

What the 'New Masses' Refused to Print

Concerning the «Defenders» of the October Revolution

By L. D. TROTSKY

Dear Friend:

I have received a copy of the New York magazine the *New Masses* containing articles about my autobiography and about the suicide of Maiakovsky. I do not regret the fifteen minutes I have spent getting acquainted with the American Left intelligentsia. Magazines like this are to be found in several countries. One of their most important tasks is said to be the "defense" of the Soviet Union. This is a wholly praiseworthy undertaking, regardless of whether the Messrs. "Defenders" fulfil it from inward conviction or—as is sometimes the case—from less lofty motives. But it would be foolish to exaggerate the importance of this defense. These groups, sufficiently variegated in their composition, busy themselves on one side with fringes of the bourgeoisie, on the other with the fringes of the proletariat, and offer no guarantee whatever as to their own future. As the majority of pacifists struggle against war only in times of peace, so these radical "defenders" of the Soviet Union, its titular "friends" from the ranks of Bohemia, will fulfil their mission only so long as this does not demand real courage and genuine devotion to the revolution. These qualities they do not possess. And where indeed should they get them? Their radicalism needs a protective coloration. For that reason it finds its chief expression in the "defense" of the Soviet Union—defense of a state possessing power, wealth and authority. It is a question of defending what exists and is already achieved. For such defense it is not at all necessary to be a revolutionist. You can quite well remain a mixture of anarchist and conservative. But at the same time you can seem revolutionary, deceiving others and, to some extent, yourself. We have seen this in the example of Barbusse and the French paper *Monde*, which belongs to the same category as *New Masses*. From the standpoint of time, their radicalism is chiefly directed toward the past. From the standpoint of space, it is directly proportional to the square of the distance from the scene of action. In relation to their own country, these bold boys always were and always will be infinitely more cautious and evasive than in relation to other countries—especially those in the East.

The best representatives of this type, excelling the rest by many heads both in gifts and character, is undoubtedly Maxim Gorky. He sympathized for years with the Bolsheviks and considered their enemies his enemies. This did not prevent him from appearing at the time of the proletarian revolution in the camp of its enemies. After the victory of the revolution he long remained in the camp of its enemies. He reconciled himself with the Soviet Republic when it became for him an unalterable fact—that is, when he could reconcile himself with it without departing from his essentially conservative outlook. There is irony in the fact that Gorky warred against Lenin at the greatest period of Lenin's creation, but now long afterward, gets along very peacefully with Stalin. What can we expect of the pencil-sized Gorkys?

The essence of these people from the Left wing of the bourgeois Bohemia is that they are capable of defending the revolution only after it is accomplished and has demonstrated its permanence. In defending the yesterday of the revolution they adopt an attitude of conservative hostility to all those who are laying the road to its tomorrow. The future can only be prepared by revolutionary methods, methods as foreign to the conservative Bohemia as were the ideas and slogans of the dictatorship of the proletariat on the day before the October revolution. These gentlemen remain, accordingly, true to themselves and to the social classes which created them and feed them. Furthermore, in spite of a formal veering to the Left, to the "new masses" (!), their conservatism has really grown stronger since they are leaning their backs against—not the October revolution, no!—but against a great state as an "institution", independent of its guiding ideas and of its policy. They were with Lenin and Trotsky—by no means all of them, by the way—after that they were with Zinoviev, after that with Bukharin and Rykov, now they are with Stalin. And tomorrow? Upon that they will express themselves when tomorrow has be-

the bourgeoisie and the social democracy? come yesterday. They have accepted every change in the governmental course as patriotic officials accept a change of uniform. There are always potential Chinovniks sitting around Bohemia. These people are courtiers of the Soviet power, not soldiers of the proletarian revolution.

The workers state, as a state, may have need of such characters for temporary goals, although I have always thought that the near-sighted epigones greatly exaggerate the weight of these groups—just as they exaggerated the value of the "defense" of Purcell or the "friendship" of Chiang Kai-Shek. As for these characters themselves, I am ready to acknowledge that it is better to be a courtier of the Soviet power than of the oil kings or the British secret service. But the proletarian revolution would not be the proletarian revolution if it allowed its ranks to be confused with this problematical, unreliable, fickle and wavering brotherhood.

