

Workers' Voice Information Bulletin #1, April, 2022

On questions of war and imperialism



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Introduction

The present war in Ukraine against the Russian invasion is primarily a war against an aggression of imperialist character, but at the same time it takes place in a context of rising inter-imperialist rivalries between two groups of great economic and military powers: the USA and Europe on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. It is therefore a war with a combined character: a principal contradiction, which is the defense of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and a secondary contradiction for the moment, or in the background, but feeding the conflict: the rivalry between the NATO bloc and Russia (with the support of China) for economic, political and military domination over Ukraine and Eastern Europe. This explains in part the great debates taking place on the world left, both on the character of the war, and on the policy that revolutionaries should have in it.

However, this is not the first time that this type of war has occurred in a decadent imperialist system. A very similar scenario took place in the second part of the 1930s, when two wars were fought which also had this combined character: the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1936) which lasted only 6 months, and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). The latter began, like the Ethiopian War, as a war of national liberation, but it overlapped with the Second World War, and with the entry of the United States in conflict with Japan in 1944, its character changed, and the main contradiction became the anti-imperialist confrontation.

In 1934, in *The War and the Fourth International*, a very important text which gave a solid and dialectical framework to the Trotskyists, Trotsky explains that the present economic and social crisis of imperialism and the rapid rearmament of the main powers announce a new imperialist conflict. In that text, he also explains how revolutionaries must combine in the wars of that period the struggle for the tasks of national liberation and defense of the USSR, with the struggle against all imperialisms, and he also explains how the tasks can vary according to whether one is in a colonial or semi-colonial country, in an aggressor imperialist country, or in an imperialist country acting in a war in favor of a national liberation struggle or for the defense of the USSR, that is to say an imperialism militarily aligned with the progressive camp of a "just" war but to defend its own interests. The latter was the case both in the Italian-Ethiopian war of 1935, when England sought to intervene against Mussolini's Italy which was invading Ethiopia, or when the USA intervened militarily to support China in its national liberation struggle against Japanese imperialism.

The texts of this dossier are only a very initial selection of the great political accumulation that world Trotskyism has in the analysis and direct intervention of both

wars of combined character, or with multiple contradictions and which is of great utility today.

Trotsky understood the second Italo-Ethiopian War as the place of articulation of a double contradiction or confrontation. It was of course about facing the priority struggle to ensure the national sovereignty of an independent country in the face of the imperialist aggression of Italy, and that was definitely the main contradiction of the conflict. But this war was also taking place against a background of rapid rearmament and growing economic warfare between the various imperialist powers, both triggered by the brutal economic crisis of the 1930s, by the unresolved imperialist rivalries after the Treaty of Versailles 1919, and obviously by the structural need of imperialist capitalism to constantly increase its profits, which requires the conquest of new territories that provide both resources and labor and markets to realize surplus value. It was therefore a war of national liberation fought in a context of prologue to a new imperialist war.

Trotsky was in direct discussion with the group of Trotskyists acting in the ILP (Independent Labor Party) grouped in the Marxist Group, where CLR James militated, from which we present one text. The Trotskyists of the ILP took a clear position of support for the Ethiopian resistance against the Italian invasion, even though Ethiopia was led by Haile Selassie, a tremendous dictator. For them they organized a major solidarity campaign, promoting boycotts of the Italian arms industry and Italian imperialism in general, in what they called "workers sanctions," to counterpose them to the imperialist sanctions of the conservative Baldwin government and the United Nations which the ILP rejected outright. Trotsky fully supported the MG's policy, both the firm rejection of any kind of support to imperialist sanctions since it was necessary to fight patriotic social pressure and separate the British proletariat from its own bourgeoisie, and the active support to all activities of solidarity with Ethiopia and workers' sanctions. On this second front, the MG Trotskyists had to face social-patriotic pressures from sections of British social democracy which preferred neutrality in the war. CLR James' text shows how the British Trotskyists mobilized a campaign of solidarity with Ethiopia at the same time as, or rather from, a clear denunciation of their own imperialist government and its opportunist policy of sanctions. Swabeck's text explains the position of the Trotskyists on the imperialist sanctions.

In relation to the second conflict, both Trotsky's text (Letter to Rivera) and that of John G Wright of the SWP explain the character of the Sino-Japanese war and what should be the policy of the Chinese revolutionaries and the rest of the world: fight against Japan for national liberation and at the same time politically confront the regime of Chiang Kai-shek. Any posture of neutrality in that war would be a disaster. At the same time, Trotsky was also in discussion with the American SWP which also made a great

campaign of active solidarity with both the Chinese Trotskyist party and the resistance movement, collecting direct aid funds and promoting workers boycott actions against the Japanese arms industry, while criticizing the bourgeois leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and of course, the real interests and hypocrisy of the Roosevelt government intervening in that war against Japan. The text of the SWP of 1941 shows that the policy of Trotskyism is always to seek an independent way out for the working class which does not trust any bourgeois leadership and even less imperialist.

In both cases then, the challenge for revolutionaries was twofold: first to analyze the character of the concrete conflicts by their objective tendencies in the class struggle and consequences, and not simply by their directions, taking into account the totality of contradictions, and second to develop a consistent political intervention in each country.

In both Ethiopia and China, the leaderships of the anti-imperialist struggle were neither working class nor socialist, but rather bourgeois and reactionary, but Trotsky and the revolutionaries explained the progressive character of one military camp against the other, the importance of the democratic slogans of national liberation and that the victory of the Ethiopian people like the victory of the Chinese people against the aggressor imperialisms would unleash a new wave of mass struggles and revolutions of the oppressed. But at this juncture, the Trotskyists did not for a second fail to demarcate themselves politically from the supposedly "friendly" imperialisms which sought to intervene in such conflicts to defeat their imperialist competitors and increase their own colonial domination. Klement's 1937 text, and Trotsky's "Learn to Think" are both a commentary on a key part of Trotsky's 1934 text. In them Trotsky and Klement analyze the tasks of revolutionaries in the imperialist countries when their own governments intervene in progressive wars to help them, and it is of great importance today, since it explains how the task of revolutionary defeatism is concretized according to the concrete character of each war and according to the role of each imperialism in it.

Section 1: The Second Italo-Ethiopian War

Is This Worth a War? The League's Scheme to Rob Abyssinia of its Independence CLR James

Below will be found a full analysis of the League of Nations Report on Abyssinia. The author, C.L.R. James, is a Negro and Socialist. He is chairman of the Finchley ILP. He writes fiercely. He says that it is 'a brazen lie' that the British government is defending the independence of Abyssinia, and passionately warns British workers against being

led to support League sanctions in order to put a 'stranglehold' on the Ethiopian people. Only independent and united action by the British and African workers can overthrow imperialism.

'Gallant little Belgium' was bad enough, but 'the independence of Ethiopia' is worse. It is the greatest swindle in all the living history of imperialism. The British government, having mobilised world opinion and many of its own workers behind it, has put a stranglehold on Ethiopia, as tight as anything Italian imperialism ever intended.

The proposals of the Committee of Five expose the brazen lie that any independence is being defended. The document is short and concise.

The public services of Ethiopia will be divided into four departments: Police and Gendarmerie, Economic Development, Finance, and Other Public Services. As usual with imperialist banditry masquerading under the name of law, the means of repression stand first on the list.

The Foreign 'Specialists'

Foreign specialists will organise a corps of police and gendarmerie, which will be responsible for 'strictly regulating the carrying of arms by persons not belonging to the regular army or to the police or gendarmerie forces', in other words, disarming the people.

This group of specialists will be responsible for 'policing centres in which Europeans reside', and 'ensuring security in agricultural areas where Europeans may be numerous and where the local administration may not be sufficiently developed to provide them with adequate protection'. Thus the local population being disarmed will be taught the proper respect due by black men to white in imperialist Africa.

Mussolini was going to do the same. But he rather stupidly demanded the disbandment of the army. These foreign specialists will not disband the army. The army will be allowed to carry arms. Egypt, which is also independent, has an army of only 10,000 men, so ill-equipped that they are useless for anything except to show how independent Egypt is!

The regular army of Ethiopia has never been large. The strength of the country has always been in the fact that the whole population was the army.

Once the gendarmerie has done its work, imperialism can go safely ahead with civilisation. Under Section II, Economic Development, foreigners will 'participate in land tenure, mining regulations, exercise of commercial and industrial activities'; also public works, telegraphs, etc., all the things imperialism needs for its trade. It will be the same old exploitation that is going on in every part of Africa today.

First, the imperialists called the exploited areas colonies; next, protectorates; then, mandates. Now it is 'helping a sister nation'.

The name will make little difference to the native deprived of his arms, herded into compounds, working in mines at a few shillings a week without trade union protection, with special police and gendarmerie to teach him the way he should go. He has preferred his feudal slavery. He will look back to it in years to come as to a golden age.

Section III, Finance, shows that the League advisers will also be responsible for 'assessment and collection of taxes, fees and dues'. How they will revel in it! Loans also (from which the City will grow fat), and 'control of pledges assigned to the service of the loans'. This means that, as in China and other parts where imperialism has been 'helping' the native ruler, customs and similar dues will be collected by the imperialists at once and sent to investors in Europe. Britain can default, but Ethiopia, like India, will have to pay if the native sweats blood.

After the service of the loans will come the paying of salaries, money for the gendarmerie, telegraphs, roads, railways, etc. The balance will then go to education, etc — as we can see in India after over 200 years of British rule, where the percentage of illiterates is over 90.

Section IV deals with justice. The mixed courts which try cases between foreigners and Europeans will be 'reorganised'. Also there will be a reorganisation of 'native justice'. We recommend in this connection the study of the report published last year on native justice in British East Africa.

Who will apply all this assistance to the long-lost sister nation of Ethiopia, so happily found at last? First, the police and gendarmerie. Wherever European settlers live in great numbers, and on the frontiers, the gendarmerie 'will participate in general administration to an extent varying according to the standard reached by the local authorities and the nature of the problems to be solved'.

Carte blanche

But even elsewhere the imperialists will not leave anything to the Ethiopian government at all. Each of these four sections will have at its head a 'principal adviser' sent by the League. These four will have above them a chief, who will be a delegate of the League of Nations accredited to the Emperor. If this League Emperor is not specially appointed, then the four advisers will themselves elect a chief.

These gentlemen, in addition to controlling police and gendarmerie, finance, commerce and justice, also 'must be able to rely on the effective cooperation of the Ethiopian authorities', and this even where they have not got special powers. Better still, there is going to be a central organisation both to coordinate the work of the assistance services and to secure for them 'the necessary support of the Ethiopian Government'. The League Emperor and his advisers will thus do as they like in the country and have the full support of the Ethiopian government.

The delegate and the principal advisers will, of course, be appointed by the Council of the League, 'with the agreement of the Emperor'. Thus he can choose between British Imperialist No. 1 or No. 2 or French Imperialist No. 3 or No. 4, or Swedish No 1 or Belgian No. 2. How much choice will he have?

Hobson's Choice

But more than that. The Emperor will not be able to appoint freely a single one of the staffs of these advisers. The advisers will submit names to him from which he can choose, or even if he appoints some agents the League adviser will have to give his endorsement 'according to the nature and importance of their functions'.

Finally, what control, even nominal, will the Ethiopian people, or even the Emperor, have over all this? None whatever. These advisers will 'make reports which will be communicated to the Emperor at the same time as they are addressed to the Council of the League'. Thus, the advisers are not to be bothered with the Ethiopian government at all, which, however, will be able to 'submit to the Council any observations it may wish to formulate in regard to these reports'.

At the end of five years the plan is to be reviewed. But, by this time, imperialism will have sunk its teeth and claws so deep into the country that nothing but a revolution by the Ethiopian masses will ever hack them out.

