

The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition

Continued from Last Issue

Urbahns, however, raises the slogan of the freedom of organization in the general democratic sense. In fact, it would be impossible in any other sense. Urbahns formulates the same demand for Russia, for China and all the capitalist countries. This would be absolutely correct, but on one little condition: the recognition that the Thermidor is already accomplished. But here it is Urbahns who "does not go far enough". To put forward the freedom of organization as an isolated demand is a caricature of politics. Freedom of organization is inconceivable without freedom of assemblage, freedom of press, and all the other "liberties" which the decision of the February conference (Reichsausschusses) of the Leninbund mentioned vaguely and without comment. But these liberties are inconceivable outside the regime of democracy, that is, outside of capitalism. One must learn to think one's thoughts out to the end.

Even while Retreating before the Marxist Criticism, Urbahns Combats not Korschists but Marxists

Referring to my remarks that we fight against the Stalinist faction but defend the Soviet Republic to the very end, the *Fahne des Kommunismus* explained to me that "an unconditional (?) support (?) of the Stalinist policy (?), the foreign policy included," would be inadmissible, and that I would acknowledge this myself if only I would "think my thoughts out to the end" (No. 31, p. 246). It is not astonishing that I awaited with interest the conclusion of the article (No. 32): It was to produce the tactical deductions from the theoretical contradictions with which the first half was filled and besides that, it was to teach people to think out their thoughts to the end.

Between the 1st and 2nd halves of the article many things became clear. In that time, Urbahns and his friends had the opportunity of receiving the resolution of the Bureau of the Second International which could not pass without a sobering effect upon them, since the agreement between the arguments of Otto Bauer and those of Louzon and Paz were too flabbergasting.

However that may be, in the second half of the article, *Die Fahne des Kommunismus* comes to the conclusion that the Soviet republic must be defended even in the conflict with China. Very praiseworthy. But what is stupefying is that the article, in arriving at this conclusion, polemicalizes not against the Korschists, not against the Ultra-Left, not against Louzon, not against Paz but against the Russian Opposition. It would seem that the question of the defense or non-defense of the Soviet republic is in itself so important that secondary and tertiary considerations would disappear before it. That is dictated by the most elementary requirements of politics. But Urbahns and his friends proceed quite differently. At the most critical moment in the Soviet-China conflict, they print the articles of the ultra-Leftists who, as I showed above, simply demand that Chiang Kai-Shek be supported against the Soviet republic. It is only under the pressure of the Marxists that the editors of the *Die Fahne*, six weeks after the beginning of the conflict, pronounce themselves for the defense of the Soviets. Yet even here they do not conduct a struggle those who denied the elementary duty of defense, but against... Trotsky. Every mature political person must come to the conclusion that the question of the defense of the October revolution is a secondary affair for Urbahns, and that his principal aim is to show that he is not in "one hundred percent" agreement with the Russian Opposition. It evidently never occurs to comrade Urbahns that whoever seeks to demonstrate his independence by such artificial and negative methods, only demonstrates in reality his complete lack of intellectual independence.

In the second part of the article, it says:

"Besides the sympathy for Soviet Russia and Communism destroyed in the Chinese people by the policy of Stalin, the fact that Russia resorts to war over the Chinese Eastern Railway when it did not lift a hand while Chiang Kai-Shek and his military hordes waded in the blood of the Chinese workers and poor peasants, would undoubtedly play a role in the attitude of the Chinese people to such a war" *Fahne des Kommunismus*, No. 32, p. 246).

What is correct and what has been said long ago is mixed up here with what is new and wrong. The crimes of the Centrist leadership in China are absolutely unprecedented: Stalin and Bucharin murdered the revolution in China. This is a historical fact which penetrates more and more into the mind of the vanguard of the international proletariat. However, to accuse the Soviet republic of not having intervened with arms in hand in the Shanghai or Canton events, is to substitute sentimental demagoguery for revolutionary policy. Louzon is of the opinion that every military intervention in the affairs of another nation is "imperialism". That, of course, is a pacifist absurdity. But no less absurd is the directly contrary demand that the Soviet republic, under the present relationship of forces and in the present international situation should repair with Bolshevik bayonets what was lost with Menshevik policy. Criticism must move along real and not imaginary lines; otherwise the Opposition will never win the confidence of the workers.

