

Leon Trotsky: Against National Communism! Lessons of the "Red" Referendum

(Continued from Last Issue)

After this, it would have been necessary to open as broad and open a discussion as possible, because it is necessary for the leaders, even for such infallible ones as Heinz Neumann and Remmele, to listen attentively at every turn to the voice of the mass. It is necessary to listen not only to the official words which the Communist speaks from time to time, but also to those deeper thoughts more close to the masses which hide themselves beneath his words. It is necessary not to command workers, but to know how to learn from them.

If the discussion had been an open one, then probably one of the participants would have made a speech something like this: "Thaelmann is right when he demands that regardless of the undoubted changes in the situation, we must not, because of the relation of forces, strive to a revolutionary event. But precisely for that reason the most extreme decisive elements are forcing an outbreak, as we see. Are we able, in such a situation, to save the time essential for us in order to effect preparatory changes in the relation of forces; that is, to snatch the basic proletarian masses from under the influence of the social democracy and thereby force the despairing lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie to turn their face to the proletariat and their backs to Fascism? Certainly, if the opportunity presents itself. And what if the Fascists, against our will, bring the matter to an uprising in the near future? Will the proletarian revolution then be once more foredoomed to a heavy defeat?"

Then Thaelmann, if he were a Marxist, would have answered roughly thus: "It is self-understood that the choice of the moment of decisive struggle depends not only on us, but also on our enemies. We are in entire agreement that the task of our strategy at the present moment is to make difficult, and not to facilitate, for our enemies the forcing of an outbreak. But if our enemies nevertheless declare war on us, we, of course, must accept, because there is not and there cannot be a heavier, more destructive, more annihilating, more demoralizing defeat than the surrender of great historical positions without a struggle. If the Fascists take the initiative for an outbreak on themselves—if it is clear for the popular masses—they will push to our side the broad layers of the toiling masses. In that case, we would have all the greater chances to obtain a victory the more clearly we show and prove today to the working millions that we do not at all intend to accomplish revolutions without them and against them. We must therefore state clearly to the social democratic, Christian and non-party workers: the Fascists, a small minority, wish to overthrow the present government in order to seize power. We Communists consider the present government the enemy of the proletariat but this government supports itself on your confidence and your votes; we wish to overthrow this government by means of an alliance with you and not by means of an alliance with the Fascists against you. If the Fascists attempt to organize an uprising then we Communists will fight with you until the last drop of blood—not in order to defend the government of Braun-Bruening but in order to save from being strangled and annihilated the flower of the proletariat, the workers' organizations, the workers' press, not only our Communist press, but also your press. We are ready together with you to defend any workers' home whatsoever, any printing plant of a workers' press, from the attacks of the Fascists. But we demand from you that you pledge yourselves to come to our aid in case of a threat to our organizations. We propose a united front of the working class against the Fascists—the more firmly and persistently we will carry out this policy, applying it to all questions, the more difficult it will be for the Fascists to catch us unawares and the smaller will be the chances to defeat us in open struggle. Thus would have answered our hypothetical Thaelmann.

But here Heinz-Neumann, the orator permeated through and through with great ideas, takes the floor. Nothing will come of such a policy anyway, he says. The social democratic leaders will say to the workers, "Do not believe the Communists, they are not at all concerned about saving the workers' organizations, but wish only to seize power; they consider us to be social-Fascists and they do not make any distinctions between us and the Nationalists. That is why the policy that Thaelmann proposed would simply make us look ridiculous in the eyes of the social democratic workers."

To this Thaelmann should have had to answer: To call the social democrats Fascists, that is certainly a stupidity into which we collide at every critical moment and which prevents us from finding the way to the social democratic workers. To renounce this stupidity is the best thing we can do. As to the accusation that under the pretense of the defense of the working class and its organizations, we desire simply to seize power, we will say to the social democratic workers: Yes, we Communists strive to conquer power, but for that we

require the unconditional majority of the working class. The attempt to seize power, supporting oneself on a minority, is a contemptible adventure with which we have nothing in common. We are not able to force the majority of the workers to follow us, we are only able to convince them. If the Fascists should defeat the working class, then it would be impossible even to speak of the conquest of power by the Communists. To protect the working class and its organizations from the Fascists signifies for us to assure ourselves of the possibility to convince the working class and to lead it behind us. We are unable, therefore, to arrive to power otherwise than by protecting, if necessary with arms in hand, all the elements of workers democracy in the capitalist state.