The imperialists have been after Ethiopia for a long time, and they have got it at last. All that Italy gets, however, is a promise of her predominant interests to be recognised. It isn't good enough. Musso the Monkey put his fingers into the fire, but the British lion has snatched the nut. No wonder Garvin, in Sunday's Observer, shouts that it isn't fair,

that Mussolini should have some, enough at least to show Italy that Fascism is not all bluff and does bring home the goods some time. If war is averted this way, then Eden and Laval can go back home, carrying peace with honour, and enough of Ethiopia to keep the home fires burning a little longer.

Now is there any British worker, any Negro in Africa, who, having understood this infamous document, is prepared to urge League sanctions and follow the imperialists in their defence of the 'Independence of Ethiopia'?

Having got the Emperor to agree to all they wanted, the imperialists have now remembered their treaty obligations and begun to allow arms to go in. A shipment from Belgium has arrived; also anti-aircraft guns from Switzerland. The French are getting ready to protect the railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. This is to ensure the little sister nation Ethiopia getting arms and supplies during the war.

The British worker, the Negro anxious to help Ethiopia, should keep himself far from this slime, which may so soon become blood.

Use Your Own Power

Workers of Europe, peasants and workers of Africa and of India, sufferers from imperialism all over the world, all anxious to help the Ethiopian people, organise yourselves independently, and by your own sanctions, the use of your own power, assist the Ethiopian people. Their struggle is only now beginning.

Let us fight against not only Italian imperialism, but the other robbers and oppressors, French and British imperialism. Do not let them drag you in. To come within the orbit of imperialist politics is to be debilitated by the stench, to be drowned in the morass of lies and hypocrisy.

Workers of Britain, peasants and workers of Africa, get closer together for this and for other fights. But keep far from the imperialists and their Leagues and covenants and sanctions. Do not play the fly to their spider.

Now, as always, let us stand for independent organisation and independent action. We have to break our own chains. Who is the fool that expects our gaolers to break them?

What are Sanctions? “Collective Efforts for Peace” or Imperialist Battle for Empire? - Arne Swabeck

Fifty-two nations, including the Soviet Union, have voted to enforce sanctions, under the League of Nations covenant, against Fascist Italy. Liberals, pacifists and labor organizations, with but few exceptions throughout the world, support sanctions. A similar position is taken by the Second and the Third Internationals. In unison, both of these Internationals have become aggressive supporters of Sanctions ever since this ingenious device was invented by the capitalist statesmen at Geneva.

The fateful days of 1914 had for their rallying cry the “defense of the fatherland.” Is history now repeating itself Are not issues of similarly fateful consequences to the future of the whole of humanity joined-up in this rallying cry of 1935 – the cry of sanctions?

What will sanctions mean when actually enforced? Are they to be purely financial and economic or are they to be military? Is it true that the sanctions to be invoked by the League of Nations represent the collective efforts of these nations to punish an aggressor and to stop war, or do they mean the extension of the war in Ethiopia on a far more colossal scale. This is the first and most essential question that confronts the working class.

For an answer it is necessary to examine at least the most outstanding factors involved.

The Causes of War

It has been said – and correctly so – that war is the continuation of politics by military means. Imperialist wars arise from the constant struggle between the powers for increased rations in world economy. All imperialist powers today feel the consequences of the economic crisis. The vast expansion of their productive forces presses them onward inexorably and irresistibly in the struggle for new markets and new colonial fields where they can tap the sources of raw materials, invest surplus capital and extract new and greater profits. On every continent they are openly advancing for new conquests. Owing to the severe defeats which the workers have suffered under Fascist onslaughts, the imperialist gamblers feel free to engage in a continuation of the conflict for increased economic rations by military means.

It is, of course, not the particular aggressor attitude of one or the other of these powers that produces war. This merely expresses a readiness to strike out for new territories. Fascist Italy has embarked on its course of expansion at the expense of the last of the independent African states. But in a world already divided into colonies and spheres of influence such a course must inevitably become a struggle for redivision of markets,

involving in the first instance those powers having the greatest possessions. And so, in this case, Fascist Italy came into direct conflict with the British Empire.

Britain and Italy

These two imperialist powers, Britain and Italy, are the major adversaries in the present war situation and in no case can the clash be considered a conflict of democracy versus dictatorship, as it is presented today. They are typical of a power pressing forward in the struggle for expansion and a power seeking to maintain its present possessions. On the one side is Fascist Italy, caught in its inability to stem the tide of its own internal economic and political contradictions, desperately seeking an outlet through the restoration of Caesar's empire. On the other side is the existing British Empire on which the sun never sets.

Britain had centuries to consolidate her position. Tapping vast resources all over the world, deriving countless profits from the sweat and blood of millions of subjected peoples, she enjoyed a privileged imperialist position and could not tolerate any rivals. Her diplomats scored easy victories – with the British navy standing by. Now she is hard pressed throughout the world; the diplomatic victories have become questionable; elements of decay are apparent and expressed even in the reactionary attitude of the bureaucratic leaders of her official labor movement in support of sanctions, not merely out of pacifist motivations, but in solidarity with the continued oppression of the millions of colonial peoples by the imperialist masters. 7,287,937 square miles containing a population of 446,191,000 is the extent of these possessions, dominion and colonial, that touch every continent. What is popularly called the imperial life line, begins at Gibraltar and extends through the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the Indian Ocean. All along this line the British navy must remain supreme if the imperial possessions are to be retained unchallenged.

Not Ethiopia – the British Empire

The British rulers are not concerned with the independence of Ethiopia. Only too often have they proceeded with fire and sword to crush the independence of other native peoples. No, their sole concern is the preservation of their own far flung colonial empire. That Ethiopia's independence could be sacrificed easily enough was shown by the action of the League of Nations Council last summer. By a unanimous vote of all of its members, including the Soviet Union, a resolution was adopted to dismember Ethiopia on the basis of the robber treaty of 1906 between Italy, Britain and France. But Mussolini truculently rejected this offer inasmuch as he wanted possession of Ethiopia for Fascist Italy alone.

Indirectly this spells danger to the British Empire through the prospects of uprisings by the millions of peoples it now holds in subjection. But much more directly, this threatens to cut the imperial life line. Fascist Italy is building fortifications in Eritrea, on the coast of the Red Sea, and it is aiming for naval and aerial supremacy in the Mediterranean. This is the most immediate issue around which the war clouds are thickening today and the main motivating force behind the swift action of Britain for sanctions at Geneva.

The Many-Sided Danger of War

Obviously the League of Nations has not in the least, and could not in the least, serve to remove, or even to diminish, the causes of imperialist war. Organized as an instrument to ensure the spoils of the victors in the last war, and to maintain their hegemony, its numerous disarmament conferences served as a screen behind which all the capitalist powers, without exception, managed to perfect their armaments. New issues of conflict between these victors were, of course, inevitable. Japan some time ago embarked on its conquest of Manchuria, to extend its domination over China, and is now a constant threat to the borders of the Soviet Union. Fascist Germany is rearming feverishly in preparation for the time when its cruel regime can no longer bridge the gap of its internal contradictions; it will endeavor to find an outlet by means of new conquests. The imperialists of the United States have proclaimed neutrality while engaging in ever more extensive naval maneuvers in the Pacific with an eye to a future establishment of a base in China, in order to raise the question of possession of India at the next historical stage.

On the battlefields of Ethiopia war has become a reality. The guns of the highly mechanized Fascist armies are spitting fire in the campaign to ravage and subjugate the native population. The capitalist powers in the League of Nations proclaim their peaceful intentions while all of them are arming to the teeth; some of them in order to use the first opportunity to spring to like conquests and others in order to defend their present possessions to the end. There may yet be an intermission before the general conflagration; but in any event the war that has already started in Ethiopia is only a prelude to the much greater catastrophe now in preparation under the rallying cry of sanctions.

“Good-Intentioned” Treachery

Only on this background can the question of sanctions be properly understood. And yet in this situation the Stalinist party, through the Daily Worker, informs us that; “The next step must be punishment of the guilty – sanctions.” It exhorts; “All opponents of war

and Fascism should support this policy and demand that the League of Nations bar all trade with Italy and close the Suez Canal.”

In the thieves jargon of diplomacy, sanctions, in their ultimate implication, mean war. Mussolini said so. Stanley Baldwin repeats it, although much less boldly, and with many disguising hypocritical trimmings. Nevertheless the leaders of the British Labor Party demand sanctions. And Harry Pollitt, the leader of the British Stalinist party, in a recent address before a London district conference of the party, formulated his demands upon the British government as follows:

“But we also demand the closing of the Suez Canal, and the carrying out of the Covenant of the League of Nations, because we believe that all these measures can prevent Mussolini going to war, and we must utilize the present contradictions in the capitalist world, and force economic and military sanctions, if necessary.”

We may grant that Pollitt has other intentions than Stanley Baldwin, but the way to hell is paved with good intentions. Pollitt together with the leaders of the British Labor Party may criticize the National government; each in his own way, but this can only be incidental to the decisive issue of sanctions. And let it be noted, it is the League of Nations, and with it the British government, that are in this case called upon to close the Suez Canal and to enforce sanctions, “economic and military.” Consequently the government is to be supported on this decisive issue. Behind this rallying cry of sanctions the British worker is being led into united support of the Tory government – the real enemy of the workers. To this enemy is to be entrusted the guarantee of peace.

Democracy versus Dictatorship?

While at this time particularly the League of Nations should be exposed for what it is and the mask of hypocrisy torn off from the face of the imperialists, old illusions in the League are being strengthened and a new confidence of the workers in the Tory government is being built up. A new national union is being created with the connivance of Labor Party and Stalinist leaders which, regardless of intentions, can lead only to war for the maintenance of the British imperial possessions.

Britain is today in the center of the war developments but it is not alone; nor is the position taken by the British Stalinists an exception. We are informed by the Daily Worker, for instance, that the C.P. of Czechoslovakia on October 7 cabled the League of Nations demanding “the immediate application of effective economic and military sanctions against Italy.” Here is a voice from another “democratic” country which the Comintern has declared as its policy to defend against Fascism. But it is not the voice of the revolutionary workers. Can anyone conceive of Czechoslovakia, or Britain, or the

United States, or any other capitalist democratic country, really going to war to defend the democratic rights of the people against Fascism? Need there be any doubt that the war they will wage will be for imperialist issues? And we might add, is it not more likely that when the war actually breaks out that serious efforts will be made by the capitalist rulers of these countries to transform them into Fascist states?

For the Stalinist parties the support of sanctions is not an accident; nor can it be regarded as just another mistake. It is a part of a whole system of policies which, once such a course is embarked upon, could lead to no other results. This system of policies proceeds consistently from reliance on pacts and treaties between the Soviet Union and the capitalist powers, instead of reliance on the proletarian revolution, to support of the League of Nations and to support of the capitalist governments in carrying out sanctions. In turn sanctions becomes the deceptive device for the mobilization of the masses for imperialist war.

Shall It Be 1914 Again?

What we have before us in this question is imperialist sanctions, for imperialist ends, and not working class action to prevent war. The two are not complementary, as the new-baked defenders of the remnants of bourgeois democracy would have us believe. These two are opposite poles. It is therefore necessary to emphasize that not only are issues, as fateful in their consequences to the future of the whole of humanity, joined up in this question of sanctions as was the case of the rallying cry of the “defense of the fatherland”; but also to add, that another historic betrayal is in preparation, and this time on a far more colossal scale. In 1914, national unity within the imperialist powers and the plunging of millions into the bloody battlefield was preceded by the treason of social democracy. Today the demand for sanctions can lead only to restoration of national unity behind the capitalist governments to plunge the masses into another and far more terrible conflagration – a repetition of the betrayal of 1914 – this time, however, participated in by the social democrats and the Stalinists jointly.