How, then, could the Soviet republic decide in this case to carry on a war for the possession of the Chinese Eastern Railway? I have already said that if it comes to war, this fact alone would demonstrate that it is not a matter of the Chinese Eastern Railway but of something infinitely greater. It is true that this railway, even by itself, is a far more serious matter than the head of the Archduke killed in 1914, which was the occasion for the outbreak of the war. But it is not at all a matter of the railway. A war in the East, regardless of what were the immediate cause would inevitably be transformed the very next day into a struggle against Soviet "imperialism", that is, against the dictatorship of the proletariat; and the violence of the conflict would be immeasurably greater than that of the war which, provoked by the killing of an archduke, was transformed into a campaign against Prussian militarism.

It now looks like an agreement between Moscow and Nanking which can end in China redeeming the railway with the aid of foreign banks. That would mean, in reality, that control would pass from the hands of the workers' state into those of finance capital. I have already said that the cession of the Chinese Eastern is not out of the question. But such a cession must not be regarded as a realization of the principle of national self-determination, but as a shifting of strength from the proletarian revolution in favor of the capitalist reaction. But there can be no doubt that it is precisely Stalin and company who will seek to present this surrender of position as a realization of national justice, in conformity with the categorical imperative, the evangel according to Kellogg and Litvinov and the articles of Louzon and Paz that were reprinted in the organ of the Leninbund.

Practical Tasks in Case of War

The practical tasks of the Opposition in case of a war between China and Soviet Russia are characterized in the article in an unclear, ambiguous and evasive manner. "In case of a war between China and Soviet Russia for the possession of the Chinese Eastern Railway," says the article, the Leninist Opposition is against Chiang Kai-Shek and the imperialists standing behind him." (No. 32, p. 250). Ultra-Left confusion has gone so far that "Marxist Leninists" must declare "we are against Chiang Kai-Shek". That's how far things can go. Good, against Chiang Kai-Shek. But for whom are you?

"In such a war," the article replies, "The Leninist Opposition will mobilize the forces of the proletariat in every country with the aim of a general strike, proceeding from the organization of the prevention of arms manufacture, and any kind of arms transport, etc." (No. 32, p. 250). That is the position of pacifist neutrality. The task of the international proletariat, according to Urbahns, lies in the preventing any sort of arms transport, that is, not only to China but also to the Soviet republic. Is that your thought? Or have you simply said something different from what you wanted to say? Perhaps you have not thought out your thoughts "to the end"? In that case, hurry to correct yourself: the question is worth it. The correct formulation should be: By all means to prevent the transport of arms to counter-revolutionary China, and by all means to facilitate the acquis-

ition of arms by the Soviet republic.

Does the Defense of the U. S. S. R. Mean Reconciliation with Centristism?

In order to show wherein the standpoint of the Leninbund differs from that of the Russian Opposition, Urbahns makes two discoveries: 1. Should an imperialist state intervene on the side of Russia, in the event of a war of the Soviet republic with China, then the Communists of this bourgeois state should not make civil peace with their bourgeoisie, as Bucharin taught, but they must adopt the course of overthrowing their bourgeoisie; 2. In defending the Soviet republic in the war with the Chinese counter-revolution, the Opposition must not become reconciled with the Stalinist course, but must conduct a decisive struggle against it. This is supposed to explain the difference between the position of the Leninbund and our own. In reality it is confusion, and I fear, not unconscious. These two theses, dragged in by the hair, do not refer to the Sino-Soviet conflict as such but in general to every war against the Soviet republic. Urbahns submerges a specific question under a general question. Neither Louzon nor Paz have as yet renounced the duty of the international proletariat to defend the Soviet republic in the event that it is attacked, for example, by America or England over the payment of czarist debts, the abolition of the foreign trade monopoly, the denationalization of the banks and factories, etc. The discussion arose over the specific character of the present conflict between China and the Soviet Union. It is precisely in this question that the ultra-Leftists showed themselves incapable of correctly evaluating individual and complex facts from a class standpoint. They are just the ones to whom the Leninbund so widely opened the columns of its paper. It is precisely over the slogan of "Hands Off China" that the *Fahne des Kommunismus* refrained for six weeks from expressing any opinion, and, when further silence was impossible, limited itself to half-hearted and ambiguous formulae.

What has the theory of Bucharin to do with this? What is the question of the cessation of struggle against Stalinist Centristism doing here? Who proposed it? Who spoke of it? What is it all about? Why is it necessary?

It is necessary in order to hint that the Russian Opposition—not the capitulators and turncoats, but the Russian Opposition—is leaning towards peace with Centristism, using the war as a pretext. Since I am writing for uninformed or badly informed foreign comrades, I consider it indispensable to recall, even if quite briefly, how the Russian Opposition posed the question of its attitude to the Stalinist course during the conditions of a war.

