

## **Workers' Voice Information Bulletin #3, May, 2022**

### **The SWP and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) – On US Intervention and Material Aid**

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## Introduction:

We know several comrades have questions regarding the current position to take in the War in Ukraine because of the United States intervention through sanctions and material aid to support Ukraine. This is not the first time in the history of imperialism where we have wars where there is a “progressive” side, (such as a struggle against imperialist aggression, for national liberation or against a dictatorship), where rival imperialist powers intervene to assert their interests. Like in the case of the present war, where the United States is intervening as an “ally” of Ukraine, in the Second Sino-Japanese War the United States entered the war in 1941 becoming the imperialist “ally” of China, and started sending direct material aid to China in its war against Japan.

At the time a debate emerged between the SWP and the Fourth International on the one hand, and the WP (Workers’ Party) led by Shachtman on the other. The latter argued that US intervention in the war in 1941 changed qualitatively the nature character of the war from a war of national liberation to an inter-imperialist war, and that therefore revolutionaries should stop giving any support to the Chinese masses and argue instead for revolutionary defeatism in the US and Japan. The SWP polemized with the WP and continued giving active support to the Chinese masses at war with Japan while arguing for a class independent position in the struggle.

Yet in 1944, when US intervention change in its nature and intentions, and started supporting the bourgeoisie reactionary side in the developing Chinese civil war, the SWP changed its policy and raised “US out of China” embracing full on the revolutionary defeatist position. We have a lot to learn by analyzing and understanding the position of the SWP and the Fourth International in that war.

We had previously sent in the ***Information Bulletin # 1*** two very important texts on this issue: the official position of the Fourth International (**“American Intervention in China”, March 1941**) and a text by **John Wright (“Why We Defend China” April 1942)**. We ask comrades who have questions to re-read both texts and we are sending in this third bulletin a few more texts. We are now sending the polemics between Max Schachman (against the SWP position and Wright’s text), and the SWP responses by M. Morrison and Felix Morrow responding to it. If you have questions regarding whether US intervention in a conflict where there is an obvious progressive side is per se a reason to not take a position on it, you should read the polemic. In it SWP comrades outlines what are the criteria to decide when US or imperialist intervention risks changing the character of the war. We are also sending the texts by the SWP outlining their position in relation to US material aid to China and the attitude to have towards it.

# **1. Anthony Massini “Character of China’s War. China is Fighting Against Imperialist Domination” (April 1942)**

From *The Militant*, [Vol. 6 No. 17](#), 25 April 1942, p. 7.  
Transcribed & marked up by [Einde O’Callaghan](#) for the Encyclopaedia of Trotskyism On-Line (ETOL).

The current (April) issue of the magazine, Fourth International, contains a complete and detailed Marxist analysis of the questions raised in Myra Ward Beech’s letter on China. We recommend that all readers of *The Militant* who are interested in this very important question read that article, entitled Why We Defend China by John G. Wright. Here we make only a few remarks on the question.

China’s war is the struggle of a semi-colonial country for its national independence. China’s main enemy today is Japan, the imperialist invader; Japan today is the chief obstacle to the right of the Chinese nation to rule itself. The victory of China over Japan in this war would be a powerful blow against the whole imperialist world and an inspiration to all the oppressed peoples to throw off their chains of imperialist slavery. For this reason Marxists consider China’s war as progressive and have supported it since the beginning of the Japanese invasion.

Our support of China’s war has nothing in common with political support of Chiang Kai-shek, or the Kuomintang, which he leads, or the Chinese capitalist class whose interests he represents. On the contrary, we have supported China in spite of and against the reactionary policies of Chiang Kai-shek’s regime.

## ***Question of Material Aid and Alliances***

We unceasingly criticized and exposed the reactionary policies which drowned the 1925–27 Chinese revolution in blood, established a military dictatorship over the people, demoralized the masses and thus opened wide the doors for Japanese invasion and still obstruct the successful prosecution of the war against Japan.

It is clear therefore that our position in support of China’s war was not arrived at because of the slightest confidence in Chiang or his policies.

We do not oppose acceptance by China of aid from Anglo-American imperialism; we do not oppose an alliance of China with one imperialist power against another – neither of these in and of themselves would change thy situation so as to warrant a change in the policy of the Marxists, for neither of these by themselves could transform

the character of China's War against Japan. What we oppose is any subordination of China's war for freedom to the aims and strategy of imperialist allies of China.

To determine the correct position toward China's war today, it is therefore necessary for those who supported China's war before December 7 only to look at what has happened since then and to ask: Has China or China's war come under the control of China's imperialist allies, has China's war become subordinated to the strategy and aims of those allies? If it has, then Marxists can no longer support China. If it hasn't then Marxists, while remaining aware of future dangers, must continue to support China.

What has happened since December 7 and the extension of the world war to the Pacific? The struggle for national liberation in the most important colonial and semi-colonial countries in the Southwest Pacific has become stronger and bolder, rather than weaker. The grip of Britain on India, for example, has been loosened. London and Washington now find it necessary to make overtures and promises to the Indian nationalist movement: and the answers they receive from the native capitalists are not the subdued and respectful ones they used to be.

### ***China Bolder Now***

Similarly, the grip of Washington and London has been loosened on China. The Chinese regime feels freer than ever before to resist dictation of China's military struggle by the United States and Britain. Even less than on December 6 do the wishes and desires of Roosevelt and Churchill today determine the course of China's war. The Chinese government is demanding more, not less.

Win. P. Simms, Scripps-Howard Foreign Ed., told on Apr. 18 of "the rising demand on the part of the Chinese, Indians and others for a Pacific Charter." He reports:

*"In the East, observed Ta Knius Pao, one of Chungking's leading newspapers, 'many nations are of a colonial or quasi-colonial status. The Roosevelt-Churchill declaration (Atlantic Charter) is applicable to independent nations which were overrun by the Axis powers. It has made no provisions concerning the postwar positions of such countries as India and Burma.'*

*"The spirit of the proposed Pacific Charter," paper said, "should aim at the liberation of Korea, the Liuchu Islands and Formosa from Japanese domination and the freedom from Allied control of India, the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines. China, it added, 'is certainly not helping one imperialism fight against another imperialism.'"*

One can hardly imagine such statements coming from the Chinese capitalists five months ago. And one can easily imagine what Washington and London think when they hear such things. There is no question but that China's hand in the war has been strengthened, that it is more independent of Anglo-American control than ever before.

### ***What Chiang's Role Is an Argument For***

In other words, it is completely false to reduce the question of China's war to the reactionary policies of Chiang Kai-shek. We condemn Chiang's intervention in India because it was a blow at China's struggle, because its effect was to alienate the sympathy of India's masses for China's war. It is another example of how the Chinese capitalists hamper the struggle for independence.

But this is no argument against supporting China's progressive war – it is only an argument against placing any confidence in Chiang, it is only an argument for the continuation of the political struggle against Chiang by the Chinese masses, while they continue to direct their fire at the main enemy of Chinese national existence, Japan.

### ***Problem of Ethiopia***

The situation of Ethiopia is not at all like the situation in China today. It is more like the situation in India, because Ethiopia is today a colony of Britain.

In 1935 we supported Ethiopia's war against Italy as the war of a backward country for independence from an imperialist power. We said it was correct for the Ethiopians to accept aid from the British in order to drive the Italian conquerors out of their land. We warned the Ethiopian people then, as we warn the Chinese masses today, to be on guard against their imperialist "allies," We predicted the Ethiopian people would have to fight the British who would try to take over. That Britain was not fighting for Ethiopian independence was shown two months ago, when Britain forced the signing of a British-Ethiopian treaty which gives Britain control of the police, courts, military forces, railroad, etc.

In other words, Ethiopia has been reduced to the status of a British colony; and under such conditions the only kind of war in which Marxists could support Ethiopia would be a war against Britain, Ethiopia's main enemy today.

## 2. Max Shachtman “China in the World War” (July 1942) (excerpted you can read [here](#) the entire very long polemic)

### Marxism on the Wars of Colonies for Independence and the Wars of Imperialism for Colonies (June 1942)

From *New International*, [Vol. VIII No. 5](#), June 1942, pp. 162–172. Transcribed & marked up by [Einde O’Callaghan](#) (December 2012).

John G. Wright does not approve of the position adopted by the Workers Party on China following the spread of the World War to Asia and the Pacific. That much is fairly clear from his article in the April 1942 *Fourth International*, a typical example of the snort-sneer-and-snarl school of polemics to which he is devoted. To an ordinary reader, nothing else in the article is very clear. We venture to say this because we are dealing with the man known as the whirling dervish of the Socialist Workers Party. He starts every argument – witness the article in question – with a piercing shriek which rises in a shattering crescendo while he executes furious pirouettes and leaps into space; his chest heaves violently and there is foam on his lips; finally, as Beck described the original Ottoman twirlers, “worn out and perspiring, with glazing eyes and pale face, he falls into the sacred convulsion (*haluk*).” Wright’s article on China was obviously written in a *haluk*. There is no other way of explaining how he got the courage to invoke Lenin in justification of the present social-patriotic position of the SWP on China which he expounds and defends.