To that Thaelmann might have added: In order to win the firm inextinguishable trust of the majority of the workers, we must above all renounce throwing dust in their eyes, to exaggerate our forces, to close our eyes to facts, or still worse, to distort them. It is necessary to state what is. We shall not deceive our enemies, we have thousands of organs for testing. By deceiving the workers, we deceive ourselves. By pretending to be very strong, we only weaken ourselves. Therein, friends, lies no lack of confidence,

no "pessimism". Ought we to be pessimists? Before us there are gigantic possibilities. For us there is an unlimited future. The fate of Germany, the fate of Europe, the fate of the whole world depends on us. But precisely he who firmly believes in the revolutionary future has no need for illusions. Marxist realism is a prerequisite of revolutionary optimism.

Thus would Thaelmann have answered if he were a Marxist. But, unfortunately, he is not a Marxist.

Why Was the Party Silent?

But how then was it possible for the party to remain silent? The report of Thaelmann, representing a turn of 180 degrees in the question of the referendum was accepted without discussion. Thus it was proposed from above, but proposed means ordered. All the accounts of the Rote Fahne report that at all the assemblies of the party, the referendum was adopted "unanimously". This unanimity is represented as a sign of the particular strength of the party. When or where has there yet been in the history of the revolutionary movement such dumb "monolithism"? The Thaelmanns and the Remmeles swear by Bolshevism. But the whole history of Bolshevism is the history of intense in-

ternal struggle in which the party won its position and hammered out its methods. The history of the year 1917, the greatest year in the history of the party, is full of tense internal struggles, as is also the history of the first five years after the conquest of power, despite this—not one split, not one widespread expulsion for political motives. But—at the head of the Bolshevik party there stood leaders of growth, another tempering and another authority than the Thaelmanns, Remmeles and Neumanns. Whence then this terrible present-day "monolithism", this destructive unanimity which transforms each turn of the unfortunate leaders into an absolute law for the gigantic party?

"No discussions!" Because, as the Rote Fahne explains, "in this situation it is not speeches but action we need." Repulsive hypocrisy! The party must accomplish "deeds", but renounce participating in their preparatory deliberation. And with what deed are we concerned at present? With the question of placing the cross on the ballot, although in the final balance of proletarian crosses there is not even the possibility of ascertaining whether it is not the Fascist cross. (Hakenkreuz—the Fascist swastika.) Without doubts, without consider-

ation, without questions, without even anxiety in your eyes, accept the new, wild jump of the present holy leaders, otherwise you are—a renegade, a counter-revolutionary! This is the ultimatum that the international Stalinist bureaucracy holds as a revolver against the temple of each militant.

What Does Stalin Say?

Did Stalin actually sanction in advance the new zig-zag? No one knows that, just as no one knows the opinions of Stalin on the Spanish revolution. Stalin remains silent. When more modest leaders, beginning with Lenin, wished to exert influence on the policy of a brother party, they made speeches and they wrote articles. The point lay in the fact that they had something to say. Stalin has nothing to say. He uses cunning with the historical process just as he uses cunning with individual people. He does not consider how to help the Spanish or German proletariat take a step forward, but how to guarantee for himself in advance a political loop-hole.

