

# Report of the New York Anti-War Conference

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set the official tone of the conference by his speech, but it was enthusiastically applauded by the assembled Communist workers disorientated and intellectually demoralized by their leaders who, all during the conference, did not utter a single word of criticism of the speech, did not make a single reservation, did not indicate in any way that the Communists would not identify themselves with the point of petty bourgeois pacifism. It is at them, that the criticism should be directed!

## Left Opposition Makes Itself Heard

If the party spokesmen maintained an oyster's silence on the role of pacifism at the conference, they made amends by their vociferous attacks upon the Left Opposition. It is no exaggeration to say that the real center of attention at the Conference was the Left Opposition and the standpoint it presented.

All the preliminary arrangements went off smoothly, in accordance with the previous decisions of the party. As an innovation in the party's "united front" conferences, the chairman and committees were not appointed this time, but formally at least elected from the floor. Let nobody be deceived about this change of heart. It was not dictated by any concern with elementary principles of workers' democracy, but rather as a concession to its "prejudices on fairness" entertained by the liberal partners of the party in the movement.

What constant protests from Left Opposition delegates and other non-Stalinist forces at similar conferences failed to gain from the party bureaucracy, the petty bourgeois pacifists and men of letters were able to gain with little difficulty, if only as a formality without real meaning. There was only one slight slip-up in the party's plans: the selection of the credentials committee. One non-Stalinist delegate, I. Dryar, who represented a branch of the International Workers' Order, was elected on the committee as the fourth member in addition to the three already chosen for the posts in advance. Their report will come up later on.

The delegates of the Communist League of America (Opposition) were comrades James P. Cannon, Hugo Oehler and Max Shachtman. Despite the presence at the door of the Argus-eyed Ludwig Landy, the professional Stalinist manager of such projects, the Opposition delegates were permitted to enter the hall without being challenged. As other delegates came in, they invariably had in their hand either a copy of the *Militant*, or a mimeographed copy of the resolution we had prepared in advance for submission to the Conference, or both. To prevent in advance the complete suppression of our point of view, we had made adequate arrangements for the distribution in the lobby of our resolution so that, in any case, the bulk of the delegates would at least have a written memorandum of the standpoint of the Opposition.

In contrast to our resolution, printed elsewhere in this issue, the chairman, Jackson, a party member in the Marine Workers' Industrial Union, presented a resolution in the name of the American Committee. A more wretched piece of hollow pacifist literature could hardly have been read by a Communist without gagging. The tone set by the liberal "keynote" was to be consecrated in the form of a resolution, undoubtedly drawn up by the party fraction in the American Committee for the purpose of satisfying the totally disparate elements collected as the directors of the struggle against war, ranging from Harry Elmer Barnes and Upton Sinclair to . . . Moissaye J. Olgin, and presented by a Communist chairman for adoption by a Communist audience.

The resolution, which we challenge the party press to reprint as it was read at the Conference, endorsed the whole enterprise without reserve, endorsed the call sent out by Romain Rolland. In other words, the chairman called upon the Communist workers present to endorse a call which declares that war is not a "question of interest of one nation, of one class". To endorse a movement to "raise an immense wave of opinion against war, whatever war it may be, wherever it may come from, wherever it may menace", that is, to oppose a war—if the words have any meaning at all—of the working class against the bourgeoisie, to oppose a war of national liberation of an oppressed colonial people against an automatic imperialist oppressor, to oppose a revolutionary war of a victorious proletariat against a bourgeois enemy—to oppose all those wars which Lenin tried to teach the exploited of the earth to carry on unremittingly.

By this resolution, the Communist workers were to commit themselves, for example, against the idea symbolized by the war of the Russian workers and peasants against their bourgeoisie in 1917-1918, the war of the Chinese people against the imperialists in 1925-1927 or their war against Japan in Manchuria today, against the war conducted by the Soviets against Pilsudsky's Poland in 1920 or against the Menshevik agency of imperialism in Georgia more than a decade ago, concerning this reactionary document, the Communist stage-managers of the Conference had only words of praise. They sewed their condemnations for something else.

No sooner had the chairman announced that there would now be discussion from the delegates, than comrade Shachtman of the C. L. O. (O.) delegation, jumped up to request the floor to read a substitute resolution. Taken aback, the chairman replied that there would be "adequate

opportunity for everybody" to speak if the names of the speakers and their organizations would be sent up to the platform on slips of paper. We have never had any illusions about this procedure. It is employed for the purpose of enabling the chairman to make an arbitrary selection of speakers, for the audience is left in the dark as to who has asked for the floor until the chairman announces his name and place. However, immediately upon this announcement, a slip of paper was speeded to the platform in so ostentatious a manner that the whole audience could see that we had been the first to make the request. After a hurried consultation on the platform with the Central Committee promoter in charge of the floor arrangements for the party, Joseph Brodsky, the chairman gave the floor to Shachtman.

By a snap vote, it had already been decided that on the burning question of war, the speakers from the floor would be limited to five minutes each. In view of the delays in getting started, this left less than an hour for discussion on the most important Conference question: the resolution of opinion and policy. Comrade Shachtman was therefore able only to read our resolution. It was heard in an intense silence throughout the hall and when, at the end of the first five minutes, a few zealots began shouting that his time was up, the chairman, with half an eye to his liberal partners, announced that the speaker would be permitted to finish his reading.

The Opposition's resolution is printed on the third page. Let every worker read it and see for himself if it isn't almost a word for word transcription in condensed form of all that Bolshevism has taught on the question of the war struggle, which every Communist worker should be duty-bound to support.