Still it remains as true as ever that only working class action can prevent war. Liebknecht warned that the enemy is at home; and, in this respect nothing has changed since. Therefore the duty of the revolutionists is clear. It is the irreconcilable struggle to overthrow capitalism as the only way to do away with imperialist war.

Socialists And The Italian-Ethiopian Conflict, Socialist Appeal, October 1935

THE National Executive Committee of our party correctly surmised that the contemplated attack of Italy upon the Ethiopian people was important enough and serious enough to justify the issuing of an appeal to the American workers to support the Ethiopian people. Perhaps we should be grateful for such little favors and not look too carefully at the contents of the proclamation. But alas we need not look too carefully at the contents to convince us that as revolutionary socialists we must protest and vigorously at that.

We had a vague suspicion that our NEC had something to do with the socialist movement. We therefore half expected that a proclamation coming from the NEC dealing with such a vital problem as an immediately threatening attack by an imperialist power would say something with reference to capitalism being the fundamental cause of imperialist war and with reference to socialism as the only guarantee of permanent peace. Knowing the character of the N E C we hardly expected a revolutionary socialist proclamation but we did hope for a vaguely socialist proclamation.

The word 'socialism' cannot be found in the proclamation except when mention is made of the Labor and Socialist International. Neither does the word 'capitalism' occur. It would be absurd for us to insist that those words must be used in every socialist proclamation although we can hardly conceive of the possibility that they would be altogether omitted. We simply mean to indicate that the proclamation has absolutely no socialist character whatsoever about it. The mildest type of liberal could vote for that proclamation with both hands. As a matter of fact no supporter of the capitalist system could possibly take offense at it, excluding a principled fascist.

What an enthusiastic greeting the proclamation should receive at the hands of the Stalinists! It contains the fundamental premise of the communists that at the present time only the reactionary powers, Italy, Germany and Japan will be responsible for any war. The inference is clear that the other capitalist powers are not reactionary and are not to be held responsible for any conflict.

“The enemy of all that is best in modern civilization.... is to be found in the fascist and aggressive militarist nations like Italy, Germany and Japan” categorically asserts the NEC in its statement. What conclusion can the workers draw from this solemn pronouncement? That capitalism is not the enemy; only fascism. If the dominant elements of the NEC had any political sense they would immediately accept every united-front offer of the communists. There are no theoretical differences between those

two camps. In France where the situation is critical the right wing socialists have some political acumen and are not governed by the prejudices of yesterday and consequently find no difficulty in working together with the bureaucrats of the Communist party against the revolutionary socialist elements.

Position of Norman Thomas

We presume that Comrade Thomas read the NEC proclamation and realized that it is not exactly in harmony with his position of supporting the neutrality resolution introduced in congress. Thomas was not satisfied with that resolution because he was in favor of ..a more. strict neutrality than that provided for by the resolution. In his later comments on the war situation Thomas does not at all make clear what attitude he takes towards the problem of neutrality. He seems to have veered around to the NEC position of a boycott against Italy and not against Ethiopia, which is correct.

No argument should be necessary to convince a revolutionary socialist that it is impossible for a Socialist party to be neutral in a war between an imperialist robber country and a semi-colonial people. We must call upon the workers to do all they can to defeat the imperialist power because the interests of the international working class demands the defeat of any imperialist power attempting to enslave a backward people.

This does not mean that we should agitate to have our own capitalist government place an embargo on Italy. In a case where War is involved the working class must play its role independently of the capitalist government. We can have no faith whatever in any motives of a government representing the capitalist class. We would be bitterly opposed to having our "own" government declare war on Italy because we know that it would do so only to protect its own imperialist interests and not to help Ethiopia.

Reformist Socialists and Communists Help their Capitalist Governments

The Labor and Socialist International, the International Federation of Trade Unions together with the Communist International have come out for sanctions by the League of Nations against Italy. THIS IS THE BETRAYAL OF 1914 OVER AGAIN.

We are against supporting any capitalist government in any war. Revolutionary socialists are for revolutionary defeatism. The reformist socialists and the communists have now openly shown that they are birds of one feather. The threatening war has shown clearly that a united front of reformists and Stalinists against revolutionary socialists is inevitable.

Pacifism, and Confusion

In the lead of those who demand that the capitalist governments apply sanctions against Mussolini are the British labor leaders, as was to be expected. That party is more than anxious to show its readiness to defend the interests of British imperialism. George Lansbury and Arthur Ponsonby of the British Labor party have come out in opposition to sanctions because they are opposed to a "peace, by force policy." This is a pacifist position with which revolutionary socialists can have nothing in common. The attitude of Stafford Cripps is a highly confused one. As John Cripps admits in an article in the Socialist Call "its practical results would be very similar to that of Comrade Lansbury". Cripps says he will not Support sanctions as long as it is in favor of an imperialist government but his methods of doing away with imperialists seems to be to ask the imperialists to surrender their imperialist rights. Whereas the attitude of revolutionary socialists is to struggle for the defeat of their own imperialist government.

It must be made exceedingly clear that in fighting against the Italian imperialists we are fighting for the interests of the Italian working class. The cause of the Italian workers is very dear to us and we shall do all in our power to help them free themselves from slavery of fascism and capitalism. The defeat of Mussolini is a victory for the Italian workers.

And it must be made just as clear that we are not at all interested in the King of Kings and the Conquering Lion of Judah How shameful and disgraceful is the attitude of the Communists toward that slave owner and defender of the feudal lords They act as if that slave driver represents the interests of the Ethiopian peasants and slaves. We defend the Ethiopian people against the imperialist designs of Italy but we are not at all interested in seeing that Haile Selassie remains as the ruler of an exploited people.

Revolutionary socialists in contradistinction to reformists and Stalinists will say clearly:
**WE ARE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF MUSSOLINI BUT WE ARE ALSO
AGAINST OUR OWN IMPERIALIST GOVERNMENTS AND THAT FIRST OF ALL.**

Section 2: China and the question of imperialist aid

On the Sino-Japanese War, Leon Trotsky

Dear Comrade Diego Rivera:

During the past few days I have been reading some of the lucubrations of the Oehlerites and the Eiffelites (yes, there is a tendency of that sort!) on the civil war in Spain and on the Sino-Japanese War. Lenin called the ideas of these people “infantile disorders.” A sick child arouses sympathy. But twenty years have passed since then. The children have become bearded and even bald. But they have not ceased their childish babblings. On the contrary, they have increased all their faults and all their foolishness tenfold and have added ignominies to them. They follow us step by step. They borrow some of the elements of our analysis. They distort these elements without limit and counterpose them to the rest. They correct us. When we draw a human figure, they add a deformity. When it is a woman, they decorate her with a heavy moustache. When we draw a rooster, they put an egg under it. And they call all this burlesque Marxism and Leninism.

I want to stop to discuss in this letter only the Sino-Japanese War. In my declaration to the bourgeois press, I said that the duty of all the workers’ organizations of China was to participate actively and in the front lines of the present war against Japan, without abandoning, for a single moment, their own program and independent activity. But that is “social patriotism!” the Eiffelites cry. It is capitulation to Chiang Kai-shek! It is the abandonment of the principle of the class struggle! Bolshevism preached revolutionary defeatism in the imperialist war. Now, the war in Spain and the Sino-Japanese War are both imperialist wars. “Our position on the war in China is the same. The only salvation of the workers and peasants of China is to struggle independently against the two armies, against the Chinese army in the same manner as against the Japanese army.” These four lines, taken from an Eiffelite document of September 10, 1937, suffice entirely for us to say: we are concerned here with either real traitors or complete imbeciles. But imbecility, raised to this degree, is equal to treason.

We do not and never have put all wars on the same plane. Marx and Engels supported the revolutionary struggle of the Irish against Great Britain, of the Poles against the tsar, even though in these two nationalist wars the leaders were, for the most part, members of the bourgeoisie and even at times of the feudal aristocracy ... at all events, Catholic reactionaries. When Abdel-Krim rose up against France, the democrats and Social Democrats spoke with hate of the struggle of a “savage tyrant” against the “democracy.”

The party of Leon Blum supported this point of view. But we, Marxists and Bolsheviks, considered the struggle of the Riffians against imperialist domination as a progressive war. Lenin wrote hundreds of pages demonstrating the primary necessity of distinguishing between imperialist nations and the colonial and semicolonial nations which comprise the great majority of humanity. To speak of “revolutionary defeatism” in general, without distinguishing between exploiter and exploited countries, is to make a miserable caricature of Bolshevism and to put that caricature at the service of the imperialists.

In the Far East we have a classic example. China is a semicolonial country which Japan is transforming, under our very eyes, into a colonial country. Japan’s struggle is imperialist and reactionary. China’s struggle is emancipatory and progressive.

But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle.

Let us use the example of a strike to clarify the question. We do not support all strikes. If, for example, a strike is called for the exclusion of Negro, Chinese, or Japanese workers from a factory, we are opposed to that strike. But if a strike aims at bettering—insofar as it can—the conditions of the workers, we are the first to participate in it, whatever the leadership. In the vast majority of strikes, the leaders are reformists, traitors by profession, agents of capital. They oppose every strike. But from time to time the pressure of the masses or of the objective situation forces them into the path of struggle.

Let us imagine, for an instant, a worker saying to himself: “I do not want to participate in the strike because the leaders are agents of capital.” This doctrine of this ultraleft imbecile would serve to brand him by his real name: a strikebreaker. The case of the Sino-Japanese War, is from this point of view, entirely analogous. If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favor China. Japanese patriotism is the hideous mask of worldwide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of “social patriotism” can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin, who have understood nothing of the attitude of the Bolsheviks during the imperialist war, and who can but compromise and prostitute the teachings of Marxism. The Eiffelites have heard that the social patriots accuse the internationalists of being the agents of the enemy and they tell

us: "You are doing the same thing." In a war between two imperialist countries, it is a question neither of democracy nor of national independence, but of the oppression of backward nonimperialist peoples. In such a war the two countries find themselves on the same historical plane. The revolutionaries in both armies are defeatists. But Japan and China are not on the same historical plane. The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say unhindered by external oppression, of the class struggle in China.

But can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do this it is necessary not to remain suspended in the air but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and the internal betrayal. At a certain point, which we cannot fix in advance, this political opposition can and must be transformed into armed conflict, since the civil war, like war generally, is nothing more than the continuation of the political struggle. It is necessary, however, to know when and how to transform political opposition into armed insurrection.

During the Chinese revolution of 1925–27 we attacked the policies of the Comintern. Why? It is necessary to understand well the reasons. The Eiffelites claim that we have changed our attitude on the Chinese question. That is because the poor fellows have understood nothing of our attitude in 1925–27. We never denied that it was the duty of the Communist Party to participate in the war of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of the South against the generals of the North, agents of foreign imperialism. We never denied the necessity of a military bloc between the CP and the Kuomintang. On the contrary, we were the first to propose it. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organizational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism, as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie. We hold the same policies in the present war. We have not changed our attitude one iota. The Oehlerites and the Eiffelites, on the other hand, have not understood a single bit of our policies, neither those of 1925–27, nor those of today.

In my declaration to the bourgeois press at the beginning of the recent conflict between Tokyo and Nanking, I stressed above all the necessity of the active participation of revolutionary workers in the war against the imperialist oppressors. Why did I do it? Because first of all it is correct from the Marxist point of view; because, secondly, it was

necessary from the point of view of the welfare of our friends in China. Tomorrow the GPU, which is in alliance with the Kuomintang (as with Negrin in Spain), will represent our Chinese friends as being “defeatists” and agents of Japan. The best of them, with Chen Tu-hsiu at the head, can be nationally and internationally compromised and killed. It was necessary to stress, energetically, that the Fourth International was on the side of China as against Japan. And I added at the same time: without abandoning either their program or their independence. /p>

The Eiffelite imbeciles try to jest about this “reservation.” “The Trotskyists,” they say, “want to serve Chiang Kai-shek in action and the proletariat in words.” To participate actively and consciously in the war does not mean “to serve Chiang Kai-shek” but to serve the independence of a colonial country in spite of Chiang Kai-shek. And the words directed against the Kuomintang are the means of educating the masses for the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek. In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence—to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek ... that is the only revolutionary policy. The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of “class struggle” to this “nationalist and social patriotic” policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile opposition all his life. To him, the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the World War and twenty years after the October revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard. This is exactly the case with Eiffel and his kind!