Wright’s entire argument is based upon a cool distortion of Lenin’s position on the question. We say “distortion” rather than “misunderstanding” because it is utterly impossible for anyone to misunderstand Lenin’s views once he has read them, and Wright has at least read them. In the course of irrefutably demonstrating this charge, it will be possible, we believe, for the reader to gain a deeper insight into the Leninist view of the national and colonial question as it relates to the imperialist war and to understand why the Workers Party took the position it did in its resolution on China and the World War printed in *Labor Action* (March 16, 1942). This is the resolution for which Wright takes us to task. Briefly, it declares that with the spread of the World War to the East, the just struggle for national independence of China has been decisively *integrated* into and *subordinated* to the reactionary inter-imperialist war and that it can therefore no longer be supported by the revolutionary Marxists.

### *Why Lenin Distinguished Three Types of Countries*

Wright begins his elucidation, of the “Leninist policy on the national question” by quoting from Lenin’s article in 1916 in which he distinguished three types of countries. First, “the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States of America” where “the bourgeois, progressive national movements came to an end long ago”; secondly, “Eastern Europe: Austria, the Balkans and particularly Russia,” where the tasks of the proletariat “cannot be achieved unless it champions the right of nations to self-determination”; and thirdly, “the semi-colonial countries, like China, Persia, Turkey and all the colonies,” whose liberation is demanded by socialists who “must render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their rebellion – and if need be, their revolutionary war – *against* the imperialist powers that oppress them.” (*Works*, vol. XIX, p. 55) The national movement in the first type of country, wrote Lenin, is a thing of the past; in the second – a thing of the present; in the third – a thing of the future.

”In the most advanced countries of Europe and America and in Japan,” says Wright about the first type, “the national issue is today simply a reactionary cover for the imperialist bourgeoisie. The national problem has been solved in these nations long ago.” This statement, like many others made by Wright, is thoughtless parroting of what Lenin wrote a quarter of a century ago, and has little in common with Marxism applied to the real situation in Europe today. The national issue in such advanced countries of Europe as France, Norway, Holland, Bohemia and others is not *simply* a “reactionary cover for the imperialist bourgeoisie,” but is, or should be, made into an issue by the revolutionary proletarian vanguard, precisely in order that it does not remain a cover for all kinds of de Gaulles and Wilhelminas and Haakons and Beneses, but rather one of the bridges to the socialist struggle for power. Every thinking Marxist understands this; people suffering from pseudo-Leninist *psittacosis* do not. That is undoubtedly why the Cannonites continue to suppress the views of the German Trotskyists on this question. However, since a discussion of this aspect of the national question today would lead us too far afield, and since it does not constitute the essence of Wright’s distortion of Lenin’s position, we reluctantly leave it for another occasion.

It is to a comparison between the second and third types of countries listed by Lenin that Wright really addresses himself, and it is this comparison that leads us to the heart of the problem.

The First World War was an imperialist war, but like all other great and therefore complex social phenomena, it was not “pure” in type. Involved in it were other, contradictory elements, like the just struggle of national minorities and small nations against their oppressors. One example was the struggle of the Poles against their Russian oppressors; another was the struggle of the Serbs against their Austrian oppressors. Lenin regarded these struggles (“wars”) as *just* and, given certain conditions about which more will be said herein, worthy of the support of both honest democrats and revolutionary socialists. He argued that if the war were confined to an isolated duel between the Serbs and Austro-Hungarian imperialism, the Marxists would support the Serbs and even work for the victory of the Serbian bourgeoisie. Similarly, if there were an isolated struggle between the Poles and the Great Russian Empire.

But under the concrete conditions of the European war, the inter-imperialist conflict (the Entente versus the Central Powers) and not the national struggle of the Serbs or the Poles was the decisive element. That is why it would be *exactly* correct to speak of the First World War (and the Second, for that matter) as a *decisively* or a *predominantly* imperialist war. Since the decisive dominates the subordinate, the character of the latter is determined by the former. That is why Lenin refused to support even Serbia or Poland in the war, because he knew that such support meant at least partial support to the reactionary imperialist war.

Now let us see how Wright presents Lenin's views on this aspect of the question, and then check with what Lenin's views really were. According to Wright, Lenin said that in countries of the second type, where Czechs, Poles, Serbs, Finns, etc., were fighting for national independence,

... the question of national independence plays a different rôle from that in advanced countries. Under certain circumstances it is progressive; under other conditions reactionary. What decides is whether or not in every given situation a small country plays an *independent* rôle in its struggle for national existence. If it does, then the Marxists say: Support of a national struggle in such a case is obligatory upon all workers. Thus, in an *isolated* struggle between a small country like Serbia and an oppressor nation like Austria, Lenin and the Serbian socialists supported Serbia. However, because of the overwhelming economic and political preponderance of the imperialist bourgeoisie, the small European countries cannot play such an independent rôle in the conditions of an imperialist war. They are too closely integrated economically and politically with the great powers to pursue their own nationalist goals at a time when the full power of the imperialists is unleashed.

This formulation of Lenin's views will do as a model of a first-rate muddle until something bigger is provided – and we may calmly rely on Wright to produce even more fantastic muddles as he twirls around. Lenin *at no time* declared that “what decides” the progressive or reactionary character of the struggle for national independence of an oppressed European nation or people was “whether or not in every given situation a small country plays an *independent* rôle in its struggle for national existence.” In fact, he said exactly the opposite, that is, that these small nations *could not play an independent rôle* in our epoch, the epoch of imperialism. Not only did he say this, but Wright knows he said it! And Wright not only knows it, but he actually quotes Lenin to this effect! On the very same page from which we took the just-quoted paragraph, in the very next column to it, is to be found the appropriate quotation from Lenin:

The dialectic of history is such that small nations which are impotent as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play the role as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, aiding the arrival on the scene of the *real* force against imperialism,

namely, the socialist proletariat. (*Works*, vol. XIX, Russ. ed., p. 270; Eng. ed., p. 303)

Now if the “independent rôle” played by a small country in the struggle against an imperialist oppressor “decides” the support of the proletariat (and the proletarian party) – as Wright says – and if these small countries are powerless “as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism” – as Lenin says with Wright’s evident approval – we are left at a total loss to understand why the devil the question of supporting the national wars of small countries was ever raised at all, either by Lenin or by Wright.

### ***Fundamentals of Lenin on the National Question***

Fortunately, while Wright obviously does not have the slightest understanding of what he is quoting from Lenin, Lenin’s own position communicates itself without any difficulty to the normal reader:

*In general*, Lenin favored the struggle for national independence of any country oppressed by another on the grounds of what he rightly called *consistent democracy*. If, as any genuine democrat would have to grant, the right of any people to self-determination constitutes one of the elementary democratic rights, then socialists who aim at the most complete realization of democracy must necessarily support any people, any national minority, any small country which seeks to exercise this right, and support it even to the point of secession from the ruling (and oppressing) “motherland.” Nobody who is opposed to the forcible annexation of one people (or country) by another, can possibly fail to support the annexed people in a struggle for national independence (self-rule), even if this struggle is led by the bourgeoisie, and even if this struggle is initiated militarily by the oppressed people. The Finns have the right to rule themselves as they see fit, and not be ruled by the Great Russians; similarly with the Poles; similarly with the Mongolians. The Irish have the right to rule themselves, and not be ruled by the British. And so on.

*In general*, furthermore, Lenin favored such national struggles not because of any “independent rôle” they might play, but because they would “sharpen the revolutionary crisis. That is, being directed in each case at weakening the rule of an imperialist power (the Poles against Russian imperialism; the Irish against British imperialism, etc.), they would tend to speed “the arrival on the scene of the *real* force against imperialism, namely, the socialist proletariat”

*In particular*, however, Lenin opposed giving support to such a struggle, no matter how just it was to begin with, *if* it was transformed into or subordinated to an inter-imperialist war. For example: *If*, in 1914, the struggle between Serbia and Austro-Hungary had remained *isolated*, had remained what Lenin called a “duel” between the powerful imperialism and the small country, it would have been correct for socialists to support Serbia in the war despite the rule of the bourgeoisie and even though she were backed by the Russian Czar. But that war proved to be only the very briefest overture to the war between the two great imperialist coalitions, in which the national struggle of Serbia formed only a minor, a subordinate, a non-determining part.

*In particular*, further, Lenin opposed giving support to the national struggle of a small nation, no matter how just “in itself,” *if* such support meant aiding one imperialist power at war with another. For example: Lenin, like Marx and Engels, was a life-long supporter of the Polish struggle for national independence. He wrote I don’t know how many polemics against those who challenged the socialist validity of this position. Yet, when the World War broke out, he was even opposed to putting forward the slogan of independence for Poland! Josef Pilsudski, Ignace Daszynski and other leaders of the right-wing, nationalistic Polish Socialist Party (PPS) had organized an armed Polish Legion to fight for the liberation of Poland from Russian imperial rule. But the Legion fought as part of the armed forces of the Central Powers, particularly of Austria-Hungary. The “struggle for Polish freedom” became an integral, subordinated part of the struggle of one of the imperialist camps against the other. Without abandoning his basic position in favor of the right of self-determination, for the Poles specifically, Lenin nevertheless wrote:

The Polish social democrats [he referred to the SDPL, the party of Rosa Luxemburg] cannot, at present, advance the slogan of Polish independence, because, as proletarian internationalists, the Poles can do *nothing* to achieve it without, like the “Fraki,” sinking into mean servility to *one* of the imperialist monarchies. (**Works**, vol. XIX, p. 297)

In other words, revolutionary socialists cannot support even the just struggle for independence of a people or nation where it means, practically, supporting one imperialist camp in its war with another. We have here again an example of the emphasis laid by Lenin on the *isolated* (not at all on the allegedly “independent”) character of the national struggle as a condition for proletarian support.

