

# Tasks of the American Opposition *A Letter from Comrade Trotsky*

To the American Bolshevik-Leninists  
(The Opposition)

Editors of "The Militant"

Dear friends:

I follow your journal with great interest and am delighted with its fighting spirit. The history of the origin of the American Opposition is itself highly characteristic and instructive. After five years of struggle against The Russian Opposition, it required a journey of members of the Central Committee of the American Party, and even of its Political Bureau, to a Congress in Moscow in order for the first time to find out what so called "Trotskyism" is. This single fact is an annihilating indictment against the regime of Party police rule and poisonous falsification. Lovestone and Pepper did not create this regime but they are its staff officers. I convicted Lovestone of a foul ideological falsification (see my book "Europe and America.") Under a fairly normal regime that alone would have been enough to bury a man for a long time, if not for good, or at least to make him confess and repent. But under the present regime, to reinforce their positions, the Lovestones need only stubbornly repeat the falsifications that have been exposed. They do this with utter shamelessness, imitating their present teachers, or rather their administrative bosses. The spirit of the Lovestones and Peppers is fundamentally opposed to the spirit of the proletarian revolution. That discipline towards which we strive — and we strive towards an iron discipline — can be founded only upon consciously won convictions which have entered into the flesh and blood.

I haven't had an opportunity of close contact with the other ruling elements of the American Communist Party—except, to be sure, Foster. The latter always seemed to me made of more trustworthy material than Lovestone and Pepper. In Foster's criticisms of the official leadership of the Party there was always much that was true and acute. But as far as I understand him, Foster is an empiricist. He does not want to, or is not able to, carry his thinking through to the end, and make upon the foundation of his criticisms the necessary generalization. For that reason it has never been clear to me in what direction Foster's criticism is pushing him: to the left or to the right of the official Centrism. We must remember that besides the Marxist Opposition there exists an opportunist Opposition (Brandler, Thalheimer, Souvarine and others.) This same empiricism apparently suggests to Foster the whole form of his activity, which consists of struggling against the little devil with Satan's support. Foster tries to conceal himself with the defensive coloration of Stalinism in order by this contraband route to move toward the leadership of the American Party. In revolutionary politics the game of hide-and-seek never yet gave serious results. Without a general principle position upon the fundamental questions of the world revolution, and first of all on the question of socialism in a single country, you cannot have permanent and serious revolutionary victories. You can only have bureaucratic successes, such as Stalin has. But these temporary successes are paid for by the defeats of the proletariat and by the falling apart of the Comintern. I do not think that Foster will achieve even those second class aims which he is pursuing, for the Lovestones and Peppers are much better fitted to carry through a policy of bureaucratic centrism, having no real character, and being ready in twenty-four hours to put through any zig-zag whatever according to the administrative necessities of the Stalinist staff.

The work to be achieved by the American Opposition has international-historic significance, for in the last historic analysis all the problems of our planet will be decided upon American soil. There is much in favor of the idea that from the standpoint of revolutionary order, Europe and the East stand ahead of the United States. But a course of events is possible in which this order might be broken in favor of the proletariat of the United States. Moreover, even if you assume that America which now shakes the whole world will be shaken last of all, the danger remains that a revolutionary situation in the United States

may catch the vanguard of the American proletariat unprepared, as was the case in Germany in 1923, in England in 1926, and in China in 1925 to 1927. We must not for a minute lose sight of the fact that the might of American capitalism rests more and more upon a foundation of world economy with its contradictions and crises, military and revolutionary. This means that a social crisis in the United States may arrive a good deal sooner than many think, and have a feverish development from the beginning. Hence the conclusion: **It is necessary to prepare.**

As far as I can judge, your official Communist Party inherited no few characteristics from the old socialist party. That became clear to me at the time when Pepper succeeded in dragging the American Communist Party into the scandalous adventure with the Party of LaFollette. This low-grade policy of parliamentary opportunism was disguised with "revolutionary" chatter to the effect that the social revolution will be achieved in the United States not by the proletariat but by the ruined farmers. When Pepper expounded this theory to me upon his return from the United States I thought that I had to do with a curious case of individual aberration. Only with some effort I realized that this is a whole system, and that the American Communist Party had been dragged into this system. Then it became clear to me that this small Party cannot develop without deep inner crises, which will guarantee it against Pepperism and other evil diseases. I cannot call them infantile diseases. On the contrary, these are senile diseases, diseases of bureaucratic sterility and revolutionary impotence.