An unsurpassable example of the duality of Stalin in the basic questions of the world revolution, is his attitude towards the German events in the year 1923. Let us recall what he wrote to

Zinoviev and Bucharin in August of the same year. "Ought the Communists strive (at the present stage) to seize power without the Social Democrats? Are they ripe yet for that—in that, in my opinion, consists the question. At the same time of the taking of power we had in Russia such reserves as (1) peace, (2) land to the peasants, (3) the support of the enormous majority of the working class, (4) sympathy of the peasantry. At present, the German Communists possess no such thing. It is true that they have as their neighbor the Soviet country, which we had not, but what can we do for them at the present moment? If, at present, the power of Germany would fall, so to speak, and the Communists would seize it they would collapse with a crash. That is in 'the best case'. But in the worst case—they would smash into smithereens and be thrust backwards. In my estimation, we must hold back the Germans and not encourage them." Stalin stood, this way, at the Right of Brandler who, in August-September 1923 considered, on the contrary, that the conquest of power in Germany would not present any difficulties, but that the difficulties would begin on the next day after the conquest of power. The official opinion of the Comintern at present is that the Brandlerites in the Fall of 1923 let pass an exceedingly revolutionary situation. The leading accuser of the Brandlerites is—Stalin. Has he, however, explained to the Comintern the question of his own position in that year? No, for that there is not the least necessity: it is sufficient to forbid the sections of the Comintern to raise the question.

In the same fashion, Stalin attempts to play also with the question of the referendum. Thaelmann* is unable to reveal the fact that Stalin worked through his agents in the German Central Committee and himself remained ambiguously in the rear. In the case of a victory of the New Line all the Manuilskys and Remmeles would proclaim that the initiative was Stalin's. In case of a defeat, Stalin would retain the full possibility to find a guilty one. In precisely this lies the quintessence of his strategy. In this field he is powerful.

What does "Pravda" Say?

And what then does Pravda, the leading journal of the leading party in the Communist International, say? Pravda was unable to present one serious article, an attempt at an analysis of the situation in Germany. From the large programmatic speech of Thaelmann it shamefully produces a half-dozen phrases. And indeed what can the present headless, spineless Pravda, servile to the bureaucracy and tangled in contradictions say? What can the Pravda speak about when Stalin remains silent?

Pravda of July 24 explained the Berlin turn in the following fashion: "Failure to participate in the referendum would signify that the Communists support the present reactionary Landtag". The whole matter is here reduced to a simple vote of lack of confidence. But why then in such a case did not the Communists take the initiative in the referendum, why did they struggle for several months against this initiative, and why on the July 21 did they suddenly kneel down before it? The argument of Pravda is a belated argument of parliamentary cretinism, and nothing else.

On the August 11, after the referendum, Pravda changed its argumentation: The purpose of the participation in the referendum consists for the party in the extra-parliamentary mobilization of the masses. But was it not for precisely that reason, for the extra-parliamentary mobilization of the masses, that the day of August 1st was assigned? We shall not now stop for a criticism of calendar Red Days. But on the First of August, the Communist party mobilized the masses under its own slogans and under its own leadership. For what reason, then, in a week's time, was a new mobilization necessary, moreover of such a nature that the mobilized do not see one another, that no one of them is able to calculate their numbers, that they themselves, nor their friends, nor their enemies, are able to distinguish them from their deadly enemies.

On the following day in the number of August 12 Pravda declares, no more, no less, than that "the results of the voting signified . . . the greatest blow of all that the working class has yet dealt the social democracy." We will not produce the figures of the statistics of the referendum. They are known to all (except to the readers of the Pravda) and they strike the idiotic and shameful boasting of Pravda in the face. To lie to the workers, to throw dust in their eyes, these people consider to be in the very nature of things.

Official Leninism is crushed and trampled under the heels of bureaucratic empiricism. But unofficial Leninism lives. Let not the unbridled functionaries think that all will pass over for them with impunity. The scientifically founded ideas of the proletarian revolution are stronger than the apparatus, stronger than any amount of money stronger than the fiercest repression. In the matter of apparatus, money and repression, our class enemies are incomparably stronger than the present Stalinist bureaucracy. But nevertheless, on the territory of Russia, we conquered them. We demonstrated that it was possible to conquer them. The revolutionary proletariat shall conquer them all over. For that it needs a correct policy in the struggle for its right to carry on the policy of Marx and Lenin.