*In particular*, still further, Lenin opposed giving support to the national struggle of a small nation, *if* such support of a democratic right conflicted with socialist, and therefore superior, rights. In one sense, the preceding example of Poland in the last war illustrates this point. In a much more striking and literal sense, however, it is illustrated by Lenin’s position with regard to the intervention of the Red Army on the soil of “democratic” Menshevik Georgia in 1920. The democratic national sovereignty of Georgia – at any rate, as much sovereignty as “protective” British imperialism then allowed it – was undoubtedly ignored by Lenin. But the march on Georgia which resulted in the federated incorporation of that country into a revolutionary workers’ state was in the superior interests of the socialist proletariat and the socialist revolution.

*In particular*, finally, Lenin opposed giving support to a national struggle when it was merely a front for reactionary (example: feudal or feudal-ecclesiastical) elements exploiting a just demand for people for freedom from imperialism. We need not dwell on this, as it does not enter significantly into our present discussion. It will suffice to point out, as one example, the “national struggle” – i.e., the pogroms – of the Palestine Mufti against the Jews in 1929.

As simply and briefly as possible, that is Lenin's position on the national question. It is not the *whole* of Lenin's position because the question of the relations between the socialist proletariat and the nationalist bourgeoisie, between the democratic and the socialist revolutions – problems that arose so acutely in the years of the struggle against Stalinism – has been deliberately omitted here. But it is enough of Lenin's position to satisfy, for the moment, the needs of the present discussion.

Now it is entirely possible that Wright might express himself as more or less in agreement with our formulation of Lenin's views; that he might retreat from his utterly invalid criterion of "independence" with the complaint that he was misunderstood or even misrepresented. This is possible, but not very likely, because of the arguments he proceeds to unfold. For his main point is: While all that has been said may or does hold true with regard to Lenin's position on countries of the "second type," fundamental modifications are required with regard to countries of the "third type" (China, India, Persia, Morocco, etc.). It must be remembered that Wright is out to show that what Lenin refused to do with Serbia in the war of 1914, namely, support it, the followers of Lenin must do with China in the war of 1942. And here – on guard! For Wright is about to take us for a real whirl. (...)

### ***Two Criteria for Judging Colonial Wars***

Wright explained to his readers that the criterion for supporting or not supporting a country of the "second type" in a war was whether or not it "plays an independent rôle." Lenin *never* put that forward as his criterion, but let it go for the moment. What interests us now is what criterion should be employed by the proletariat with regard to wars conducted by countries of the "third type." Wright went through elaborate conclusions to explain the fundamental difference between the one and the other, to show that the latter differed from the former "not only in degree but in kind" and must therefore be approached differently. What then is his criterion in the case of the colonies? The answer is truly seductive in its overwhelming simplicity: the criterion for the "third type" of country is ... exactly the same as the criterion for the "second type" of country! Yes, sir, after all the wind and fury have died down, and the fundamental differences between the two have been emphasized and belabored, we learn that a war conducted by either one of them must, after all, be judged in exactly the same way. Unbelievable, but there it is, black on white:

What is the criterion whereby Marxists determine whether a colonial or semi-colonial country is conducting a progressive struggle? We determine our position, first of all, on the basis of *fact*. Does this struggle play an *independent* rôle? If it does, we support it. (Wright's emphasis.)

But that's exactly what Wright wrote one page earlier about the wars of countries of the "second type"! Toward what end was so much good and patient paper smeared up in between these two conclusions? The most merciful answer that can be given is that in Wright's construction, the difference boils down to the rather dogmatic assertion that

the struggles of small European countries “can be progressive only in *isolated* instances” (does Wright mean “only in rare cases”? It is not clear from his text), whereas the struggles of Asiatic colonies can be progressive in a greater number of cases because, allegedly, they can play “an independent rôle” even “in the very midst of an imperialist war.”

Before we go over to the very important question of “fact” in judging our attitude toward China’s war with Japan in the midst of the Second World War, let us dwell for some informative moments on the guiding lines suggested by Lenin in this question. He was acquainted with the problem of a just war of a colony against an imperialist power and the relations between such a war and an imperialist war, or between such a war and aid given to a colony by one imperialist power against another.

In his wartime polemic against “Junius” (Rosa Luxemburg), Lenin gave examples to support his thesis that just wars of national liberation “*may* lead to an imperialist war,” in which case they could not be supported, “or they may not; that depends on many circumstances.” To illustrate, he cited the war of the thirteen American colonies for independence from England.

Out of enmity toward England, i.e., in conformity with their own imperialist interests, France and Spain, which still held parts of what are now the United States, concluded friendly treaties with the states that had risen against England. The French forces together with the American defeated the English. Here we have a war for national liberation in which imperialist rivalry is a contributory element of no great importance (***Works***, vol. XIX, p. 204)

Now, in the same issue of the ***Fourth International*** containing Wright’s article, there is a criticism of the Stalinist war position by the editor, Morrow. In it Morrow quotes the above passage from Lenin’s criticism of Junius as it appeared for the first time in English in the British ***Labour Monthly*** of January 1935. The quotation deserves some comment:

1. The ***Labour Monthly*** translation is no good. Morrow unwittingly accepts the bad translation because it seems to support the SWP position on China against ours! Here is how the last sentence of the Lenin quotation above appears in the ***Fourth International***:

We thus see a national liberation war, in which the imperialist cooperation [with the colony – *F.M.*] appears merely as a secondary element without serious significance ...

Whereupon Morrow triumphantly comments: “Lenin was considering the great colonial and semi-colonial countries like India, China and Persia, fighting their main imperialist oppressors where it was possible for the imperialist cooperation with the colonial country to be ‘merely a secondary element.’”

What Lenin actually wrote was not that “imperialist *cooperation*” with the colony (as Morrow interpolates) was the secondary element, but that a just national war for independence was possible in which “imperialist *rivalry*” would be “a contributory element of no great importance.” The difference between the two words (cooperation or rivalry) is of key importance. Lenin considered the American war for independence a just war, not in spite of French imperialist “cooperation” with the thirteen colonies, but in spite of the “rivalry” between French and English imperialism. Why? Because, to repeat his words, this rivalry was only “a contributory element of no great importance.” Every student of the American Revolution knows this. The revolution was not a *product* of the rivalry between France or Spain and England; the revolution was at no time an integral part of a war between France and England (indeed, there was no war between the two countries at the time of the American Revolution; there was only the continued “rivalry” which had taken the form of war a few years before the revolution and in the Napoleonic wars after the revolution); the revolution was at no time subordinated to the struggle between France and England; the revolution was at no time directed or controlled by French or Spanish imperialism; at no time did the American bourgeoisie come under the financial, political or military domination of French or Spanish imperialism, even though French *cooperation* with Washington at one time became so important (Rochambeau’s expedition) as to be virtually decisive.

It is from the point of view of these *facts*, known to most schoolboys, that Lenin was able to say that Anglo-French rivalry was only a “contributory element of no great importance.” We shall see presently if the same can be said about the present situation of China.

2. Morrow, who had to rely on a poor translation of Lenin, may be excused for the moment. But Wright knows better. He is acquainted with the important passage from Lenin “in the original Russian.” Does he quote it? No; he paraphrases it in his own words but at even greater length than the original. We get the same stupid analogy between China’s war today and the war of 1776. He even improves on Morrow, and adds another “historical instance.” Marx supported the North in the American Civil War. Yet, Russian warships under the command of Grand Duke Alexis appeared in San Francisco harbor at one of the critical junctures in the relations between Washington and France and Great Britain. Thus, in order to defend its national existence and independence, the most progressive government in the world at that time, the United States, was obliged to ally itself with the most reactionary regime in the world – czarist Russia.

This “historical instance” is supposed to justify support of China in the Second World War! Unbelievable again, but we are ready to take our oath that it is to be found, black on white, in the April 1942 issue of the ***Fourth International***, for all English-reading people to look at with wonderment for generations to come.

What good Alexis’ warships were supposed to do Lincoln in San Francisco harbor, we don’t exactly know; perhaps they were maneuvering to get the firing range of Richmond or Vicksburg. But Wright misses a real bull’s eye when he fails to mention that Alexander II really sent *two* Russian fleets, and one of them dropped anchor in New York harbor. And that the Czar gave his admirals sealed orders to place themselves at

Lincoln's disposal if France or England intervened militarily on the side of the South. And that this "hint" was enough to cool the ardor of Napoleon III, who was playing with the idea of a coalition to support the South.

But, pray, what has all this interesting and erudite detail to do with China in the war today? Was there, perhaps, in the early 1860s, a big, all-dominating war going on between Russia and France, with Lincoln (the North) allying himself with Russia to help Alexander win his war over the Little Napoleon? Was there even one shell fired from the famous Russian warships, except perhaps in salute? Did the Grand Duke Alexis perhaps replace McClellan or Grant – or Lincoln – as commander of the Union armies? Was the conduct of the Civil War by the North in any way at all (except for the obscure incident mentioned by Wright) dependent upon the Grand Duke, or the Czar, or the Czarina, or the Czarevitch, or the whole Russian Imperial Court?

And while we're at it, let us also ask why Wright inflates the whole trivial business of Russia in the American Civil War to the imposing proportions of an "alliance"? Is it in order to gloss over the treacherous capitulatory and reactionary alliance the Chinese national bourgeoisie has made with "democratic" imperialism by suggesting that, after all, Lincoln "also" made an alliance with a reactionary power which was "approved" by Marx? We will return to this question later. (...)