Their moral triviality assumes cynical and sometimes insufferable form when they, in the character of "friends of the family", interfere in the inner problems of Communism. To this testifies the aforementioned number of the *New Masses* (a paradoxical name by the way for an organ of Bohemia!). These people, you see, think that my autobiography will serve the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, while *New Masses*, *Monde*, and other publications of this kind, are obviously necessary to the

proletariat against the bourgeoisie. This aberration is easily explained: Fooling around the fringes of two hostile classes and revolving continually on their own axes, the Barbussees of all countries naturally get mixed up as to where is the bourgeoisie and where the proletariat. Their criteria are simple. Since the work of the Left Opposition decisively criticizes the domestic policy of the Soviet Union and the world policy of the Comintern, and since the bourgeois newspaper-writers exult in this criticism and try to make use of it—why, the conclusion is perfectly obvious: The courtiers are in the camp of the revolution, and we, the Left Communists, in the camp of its enemies! This is the usual depth of the political thinking to be found in Bohemia.

The bourgeoisie would be stupid if they did not try to use the inner disagreements in the camp of the revolution. But was this question first raised in my autobiography? Wasn't the expulsion from the Party of the President of the Comintern, Zinoviev, and one of the presidents of the Soviet government, Kamenev, a gift to the bourgeoisie? Did not the exile and subsequently the banishment of Trotsky give the bourgeois press of the whole world a welcome theme for agitation against the October revolution? Was not the denunciation of the head of the government, Rykov, and the head of the Comintern Bukharin, as "bourgeois liberals" used by these facts, brought to the attention of the

whole world, were far more helpful to the bourgeoisie than the theoretical reflections or historical explanations of Trotsky. But what interest has the anarcho-conservative Bohemia in all this? It takes all the foregoing events, because stamped with the official stamp, as once for all given and eternal. Criticism of the Stalin regime is impossible to them, not because the Stalinists are right, but because the Stalinists are today the government. I repeat. These are courtiers of the Soviet power, and not revolutionists.

For revolutionists, the question is decided by the class line, the content of ideas, the theoretical position, the historical prognosis, and the political methods, of each of the opposing sides. If you think, as we think—and as we have proven on a world scale—through the experiment of the last six years—that the policies of the Stalin faction are weakening the October revolution, that they destroyed the Chinese revolution, that they are preparing the defeat of the Indian revolution and undermining the Comintern, then—and only then—our policy is justified. The bourgeoisie will grab up the fragments of our true and necessary criticism of course! But does that change in the slightest degree the essence of a great historical problem? Has not revolutionary thought always developed by the road of ruthless inner struggle, at whose fire the reaction always tried to warm its fingers?

I remark in parenthesis, however, that the whole bourgeois press, from the *New York Times* up to the Austro-Marxist *Arbeiter Zeitung*, in its political estimate of the struggle of the Left Opposition with Stalinist Centrism, stands incomparably nearer to the Centrists and never conceals it. You could publish a whole anthology of press clippings to prove this. Thus, in addition to all the rest, the "friends" and "defenders" of the revolution, having nothing in common either with the old or the new masses, crudely distort the genuine picture of the distribution of political sympathy and antipathy among the bourgeoisie and the social democrats.

Lying, by the way, is a necessary accomplishment in a courtier. In the article about Maiakovsky, as I turned over the leaves of the magazine, I hit upon the name of Rakovsky. I read eight or ten sentences, and although I am accustomed to much, nevertheless what I read made me gasp. It is related here how Maiakovsky "hated war" ("hated war"—what a vulgar formulation of the relation to war of a revolutionist!) and how, in contrast to that, Rakovsky, at Zimmerwald "was going to take off his coat and punch Lenin and Zinoviev... in the jaw" for their revolutionary struggle against war. Rakovsky is named here for no purpose whatever except for that of spreading this scandalous lie. It is necessary to spread it because Rakovsky is in exile and it is necessary to justify his being there. And so the courtier becomes a contemptible slanderer. He spreads this stupid scandal instead of stating—once he has named Rakovsky in connection with the war—with what revolutionary courage Rakovsky struggled against war under a hail-storm of persecution, slander, assault and police prosecutions. Exactly for that struggle Rakovsky was thrown into prison by the Roumanian oligarchy and was saved from the fate of Lebedev and Rosa Luxemburg only by the revolutionary Russian army.

