia, the "petty-bourgeois renegades" of the Workers Party would be outlawed? They wouldn't qualify for release from Stalin's jails?

10. *The Militant's* proposal of the Socialist United States of Europe as an immediate alternative to the war seemed to take the existing German empire as a given starting point, ignoring the conquered European peoples and their national rights and possible inclinations. That may have been rooted in Trotsky's 1915 "Peace Program", in which he argued that if Germany united Europe, then socialists should fight within that Europe for its transformation into a democratic federation. It is plain in hindsight that Trotsky underestimated the upsurge of nationalism that conquest would trigger in the forcibly "united" nations of Europe. The caricature of Trotsky's 1915 idea in the press of the Orthodox in World War Two was an aspect of their blindness towards the national liberation movements that would develop in some of the Nazi-occupied countries.

11. And so at the outbreak of war in 1939 did the Nazis. They issued an appeal to the working class of the world — in the form of a call from Robert Ley, gauleiter of Hitler's police-state "unions". In Britain that appeal was reprinted in the press of the anti-war but often confused Independent Labour Party.

12. This sort of mental operation would be a model for many other political rationalisations in the future, as for instance to explain how Mao Zedong's peasant army could make a working-class revolution in China, as they believed it had.

13. The lack of internal party critics with enough self-confidence to call the SWP leaders to order also contributed. It was sometimes said, approvingly, of Stalin's USSR in World War Two that it had no disloyal "fifth column" because all the "fifth columnists" had been shot. James P Cannon, too, faced no revolt or "fifth column" in his ranks because, politically speaking, he had shot them.

14. These important critics from within Orthodox Trotskyism as it took shape themselves fell down before the contradictions and difficulties of the time. Goldman and some of his co-thinkers joined the Workers Party in June 1946. Goldman remained active until 1948, when he left the Workers Party, differing with them about the Marshall Plan of US aid to Europe (Goldman was for it). He then quit political activity. Morrow did not leave the SWP with Goldman. He was expelled in November 1946, and left politics at that point. Another significant critic, Louis Jacobs, distributed his document "We arrive at a line" in late 1944 and then dropped out of the SWP, writing occasionally for the WP press. Jean van Heijenoort, wartime secretary of the New York based Fourth International, dropped out too.

15. See Trotsky's 'Letter to Borodai' of late 1928, in which he defined political reformability as the criterion of a workers' state, and Shachtman's discussion of Trotsky's later shift to nationalised property as the empirical criterion. *The Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 1*, pp.300-309.