### ***What Are the Real Facts of the War?***

There is left, finally, in determining our attitude toward China in the war, the question of "fact" mentioned by Wright with such unexpected suddenness and in such violent discordance with everything that went before. Most important question, indeed! The question of "fact" to establish is simply this: Has the war of China against Japan become an integral and subordinate part of the general inter-imperialist World War, or has it not? Or, to use Lenin's formula: in judging the Sino-Japanese war, is the inter-imperialist rivalry or conflict "a contributory element of no great importance" or is the national struggle of China "of no great importance compared with the all-determining imperialist rivalry"? A third position, sharply distinguished from either of these two, is out of the question.

Now, judged by the fairly precise yardstick of Lenin, there would seem to be no possibility of two answers to the question of China in the war today. That is, provided one based himself on the facts, the realities, which are universally acknowledged. More accurately, all but universally acknowledged," for Wright and his political colleagues have an almost unique and mystical conception of what is happening in the world at war today.

To all ordinary people, and especially to those for whom the word "dialectics" is not a license for uttering the most demonstrable nonsense, the Second World War is a *total war*. It is not necessary to lay claim to, or possess, special military-strategical ability to understand that in this war, far more than even the First World War, all the present fronts are inseparably linked and mutually interdependent. The character of the

war, the conduct of the war and (for the present) the outcome of the war, are determined by the two couples of imperialist titans which dominate each camp respectively, the United States and Great Britain, and Germany and Japan. (Within each of the two, in turn, there is a senior and a junior partner!) *All* the other countries in the two great coalitions are reduced to vassalage to the giants which differs in each case only in degree. This vassalage is determined by the economic (industrial-technical), and therefore the financial, and therefore the political, and therefore the military domination of the war by the two great “power-couples.” Italy is less dependent upon the masters of its coalition than Hungary, and Hungary less than Slovakia. But these facts do not alter the state of their vassalage – they only determine its degree. Stalinist Russia is less dependent upon the masters of its coalition than China (it would lead us too far afield to show in what sense, however, it is even more dependent upon U.S.-England than China), and China less than the Philippines. But again, these facts only determine the degree of *their* vassalage. Except, therefore, for inconsequential cranks and special pleaders in the bourgeois world, everyone in it understands the total nature of the war as a whole; the total nature of each coalition; the relative position and weight of each sector of the coalition; the mutual interdependence of all fronts.

None of this exists in the dream-world of Wright and his friends. To them, there are at least two and perhaps three distinct and separate wars going on at the same time, but, in essence, parallel to each other. There is the imperialist war between U.S.-England and the Axis (we are compelled to assume that the SWP considers this an imperialist war since it has not found it necessary to give its opinion on the subject). Then there is another war – between Germany and the Soviet Union, A third war – at least one phase of the second war – is that between Japan and China, and in it the SWP supports China.

Are these two wars (or three wars) taking place independently of each other? Whatever our theories may have been yesterday, or are today, all the facts speak against such an assertion.

Anglo-American and Japanese imperialism have been fighting a most desperate war since December 7, 1941, for the domination of the Pacific and of the Asiatic continent. In the course of a few months, territories of hundreds of thousands of square miles, inhabited by tens of millions of people, have changed hands, so to speak. Does Wright expect any Marxist, any person with a little political experience, or, in general, any moderately informed and moderately sane person to believe that this war between the two big imperialisms is only “a contributory element of no great importance” in relation to the war of China against Japan? Is this the kind of “fact” on which Wright bases himself in order to determine his position? Who is expected to take seriously a comparison between Czar Alexander II’s intrigues against Napoleon III and their relation to the American Civil War, on the one side, and the world-shaking, all-determining war for the domination of the Orient between the U.S. and Japan and its relations to China’s war, on the other?

In the environs of the radical movement, somewhere in New York, there is a man named Marlen, whose sufferings indicate the *monotypic* described in the studies of

Wechniakoff and Letourneau. The mania which preoccupies his life is the insistent, year-in-year-out declaration that the only war going on in the world since 1939 has been the all-imperialist struggle to crush Russia, cunningly concealed behind a phoney war which the democratic and fascist imperialisms have pretended to carry on against each other. The invasions of Poland, Norway, the Balkans, Holland and Belgium and France, of Iceland and Greenland and Libya, the air raids on England and Germany – all these are just cleverly contrived frauds, jokingly arranged among England, Germany, Italy and the United States to create the impression that they have a war on among themselves, whereas in reality the only war being fought is the one all of them are fighting against Russia.

Wright puts forward a variant – a much milder variant, to be sure, but a variant nevertheless – of our monotypic’s ultramundane animadversions. Russia’s war with Germany is independent of the war with Germany of U.S.-Britain, with which Russia is allied. China’s war with Japan is independent of the war with Japan of U.S.-Britain, with which China is allied. In both cases, presumably, the inter-imperialist war is merely a second-rate, contributory element of no great importance in the “just wars” of Russia and China, or as Trotsky would have put it, it’s like “a war on the face” – not pleasant, “reactionary,” but in any case not decisive in judging the main qualities of the face itself. (...)

### ***The Future of the Colonial Struggles***

Is there then no future for. China’s struggle against imperialism? Is the struggle for freedom of the colonial countries and peoples in general a hopeless one, at least while the World War is on?

Yes, the struggle of the colonies for freedom is utterly hopeless during the present World War *if they continue the course of serving one imperialist camp against the other*. That is today the course of the bourgeoisie in every colonial and semi-colonial country, and its tragic results multiply every day in Latin America, in Europe, in Africa and above all in Asia. It is not the course toward independence, but rather to deeper, more exhausting, more ignoble dependency upon imperialism, that is, enslavement to it.

To cover up their complete capitulation to imperialism, their betrayal of the genuine struggle for national independence, the Chiangs, and the Wangs, the Nehrus and the Boses, the Sultans of the East Indies and the Lions of Judah, the Quezons and the Sakdalistas say: Allied with our Great and Powerful Friend and Protector, we are continuing the struggle for national freedom. Join and fight with us, workers and peasants!

To cover up their sordid imperialist aims, each of the two big war coalitions, the “power-couples,” who hate the very thought of any national freedom except their own freedom to oppress and exploit all the weaker and smaller countries, says to the skeptical masses: In union with our brave allies from the little nations and the colonies

who have so long suffered under the yoke of the other coalition, we are fighting for their national emancipation. Come, support us in this noble task!

The Second World War, imperialist to the marrow, is total and all-dominating. In its first stage, at least, it was inevitable that it draw into the grip of its iron ring all the small countries, all the would-be neutral countries, all the isolated national wars and struggles for national freedom. That is where these struggles are today – within the iron ring of the imperialist war.

Does this mean that this is where they will remain? Does this mean that there can be no struggle for national independence by the colonies or by other oppressed countries? Does this mean that revolutionary Marxists can no longer support any national struggle?

Deserter! You have deserted the struggle for national emancipation! screams Wright. Poor chap. He seems to think that an amateur slanderer will succeed with people who were unmoved by practiced Stalinist professionals. Yes, the struggle for national emancipation of the colonies *has* been deserted – by the Chiangs and the Nehrus and the Boses and the Wangs, by the people who led and directed it and then, at the showdown, brought it into the imperialist war camp. The problem is to lead the national movement out of the camp of imperialism and into the field of struggle against imperialism!

In other words, we are not one whit less the partisans of the fight for freedom of small nations and colonies today than we were yesterday. China's struggle for national independence is not one whit less just in our eyes today than it was yesterday; nor is the struggle of India, of Iran, of Ethiopia. What we want is precisely to launch that struggle all over again where it has been strangled or betrayed; to develop it more broadly, more militantly, more consciously wherever it has already started; to help it to victory over our common enemy where it is already engaged in struggle. The precondition for this victory, however, is for the national movements to free themselves from the imperialist bondage into which they have been sold by their false leaders, the bourgeoisie. In other words, the precondition for the victory is to break the iron ring of imperialist domination and exploitation of the national emancipation movements.

The ring is made of iron; it is not easy to break; but it is not unbreakable. Where will it break? As in 1917, at its weakest point, and it is not possible to say right now where that is. When will it break? It is even more difficult to make predictions on dates. Who will break it? To this question we have a categorical and confident answer: the revolutionary proletariat. Be it in the imperialist metropolis or in the backward colony, the working class is the only one capable of leading the break through the ring. Its leadership, and only its leadership, will assure the *independent rôle* of the struggle for national independence, not “even” in the colonies but precisely in the colonies, because that leadership will at the same time assure the independent class road, the road to socialism, for the colonial countries. No other road is now practically possible.