***Why We Defend China*, John G. Wright**

In the fifth year of the Chino-Japanese war and in the third year of the second World War, the Oehlerites and Shachtmanites have suddenly discovered that it no longer is permissible for them to support China’s war for national emancipation.

For a time after their break away from us, the Oehlerites and Shachtmanites continued to repeat a few of the scientific formulas they learned in our movement but never completely understood. They accepted our position that the nationalist war of China must be supported despite the crimes of the Chinese bourgeoisie led by the butcher Chiang Kai-shek.

China’s war has unfolded since 1937 under Chiang’s leadership who continued his role as a willing agent of any imperialist whom he could approach. Still Oehler and Shachtman remained supporters. The second World War exploded. They saw no reason for change. To be sure, the Oehlerites decided to penalize the Chinese people by refusing

to extend them material aid, because, they said, Chiang headed their struggle. The Shachtmanites for their part were “able to give only critical support to the Chinese struggle” (Labor Action, March 16, 1942). Nevertheless for the more than two and a half years of the war China remained assured of Oehlerite-Shachtmanite support. But not today! Why?

The Oehlerite position, presented in the name of the theory of the permanent revolution, can be summed up in one proposition. Marxists must now conclude that China’s role is today identical with that of Serbia in 1914, and that therefore, Oehler’s position in 1942 is the same as Lenin’s in 1914:

“In precisely the same way the Serbian national struggle was no longer supported by the Marxists when it became a phase of the first imperialist war” (International News, February 1942).

Lenin used to complain that a sectarian could so confuse issues in a few lines that twice as many volumes were needed to unravel the complex mess. We shall be as brief as possible.

Lenin’s Position on the National Question

Leninist policy on the national question is not reducible to an empty abstraction which may be applied in the same way, under all conditions, at all times, everywhere.

In his 1916 theses on the national question Lenin differentiated between three types of country.

“The first type—are those advanced countries of western Europe (and America) where the national movement is a thing of the past. The second type—eastern Europe, where the national movement is a thing of the present. And thirdly, the semi-colonies and colonies where it is in large measure in the future” (Lenin’s Collected Works, Russian edition, vol.XIX, pp.203-204).

Lenin was not splitting hairs. Nor was he quibbling about grammatical tenses. He was laying bare in this analysis the dialectic of history with regard to the national question. These three types represent three different paths of historical development. The tasks of the workers differ profoundly depending upon the type of country involved.

In the most advanced countries of Europe and America and in Japan the national issue is today simply a reactionary cover for the imperialist bourgeoisie. The national problem has been solved in these nations long ago. Here the revolutionists can and must advance

immediately to socialism. Since 1914-18 the imperialist bourgeoisies have only further revealed themselves as the mortal enemies of their own nations and of all mankind. For the sake of preserving even a share of their profits and ruling positions they unhesitatingly slaughter millions, destroy vast wealth and betray the vital interests of their respective peoples. The American workers need only look at the French bourgeoisie and its Petain to discover the real attitude of the bosses towards their "nation." Since the war of 1914-18 the lie of "defense of the fatherland" has become all the more monstrous and vile.

Among the countries of the second type Lenin included the "prison-houses of the peoples," the empires of Austro-Hungary and Russia, and the Balkan cockpit of Europe. In these countries imperialist regimes were denying national independence to the Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Ukrainians, Poles, Finns, Letts, etc. In these countries, Lenin taught, the question of national independence plays a different role 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 role 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 role 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. Lenin and the Serbian socialists never denied during the last war that the Serbs were fighting for their national existence. What they denied was the independent role of this struggle once Serbia became involved in the imperialist war. Serbia's war then became completely subordinated to the aims and goals of the imperialists. To support Serbia under these conditions was to support the imperialist war.

"The national element in the Austro-Serbian war," wrote Lenin, "has no serious significance in comparison with the all-determining imperialist competition" (Lenin's Collected Works, Russian edition, vol.XIX, p.183).

The experience of the first World War and the post-war period has proved to the hilt Lenin's analysis that the complete subservience of the small European countries to the great powers precludes for them the attainment of national independence through participation in the imperialist wars. Czech nationalism played a completely reactionary role, during the war as the ally of the "democratic" imperialist camp, after the war as a junior partner of victorious French imperialism; Czechoslovakia was herself an

imperialist country, oppressing the Slovaks and the Sudeten Germans. Serbia emerged from the war not as an independent nation, but as an imperialist-vassal state (Yugoslavia) set up at Versailles. Polish nationalism supported the Central Powers against the “democracies,” and switching camps, also emerged as an imperialist oppressor of Ukrainians and Germans.

In the second World War, the fate of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Roumania, et cetera, demonstrates that the small countries cannot maintain an independent existence but must line up with one or another camp whenever the showdown between the imperialists comes.

This does not mean that the small European countries should forsake their struggle for independence. But they can achieve a lasting and genuine independence only in one way, by joining the proletariat of the ranking imperialist countries in the struggle against the imperialist system, and for socialism. That is why Marxists, while refusing to support the small countries participating in the imperialist war, nevertheless raise the slogan of self-determination.

“The dialectic of history,” explained Lenin, “is such that small nations who 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.” (idem, p.270)

Lenin’s position in regard to the small European countries—after more than two decades in which the bourgeois national movements of these countries demonstrated their completely reactionary content—is as valid today as it was in 1914-18. Their struggles can be progressive only in isolated instances.

Colonial and Semi-colonial Countries

We now come to the third type of country—the colonies and semi-colonies of Asia, Africa and South and Central America. The world imperialist system consists of two diametrically opposed spheres: the metropolitan centers (the “mother-countries”) at one pole and the colonies and semi-colonies (the doubly enslaved peoples) at the other. The national task of the workers in the colonial and semi-colonial countries differs profoundly from that of the other two types. Their countries are integrated in a different way into the imperialist system. The oppression strikes at all classes in the colonies and semi-colonies with the exception of a tiny minority of native agents and partners of the imperialist rulers.

During the first World War there were also sectarians who tried to deny the duty of Marxists to give unconditional support to the nationalist mass movements in colonies and semi-colonies. Lenin explained:

“Is the actual position of the workers in the oppressor countries and those in the oppressed nations one and the same from the standpoint of the national question?”

“No, it is not the same.

“1. The economic difference lies in this, that sections of the working class in the oppressor countries profit from those crumbs of superprofits obtained by the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nations, who always tear two skins from the backs of the workers of the oppressed nationalities ... the workers of an oppressor nation are to a certain extent partners of their bourgeoisie in the latter’s plundering the workers (and the mass of the population) of an oppressed nation.

“2. The political difference lies in this, that the workers of the oppressor nations occupy a privileged position in a whole number of spheres of political life as compared with the workers of an oppressed nation.

“3. Ideologically or psychologically the difference is this—that the workers of oppressor nations are always educated both in schools and by life itself in the spirit of contempt or indifference toward the workers of oppressed nations.

“And so, in objective reality there is a differentiation all along the line” (Lenin’s Collected Works, Russian edition, vol.XIX, p.218).

Marxists give political expression to this differentiation in objective reality by singling out the different tasks confronting the workers of the oppressed nations with regard to the national question.

Today as in 1914-18, the task of the European workers, no matter what their country, is the accomplishment of the socialist revolution, i.e., resuming the road pioneered by the Bolsheviks in the Czarist empire of 1917. The national element—for all its importance—can play in Europe only the same subordinate role that it did in 1914 in the case of Serbia. But the workers in colonial and semi-colonial countries in Asia have before them, first of all, the objective tasks of the democratic revolution. For them the national question is the most burning and immediate. Whoever seeks to divert them from the solution of this task cannot speak in Lenin’s name.

When Lenin wrote his theses on the national question during the first World War, these semi-colonial and colonial struggles were still in the future. Despite, or rather because of this fact, he kept reiterating in the very midst of an imperialist war, that such struggles were progressive, and must be supported if and when they did occur. On October 14, 1914, Lenin said:

“The class-conscious proletarians in India and China cannot follow any but the national road, as their countries have not been formed as yet into national states. If China had to wage an aggressive war for this purpose, we could only sympathize with it, since objectively that would be a progressive war.” (Lenin’s Collected Works, English edition, vol.XVIII, p.69)

In August 1915, Lenin wrote:

“The socialists recognized and do recognize at this very moment the legitimacy, progressiveness and justice of ‘defending the fatherland’ or of a ‘defensive war.’ Far instance, if Morocco were to declare war against France tomorrow, or India against England, or Persia or China against Russia, et cetera, these wars would be ‘just,’ ‘defensive’ wars ... Every socialist would then wish the victory of the oppressed, dependent, non-sovereign states against the oppressing, slave-holding, pillaging ‘great nations.’” (idem, p.220)

Dozens of similar quotations could be cited from Lenin’s speeches and articles during and after the first World War. The difference between Serbia and China remains no less profound today. It is impermissible even to talk about the theory of the permanent revolution unless one first understands that the position of the colonial and semi-colonial countries in relation to the imperialists is different not only in degree but in kind from that of the small European countries. The colonial and semi-colonial peoples can play and are playing an independent role not only in isolated struggles, but also in the very midst of an imperialist war.

National struggles of colonial and semi-colonial peoples are doubly progressive. First, the struggle tears vast masses of backward peoples out of barbarous systems, particularism and foreign bondage, and thus opens the road for their economic and cultural advancement. Secondly, it strikes mighty blows at the very heart of imperialism, and thus facilitates the struggle for socialism of the workers in Europe, the United States and Japan.

This was Lenin’s position. These principles were later incorporated in the programmatic documents of the first four World Congresses of the Communist International. The

Trotskyist movement, the genuine continuator of Leninism, has never swerved from this position.

Lenin died in January 1924, on the eve of the first great movement of liberation in Asia. The Chinese revolution erupted in 1925. The Indian masses began to move in the late twenties.

Owing to uneven development the nationalist movement in the colonies and semi-colonies is today differentiated into: 1. those countries where it is a thing of the present (China, Ceylon, Malaya, Syria, India); 2. those where it is still largely in the future (Kenya Colony, Libya, Togoland, Liberia).

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 role? If it does, we support it. The actions of the imperialists are decisive only to the extent that the nationalist element of the struggle is destroyed by them or their agents. Any one who opposes support of China's war against Japan must first demonstrate that the nationalist element in China's war against Japan has no serious significance in comparison with the direct intervention of China's imperialist "allies."

* * *

Marxists begin by taking the historical task as their point of departure. China must solve her national problem. Is China's struggle today still a national struggle? Oehler still speaks of the Chinese armies as nationalist armies. This is precisely what we maintain. We support China's war unconditionally, because, among other things, her armies are today still primarily waging a national war. Oehler calls our policy "spreading nationalist confusion." The confusion, however, is in his own head and not in our Leninist policy.

Petty-Bourgeois Confusionism

Shachtman motivates his current position on China as follows:

"China's struggle against Japan was progressive when it was an anti-imperialist struggle; it loses that characteristic when it becomes a struggle against one imperialist power conducted and directed by another imperialist power and its interests" (Labor Action, March 16, 1942).

No more than Oehler does he attempt to determine in fact whether or not what he claims has actually taken place.

To dispose of China's nationalist struggle, Shachtman waves a magic wand and—presto! change-o!—"the character of the war has changed."

"In the person of Chiang Kai-shek, China has become a tool in the hands of Anglo-American imperialism ..." (loc. cit.).