That is why I suspect that the Communist Party has taken over many of the qualities of the socialist party, which in spite of its youth struck me with features of decrepitude. For the majority of those socialists—I have in view the governing strata—their socialism is a side-issue, a second-class occupation accommodated to their leisure hours. These gentlemen consecrate six days of the week to their liberal or commercial professions, rounding out their properties not without success, and on the seventh day they consent to occupy themselves with the saving of their souls. In a book of my memoirs I have tried to outline this type of socialistic Babbit. Evidently not a few of these gentlemen have succeeded in disguising themselves as Communists. These are not intellectual opponents, but class enemies. The Opposition must steer its course not on the petty-bourgeois Babbits, but on the proletarian Jimmie Higginses, for whom the idea of Communism, when they are once imbued with it, becomes the content of their whole life and activity. There is nothing more disgusting and dangerous in revolutionary activity than petty-bourgeois dilletantism, conservative, egotistical, self-loving and incapable of sacrifice in the name of a great idea. The advanced workers must firmly adopt one simple but invariable rule: Those leaders or candidates for leadership who are, in peaceful, every day times, incapable of sacrificing their time, their strength, their means, to the cause of Communism, will oftenest of all in a revolutionary period become direct traitors, or turn up in the camp of those who wait to see on which side the victory lies. If elements of this kind stand at the head of the Party, they will indubitably ruin it when the great test comes. And no better, are those brainless bureaucrats who simply hire out to the Comintern as they would to a notary, and obediently adapt themselves to each new boss.

Of course the Opposition—that is the Bolshevik-Leninists—may have their traveling companions, who, without giving themselves wholly to the revolution, offer this or that service to the cause of Communism. If would of course be wrong not to make use of them. They can make a significant contribution to the work. But traveling companions, even the most honest and serious, ought to make no pretence to leadership. The leaders must be bound in all their daily work with those they lead. Their work must proceed before the eyes of the mass, no matter how small that mass may be at the given moment. I wouldn't give a cent for a leadership which can be sum-

moned by cable from Moscow, or anywhere else, without the masses ever noticing it. Such leadership means bankruptcy guaranteed in advance. We must steer our course on the young proletarian who desires to know and to struggle, and is capable of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. From such people we must attract and educate the genuine cadres of the Party and the proletariat.

Every member of the Opposition organization should be obliged to have under his guidance several young workers, boys from 14 to 15 up, to remain in continual contact with them, help them in their self-education, train them in the questions of scientific socialism, and systematically introduce them to the revolutionary politics of the proletarian vanguard. The Oppositionist who is himself inadequately prepared for such work should hand over the young proletarians recruited by him to more developed and experienced comrades. Those who are afraid of rough work we don't want. The calling of a revolutionary Bolshevik imposes obligations. The first of these obligations is to struggle for the proletarian youth, to clear a road to its most oppressed and neglected strata. They stand first under our banner.

The trade union bureaucrats, like the bureaucrats of false Communism, live in the atmosphere of aristocratic prejudices of the upper strata of the workers. It will be tragedy if the Oppositionists are infected even in the slightest degree with these qualities. We must not only reject and condemn these prejudices; we must burn them out of our consciousness to the last trace. We must find the road to the most deprived, to the darkest strata of the proletariat, beginning with the Negro, whom capitalist society has converted into a Pariah, and who must learn to see in us his revolutionary brothers. And this depends wholly upon our energy and devotion to the work.

I see from comrade Cannon's letter that you intend to give the Opposition a more organized form. I can only welcome that news. It wholly follows the line of the views expounded above. In the work which you are doing well-formed organization is necessary. The absence of clear organizational relations results from an intellectual confusion, or leads to it. The cry about a second party and a fourth international is merely ridiculous, and should be the last thing to stop us. We do not identify the Communist International with the Stalinist bureaucracy, that is, with the hierarchy of Peppers in different degrees of demoralization. At the foundation of the International there lies a definite group of ideas and principles, conclusions from the whole struggle of the world proletariat. That group of ideas we, the Opposition, represent. We will defend it against the monstrous mistakes and violations of the 5th and 6th Congresses and against the usurping apparatus of the Centrists, who upon one flank are wholly going over into the ranks of the Thermidorians. It is too clear to any Marxist that, in spite of the enormous material resources of the Stalinist apparatus, the present governing faction of the Comintern is politically and theoretically already dead. The banner of Marx and Lenin is in the hands of the Opposition. I do not doubt that the American division of the Bolsheviks will occupy a worthy place under that banner.

With hearty Opposition greetings,

L. TROTSKY.

Constantinople.

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