This should be clear, especially in the case of China. The national bourgeoisie led the fight against Japan largely under the impatient pressure of the masses, whose struggle the bourgeoisie was afraid to “leave leaderless”; and above all in the hope of attaining that great ideal of the colonial bourgeoisie, customs autonomy, which would enable it to grow and fatten without heavy tribute abroad. But talk about “customs autonomy” for China in the present titanic struggle between the two big imperialisms is utterly ridiculous and nobody knows it better than the Chinese bourgeoisie. Above all else in importance, however, is its knowledge that in *the conditions of the imperialist war, a genuine struggle for national independence demands such an arousing and mobilizing of the masses, such a revolutionization of their political thinking and acting as would instantly threaten and immediately thereafter destroy the rule of the colonial bourgeoisie itself*. There is the thorny point! With the country threatened by both imperialist groups, we repeat, Chiang could carry on a real struggle for national independence only by setting in motion the revolutionary forces that would eliminate him and what he represents. Hence, when the World Imperialist War broke over its head, the bourgeoisie did not waver for a moment. It took out a commission in the camp of imperialism and brought its “national struggle” along with it as useful camouflage. This reduces the national bourgeoisie to pretty small potatoes, to be sure; but the alternative – the continuation and intensification of the struggle for independence – meant reduction to zero. Wright does not of course begin to understand the dynamics of this development; he still asks, challengingly, how the bombing of Pearl Harbor succeeded in “blowing up China’s war”? But the colonial bourgeoisie understands to perfection.

### ***For a Marxist Colonial Policy***

It is therefore on the basis of objective analysis, and not of rhetoric, that we declare that only the proletariat can break through the ring of the imperialist war, only the leadership of the proletariat can re-launch the just wars of the colonies against imperialism, or the just wars of conquered nations and peoples against their conquerors. Without the support of other social groups, especially the peasantry, the proletariat will not succeed in this struggle, to be sure. But with the leadership of the proletariat, the struggle for national independence, be it in Norway or Slovakia or India or China, cannot now even hope to succeed.

The colonial and semi-colonial countries, especially the more politically advanced, like China and India, have certainly not said their last word. The proletariat of a country like China was brought to its feet in the course of years of national struggle, not merely by the ideal of national independence but also by the ideal of social freedom. The attainment of both was bound up in its mind, as it was in fact, with the struggle against the foreign oppressor. It is likely that it will long endure the siphoning off of its efforts and struggles to the interests of one group of these oppressors as against another? The colonial working class will be least of all inclined to continue long in a war to decide that it should be ruled by a whiskey-besotted British democrat instead of by an equally depraved Japanese martinet, or *vice versa*. What will this working class do when it realizes the conflict between what its rôle is and what its rôle should be?

Wright terrifies weak-minded children by writing: “Oehler and Shachtman today say in effect: Chiang is the main enemy.” The formula is not bad; only, because it is too summary it can lead to misunderstandings; and that alone is why it is not our formula but rather our critic’s inadequate paraphrase. The “main enemy” of a colonial country which is oppressed and exploited by an imperialist power – this is the ABC of Marxism – is imperialism and remains imperialism so long as the country remains in a colonial or semi-colonial state. And imperialism is indeed the “main enemy” I would tell the Chinese worker and peasant to fight against.

But this generally correct formula becomes an abstraction, if not a downright deception, if it is used as a substitute for that truth which is always concrete. In the concrete situation, today as in 1914, the immediate rulers of China, Chiang and his national bourgeoisie, *prevent* the masses from fighting the main enemy, imperialism. Chiang makes the Chinese masses fight one imperialist power in behalf of another imperialist power – which is an altogether different thing from fighting *imperialism*. That is why I say to the Chinese masses, not in Wright’s brusque, unilluminating and malicious formula, but at more explicit length:

Now, today, in order to fight your classic foe, imperialism, it is necessary to remove the main obstacle in the road of that fight, Chiang. That means, remove the class he represents, for it now fears you, the masses, more than it envies imperialism and it has therefore put you under the control of one of the imperialist war coalitions. In its place you must put into power the only class whose interests, whose social cohesion and character make its rule the only guarantee today that China can gain its national independence: the working class. The bourgeoisie can desert the struggle for national freedom and has deserted it. The working class will not.

This is the counsel that the Fourth International must give the long-suffering, oft-betrayed peoples of the colonies, and no other. When the hundreds of millions rise to act on this counsel, the whole world will shake. There is no possibility of doubt, once it happens, that it will be the final conflict.

### **3. Morrison, “Why We Support China Part 1” (July 1942)**

*The Militant*, July 18th 1942

Serious people assuming to be Marxists never reject or modify a policy long adhered to by the revolutionary Marxist movement without saying so in so many words and furnishing reasons for rejection or modification. Would any one, for instance, knotting what he is talking about and taking himself and others seriously, reject or modify the Leninist theory of the party, without clearly saying so and giving his reasons for it?

In his article on "China in the World, War" published in the June issue of *New Internationalist* as an answer to Comrade Wright's article on China published in the April issue of *Fourth International*, Max Shachtman rejects or at least modifies, the colonial policy followed by all revolutionary Marxists, since it was formulated by Lenin — and he does this without so much as a suggestion that he has revised that policy. Is it possible that Shachtman is unaware of the fact that he has revised the colonial policy adopted by the Communist International in the days when it was headed by Lenin and Trotsky? That is difficult to believe.

It is of course not to be contended that a policy should not be revised because it was formulated by Marx or Engels or Lenin or Trotsky. Revolutionary Marxists are not blind followers. If one is convinced that a certain idea or policy advocated by any of the great socialists is wrong, then it is his duty to say so. But he must say so openly and present his reasons, Any other course is dishonest and completely lacking in seriousness.

The struggle of a colonial or semi-colonial people against an imperialist nation is supported by revolutionary Marxists because it is in the first place a blow at imperialism, the most reactionary phenomenon of our time. A victory of a colonial or semi-colonial nation also permits the development of the productive forces of that nation. Imperialist rule retards such a development because it is not in the interests of the imperialists to develop the productive forces of a backward country. And the right of every people to determine their own fate is a democratic right always supported by Marxists unless it conflicts with the interests of the proletarian revolution.

It follows -that Marxists support a colonial struggle against imperialism even if it is led by the colonial capitalists, It is of course true that, the colonial bourgeoisie is incapable of waging the struggle as a victorious working class would. conduct it. The interests of the colonial capitalists are to a large extent tied up with the imperialist world. While they are interested in obtaining freedom for their own country because that would give them a larger share in the profits derived from exploiting their own

working masses, they are at the same time interested in preserving the capitalist system, a factor which must necessarily make their struggle against the imperialist oppressor less effective, and making a betrayal of that struggle on the part of the capitalists very probable.

Understanding the weaknesses of the colonial bourgeoisie, Marxists do not give a colonial bourgeois government political support even while it is involved in a War against an imperialist oppressor. They continue to struggle against the capitalist government at the same time that they support the struggle against the imperialists. The independence, of the working class must be retained under all circumstances. That Chiang Kai-shek is a reactionary of the worst type is an old story. His brutality is no less than that of Hitler. It so happens, however, that he is the head of a semi-colonial nation struggling against an imperialist oppressor while Hitler is at the head of an imperialist nation fighting to gain control of other nations.

Representing the Chinese capitalists who do not want to give the foreign capitalists too large a share of the profits and will want to see the productive forces of China grow, Chiang Kai-shek leads the struggle against the Japanese imperialists. Marxists support that struggle. Representing the same capitalists, Chiang Kai-shek suppresses all organizations of workers and is ready to mow down tens of thousands of workers to guarantee the rule of the capitalists. Marxists call upon the Chinese masses to destroy the regime of Chiang Kai-shek.

Such was the attitude of the Trotskyists before Pearl Harbor and such is still our attitude-Shachtman had the same attitude prior to Pearl Harbor but now he has changed. He no longer supports the struggle of the Chinese against the Japanese imperialists and in explaining his change of policy in his article mentioned above he has in effect rejected the colonial policy followed by revolutionary Marxists since it was first formulated by Lenin.

Shachtman's general proposition is that it is not permissible to support the struggle of a colonial or semi-colonial nation against an imperialist nation that is involved in a war with another imperialist nation, so long as the colonial nation is under the control of the capitalist class. When Japan was not at war officially with the United States and Great Britain, it was correct to support China but it became incorrect to do so as soon as fighting began between Japan and the United States and Great Britain. Shachtman's conclusion constitutes a rejection of the colonial policy of revolutionary Marxism because at no time did any one recognized as an authority by revolutionary Marxists make any claim that the policy of supporting a colonial or semi-colonial nation against an imperialist oppressor is applicable only when there is no imperialist war going on or when the imperialist oppressor against whom the colonial nation is struggling is at peace with all other imperialist nations.

That Shachtman is aware of the fact that he has, as to speak, advised the colonial peoples not to fight against an imperialist oppressor during an imperialist war is evidenced by the question which he himself asks: "Is there then no future for China's

struggle against imperialism? Is the struggle for freedom of the colonial countries and peoples in general a hopeless one, at least while the World War is on?"

And he proceeds to answer that it is unless the proletariat assumes power in the colonies. But the essence of the colonial policy of revolutionary Marxism is to support the struggle of the colonial people against an imperialist oppressor even though it is led by the bourgeoisie and without making any exception during a period when an Imperialist war is raging. Shachtman considers a colonial struggle during an imperialist war as a hopeless one. To that we can only give Lenin's answer to a similar argument: a hopeless struggle is still a struggle.

Shachtman's advice to the colonial peoples amounts to this: do not struggle against your imperialist oppressor while he is at war with another imperialist oppressor. Fourth Internationalists say to the colonial peoples: follow the advice of Lenin and Trotsky who said that the time when your imperialist oppressor is involved in a war with a rival imperialist nation is the best time for you to revolt. Lenin's and Trotsky's advice to the colonial Peoples was to, take advantage of the difficulties created by war in order to throw off the chains of imperialist oppression. This is not to say that revolutionary Marxists support all colonial nations when their governments declare war against an imperialist country, Marxists know no such general rule. The conditions determining whether or not they support a colonial nation will be discussed next week.