China—"in the person of Chiang Kai-shek"!

Chiang looms titanic in the imagination of many muddle-heads. But just how has the august person of Chiang wiped out the national struggle of China? Shachtman does not say.

Not so long ago Shachtman applied the self-same formula to the Soviet Union. He then argued in effect that "in the person of Stalin" the Soviet Union had become not only a tool of imperialism, but also a counter-revolutionary state, etc., etc., and hence unworthy of his support. Apparently he now wishes to extend this same formula to China. But why stop there? Why is India exempted? If Anglo-American imperialists ever had a tool, they surely possess one in the person of Nehru. Hitler is operating as best he can with Bose. Thus far, the score stands: for China—one tool in one imperialist camp, for India — two tools in two camps. According to Shachtman's logic it would therefore follow that India's national struggle is twice-damned and doubly unworthy of his "critical support."

Chiang is a counter-revolutionary scoundrel today, as he was yesterday, as he will be tomorrow. Nehru will try to repeat in India all the abominations of Chiang, in China. If this is a cogent argument for not supporting China or India, then how could the question of support have ever arisen? Why has Shachtman supported China all these years? No, this undeniable fact is only an argument for conducting an irreconcilable struggle against these and all other representatives of the colonial and semi-colonial bourgeoisies. A Marxist would draw from this the conclusion that the nationalist struggle must be guided in such a way as to make it easier for the masses to learn from their own experience the true nature of such bourgeois leadership. We propose to help the movement to sweep over the heads of the treacherous bourgeois leadership and thus gain the opportunity for a real proletarian leadership to come to the fore. But to do this, one must not turn one's back on the movement beforehand. We remain supporters of national struggles whether they are led by Chiang in China, by Nehru or Bose in India. This is what we mean by unconditional support. But this does not at all mean that so far as the outcome of the struggle itself is concerned, the leadership is of no consequence. On the contrary, the question of the leadership is of paramount importance. That is why

we are irreconcilable opponents of Chiang, Nehru, Bose and Co. and their respective bourgeoisies.

To invoke Chiang Kai-shek's role as tool of "Anglo-American imperialism" settles nothing in and of itself. A tool is one thing; a finished job is something else again. If Shachtman means to say thereby that Chiang's role is automatically reducible to that of Wang Ching-wei, the Japanese puppet opposing China's independence, he is merely employing a piece of sophistry which falsifies present reality and is fatal to a really revolutionary policy.

It goes without saying, England and the United States hope to establish the same relationship in China with respect to Chiang that Japan has with Wang. But have they already established it as Japan has? We answer, emphatically no!

To invest his reasoning with a semblance of seriousness Shachtman tries to adduce historical illustrations. China, he says, now occupies the same position as "that occupied by countries like Ethiopia and Libya, Slovakia and Norway" (Labor Action, March 16, 1942).

Oehler with his Serbia is rational in comparison with this mish-mash.

Slovakia and Norway lie prostrate under the Nazi boot, but at no time did Shachtman propose to defend those "fatherlands." China's armies are fighting against the same invader today as when Shachtman was for the defense of this fatherland.

For both Slovakia and Norway the national question was decided long ago; the only path open for them is to join directly and immediately in the struggle for the Socialist United States of Europe. In short, China's position is not the same as Slovakia's and Norway's but just the opposite.

In Ethiopia England now rules through Haile Selassie's regime. Libya is still in Italy's hands by grace of Hitler and Rommel. For both Ethiopia and Libya the national struggle lies ahead. Their present position is not comparable to that of Norway, Slovakia or China.

Can China's War Change Character?

To justify his latest betrayal of Marxism, Shachtman points in two opposite directions with one hand to European peoples whose sole progressive road is socialism, and with the other to African peoples who have not yet entered the road of national existence.

Shachtman's crime consists in deserting the existing nationalist struggle in the semi-colonial country of China, just as he deserted the defense of the Soviet Union.

Naturally, should China's imperialist "allies" establish their domination over China as absolutely as, say, England has over Ethiopia, then China's war against Japan would remain her war in name only. However, to pose the question of a change in the character of China's war, it is first of all necessary to demonstrate that the relationship of forces has unquestionably shifted in favor of the imperialists. This is the crux of the whole issue.

The only semi-coherent argument adduced by either Oehler or Shachtman for their flip-flop on China is the declaration by Britain and the United States of war against Japan. Oehler blurts this out: "Before the imperialist war (December 7, 1941) we classified the Chinese struggle as progressive." Shachtman employs a shame-faced evasion: "Up to recently, to defend China in her war with Japan was righteous and just ..."

We await a rational explanation of just how the Japanese imperialists succeeded in also blowing up China's war by bombing Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 (or "up to recently").

For reasons known only to himself, Shachtman drags in Burma to support his position on China: "The Chinese Army is ... already fighting on Burmese soil to maintain the imperialist rule of the British bourgeoisie ..."

Shachtman declares that the Chinese troops in Burma are fighting on behalf of Anglo-American imperialism. Is this so? Yes and no. More no than yes. The Anglo-American imperialists have a stake in the defeat of the Japanese in Burma as elsewhere, but this is not the only factor in that particular segment of the struggle. The victory of the Chinese forces in Burma over Japan would give a tremendous impetus to the national-revolutionary movement in all Asia, including that of the Burmese peasants, and would bulwark the independence of China.

The Real Situation in China

The existing Burmese situation proves just the contrary of what this petty-bourgeois confusionist seeks. Japan is better situated to assert her domination over the insurgent peasants of Burma than both England and the United States are today in relation to China. Should the Burmese peasants therefore suspend their struggle for liberation? Should the Marxists on this account refuse to support them?

It is incomprehensible how anyone can support—and correctly so! — a peasant struggle in such an unstable relationship of forces as that in Burma and in the same breath withdraw support from the struggle of the Chinese people who are in a far more advantageous situation.

A demagogue might invoke the Burmese struggle to say that those who are today supporting China bear their share of responsibility for the blood of any insurgent Burmese peasants slaughtered by Chiang in Burma.

But Chiang is also covered from head to foot with the blood of Chinese workers and peasants whom he butchered yesterday as he still does today. Only a Shachtman could imply that any of this blood-guilt is borne by those who support China today just as they have during all these years, despite and against Chiang.

The extension of military hostilities does not and cannot eliminate the national question. On the contrary, it sharpens this struggle in the extreme degree, especially in colonial and semi-colonial countries. Above all, China and India.

The outbreak of hostilities between Japanese and Anglo-American imperialism has, in actual fact, complicated rather than solved Japan's difficulties in China. On the other hand, China is freer today to play an independent role vis à vis Anglo-American imperialism than at any other time since 1937.

The imperialists in both camps cannot at will transform colonial and semi-colonial struggles into their opposite. They have the will, but they lack the magic powers with which both Shachtman and Oehler endow them. As matters stand at present, all the imperialists who unquestionably intend to destroy nationalist struggles if given the opportunity, are not crushing these struggles but are involuntarily doing just the opposite in relation to China and India.

Yes, these bandits are now up to their necks in the dangerous game of supporting Chinese and Indian nationalist movements. Hitler and Japan fan the flames in India. The United States and England are committed to the same maneuver in China, hoping to spread the revolt to Manchuria, Korea, Formosa. Each hopes to weaken thereby his imperialist opponent today, and then to strangle these movements on the morrow. Japan feels sure she can repeat in India what she did in Korea. American imperialists think they can repeat in China their past performances in the Philippines, Cuba, Panama. This is easier said than done. Meanwhile, China is in position to profit from the contradictions in the imperialist camps. So is India.

The intentions of the ruling classes by no means decide great issues. Let us recall two historical instances.

During the Civil War, England and France gave aid to the South. Lincoln's government entered into a de facto alliance with Czarism. 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 fact did not prevent Marx from wholeheartedly supporting the war of the North against the South, and against the South's imperialist backers.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, two of the most reactionary regimes in Europe, the monarchy of France and the monarchy of Spain, supported the struggle of thirteen insurgent English colonies in North America. Both of these feudal empires possessed vast colonies of their own on this continent. In supporting the American revolution of 1776, the French and Spanish monarchs were intent primarily on dealing a blow to their rival, mighty England, then rising to supremacy. They doubtless proposed to deal with these colonial upstarts at their leisure at some future time. Spanish and French armies and navies fought, side by side, with the forces of the American revolutionists. From the conflict America emerged as an independent nation, signing a separate peace with England in defiance of her pact with France. The Royal Exchequer of France already sadly depleted was further drained by the considerable cost of French support to the American revolution. The financial bankruptcy of the French monarchy, as is well known, played a part in bringing about its downfall and unleashing the Great French Revolution a decade later. It is likewise well known that as a direct consequence of the French revolution, the Spanish monarch toppled from his throne. Very little remained of the colonial empires of France and Spain in the western hemisphere.

Many other examples could be cited to show that time and again the ruling classes found colonial and national-revolutionary movements passing over their heads and taking entirely different direction from the one they had expected and planned for.

The contradictions which are now convulsing all imperialists surpass in intensity the contradictions besetting the French and Spanish monarchies in the eighteenth century. This is especially true of Japan — today the main enemy of China, just as Britain is today the main enemy of India.

The Japanese empire now sits astride the volcano of agrarian revolution at home and has temporarily added to her social volcanoes abroad (Korea, Manchuria, Formosa)

those of Indo-China, Malaya, Philippines, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Burma, etc. The Mikado's strategists are bent on further warming their posteriors on the already white-hot lava of India.

The Chinese revolution, despite seventeen years of terrible bloodletting, still smoulders. Great lessons, great experiences, great traditions have been accumulated. By no means the least of these are the traditions and experiences of the years of struggle against Japan. The decisive battles of this war are still ahead.

India's struggle for liberation strengthens China and is in its own turn strengthened by the latter. All the millions of Asia are watching, learning, waiting. To the Indian workers we say: China's struggle is your struggle. Support it. Whoever tells you otherwise is not your friend, but the friend of your enemies.

Not so very far from Asia stands the Soviet Union where the socialist revolution still lives on. Traitors have turned against the USSR, but not the masses of Asia. They are waiting, watching, learning, preparing to act. Our task is to aid them and not to deal them blows.

From all this we draw the conclusion that the chances of the nationalist movement in Asia sweeping over the heads of all the imperialists are far greater in 1942 than they were in America in 1774.

Oehler and Shachtman today say in effect: Chiang is the main enemy. We, on the contrary, say to the Chinese workers: The Japanese invader is the main enemy. Fire at Japan first—and shoot with anybody who shoots in the same direction. In this way you are best preparing yourselves to assume the leadership of the Chinese nation today. In this way you will best be able to deal on the morrow with all the traitors from Chiang down.

Given the opportunity, Chiang will again betray the Chinese people as he has done so many times in the past. Roosevelt and Churchill are depending a lot on Chiang whom, like Shachtman and Oehler, they identify with the Chinese nation. Only they place a plus where Shachtman and Oehler put a minus sign. At the same time, it is by no means excluded that a section of the Chinese bourgeoisie, particularly the one led by Chiang, may decide that they can strike, after all, a better bargain with Tokyo. Meanwhile, the final outcome will be decided not by the plans in the minds of statesmen but by the struggle itself. To intervene and participate in this struggle, it is necessary to equip the Chinese masses with a correct program, tell them who their main enemy is today so that they may concentrate their fire in the right direction.

The divergence between us, on the one hand, and the sectarians and the petty-bourgeois confusionists, on the other, is not at all accidental. It represents the divergence between Marxism and pseudo-Marxism. Those who orient themselves in politics on the basis of a principled method, i.e., the Marxist dialectic, invariably find themselves in conflict with those who operate with sterile formulas and those who slither all over the landscape, depending upon episodic developments in the field of diplomacy, or moves on military maps, or the most recent impressions.