*The question of whether Thaelmann was against the turn and only subordinated himself to Remmele and Neumann, who found support in Moscow, does not occupy us here, being entirely personal and episodic: the question is that of the system. Thaelmann did not dare to appeal to the party and consequently bears the entire responsibility.

A Syndicalist Voyage to the Ranks of Stalinism

With a triumphant fanfare, the Daily Worker (10-2-31) makes much ado of the application of Sam Scarlett, an old-time I. W. W. militant for membership in the Communist Party of Canada. The Daily Worker in commenting upon Scarlett's adherence to the Communists, declares:

"Again the victory of socialist construction in the Soviet Union has shown a capacity for winning over to Communism the really revolutionary elements among the anarcho-syndicalist workers of past years."

It is a correct step for Scarlett to join the Communist Party. The Left Opposition has pointed out time and again the failure of the Communist movement in the United States and Canada and throughout the world, to attract the revolutionary syndicalist to the banner of Communism, and has explained why the Communist parties have failed. Foremost, there stood out the basic theoretical weakness of the syndicalist, the I. W. W., to grasp the cardinal necessity of a political party of the working class, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the instruments of the workers and all exploited peoples to achieve and to maintain the power of the masses against the class enemies.

But there was also the pedantic, smart-aleck and bureaucratic attitude of two-by-four functionaries of the Communist party toward the militant I. W. W. workers, participants and leaders of magnificent battles in the class struggle. Coupled with the mechanical measures utilized to win adherents of the I. W. W., these conditions served further to disgust or dismay I. W. W. militants still unclear on theoretical, principle and tactical issues avowed by the Communists. So the fundamental appeal of the Russian revolution and Communism brought only handfuls of the I. W. W. to the party wher hundreds and thousands might have come.

Catching up with the Revolution

In the 14th year of the Russian revolution, Scarlett only now finds it possible to join the Communist party, to endorse the Communist International. This act is understandable for ordinary workers just coming to comprehend the class struggle and looking for methods to throw off the shackles of wage slavery. The path of a worker, blinded by capitalist prejudices and education toward class consciousness and the revolutionary movement is, at the outset, slow for the lone worker and, for the mass of workers, is speeded up only under the impetus and blows of stupendous class struggles and political developments, economic upheavals (Russian revolution, Spanish revolution, economic crisis, general strike, etc.) But this cannot explain Scarlett's late entry, for Scarlett is a militant of many years standing. Why should he but at this day join the Communists?

Scarlett has finally caught up with the Russian revolution. He says, in his statement printed in the Daily Worker (10-2-31) that "we (the I. W. W.) underestimated the role of the proletarian dictatorship, and maintained our anarcho-syndicalist opposition to all forms of government, capitalist or proletarian." The ex-syndicalist or I. W. W. Scarlett now arrives at and sees the role of a vanguard organization of the proletariat, of a political party of the working class; he now "recognizes" the "State"; he draws the distinction between the aim and function of government in the hands of the capitalist class as an oppressor of the workers, and a Soviet Government, through the medium of the proletarian dictatorship, as the defender and guide of the workers and all the exploited peoples.

We may thus assume that Scarlett will struggle hereafter against the "epigones of syndicalism" who dominate the degenerated I. W. W. of today with false and outworn doctrines of the emancipation of the working class solely through the method of "industrial action" and the industrial union. By such "ideas", the I. W. W. remains factually and historically in the swamp of reaction.

Scarlett is correct when he says that "lack of self-criticism and inability to alter the opinions of yesterday on the basis of the facts of today led to fossilization and degeneracy" (of the I. W. W.). But will Scarlett, in thus stepping ahead, now apply this critique and approach to the problems that today face

the Communist party and the Comintern? Let us see.

Scarlett on the Field of National Socialism

Scarlett unlike the liberal and treacherous "Friends" of the Soviet Union, takes his stand on the field of Communism itself. The Left Opposition has charged that the Communist parties and the Comintern itself are neglecting or ignoring the basic problems and issues of the struggle for political power within the respective capitalist countries and on an international scale. Under the orders and guidance of the Stalinist Comintern the respective Communist parties tend to become transformed largely into auxiliary agencies for the preservation of the Soviet Union, and to push the basic issue of the international proletarian revolution into the attic of history and pure speculation. The Stalinist Comintern draws its theoretical outlook into the closed shell of "socialism in one country" and, with its narrow horizon, fails even to see that the preservation of the Soviet Union itself is predicated upon the support of a proletarian revolution in Western countries.