## 4. Morrison, “We support the Struggle for China” (2)

*The Militant*, July 25th 1942

Does our support of the Chinese struggle against Japanese imperialism indicate that we support all colonial and semi-colonial nations against an imperialist country? Not in the least. Our support depends upon whether or not the particular struggle is essentially one for the independence of the colonial nation and not a struggle in the interests of a rival imperialist country. Basing ourselves on the general principle that a war of a colonial people against an imperialist oppressor is progressive, we analyse all the factors involved in a particular struggle to determine whether its essential character is for the independence of the colonial nation or in the interests of a rival imperialist country. This is the only Marxist approach to the question, for Marxism demands above all an analysis of all the concrete factors involved in a particular phenomenon.

Obviously in the case of China the question whether to support it in the struggle against Japanese imperialism at the present time is not so simple a question as in the case of the Soviet Union. For in the Soviet Union the one objective factor of nationalized property is the all-determining factor for a Marxist. In any struggle between the Soviet Union and a capitalist country we support the Soviet Union under all circumstances because in such a struggle a defeat of the Soviet Union destroys or at least endangers the existence of nationalized property.

In the case of China we have no such basic criterion. It is a colonial country but also a capitalist one. Hence the general rule of supporting a colonial nation fighting against an imperialist country may not apply under circumstances where it is clear that the colonial nation is not in reality fighting for its own independence but for the interest of another imperialist nation.

A decision to look upon the struggle of the Chinese nation against Japanese Imperialism as part of the imperialist conflict, and therefore not to be supported, is not in itself a rejection or modification of revolutionary Marxist policy on the colonial question, provided one bases his opinion on the conclusion, after an analysis of all the facts, that the struggle has become completely subordinated to the imperialist war. The controversy, if any, would center around the alleged facts which make the struggle subordinate to the imperialist war.

As I pointed out last week, Shachtman in his article on China in the June issue of *New Internationalist* comes to the general conclusion that while an imperialist war is raging, it is impermissible to support a colonial or semi-colonial nation struggling against an imperialist oppressor. Another theory which he presents as a justification for his change of position—a theory also applicable to the Soviet Union—is the following: Because China is not so industrially developed as the United States and must get material aid from the United States, it is therefore dependent on the latter country and

its struggle is therefore an imperialist struggle. There is not an iota of Marxism in this kind of an approach.

Prior to Pearl Harbor the United States furnished some aid to China. Not because American Imperialism was interested in the welfare of the Chinese people but because its own interests were threatened by a Japanese victory. Shachtman knew that and did not change his position. Even the Oehlerites permitted China to receive some aid from U. S. Imperialism.

There is no doubt but that after Pearl Harbor far more aid was forthcoming to China. Perhaps the capture of the Burma Road by the Japanese has reduced the quantity of armaments reaching China but that is not important. We shall assume that the aid reaching China from the United States is far greater now than it was prior to Pearl Harbor. Does the quantity of material sent to China by the United States change the character of the Chinese conflict? To ask that question is sufficient to show the absurdity of such a contention.

Even prior to the official declaration of war, U. S. aviators were fighting for China. Let us suppose that now there are many more of them in China. That of course is a more important factor. But no one who is a realistic Marxist will contend that getting technical help, or even military help through specially trained officers, changes the character of the Chinese conflict. What is important is: who, in the last analysis, is in control of the armed forces and therefore in control of the conflict?

If the Indian nationalists had accepted the Cripps' offer and gone to war against Japan with the Indian armies under the control of British imperialism, India would not be fighting for its independence but for British imperialism. Thus far no one in his right senses can say that it is not the Chinese government who controls the Chinese armies and all other armies in China. Should the situation change and should a sufficient number of American troops be sent to China and take control of the struggle against Japan, then we would have to change our attitude. But this has not happened.

One can say in fact that Chinese nationalist feeling has grown since Pearl Harbor. The knowledge that U. S. imperialism is now depending upon China to carry on the struggle against Japan seems to have strengthened the independent attitude of China. At any rate there is no evidence whatever that China has as yet permitted its struggle to become subordinated to the imperialist war.

Shachtman pokes fun at Comrade Wright's statement in his article on China in the April issue of *Fourth International* to the effect that it is the independent character of the Chinese struggle that determines our attitude to it. What other general criterion is possible? Naturally, in the present imperialist epoch no struggle can be entirely independent of the imperialist forces dominating the world. But the mere fact that there is an imperialist war raging does not automatically create a state of complete dependency and subordination in the case of the war China is waging against Japanese imperialism. The independent character of the Chinese struggle means that in case of a victory over Japan, China will not be under the political yoke of an imperialist

oppressor. That U. S. imperialism will gain by a victory over Japan is undoubtedly true, but that is not the question. The important question is whether, as the struggle stands at present, China will be politically (not economically) independent in case of a victory over Japan.

Marxists do not support all colonial or semi-colonial nations participating in a war against an imperialist oppressor. It is only when the war is for their own independence that we support them. On the basis of Shachtman's general proposition, he and those who think like him would not support India if it were to begin a struggle against Great Britain under the leadership of representatives of Indian capitalism. Marxists would support it even though the Indian government would accept aid from the Japanese and German imperialists.

On the other hand if the Indian nationalists were to join Great Britain in the struggle against Japan, we would not support them. Under present conditions such a struggle would not be one for Indian independence, but for the interests of British imperialism.

Marxists do not support the Mexican government in its war against Germany because that war was obviously declared by virtue of the pressure exerted by the United States. In every instance of a colonial nation participating in a war against an imperialist nation Marxists analyze all the factors involved and determine their attitude after such an analysis and not on the basis of some general principle and some logical deductions from that principle.

So then, Shachtman will undoubtedly poke fun at us and say: you will support China against Japan, India against Great Britain and you will have three or four different positions with reference to the war. Correct! We shall analyze the facts in the case of every country and if the facts warrant the conclusion that a particular country is waging a progressive war we shall support the struggle of that country. That will not give the uniformity and purity which Shachtman demands, but it will be strictly in the tradition of Marxism, a tradition tenaciously adhered to by all Fourth Internationalists.

## 4. Felix Morrow, “China in the War” (August 1942)

Source: *Fourth International*, New York, [Vol.3 No.8](#), August 1942, pp.280-282  
Transcribed: Ted Crawford

China’s war of national liberation against Japanese imperialism entered its sixth year on July 7. The “China Incident” Japan’s militarists contemptuously called it when at last, under the pressure of the masses and faced by the prospect of complete subjugation, the Chiang Kai-shek government embarked on resistance. But, despite its vast superiority in equipment, despite its capture of the principal cities and practically the entire seacoast, Japan has been unable to terminate the incident. Japan’s perspective of a short war in China was based on an accurate enough analysis of the weaknesses of the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek regime and its isolation from the Chinese masses. The error in the Japanese analysis, which may yet prove the undoing of the Japanese Empire, was its failure to realize that China’s masses would fight on despite their lack of confidence in Chiang Kai-shek and despite Chiang’s conservative and timid conduct of the war.

If they hoped that their exhausting war would be eased after December 7, when Japan clashed with its Anglo-American imperialist rivals, the Chinese people were soon disillusioned. The white man’s prestige was quickly destroyed in all Asia, as he was driven out of Hongkong, Malaya, Singapore and the Indies. Disappointed and bitter indictments of British and American strategy were voiced by Chiang Kai-shek’s press—the bitterness exacerbated undoubtedly by the thought: And these people treat us as inferiors! Typical of Chungking’s comments was this in *Chiang’s daily, Ta-Kung Pao* on January 13: “*There are two vital Allied mistakes. First, failure to carry out a true scorched-earth policy, and second, failure to accomplish mobilization of native populations, resulting in most effective fifth-column activity.*” Chungking called these mistakes; but no doubt understood very well that imperialist greed made impossible both a scorched-earth policy and winning native support. Far from easing China’s burden, the entry of its Anglo-American allies into war with Japan brought China its worst disaster in five years, when the Burma Road fell to Japan. As the sixth year of the war began, all China knew that China’s salvation depended primarily on itself.

On top of the military disasters of the Anglo-American forces came Britain’s refusal to make any concessions to India, toward which China was frenziedly building the Indo-China Road to replace the lifeline lost in Burma. Despite the collapse of the white man’s prestige, despite the consequent new note of national self-confidence to be heard in India and throughout Asia, Britain would not surrender an iota of its control of India. The widespread sympathy of the Indian people for China was thus deprived of the means to come to China’s aid. This latest lesson as to the real attitude of British and American imperialism toward the peoples of Asia has scarcely been lost on the Chinese people. Sharing the new national self-confidence of India, China’s masses now know

more than ever that only they can will freedom for China.