In May 1940 Leon Trotsky predicted: "By its very creation of enormous difficulties and dangers for the imperialist metropolitan centers, the war opens up wide possibilities for the oppressed peoples. The rumbling of the cannon in Europe heralds the approaching hour of their liberation." This prediction is beginning to be realized before our very eyes. The peoples of Asia are stirring to life. A revolutionary situation exists in India; her chances for a successful struggle for emancipation have never been so great as they are at the present time. China's possibilities for success are increasing. We are passing through the critical juncture in the imperialist epoch when the nationalist element in the colonies and semi-colonies is assuming titanic proportions. The Oehlerites and Shachtmanites have chosen precisely this moment to desert the struggle for national emancipation in one of its chief centers, China! Yet these people are trying to issue directives to the revolutionary vanguard in the name of the theory of the permanent revolution. This spectacle would be funny, if it were not so pathetic.

Real Marxists will give unconditional support to China's war against Japan and to India's struggle for national existence. The nationalist struggles of the Chinese and Indian peoples against Japan and England are indispensable and integral parts of that great revolutionary tidal wave in the colonial countries which, merging with the impending socialist revolution in the advanced countries, will sweep away forever the decayed imperialist system.

American Intervention in China

Resolution Adopted by the Executive Committee of the Fourth International

March 31, 1941

The task of China's emancipation from the yoke of imperialism rests with the Chinese proletariat, supported by the peasant masses. Just as the national bourgeoisie is unable to pull the country out of stagnation, so it cannot conduct a successful struggle against a single imperialist power (Japan), much less make a consistent fight for China's liberation from foreign domination, Its struggle against one imperialist power only leads it into the orbit of another.

For a number of years the national bourgeoisie, personified in Chiang Kai-shek, employed the policy of “non-resistance” in face of Japan’s banditry, preferring to turn its forces against the Chinese workers and peasants. Having embarked on war against Japan when no other possibility remained open, Chiang Kai-shek has never forgotten the struggle against the Chinese people (opposition to even the most modest social reforms, the crushing of every independent movement of the masses). Chiang’s recent attacks on the New Fourth and Eighth Route armies show that his reactionary policy cannot tolerate even the timid democratic reforms introduced by these Stalinist-controlled forces.

If, in spite of this policy of social reaction, the Japanese advance could be halted and the war brought to a stalemate, it can be said with assurance that Japanese imperialism would long ago have been forced to abandon the scorching earth of China if only the agrarian revolution had set the country aflame. The fact that today Chiang Kai-shek is forced more and more to turn toward American (and British) imperialism, thus preparing a new oppression for China, is the direct consequence of the fear of the national bourgeoisie before its own people and the impossibility for it to mobilize the revolutionary forces of the nation against the Japanese invaders.

II

American imperialism, pursuing its “manifest destiny,” is preparing to take over British Empire positions in the Far East, including China, and to bring about the defeat of its Japanese rival in the Pacific. Washington plans to subdue Japan in war, to expel the Japanese imperialists from China, and to assume the overlordship of the Chinese people. Preparatory steps in this direction are the military, naval and aerial moves in the Pacific and the increased “aid” given to Chiang Kai-shek in the form of loans and war supplies.

The revolutionists, while recognizing the necessity for China to accept American material aid in the war against Japan, cannot ignore the dangers hidden behind it. They must combat all suggestions that American imperialism is actuated by benevolence toward China and explain to the broad masses the real motive of this aid—the preparation of a new slavery for tomorrow.

If the “friendly” imperialists demand payment for their aid with preferential economic rights, concessions, military bases, etc., the revolutionists must oppose such transactions, which in the end would mean the displacement in China of one imperialism by another, the change being paid for in the blood of the Chinese masses.

Should the Chinese bourgeoisie make any such bargains, revolutionists must denounce them as a betrayal of China's struggle for emancipation. But they will not "punish" Chiang Kai-shek by declaring themselves "defeatists" in China's war against Japan. They will continue to stand for the defense of China in spite of, and against, the Chinese bourgeoisie.

III

Imperialist rivalries in the Pacific are leading directly to an armed clash. When, and possibly before, the United States makes war upon Japan, a military alliance between Washington (and London) and Chungking will be on the order of the day. However, the fact that the war between Japanese and American imperialism (in which Chiang Kai-shek will be a subordinate ally of the latter) will possess a purely imperialist character, does not wipe out the problems of China's struggle to expel the Japanese invaders. Revolutionists must explain to the Chinese masses that the alliance of their national bourgeoisie with American imperialism is the inevitable consequence of Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary conduct of the war against Japan; that the crushing of every independent move for social reforms, and later the alliance with Washington, are two sides of a single policy; that this policy is neither able to assure the emancipation of the country nor to push forward the social liberation of the Chinese people. Countering official enthusiasm for the American imperialist "liberators" and their mission, the revolutionists must expose the real aims of dollar imperialism and show the great danger that is in store for China, the danger of a new enslavement. To the reactionary policy of Chiang Kai-shek, they will oppose the program of a revolutionary war based on drastic social changes (land to the peasants, workers' control of production, etc.).

This, however, will not prevent the revolutionists from continuing to stand for the victory of the Chinese armies over the Japanese invaders. The Washington-Chungking alliance and the flood of American material assistance to the Chiang Kai-shek regime will not erase the task of driving the Japanese imperialists from Chinese soil. But alongside this task it becomes increasingly important to explain to the Chinese masses the real character of American intervention and to show them that the eventual outcome of the war against Japan will depend upon the means by which victory is gained. Victory obtained by selling to another imperialist power the riches of the country can only prepare new forms of oppression for the Chinese people.

The growing collaboration between Chiang Kai-shek and the American imperialists has already had repercussions in the attacks by Chiang Kai-shek on the Stalinist-controlled peasant armies. While condemning the class-collaborationist policy of the Chinese Stalinist leaders which facilitated these attacks, the revolutionists proclaim their

solidarity with the brave peasant fighters under Stalinist leadership and their readiness to join with them in resisting the counter-revolutionary moves of Chiang Kai-shek.

IV

Washington's alliance with Chungking for war against Japan will afford the American imperialists the opportunity of covering their enterprise in China with democratic and liberationist phrases. But the American workers cannot entrust to their exploiters—the most powerful imperialists in the world—the task of liberating China from the clutches of imperialist Japan. The “defense” of China by American imperialism is in reality the preparation of a new slavery for that country. A “sacred union” of the American proletariat with its bourgeoisie in the name of China's defense, and the abandonment of the proletarian struggle for power, would mean that tomorrow China would be plundered by Wall Street. American imperialism would be strengthened at the expense of the Chinese masses and the American working class. The surest guarantee of China's independence, of her emancipation from social backwardness, and of her development toward socialism, is the Soviet United States of America. To prepare for this, the class struggle cannot be halted for a single minute.

V

If even with greatly increased American material aid the Chinese armies should prove unable speedily to expel the Japanese invaders, the American imperialists will seek to land their own troops in China and to take over China's struggle against Japan through the creation of a single command under their own control. It will be the duty of the Chinese revolutionists to oppose the subordination of Chinese military operations to the strategy and war aims of American imperialism. China, moreover, is in no need of additional manpower to expel the Japanese invaders. The landing of American armed forces in China must therefore be condemned by the Chinese revolutionists as a purely imperialist enterprise and they must mobilize the Chinese masses in opposition thereto. In this they must receive the support of the revolutionists in the United States, who must oppose with the greatest vigor the sending of American armed forces to China and demand the withdrawal of those already in the country. If American forces are sent to China, the revolutionists must strive to unite the Chinese and American soldiers against the reactionary imperialists and their Chinese bourgeois allies.

VI

The tendency for increased American control over China's struggle is bound to be accompanied by an intensification of all the political and social antagonisms inside the Chinese armies as well as throughout the country. Centers of anti-imperialist resistance,

in the armies and among the workers and peasants, will spring up to confront Chiang Kai-shek and his gang, who have led the war against Japan in order to sell themselves to Wall Street on more advantageous terms. In these conditions, the revolutionary program of defense for China—workers' and peasants' militias based on serious social reforms in town and village—will become more and more a reality.

VII

Any major military defeat which Japan suffers as a consequence of American intervention in the Far East will create revolutionary movements of the masses in Japan and the Japanese colonies of Manchukuo, Korea and Formosa, and will stimulate a revolutionary revival in China. The American imperialists, confronted with this spreading revolutionary upsurge, will grow less concerned about the struggle against Japan than with crushing the independent movement of the masses which will threaten their entire position. Just as the war against Japan has led Chiang Kai-shek to become a tool of American imperialism, so the masses of China, in alliance with their class brothers in the Japanese Empire, will be led to the social revolution.

March 31, 1941

Principles and tactics in war by Rudolf Klement

The following article was originally written by Rudolf Klement in late 1937. Trotsky warmly welcomed it, although he made some minor criticisms. (See *An Excellent Article on Defeatism*, Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38, New York, 1976, pp.153-154) Klement revised the article and we publish the English translation as it appeared in the *New International*, May 1938.

The review of the book *The Case of Leon Trotsky* in the first number of the periodical *Der Einzige Weg* quotes the following interesting statement of comrade Trotsky on the difference in the tasks of the proletariat during the war between France-Soviet Union and Germany-Japan (reproduced here somewhat more completely):

STOLBERG: Russia and France already have a military alliance, Suppose an international war breaks out. I am not interested in what you say about the Russian working class at this time. I know that. What would you say to the French working class in reference to the defence of the Soviet Union? "Change the French bourgeois government" would you say?

TROTSKY: This question is more or less answered in the thesis, *The War and the Fourth International*, in this sense: In France I would remain in opposition to the government and would develop systematically this opposition. In Germany I would do anything I could to sabotage the war machinery. They are two different things. In Germany and in Japan, I would apply military methods as far as I am able to fight, oppose, and injure the machinery, the military machinery of Japan, to disorganise it, both in Germany and Japan. In France, it is political opposition against the bourgeoisie, and the preparation of the proletarian revolution. Both are revolutionary methods. But in Germany and Japan I have as my immediate aim the disorganisation of the whole machinery. In France, I base the aim of the proletarian revolution ...

GOLDMAN: Suppose you have the chance to take power during a war, in France, would you advocate it if you had the majority, of the proletariat?

TROTSKY: Naturally. (pp.289f.)

Within the limits of a book review it was naturally impossible, with this isolated, half-improvised, necessarily incomplete and special colloquial statement, to develop the general problems of the revolutionary struggle in wartime or even to throw a sufficient theoretical light on that special question. Since the above quotation thereupon unfortunately led to misunderstandings, and worse yet, to malicious distortions (“preparing for the civil peace in France”, renunciation of revolutionary defeatism, etc!), it is well to make up here for the previous neglect.

As to the basic principles of the revolutionary struggle against war and during it, considerations of space compel us to confine ourselves here to our theses on war, which were adopted in May 1934 by the International Secretariat of our movement, have since formed one of the most important programmatic documents of Bolshevism, and acquire more topical importance with the passing of every day.

With regard to the specific question that interests us, comrade Trotsky, in the statement above, makes reference to the following points in the theses on war:

44. Remaining the determined and devoted defender of the workers' state in the struggle with imperialism, the international proletariat will not, however, become an ally of the imperialist allies of the USSR. The proletariat of a capitalist country which finds itself in alliance with the USSR must retain fully and completely its irreconcilable hostility to the imperialist government of its own country. In this sense, its policy will not differ from that of the proletariat in a country fighting against the USSR. But in the nature of practical action considerable differences may arise, depending on the concrete war situation. For instance, it would be absurd and criminal in case of war between the

USSR and Japan for the American proletariat to sabotage the sending of American munitions to the USSR. But the proletariat of a country fighting against the USSR would be absolutely obliged to resort to actions of this sort—strikes, sabotage, etc.