Scarlett himself accepts this narrow Stalinist theory. Like the Daily Worker in its opening sentence, Scarlett says, "The political line of the Communist Party is correct. It is necessary to build socialism in a territory which is industrially and politically backward." He is impressed with the "amazing progress of industrialization"; he watches the revolution change from the "haystack" to the "smoke-stack stage".

With these lines we see how Scarlett comes to the Communist Party. From the theoretical swamp of the I. W. W. he progresses to the need of a political party of the working class, etc., only to fall into the anti-Marxist, Stalinist and reactionary swamp of the theory of socialism in one country. Neither the effusion of the Daily Worker nor of Scarlett carry the burning spirit of international revolution and socialism, for a genuine

Comintern. Both begin and end with the glorification of Soviet industrial successes, even as liberals hail these successes. The Left Opposition forecast, planned and worked for these successes, despite Bucharin's and Stalin's hopelessness and pessimism.

From what considerations does Scarlett come to accept the theory that a complete Soviet industry and economy can be built independently in the Soviet Union without the assistance of the workers in other countries and through international proletarian revolution?

The Struggle Against Bureaucracy

Further, has Scarlett failed to note, in his 14 years of lonely progress to Communism, the specific problems and contradictions developing in the Soviet Union, arising both from objective factors and the Stalinist destroyers of revolutionary theory and revolutions themselves (China, Germany, etc.) Is Scarlett blind to the changes in Soviet industry in respect to continuous loss of workers' control in the shops, lack of Communist direction, etc.?

In the old I. W. W. emphasis was laid, and no doubt endorsed by Scarlett too, on the unskilled workers, the most exploited, the lowest workers, whom the I. W. W. reached in the wheat fields, the lumber camps, the oil territories, the waterfront, etc. Potentially, these were the most revolutionary, workers with nothing to lose and all to win. The old I. W. W. fought militantly for free speech, in and outside of the organization, for democratic methods, against fakers and bureaucrats. These were strong points on the I. W. W. side.

Will Scarlett react to these good qualities of a revolutionary syndicalist and a Communist, and will he now fight for workers' democracy within the Communist party and Comintern? Will he oppose the bureaucracy in the Communist Party of Canada, the United States and the Comintern?

In "Problems of the Development of the U. S. S. R.", Trotsky has accurately

forecast the present and impending difficulties in the Soviet Union, arising out of the successes of industrialization and agricultural collectivization, and the contradictions of the temporary existence side by side of a Soviet State and a remaining capitalist world. Despite Stalin and Litvinoff, the U. S. S. R. and capitalism cannot indefinitely co-exist side by side peacefully. Will Scarlett and the thousands of new Communists continue to ignore the program of the Left Opposition on these growing problems?

The Comintern bureaucracy, with its false policies, continues to corrode and poison the vitals of the Comintern and its sections, the Soviet Government and the working class. In the Soviet Union, Stalinist methods create ever wider differentiations economically among the masses, particularly the city proletariat. Workers, poorly paid, shift from job to job in hope of economic betterment. Stalinism and its lackeys everywhere make no effort to close these gaps, but only to justify them in the name of "industrialization". Stalinism makes a caricature of a correct policy of Soviet building, as set forth by the Left Opposition.

The Left Opposition has exposed the inadequacies of the theoretical position of Stalinism and its terrible results for the proletariat everywhere. For struggling for a change of the Comintern line, for the reformation of the Comintern, Oppositionists by the thousands have been imprisoned, exiled and even shot. What has Scarlett to say to all this?

Will he fight for the reinstatement of the thousands of Left Oppositionists to their rightful places in the Communist movement?

Having taken one step forward to the Communist party, will he remain, as now, on the ground of Stalinist national-socialism or will he take another step forward to the Leninist position of international socialism?