### ***The Program of the Fourth International***

As its struggle for national independence continues under the new conditions, China's war justly continues to receive the wholehearted support of the Fourth Internationalists of China—who met and confirmed this policy once again last fall when the outbreak of war between Japan and the Anglo-American imperialists was clearly imminent—and of the Fourth International throughout the world. This continued support of China is not a position hastily formulated after the events, but was prepared for in advance. Our attitude toward the various countries involved in the present war was formulated most authoritatively in September 1935 at the Founding Conference of the Fourth International. The program there adopted, entitled “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International,” formulates this attitude in the following words:

*“The imperialist bourgeoisie dominates the world. In its basic character the approaching war will therefore be an imperialist war. The fundamental content of the politics of the international proletariat will consequently be a struggle against imperialism and its war...”*

*“But not all countries of the world are imperialist countries. On the contrary, the majority are victims of imperialism. Some of the colonial or semi-colonial countries undoubtedly attempt to utilize the war in order to cast off the yoke of slavery. Their war will be not imperialist but liberating. It will be the duty of the international proletariat to aid the oppressed countries in war against oppressors. The same duty applies in regard to aiding the USSR, or whatever other workers' government might arise before the war or during the war. The defeat of every imperialist government in the struggle with the workers state or with a colonial country is the lesser evil.*

*“The workers of imperialist countries, however, cannot help an anti-imperialist country through their own government no matter what might be the diplomatic and military relationship between the two countries at a given moment. If the governments find themselves in temporary, and by very essence of the matter, unreliable alliance, then the proletariat of the imperialist country continues to remain in class opposition to its own government and supports the non-imperialist ‘ally’ through its own methods...”*

*“In supporting the colonial country or the USSR in a war the proletariat does not in the slightest degree solidarize either with the bourgeois government of the colonial country or with the Thermidorian bureaucracy of the USSR. On the contrary it maintains full political independence from the one as from the other. Giving aid in a just and progressive war, the revolutionary proletariat wins the sympathy of the workers in the colonies and in the USSR, strengthens there the authority and influence of the Fourth International, and increases its ability to help overthrow the bourgeois government in the colonial country and the reactionary bureaucracy of the USSR. (Founding Conference of the Fourth International, Program and Resolutions, 1939, pages 31-35. Our italics.)*

When the war broke out and unfolded, this unambiguous political conception motivated our opposition to all the imperialist powers and our support of the USSR and China in the sense indicated in the program. This is the course that all sections of the Fourth International without exception have followed.

### ***Shachtman's New Theory***

Among those who voted for this policy in 1935 at the Founding Conference was Max Shachtman who, indeed wrote an introduction to the program in which he—true to form—called for “sticking doggedly to the principles” of the program. A year later the same Shachtman—again true to form—abandoned the defense of the USSR and split from the Fourth International on this question. Now—still true to form—the dogged fighter abandons the defense of China against Japan. Naturally, he pretends that our defense of China is new policy unwarranted by the doctrines of the Fourth International. It will not be difficult to refute this impudent subterfuge.

The Founding Conference program, quoted above, clearly says: “Some of the colonial or semi-colonial countries will undoubtedly attempt to utilize the war in order to cast off the yoke of slavery. Their war will be not imperialist but liberating.” Semi-colonial China was engaged in attempting to cast off the yoke of slavery of Japan at the time the imperialist war was extended into the Pacific. Since then China has attempted to utilize the war—i.e., the conflict among the imperialists—to cast off the yoke of slavery, accepting aid from and entering into an alliance with Japan’s imperialist rivals—an alliance which the program termed “temporary and, by very essence of the matter, unreliable.” The program declared that we would support a semi-colonial country like China in spite of such an alliance, and that our aid in such a just and progressive war would increase the ability of the Fourth Internationalists of China to help overthrow the reactionary regime of Chiang Kai-shek. All this Shachtman agreed with in 1938 and signed his name to it. But his signature was not worth much.

Shachtman does not present any facts to justify his change of position. All that he does is put a minus now when in 1938 he accepted the plus of Trotsky and the Fourth International. The program of the founding Conference—with Shachtman’s vote—said that it was correct to support a colonial or semi-colonial country which would “utilize the war” in its struggle against its principal imperialist oppressor (China against Japan, India against Britain), despite the fact that the leadership was in the hands of the colonial bourgeoisie, and despite its alliance with imperialist powers. Shachtman now blithely renounces all that. Now he says:

*“Is there then no future for China’s struggle against imperialism? Is the struggle for freedom of the colonial countries and peoples in general a hopeless one, at least while the World War is on?”*

*“Yes, the struggle of the colonies for freedom is utterly hopeless during the present world War if they continue the course of serving one imperialist camp against the other. That is today the course of the bourgeoisie in every colonial and semi-colonial country...”*

*“The Second World War, imperialist to the marrow, is total and all-dominating. In its first stage, at least, it was inevitable that it draw into the grip of its iron ring... all the isolated national wars and struggles for national freedom...”*

*“Yes, the struggle for national emancipation of the colonies has been deserted—by the Chiangs and the Nehrus and the Boses and the Wangs, by the people who led and directed it and then, at the showdown, brought it into the imperialist war camp...”*

*“... only the leadership of the proletariat can re-launch the just wars of the colonies against imperialism.” (New International, July 1942, pages 171-2. Shachtman’s italics.)*

Thus Shachtman says that a progressive struggle of a colonial or semi-colonial country led by its bourgeoisie is impossible during an imperialist war. During the war Shachtman will support only that colonial country in which the leadership of the proletariat has been established of course a proletariat already under revolutionary and not reformist leadership. This revelation has nothing in common with Lenin and Trotsky’s reiterated and reiterated position that revolutionists should support a colonial struggle against imperialism even if the colonial bourgeoisie leads it.

### ***The False Analogy with China in 1914***

Let us attempt to come to grips with Shachtman’s theory, such as it is. He learned from Trotsky that the second World War is a continuation of the first on the part of all the imperialist powers. Shachtman’s grasp of the Marxist concept of imperialism as a stage of capitalism is extremely tenuous as he showed when he suddenly announced that the Soviet Union is “imperialist.” Shachtman perverts Trotsky’s conception to mean that the second World War is a continuation of the first on the part of all the countries participating in it. After that he needs only to repeat: “as in 1914.” So, in the case of China, Shachtman writes:

*“In the concrete situation, today as in 1911, the immediate rulers of China, Chiang and his national bourgeoisie, prevent the masses from fighting the main enemy, imperialism. Chiang makes the Chinese masses fight one imperialist power on behalf of another imperialist power—which is an altogether different thing from fighting imperialism. (New International, June 1942.)”*

What in “the concrete situation” today in China is identical with the situation in 1914? Shachtman does not tell us and cannot tell us. For there is no analogy between China’s role in the two wars, as we shall easily establish by the facts.

In 1917 a dismembered China which was not resisting any imperialist power entered the war on the side of her principal oppressors who then constituted a form of international trust dominating China—Britain, the United States, France, Japan—and proclaimed a formal state of war against Germany, a power then without holdings in China and without any forces in the Pacific. In December 1941 a semi-unified China which had conducted a war of national liberation for four and a half years against its principal oppressor, Japan, continued this war when the conflict among the imperialist powers extended to the Pacific, and accepted supplies from and an alliance with Japan’s imperialist rivals. Where Shachtman invents an analogy between 1917 and 1941, there is actually a decisive contrast.

The difference between China's role in the two wars is worth describing at length, quite apart from refuting Shachtman's preposterous analogy. For the contrast illumines the significance for today of our 1938 programmatic statement that "*Some of the colonial or semi-colonial countries will undoubtedly attempt to utilize the war in order to cast off the yoke of slavery.*" To utilize the war is only possible where there is war. But in 1914-18 the war except for the very secondary fighting in Palestine and Mesopotamia it was fought on European battlefields—did not extend into the Pacific. China and India are today for their own ends able to utilize the war—i.e., the contradictions among the imperialist powers at the stage of armed conflict—precisely because this time the Pacific has become one of the chief areas of conflict. Yet, in Shachtman's world of shadows, China's and India's struggles are transformed into mere appendages of imperialism by just this extension of the war into the Pacific! China's and India's opportunity to win freedom while the imperialists are fighting among themselves becomes for Shachtman their chain of slavery!

In 1914-18 all the Pacific powers and oppressors of China were ranged on one side in the imperialist conflict hence the colonial and semi-colonial peoples of Asia and Africa had little or no opportunity to take advantage of the imperialist conflict to free themselves. The power of the Allied imperialists remained unshattered in the Far East, in no way challenged there by Germany and her allies. Britain therefore remained undisputed master in India. China likewise experienced no lightening of the pressure of her imperialist masters. Peace in the Pacific meant a continuation of the "normal" oppression of Asia and Africa.

In 1917 China was compelled, under pressure of the Allies, to break off diplomatic relations and then declare war against Germany. The war was far away and the Chinese people were indifferent to it; so far as they had opinions about it they were for Germany for, as the great power with the smallest holdings in China, Germany had appealed to the Chinese people as the more friendly power. Germany's holdings—treaty ports in Shantung province—had been seized by Japan in 1914 without consulting China. China's participation in the war consisted primarily of "permitting" the hiring of about 200,000 coolie laborers who were sent to France. Despite pressure and threats from its "allies." China was extremely reluctant to close German banks and sequester German ships in China, for German business offered China more favorable terms than the other powers. It was not until March 1919—nearly five months after the end of the war—that China finally deported all Germans—obviously a step not dictated by war necessities but solely designed to provide Britain, Japan, France and the United States with the business formerly conducted by Germans.