45. Intransigent proletarian opposition to the imperialist ally of the USSR must develop, on the one hand, on the basis of international class policy, on the other, on the basis of the imperialist aims of the given government, the treacherous character of this “alliance”, its speculation on capitalist overturn in the USSR, etc. The policy of a proletarian party in an “allied” as well as in an enemy imperialist country should therefore be directed towards the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the seizure of power. Only in this way can a real alliance with the USSR be created and the first workers' state be saved from disaster.

The wars of recent years did not represent a direct struggle between imperialist powers, but colonial expeditions (Italy-Abyssinia, Japan-China) and conflicts over spheres of influence (China, Chaco, and in a certain sense, also Spain), and therefore did not, for the time being degenerate into a world conflict. Hitler hopes to attack the USSR tomorrow just as Japan attacks China, i.e., to alter the imperialist relationship of forces without directly violating the essential interests of the other imperialisms and thereby temporarily to localise the conflict. These events occurring since 1934, have clearly shown that the above-quoted theses on the attitude of the proletariat of imperialist countries are valid not only in an anti-Soviet war but in all wars in which it must take sides – and those are precisely the ones involved in recent years.

War is only the continuation of politics by other means. Hence the proletariat must continue its class struggle in war-time, among other things with the new means which the bourgeoisie hands it. It can and must utilise the weakening of its “own” bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries in order relentlessly to prepare and to carry out its social revolution in connection with the military defeat engendered by the war, and to seize the power. This tactic, known as revolutionary defeatism and realisable internationally, is one of the strongest levers of the proletarian world revolution in our epoch, and therewith of historical progress.

Only, where the struggle is imperialistic only on one side, and a war of liberation of non-imperialist nations or of a socialist country against existing or threatening imperialist oppression on the other, as well as in civil wars between the classes or between democracy and fascism, the international proletariat cannot and should not apply the same tactic to both sides. Recognising the progressive character of this war of liberation, it must fight decisively against the main enemy, reactionary imperialism (or else against the reactionary camp, in the case of a civil war), that is, fight for the victory

of the socially (or politically) oppressed or about-to-be oppressed: USSR, colonial and semi-colonial countries like Abyssinia or China, or Republican Spain, etc.

Here too, how ever, it remains mindful of its irreconcilable class opposition to its “own” bourgeoisie-or its political opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy – and does not surrender without resistance any of its independent positions. As in the imperialist countries it strives with all its strength for the social revolution and the seizure of power, the establishment of its dictatorship, which, moreover, alone makes possible a sure and lasting victory over the imperialists. But in such cases, it cannot and does not, as in the imperialist camp, seek revolutionary victory at the cost of a military defeat but rather along the road of a military victory of his country.

Class struggle and war are international phenomena, which are decided internationally. But since every struggle permits of but two camps (bloc against bloc) and since imperialistic fights intertwine with the class war world imperialism against world proletariat), there arise manifold and complex cases. The bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries or the liberal bourgeoisie menaced by its “own” fascism, appeal for aid to the “friendly” imperialisms; the Soviet Union attempts, for example, to utilise the antagonisms between the imperialisms by concluding alliances with one group against another. etc. The proletariat of all countries, the only international solidarity – and not least of all because of that, the only progressive class – thereby finds itself in the complicated situation in war-time, especially in the new world war, of combining revolutionary defeatism towards their own bourgeoisie with support of progressive wars.

This situation is utilised with a vengeance right now and certainly will be tomorrow, by the social-patriots of the social-democratic, Stalinist or anarchist stripe, in order to have the proletarians permit themselves to be slaughtered for the profits of capital under the illusion of helping their brothers of the USSR, China, and elsewhere. It serves the social-traitors, furthermore, to depict the revolutionists not only as “betrayers of the fatherland”, but also as “betrayers of the socialist fatherland” (just as they are now shouted down as agents of Franco). All the more reason why the proletariat, especially in the imperialist countries, requires, in the seemingly contradictory situation, a particularly clear understanding of these combined tasks and of the methods for fulfilling them.

In the application of revolutionary defeatism against the imperialist bourgeoisie and its state, there can be no fundamental difference, regardless of whether the latter is “friendly” or hostile to the cause supported by the proletariat, whether it is in – treacherous – alliance with the allies of the proletariat (Stalin, the bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries, the colonial peoples, anti-fascist liberalism), or is conducting a

war against them. The methods of revolutionary defeatism remain unaltered: revolutionary propaganda, irreconcilable opposition to the regime, the class struggle from its purely economic up to its highest political form (the armed uprising), fraternisation of the troops, transformation of the war into the civil war.

The international defence of the proletarian states, of the oppressed peoples fighting for their freedom, and the international support of the armed antifascist civil war, must however, naturally take on various forms in accordance with whether one's "own" bourgeoisie stands on their side or combats them. Apart from the political preparation of the social revolution, whose rhythm and methods are in no way identical with those of war, this defence must naturally assume military forms. In addition to revolutionary support, it consists, consequently, in military support of the progressive cause, as well as in the military damaging of its imperialist opponent.

The military support can naturally take on a decisive scope only where the proletariat itself has the levers of power and the economy in its hands (USSR, and to a certain extent, Spain in the summer of 1936). In the imperialist countries, which are allied with the countries conducting progressive and revolutionary wars, it boils down to this: that the proletariat fights with revolutionary means for an effective, direct military support, controlled by it, of the progressive cause ("Airplanes for Spain!" cried the French workers). In any case, it must promote and control, a really guaranteed direct military support (the sending of arms, ammunition, food, specialists, etc), even at the cost of an "exception" from the direct class struggle. It will have to be left to the instinct and revolutionary perspicacity of the proletariat, which is well aware of its tasks, to make the right distinction in every concrete situation, to avoid injuring the military interests of the far-off ally of the proletariat out of narrow national class struggle considerations, no matter how revolutionary they seem, as well to avoid doing the dirty work for its "own" imperialism on the pretext of giving indirect aid to its allies. The only real and decisive aid that the workers can bring the latter is by seizing and holding the power.

It is otherwise – so far as the outward form of its struggle goes – with the proletariat of the imperialism engaged in a direct struggle against the progressive cause. In addition to its struggle for the revolution, it is its duty to engage in military sabotage for the benefit of the "enemy" – the enemy of its bourgeoisie but its own ally. As a means of revolutionary defeatism in the struggle between imperialist countries, military sabotage, like individual terror, is completely worthless. Without replacing the social revolution or even advancing it by a hair's breadth, it would only help one imperialism against another, mislead the vanguard, sow illusions among the masses and thus facilitate the game of the imperialists. On the other hand, military sabotage is imperiously imposed as an immediate measure in defence of the camp that is fighting imperialism and is consequently progressive. As such, it is understood by the masses, welcomed and

furthered. The defeat of one's "own", country here becomes not a lesser evil that is taken into the bargain (a lesser evil than the "victory" bought by civil peace and the abandonment of the revolution), but the direct and immediate goal, the task of the proletarian struggle. The defeat of one's "own" country would, in this case, be no evil at all, or an evil much more easily taken into the bargain, for it would signify the common victory of the people liberated from the existing or threatening imperialist yoke and of the proletariat of its enemy, over the common overlord – imperialist capital. Such a victory would be a powerful point of departure for the international proletarian revolution, not least of all in the "friendly" imperialist countries.

Thus we see how different war situations require from the revolutionary proletariat of the various imperialist countries, if it wishes to remain true to itself and to its goal, different fighting forms, which may appear to schematic spirits to be "deviations" from the basic principle of revolutionary defeatism, but which result in reality only from the combination of revolutionary defeatism with the defence of certain progressive camps.

Moreover, from a higher historical standpoint these two tasks coincide: in our imperialist epoch, the national bourgeoisie of the non-imperialist countries – like the Soviet bureaucracy – because of its fear of the working class which is internationally matured for the socialist revolution and dictatorship, is not in a position to conduct an energetic struggle against imperialism. They do not dare to appeal to the forces of the proletariat and at a definite stage of the struggle they inevitably call upon imperialism for aid against their "own" proletariat. The complete national liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial countries from imperialist enslavement, and of the Soviet Union from internal and external capitalist destruction and anarchy, the bourgeois democratic revolution, the defence from fascism – all these tasks, can be solved, nationally and internationally, only by the proletariat. Their fulfilment grows naturally into the proletarian revolution. The coming world war will be the most titanic and murderous explosion in history, but because of that it will also burst all the traditional fetters and in its flames the revolutionary and liberative movements of the entire world will be fused into one glowing stream.

To present clearly, even now, to the proletariat the problems of the coming war and its combined tasks – this serious and difficult task is one of the most urgent of our day. The Bolshevik-Leninists alone have taken it upon themselves to arm the proletariat for its struggle and to create the instrument with which it will gain its future victories: the programme, the methods, the organisation of the Fourth International.

BRUSSELS, December 1937

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1. L. Trotsky, War and the Fourth International, Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34, New York, 1975, pp299-338

2. We leave aside the case where wars between two non-imperialist countries are only or predominantly the masked combat between two foreign imperialisms – England and America in the Chaco War – or the case where the war of liberation of an oppressed nation is only a pawn in the hand of an imperialistic group and a mere part of a general imperialist conflict – Serbia from 1914 to 1918.

3. It may confidently be assumed that for the French bourgeoisie in wartime, a strike of the Marseilles harbour workers, which makes an exception of war shipments to Russia, in which it is least of all interested, would be particularly vexatious! No less nonsensical would it be, for example, in the course of a printers' strike, not to allow the appearance of the labour papers which are needed for the strike struggle itself.

4. Lenin wrote on 26 July 1915 (see Gegen den Strom) against Trotsky's false slogan of "Neither victory nor defeat" and said polemically: "And revolutionary actions during the war surely and undoubtedly signify not only the wish for its defeat but also an actual furtherance of such a defeat (for the 'discerning' reader: this by no means signifies that 'bridges be blown up', that abortive military strikes should be staged, and in general that the revolutionists should help bring about the defeat of the government)." V. Lenin, The defeat of one's own government in the imperialist war, Collected Works, Vol.21, Moscow, 1977, pp.275-280 (My emphasis – WS)

5. Naturally, military sabotage in favour of the non-imperialist opponent of one's own bourgeoisie is not to be extended in favour of its imperialist ally. The German proletarians, for example, would seek to disorganise militarily the eastern front, to help Soviet Russia; for the western front, where a purely imperialist war would be raging between Germany and a France allied to the USSR, "only" the rule of defeatism would be valid-for the French proletariat as well as for the Germans.

The USSR and Imperialist Combinations

41. The Soviet government is now in the process of changing its course with regard to the League of Nations. The Third International, as usual, repeats slavishly the words and gestures of Soviet diplomacy. All sorts of "ultralefts" take advantage of this turn to relegate the Soviet Union once again among the bourgeois states. The Social Democracy, depending on its particular national considerations, interprets the "reconciliation" of the

USSR with the League of Nations as proof of the bourgeois-nationalistic character of the policy of Moscow or, on the contrary, as the rehabilitation of the League of Nations and, in general, the whole ideology of pacifism. In this question, too, the Marxist point of view has nothing in common with any one of these petty-bourgeois evaluations.

Our attitude in principle to the League of Nations does not differ from our attitude to each and every individual imperialist state, whether in or out of the League of Nations. The manoeuvring of the Soviet state between the antagonistic groupings of imperialism presupposes a policy of manoeuvre with regard to the League of Nations as well. So long as Japan and Germany were in the League, the latter threatened to become an arena for agreement of the most important imperialist robbers at the expense of the USSR. After Japan and Germany, the most immediate and chief enemies of the Soviet Union, quit the League of Nations, it changed partly into a bloc of allies and vassals of French imperialism, partly into an arena of struggle among France, England and Italy. This or that combination with the League of Nations may be forced upon the Soviet state, which is steering between imperialist camps equally hostile to it in essence.