At the moment of the rupture of Anglo-Soviet relations, the Russian Opposition, contemptuously rejecting the lie of defeatism and conditional national defense declared in an official document that in the event of war all the differences of opinion could only become accentuated. Such a declaration in the country of the dictatorship of the proletariat, at the moment of the rupture of diplomatic relations with England requires no further explanations and in any case gives far more serious guarantees than this or that little article.

On this question, a furious struggle broke out in 1927. Have Urbahns and his partisans heard anything about the so-called "Clemenceau theory"? With this theory, the apparatus tried to agitate the party for months. It was the question of my having pointed, as an example of patriotic opposition in the camp of the imperialists, to the Clemenceau clique, which, from 1914 to 1917, in spite of the civil peace declared by the bourgeoisie, fought against all the other factions of the bourgeoisie, took over power and insured the victory of French imperialism. I asked: Is there an imbecile in the camp of the bourgeoisie who would therefore call Clemenceau a defeatist and a supporter of conditional national defense? That is the famous "Clemenceau thesis" which was criticized in thousands of articles and tens of thousands of speeches.

A short time ago, my book, "The Revolution Distorted" appeared in Paris. Among other things it contains the speech

I made at the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission on August 1, 1927. Here is what is said in the speech on the question that interests us now:

"The greatest events in human history are revolution and war. We have tested the policy of Centristism in the Chinese revolution... The greatest historical test after revolution is war. We say in advance: in the face of the event of a war, the policy of Stalin and Bucharin, the policy of zig-zags, of mental reservations—of ambiguity—the policy of Centristism—cannot prevail. This holds for the entire leadership of the Comintern. At present the leaders of the various Communist Parties have only one test question to answer: 'Are you ready to vote day and night against Trotskyism?' The war will confront them with exigencies demanding far greater responsibility... There will be no room for the intermediary position of Stalin. That is why, if I am permitted to say so in all frankness, the prattling about the 'handful of Oppositionists', the 'generals without an army', etc., appears simply ridiculous to me. The Bolsheviks heard that many times, in 1914 and in 1917. We see the morrow too clearly and we are preparing it. In domestic policy there will also be no room under the conditions of war for the slow sliding of Centristism. All the discussions will be condensed, the class contradictions will sharpen, become acute. A clear and precise answer will have to be given... Centrist policy will be unable to stand up in time of war. It will have to fall to the Right or to the Left, that is, it will have to choose the road of Thermidor or the road of the Opposition." (Disturbance).

And it is precisely this speech that I ended with the words: "For the socialist fatherland? Yes! For the Stalinist course? No!" And when Urbahns and his friends, apropos of precisely these words, recommend to me two years later to think the question out "to the end" and to comprehend that in time of war there must be no reconciliation with Centristism, I can only shrug my shoulders regretfully.

How Has the Discussion Been Conducted?

It is an ill wind that blows no good. The conflict between China and Soviet Russia has once more shown that within the Marxist Opposition an irreconcilable line of demarcation is necessary not only from the Right but also from the Left. The philistines will sneer at seeing us, a small minority, constantly occupied with internal divisions. But that should not bother us. It is precisely because we are a small minority whose entire strength lies in its ideological clarity that we must be especially implacable against dubious friends on the Right and the Left. For many months I attempted to attain clarity from the leadership of the Leninbund by means of private letters. I did not succeed. In the meanwhile, events brought one of the most important questions to a head. The differences of opinion came out into the open. The discussion began.

Is it good or bad? The article in *Die Fahne des Kommunismus* explains to me the advantage of discussion and points to the harm caused by the absence of discussion in the Comintern. I have already heard these ideas expressed, whether by comrade Urbahns or some one else escapes me for the moment. But there are discussions and discussions. It would have been far better if the Russo-Chinese conflict had not taken the Leninbund by surprise. There was time enough in the past to prepare for it. The question of Thermidor and the defense of the U. S. S. R. is no new one. It is a good thing that it did not come to war. But had it come to one? All this is an argument not against discussion, but against a bad discussion that maintains silence on the important questions so long as they have not come out into the open. The fact is that the Leninbund at least its leadership, showed itself unprepared to reply to a question raised by life itself. There was nothing left to do but to open the discussion.

Concluded in Next Issue

LASH IS WHAT CONVICTS NEED
JACKSON, Miss.-(FP)—The sting of the lash on the back is dreaded by convicts more than any other form of punishment, and will command respect for prison management and prevent riots declares Supt. Jim Williamson of Mississippi penitentiary.