When the United States "invited" China to join it in breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany, Sun Yat-sen telegraphed to Lloyd George on March 10, 1917, protesting against the Allied move to drag China into a war which did not concern her. Sun's action was extremely popular in China. The first president of the Republic of China, set up in 1911 when the Manchu dynasty was overthrown, Sun had been replaced by the northern militarist Yuan Shih-kai in 1912, but had a majority in the impotent Parliament. Yuan convened the Parliament on May 10, 1917, and tried to force it to vote

for war, but it refused. Only by dispersing the Parliament and putting an end to the pretense of representative government, setting up a pro-Japan government in the capital at Peking, was China declared in the war on August 4, 1917. Sun Yat-sen and the nationalist Kuomintang refused to go along, and with the help of the southern war-lords set up their own government in the south, in Canton in Kwangtung province. The China which formally participated in the war thus merely consisted of the northern war-lords. The break with the south over the war question served to clarify the fact that the revolution of 1911, in toppling the dynasty, had not created a united China; on the contrary, the provincial militarists now ruled, more openly than ever, as the agents of the imperialist powers. The principal spheres of influence were: Yunnan and southern Kwangsi—France; the great river valleys economically controlled by Hong Kong and Shanghai—Britain; Manchuria and the north—Japan; with the United States pushing its way in everywhere.

With no hostilities in the Pacific, far from finding the war period an opportunity to push back imperialist pressure, China found it a period of further imperialist inroads, especially by Japan, which had the backing of a secret agreement with Britain. Japan served its 21 Demands on China and followed it up with an ultimatum; on May 25, 1915, helpless China was forced to sign an agreement granting many of the demands. The pleas of a Chinese delegation for a reversal of this situation got short shrift at the Peace Conference at Versailles. The Allies decided in favor of Japan and the rest of themselves, and the Chinese delegation refused to sign the Versailles Treaty.

Under the conditions of the first World War, then, the idea of armed resistance to any of the imperialist powers was beyond the thought of China's leaders. When Sun Yat-sen became president, his attitude was one of cringing servility to the great powers, promising them that their perquisites and privileges would remain intact. Even after the disappointment at Versailles, Sun saw hope for China only in some form of benevolent cooperation among the powers, for which he pleaded in his book, *The International Development of China* (1922).

Such, in brief, is the picture of China in the first World War. Let Shachtman try to draw an analogy between it and the present—not one of his empty generalities, but a concrete analogy. Let him show the identity between Germany of 1914 and Japan of 1941 in relation to China!

Basing himself on the writings of Trotsky and our Chinese comrades, Shachtman proves irrefutably that Chiang Kai-shek's regime is reactionary; that it has led the fight against Japan largely under the pressure of the masses, etc., etc. All this, however, was also true before Pearl Harbor, yet then Shachtman conceded that China's struggle was progressive despite the Chiang Kai-shek regime. He is under the obligation, therefore, to prove that the character of the war now being conducted by the regime is decisively different than it was before Pearl Harbor.

For the most part Shachtman does not venture beyond empty generalities about China's "complete capitulation to Anglo-American imperialism"—which is precisely what is incumbent upon him to prove. One proof he does venture to give that China is now being "directed by" the imperialist powers: "The Chinese Army is... already fighting

on Burmese soil to maintain the imperialist rule of the British bourgeoisie...” (*Labor Action*, March 6, 1942.) Very well, then, let us examine the events in Burma.

### ***The Test of the Events in Burma***

If it is correct to defend China at all, then there is no reason why the Chinese army should not have defended the Burma Road, including the section of it in Burma and the port of entry for Chinese supplies, Rangoon. No doubt British imperialist interests would have been aided as against the Axis powers by China’s successful defense of the Burma Road, but the same thing might be said about every Japanese or German soldier killed by China or the Soviet Union. The irrefutable fact is that the maintenance of the Burma Road, including its outlet in Burma, was vital both for supplies and for the defense of China in general, as has been proven since by the deadly inroads Japan has made precisely through this back-door into China. Shall China, a non-imperialist country, leave undefended a vital area extending beyond its borders, simply because some imperialist rival of Japan would also benefit by its defense? This is the logic of the madhouse of petty-bourgeois radicalism. It has nothing in common with the real interests of non-imperialist China.

The Chinese army’s crossing the frontier into Burma is the sole evidence offered by Shachtman in accusing it of serving British imperialism there. Shachtman has always had a queasy attitude toward frontiers. He once conducted a bitter fight against comrade Cannon because Cannon had, declared, when Hitler became Chancellor, that the Red Army should be mobilized. The idea of a degenerated workers’ state violating the German frontier horrified Shachtman; in the same spirit he now condemns the Chinese army for crossing the border into Burma. A war of national defense, according to Shachtman’s logic, can be fought only by sticking within one’s own frontiers; to sally out beyond them changes the character of the war. Of a Shachtman of his time who in war of national defense disapproved an offensive into enemy territory Marx wrote that he “*confuses a defensive war with defensive military operations. So if a fellow falls upon me in the street I may only parry his blow but not knock him down, because then I should turn into an oppressor! The want of dialectic comes out in every word these people utter...*”

So much we could say before the events Burma. Now we must add the facts as to the actual relations between the Chinese and the British. General Alexander, the British commander, appears to have been abysmally ignorant of the fact so well known to Shachtman, that the Chinese wanted to enter Burma merely to serve British imperialism. On the contrary Alexander refused to let Chinese troops into Burma except in token numbers. Not until after the fall of Rangoon did he finally agree to a “*closer military understanding*” reported in an AP dispatch from Chungking, April 24, which added that “there now is no limit to the number of Chinese troops which may be sent into Burma.” This dispatch, declared the April 25 *New York Herald Tribune* editorially, “*confirms the suspicion that China has not been able or permitted to throw her full strength into the struggle for Burma.*” But that “close military understanding” was not observed by the British, we now learn from a letter (*New York Times*, July 10 1942) of Lin Yutang who speaks unofficially for the Chinese government. “China wanted to

defend Burma at all costs, but was not permitted to do so, “ he writes. He gives the astonishing information that “the Chinese mechanized units”—apparently all that China had—were waiting at Kunming during the Burma campaign while the Chinese vainly sought British agreement to let them into Burma. In the end, the British authorities refused to agree to provide the mechanized units with oil to operate with in Burma.

Why did not the British permit Chiang to send as many Chinese troops as he could into Burma? The British sent as many Indian troops as they could transport—why not Chinese? for a simple reason: the Indians came as vassals of British imperialism, the Chinese would come as representatives of Free China. Every Chinese soldier would be proof to the Burmese that there are peoples of Asia who are freeing themselves. A victory for Chinese troops in Burma would have been understood everywhere as a victory for the colonial peoples and not for British imperialism. That is why, for example, the anti-British masses of India are wholeheartedly pro-Chinese. And that is also why the British preferred to lose Burma to Japan, with the hope of winning it back later, than let China hold Burma against Japan. The line of demarcation is so clear that the backward peasant in India understands it as well as does Central Alexander from the opposite side of the class line. But Shachtman does not understand the class line, as he already showed by his position on the Soviet-Finnish war.

The events in Burma demonstrate that China, far from complete capitulation to Anglo-American imperialism,” is feared and thwarted by its imperialist “ally.” The events bear out the Fourth International’s estimation of such an alliance between non-imperialist and imperialist countries as “*temporary and, by very essence of the matter, unreliable.*”

Apart from his unhappy reference to the Burma events, Shachtman offers no proofs of his position. For the rest he offers such resounding generalities as this: “*When the World Imperialist War broke over its head, the Chinese bourgeoisie did not waver for a moment. It took out a commission in the camp of imperialism and brought its `national struggle` along with it as useful camouflage.*” These generalities are safer for Shachtman than his reference to Burma only in the sense that they are irrefutable because they are empty of content. No one could reasonably ask Shachtman for a copy of the commission which China took out in the camp of imperialists. It is a literary metaphor which is enough for him and which, Shachtman hopes, he might some day exchange for facts.

We work to prevent such facts from coming into being. Our comrades in China, fighting in the front ranks in the armed forces and seeking to arouse the workers and peasants to the greatest possible effort for the defense of China, are striving to make impossible what Shachtman insists has already happened. If China can maintain its own front against Japan then there is the possibility of a Chinese victory over the oppressor. But if China’s war effort collapses, or is so weakened that in the end the land front in China is dominated by Anglo-American troops, then victory over Japan would not be a victory for China. It would be a victory for those who would simply replace Japan as the imperialist oppressor of China. The Chinese Trotskyists, and the entire Fourth International with them, struggle against such an outcome. Shachtman, as in the case of the Soviet Union, abandons the struggle, proclaiming it already lost.

Perhaps the most: important factor weighing in China's favor today is the Indian revolution, now in its opening stages. Were India soon to free itself from imperialist domination, the weight of its 400 millions would be added to and would galvanize the 450 millions of China—together they constitute nearly half the human race!—against imperialist domination by either warring camp. It is obviously the duty of every revolutionist to support India's fight for freedom. We must support it even if the Indian bourgeoisie leads the struggle at present, and no matter what imperialist powers find it expedient to aid India. By all means it is correct for India to utilize the war to throw off the yoke of Britain. But in the Indian struggle, as in China, we are separated from Shachtman by an unbridgeable gulf. We support the struggle: he brands it as "serving one imperialist camp against the other. That is today the course of the bourgeoisie in every colonial and semi-colonial country." (*New International*, June 1942, p.171.)

Thanks to the existence of the first workers' state and China's armed resistance to imperialist domination, we have new immediate tasks and possibilities in this war which the revolutionists did not have in the first World War. We look forward to the task of defending the Indian revolution. These three gigantic tasks—the defense of the Soviet Union, of China against Japan, and of India against Britain—have no place in the wretched literary scheme of Shachtman and his kind. Their veto will nevertheless not interfere with the revolutionary struggle of the Fourth International to carry out these world historical tasks.