42. Giving oneself a fully realistic account of the existing situation, the proletarian vanguard must, at the same time, place in the foreground the following considerations:

The necessity for the USSR, sixteen and more years after the October overturn, to seek a rapprochement with the League and to cover up this rapprochement with abstract pacifist formulas is the result of the extreme weakening of the international proletarian revolution and by that of the international position of the USSR.

Abstract pacifist formulations of Soviet diplomacy and its compliments directed to the League of Nations have nothing in common with the policy of the international proletarian party, which refuses to bear any responsibility for them but on the contrary, exposes their hollowness and hypocrisy, the better to mobilize the proletariat on the basis of a clear understanding of actual forces and real antagonisms.

43. In the existing situation, an alliance of the USSR with an imperialist state or with one imperialist combination against another, in case of war, cannot at all be considered as excluded. Under the pressure of circumstances, a temporary alliance of this kind may become an iron necessity, without ceasing, however, because of it, to be of the greatest danger both to the USSR and to the world revolution.

The international proletariat will not decline to defend the USSR even if the latter should find itself forced into a military alliance with some imperialists against others. But in this case, even more than in any other, the international proletariat must safeguard its complete political independence from Soviet diplomacy and, thereby, also from the bureaucracy of the Third International.

44. Remaining the determined and devoted defender of the workers' state in the struggle with imperialism, the international proletariat will not, however, become an ally of the imperialist allies of the USSR. The proletariat of a capitalist country that finds itself in an alliance with the USSR must retain fully and completely its irreconcilable hostility to the imperialist government of its own country. In this sense, its policy will not differ from that of the proletariat in a country fighting against the USSR. But in the nature of practical actions, considerable differences may arise depending on the concrete war situation. For instance, it would be absurd and criminal in case of war between the USSR and Japan for the American proletariat to sabotage the sending of American munition to the USSR. But the proletariat of a country fighting against the USSR would be absolutely obliged to resort to actions of this sort – strikes, sabotage, etc.

45. Intransigent proletarian opposition to the imperialist ally Of the USSR must develop, on the one hand, on the basis of international class policy, on the other, on the basis of the imperialist aims of the given government, the treacherous character of this “alliance,” its speculation on capitalist overturn in the USSR, etc. The policy of a proletarian party in an “allied” as well as an enemy imperialist country should therefore be directed towards the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the seizure of power. Only in this way can a real alliance with the USSR be created and the first workers' state be saved from disaster.

46. Within the USSR, war against imperialist intervention will undoubtedly provoke a veritable outburst of genuine fighting enthusiasm. All the contradictions and antagonisms will seem overcome or at any rate relegated to the background. The young generations of workers and peasants that emerged from the revolution will reveal on the field of battle a colossal dynamic power. Centralized industry, despite all its lacks and shortcomings, will reveal great superiority in serving war needs. The government of the USSR has undoubtedly created great stores of food supplies sufficient for the first period of war. The general staffs of the imperialist states clearly realize, of course, that in the Red Army they will meet a powerful adversary, the struggle with whom will require long intervals of time and a terrific straining of forces.

Learn to think, Leon Trotsky

CERTAIN PROFESSIONAL ultra-left phrase-mongers are attempting at all cost to “correct” the thesis of the Secretariat of the Fourth International on war in accordance with their own ossified prejudices. They especially attack that part of the thesis which states that in all imperialist countries the revolutionary party, while remaining in irreconcilable opposition to its own government in time of war, should, nevertheless, mold its practical politics in each country to the internal situation and to the international groupings, sharply differentiating a workers’ state from a bourgeois state, a colonial country from an imperialist country.

The proletariat of a capitalist country which finds itself in an alliance with the USSR [1] [states the thesis] must retain fully and completely its irreconcilable hostility to the imperialist government of its own country. In this sense its policy will not differ from that of the proletariat in a country fighting against the USSR. But in the nature of practical actions considerable differences may arise depending on the concrete war situation. (War and the Fourth International, p. 21, § 44.)

The ultra-leftists consider this postulate, the correctness of which has been confirmed by the entire course of development, as the starting point of ... social-patriotism. [2] Since the attitude toward imperialist governments should be “the same” in all countries, these strategists ban any distinctions beyond the boundaries of their own imperialist country. Theoretically their mistake arises from an attempt to construct fundamentally different bases for war-time and peace-time policies.

Let us assume that rebellion breaks out tomorrow in the French colony of Algeria under the banner of national independence and that the Italian government, motivated by its own imperialist interests, prepares to send weapons to the rebels. What should the attitude of the Italian workers be in this case? I have purposely taken an example of rebellion against a democratic imperialism with intervention on the side of the rebels from a fascist imperialism. Should the Italian workers prevent the shipping of arms to the Algerians? Let any ultra-leftists dare answer this question in the affirmative. Every revolutionist, together with the Italian workers and the rebellious Algerians, would spurn such an answer with indignation. Even if a general maritime strike broke out in fascist Italy at the same time, even in this case the strikers should make an exception in favor of those ships carrying aid to the colonial slaves in revolt; otherwise they would be no more than wretched trade unionists – not proletarian revolutionists.

At the same time, the French maritime workers, even though not faced with any strike whatsoever, would be compelled to exert every effort to block the shipment of

ammunition intended for use against the rebels. Only such a policy on the part of the Italian and French workers constitutes the policy of revolutionary internationalism.

Does this not signify, however, that the Italian workers moderate their struggle in this case against the fascist regime? Not in the slightest. Fascism renders “aid” to the Algerians only in order to weaken its enemy, France, and to lay its rapacious hand on her colonies. The revolutionary Italian workers do not forget this for a single moment. They call upon the Algerians not to trust their treacherous “ally” and at the same time continue their own irreconcilable struggle against fascism, “the main enemy in their own country”. Only in this way can they gain the confidence of the rebels, help the rebellion and strengthen their own revolutionary position.

If the above is correct in peace-time, why does it become false in war-time? Everyone knows the postulate of the famous German military theoretician, Clausewitz, that war is the continuation of politics by other means. This profound thought leads naturally to the conclusion that the struggle against war is but the continuation of the general proletarian struggle during peace-time. Does the proletariat in peace-time reject and sabotage all the acts and measures of the bourgeois government? Even during a strike which embraces an entire city, the workers take measures to insure the delivery of food to their own districts, make sure that they have water, that the hospitals do not suffer, etc. Such measures are dictated not by opportunism in relation to the bourgeoisie but by concern for the interests of the strike itself, by concern for the sympathy of the submerged city masses, etc. These elementary rules of proletarian strategy in peace-time retain full force in time of war as well.

An irreconcilable attitude against bourgeois militarism does not signify at all that the proletariat in all cases enters into a struggle against its own “national” army. At least the workers would not interfere with soldiers who are extinguishing a fire or rescuing drowning people during a flood; on the contrary, they would help side by side with the soldiers and fraternize with them. And the question is not exhausted merely by cases of elemental calamities. If the French fascists should make an attempt today at a coup d’etat and the Daladier government found itself forced to move troops against the fascists, the revolutionary workers, while maintaining their complete political independence, would fight against the fascists alongside of these troops. Thus in a number of cases the workers are forced not only to permit and tolerate, but actively to support the practical measures of the bourgeois government.

In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases however they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the

policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just as much to the war period as to the period of peace.

Let us imagine that in the next European war the Belgian proletariat conquers power sooner than the proletariat of France. Undoubtedly Hitler will try to crush the proletarian Belgium. In order to cover up its own flank, the French bourgeois government might find itself compelled to help the Belgian workers' government with arms. The Belgian Soviets of course reach for these arms with both hands. But actuated by the principle of defeatism, perhaps the French workers ought to block their bourgeoisie from shipping arms to proletarian Belgium? Only direct traitors or out-and-out idiots can reason thus.

The French bourgeoisie could send arms to proletarian Belgium only out of fear of the greatest military danger and only in expectation of later crushing the proletarian revolution with their own weapons. To the French workers, on the contrary, proletarian Belgium is the greatest support in the struggle against their own bourgeoisie. The outcome of the struggle would be decided, in the final analysis, by the relationship of forces, into which correct policies enter as a very important factor. The revolutionary party's first task is to utilize the contradiction between two imperialist countries, France and Germany, in order to save proletarian Belgium.

Ultra-left scholastics think not in concrete terms but in empty abstractions. They have transformed the idea of defeatism into such a vacuum. They can see vividly neither the process of war nor the process of revolution. They seek a hermetically sealed formula which excludes fresh air. But a formula of this kind can offer no orientation for the proletarian vanguard.

To carry the class struggle to its highest form – civil war – this is the task of defeatism. But this task can be solved only through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, that is, by widening, deepening, and sharpening those revolutionary methods which constitute the content of class struggle in “peace”-time. The proletarian party does not resort to artificial methods, such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, etc., in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful on this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. Revolutionary defeatism signifies only that in its class struggle the proletarian party does not stop at any “patriotic” considerations, since defeat of its own imperialist government, brought about, or hastened by the revolutionary movement of the masses

is an incomparably lesser evil than victory gained at the price of national unity, that is, the political prostration of the proletariat. Therein lies the complete meaning of defeatism and this meaning is entirely sufficient.

The methods of struggle change, of course, when the struggle enters the openly revolutionary phase. Civil war is a war, and in this aspect has its particular laws. In civil war, bombing of warehouses, wrecking of trains and all other forms of military “sabotage” are inevitable. Their appropriateness is decided by purely military considerations – civil war continues revolutionary politics but by other, precisely, military means.

However during an imperialist war there may be cases where a revolutionary party will be forced to resort to military-technical means, though they do not as yet follow directly from the revolutionary movement in their own country. Thus, if it is a question of sending arms or troops against a workers’ government or a rebellious colony, not only such methods as boycott and strike, but direct military sabotage may become entirely practical and obligatory. Resorting or not resorting to such measures will be a matter of practical possibilities. If the Belgian workers, conquering power in war-time, have their own military agents on German soil, it would be the duty of these agents not to hesitate at any technical means in order to stop Hitler’s troops. It is absolutely clear that the revolutionary German workers also are duty-bound (if they are able) to perform this task in the interests of the Belgian revolution, irrespective of the general course of the revolutionary movement in Germany itself.

Defeatist policy, that is, the policy of irreconcilable class struggle in war-time cannot consequently be “the same” in all countries, just as the policy of the proletariat cannot be the same in peacetime. Only the Comintern of the epigones has established a regime in which the parties of all countries break into march simultaneously with the left foot. In struggle against this bureaucratic cretinism we have attempted more than once to prove that the general principles and tasks must be realized in each country in accordance with its internal and external conditions. This principle retains its complete force for war-time as well.

Those ultra-leftists who do not want to think as Marxists, that is, concretely, will be caught unawares by war. Their policy in time of war will be a fatal crowning of their policy in peace-time. The first artillery shots will either blow the ultra-leftists into political non-existence, or else drive them into the camp of social-patriotism, exactly like the Spanish anarchists, who, absolute “deniers” of the state, found themselves from the same causes bourgeois ministers when war came. In order to carry on a correct policy in war-time one must learn to think correctly in tune of peace.

COYOACAN, D.F. May 22, 1938
Leon TROTSKY

Footnotes

1. We can leave aside then the question of the class character of the USSR. We are interested in the question of policy in relation to a workers' state in general or to a colonial country fighting for its independence. So far as the class nature of the USSR is concerned we can incidentally recommend to the ultra-leftists that they gaze upon themselves in the mirror of A. Ciliga's book, *In the Country of the Big Lie*. This ultra-left author, completely lacking any Marxist schooling, pursues his idea to the very end, that is, to liberal-anarchic abstraction.

2. Mrs. Simone Weil even writes that our position is the same as Plekhanov's in 1914–1918. Simone Weil, of course, has a right to understand nothing. Yet it is not necessary to abuse this right.