That is enough. If the October revolution had depended upon its future courtiers, it would never have appeared in the world. And if its further destinies depended upon their "defense", the revolution would be condemned to ruin. The proletarian vanguard can guarantee the future of the country of the Soviets, and prolong the road of the world revolution, only by a correct policy. We must work out that policy, establish it theoretically, and defend it with tooth and nail against the whole world, and if necessary against the very "highest" institutions which have raised themselves up (or rather slid themselves down) on the back of the October revolution. But of those questions we need not speak in connection with the pseudo-revolutionary courtiers from the ranks of the petty bourgeois Bohemia. For them enough has been said.

YOURS,
—L. D. TROTSKY

Prinkipo, June 10, 1930.

Hypocrisy for Art's Sake in the New Masses

Correspondence between Max Eastman, Walt Carmon, Mike Gold

The following letters are virtually self-explanatory. They arose out of a letter sent to Michael Gold, editor of the *New Masses*, by Comrade Max Eastman. In this letter comrade Eastman enclosed the article by Trotsky (printed in this issue of the *Militant*) and demanded the publication of the latter in the *New Masses*, in view of the slanderous attacks made by Gold and Earl Browder against the Opposition in general, and Trotsky and Rakovsky in particular, in a previous issue of that periodical. The first reply to Eastman's letter was in the affirmative from Walt Carmon, managing editor of the *New Masses*, followed by a cowardly negative reply from the editor, Gold, which is answered by comrade Eastman. The three letters are printed below.—Ed.

NEW MASSES

112 East 19 St. New York, N. Y.

July 7, 1930

Max Eastman,
Chilmark, Mass.

Dear Max Eastman:

This will acknowledge receipt of your note and article by Leon Trotsky. We are certain to use this in the coming issue. Mike Gold is not in town. Back in a few days. You will probably hear from him as well on his return.

Yours,
WALT CARMON

NEW MASSES

112 E. 19 St. New York, N. Y.

July 16, 1930

Dear Max:

I'm sorry, but I really don't think we should print this in *New Masses*. We reviewed Trotsky's book, because it was "literature", but all of us here agree that the mag. shouldn't become an organ of political discussion and if we give up a job of space to this Trotsky fight from now on—we immediately lose our function as a literary vehicle—

Sorry

MIKE GOLD

July 18, 1930

Dear Mike Gold:

Your pretense that you will not publish Trotsky's rejoinder to your cheap attack on him because your magazine is too "literary" is an insult to my intelligence. The article to which Trotsky makes this rejoinder was written by an active head of the Workers Party and was a political attack from the first word to the last.

Moreover it was a total abandonment of the policy of your paper which had been to pussy-foot on this whole issue of the Left Opposition. You refused to let me write about it as a member of your Executive Board, even with an answer by a Stalinist in the same number. When I resigned, the pussy-foot policy was carried to the point of not printing my letter of resignation. When I stated this fact in a communication to *The Nation*, suggesting that this was not a shining example of "brave thinking", you replied justifying yourself on the ground that "We none of us used the magazine to express our opinions". (I quote this confession of yours from memory.)

Moreover about a year ago when I met you on 7th Ave. and asked how the magazine was getting on, you volunteered the information that, "We're through with the Party, we've learned that much anyway." (Here too I am quoting from memory but my memory is good.) It struck me strange that you should offer me this piece of inside information, when all previous negotiations with me had been conducted under the pretense that the magazine was independent of the Party—a "free revolutionary magazine" as it advertised itself. Upon reflection I wondered whether this gratuitous declaration of independence might not mean that you are now directly subsidized by the International.

Whether because you are subsidized, or because you depend upon the party for sales, the fact is that in publishing these attacks on Trotsky and Rakovsky you have at last shown your political colors. You are now overtly what you were before under cover, a Stalinist organ. And yet you have the brass to tell me that you won't publish Trotsky's rejoinder because you are too "literary".

And you have the folly to add, "All of us here agree etc.," although you know that ten days ago I received a letter from your associate Walt Carmon stating—what any courageous and independent editor having viciously attacked one man and slandered another would state—that "We are certain to use this in the coming issue."

What happened during these ten days? Do you really expect any grown person to believe that having attacked a political leader with a page and a half of vituperation written by a political opponent, you refuse to publish a brief rejoinder because you are literary? Even people who re-

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