—MARTIN ABERN.

Conference Acts on Weisbord

In regard to the proposal from the Weisbord group to have representatives appear before our conference to present its views in regard to what it calls the existence of two groups adhering to the International Left Opposition, the Credentials Committee recommends to the Conference:

The Conference rejects the proposal to have representatives of the Weisbord group appear to present its views for the following reasons:

- (1) That the Communist League has already discussed the views of Weisbord and those who may collaborate with him, both within our units and in the Militant and decisively rejected these views as having nothing in common with those of the Left Opposition. We therefore see nothing further to discuss at this conference.
- (2) The International Secretariat in its resolution has also decisively rejected any pretense of the Weisbord group to claim adherence to the International Left Opposition and has declared that this group has nothing in common with our views.
- (3) In accordance with this, the National Committee has already previously rejected any proposals from the Weisbord group for presentation of its views to us, while Weisbord has continued his impermissible attacks upon the views and leadership of the Left Opposition.
- (4) We propose that the convention endorse this policy maintained by the National Committee.
- (5) We propose the Conference affirm the fact that there is only one section of the International Opposition in this country, the Communist League of America (Opposition) and reject the ridiculous pretenses of Weisbord and those who agree with him, of adherence to the International Left Opposition and the principles it stands for.
- (6) We propose that the conference call upon all those supporters of Weisbord and his views who seriously wish to support the Left Opposition, to trans-

late it into action by definitely opposing the attacks of Weisbord upon the Left Opposition, by severing all collaboration with him and by individually joining the only section of the Left Opposition in the United States, the Communist League of America (Opposition).

The National Conference unanimously adopted the above report of the Credentials Committee to which the letter from Weisbord has been referred.

Issue Is Skipped

A number of circumstances combined last week to prevent the appearance of the Militant, and we have therefore decided reluctantly to forego the issue. Our national conference extended for a longer period than originally planned, and the various departing delegations, plus a brief illness of the editor, created such a dislocation of the editorial department as made impossible the publication of last week's Militant. We ask the indulgence of our readers for the failure to appear and assure all of them there will be no further interruption of the regularity of the paper's appearance every week.

Classes

Monday: 8 P. M.
History of the Communist International
Instructor: Max Shachtman

Wednesday: 8 P. M.
Marxism
Instructor: Arne Swaback

Fundamentals of Communism
Instructor: Martin Abern

Registration Fee: \$1.00 — one dollar per course — unemployed workers — Special rates

Opening Week: Oct. 19th
Register at 84 East 10th St., at once

Expulsions Begin in Spartacus Club

The New York Spartacus Club, a working class organization under the leadership of the Stalinists, is now the scene of an expulsion campaign against all those who presume to differ in their political views from those of the party bureaucrats. At last Sunday's meeting of the club, two of its members, comrades Harry Kumondareas and L. Hidus, were charged with "anti-working class activity" on the grounds of which they were to be expelled. The party faction had been mobilized to its fullest extent and the Stalinist proposal was put. It immediately transpired that the "anti-working class activity" of the two comrades of explaining to workers in the club what were the differences agitating the present-day Communist movement. The anger of the bureaucracy arises from the fact that somebody sought to disturb the foundations upon which their power rests—the ignorance in which they keep the Communist workers.

A number of Club members rose to the defense of the accused and in the attacks made by the party faction upon the latter it was made clear that the reason for the expulsion was the sympathy of the two comrades for the Left Opposition, whose views have been growing popular in the ranks of the Club. The hub was organized as a non-party movement which would embrace workers of all political and economic views. With the appearance of some Left Oppositionists, the Stalinists are forgetting all this and are determined to destroy the Club rather than allow the participation of Left Opposition workers and sympathizers.

Despite the mobilization of the party faction, the vote to expel comrade Kumondareas stood at 34 in favor and 14 opposed. The absence of comrade Hidus at the meeting that day delayed a decision on his case, which is to come up for action next meeting.

The determination of the Stalinists to split the movement must be met everywhere with the greatest resistance.

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