But instead of fulfilling their revolutionary responsibility of mobilizing the Communists in support of such a resolution as against the pacifist resolution, of supporting Lenin as against Barbusse and Sinclair, the party spokesmen at the conference did two significant things:

## The Stalinists Reply to Us

First, they felt compelled, for the first time in years at such conferences attended by them and the Opposition, to discuss the two points of view: the Stalinist and the Leninist. At previous conferences, where comparatively secondary questions of dispute were involved, they felt their mechanical strength to be sufficient to settle the question in the usual manner, i. e., by merely ignoring our standpoint or by shouting us down with infamous slanders or by ridding themselves of the problem by expelling us forthwith. At this conference, where a fundamental question of principle was involved, where the party leaders had worked themselves into a position where they had to defend pacifism as against Bolshevism, the mechanical majority apparently did not suffice and the principle objections to the party line had to be met, at least to outward appearances, by an open discussion of the merits of the respective standpoints. In this lies the greatest victory for the revolutionists: the fact that for the first time on any extensive and public scale, in the presence of hundreds of Communist workers, the views of the Opposition were presented in head-on collision with the views of Centrism with the latter compelled to defend themselves from the criticisms of the Left wing.

Second, in defending themselves, the Stalinists not only made an elaborate apology for pacifism and pacifists, but a demagogic attack upon Leninism. This was the only significance of the speech delivered by Olgin.

As soon as Shachtman concluded the reading of our resolution, the chairman introduced Moissaye J. Olgin for the job of replying to the Opposition was highly characteristic. The only thing for which Olgin is "well-known" to any degree in connection with war and the defense of the Soviet Union, is his ardent support during the last world war of Wilson and his Fourteen Points, and, after the Russian revolution, his faithful services as a scribe for the yellow *Jewish Daily Forward*, where he tried to convince the readers that Lenin and Trotsky were not only German spies but that they were strangling the Russian democracy in the blood of the people. But if Upton Sinclair, another hero of the "war to end all wars", and H. G. Wells, who played a similar role, are fit to lead a movement now against the danger of imperialist war, there is no reason why Olgin should be excluded. Only one should retain at least a slight sense of proportion and values. Of all the people available in the party to "fight imperialist war and defend the Soviet Union" in the course of a vicious attack upon the spokesmen at the Conference for Lenin's standpoint the selection of the man with the least rights of anyone to speak on the question, was a

Because of the importance of the "Congress Against War", this issue of the *Militant* is being devoted largely to the New York Conference and other aspects of this movement. Consequently, we have been compelled to omit a number of other articles and other material which was intended for publication this week, including the next article in the series on "Nine Years of the Struggle of the Left Opposition". We ask the indulgence of our readers for a week, since the next issue of the *Militant* will publish the important articles we have been forced to hold over.

little too much. Discretion alone should have dictated another choice.

Olgin feebly and half-heartedly mumbled a repetition of the vulgar drivel with which the *Daily Worker* of that morning had greeted the conference—tenderness for the pacifists and calumny and rudeness for the Opposition—sought in vain to put some "revolutionary spirit" into his remarks against the "Trotskyists". At the same time, he introduced a new idea into Communist politics: the substitution of moral standards for political and class criteria. "Men like Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland are at least sincere in their opposition to war. They will defend the Soviet Union. The 'radical' phrases of this Trotskyist resolution," he continued, "criticize the Communists for uniting with Barbusse and Rolland. And what do they propose in their place? That the Communist International shall make a united front with the Second International and the Amsterdam International? They propose," cried this maestro of irony and revolutionary intransigence, "that we shall unite with Norman Thomas and Morris Hillquit to defend the Soviet Union!" The indignant sarcasm almost robs us of reply. However that may be, the fact remains that we never sat down with Hillquit and Abe Cahan to attack the Soviet Union, whereas Olgin did. His conversion to irreconcilability towards Hillquit is very gratifying, but it lacks the humility of the neophyte that should accompany it.

In any case, the manner in which Olgin posed the question is both ludicrous and unworthy of a revolutionist. The problem of fighting war and defending the Soviet Union is not exhausted or even approached by moral considerations. Sincerity and honesty of this or that individual is a great virtue, but it is not decisive in politics. The defense of the Soviet Union is a political question which is decided by the process of the class struggle. Not Barbusse's sincerity or Sinclair's repentance is of great consequence, but the masses. Barbusse, Rolland, Einstein, Alla Nazimova, and even Michael Gold, do not have nor will they ever have the masses following them.

The masses, that is, the majority of them, still follow the social democrats. Without the support of these masses, the struggle against war and for Russia will, at best, limp along on one foot. The problem is to mobilize these masses. But this can not be done by a Venetian carnival where the Communists hide behind "respectable" petty bourgeois masks. It can only be done by a correct policy, the policy of the united front as adopted by the Comintern under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.

## Olgin's Irony--at the Expense of Lenin

Olgin was followed several speakers later by his fellow party delegate, Dr. A. Markoff, who has been equally successful in the professions of dental surgery and Stalinist officialdom. Both of them worked up considerable merriment in the audience with their principal observation on our resolution: "Just look," they jeered, "in one sentence they call the social democrats traitors and social patriots. And in the very next sentence they propose that we should make a united front with these same traitors and patriots to fight against the war danger!" The fact that the scores of party members present joined in the laughter, is a deplorable, but quite comprehensible, commentary on the low level of understanding to which their leaders have driven them. We shall be unremitting in our endeavors to change that situation.

But Olgin and Markoff, who have the responsibilities of the leadership, even if it was obtained by disemboweling themselves, who know that our resolution, far from being a subject for mockery among Communists, is merely a simple statement of established Bolshevik ideas, displayed a demagogic scoundrelism which is unforgivable. Their labored irony was exclusively at the expense of Lenin. More, it was at the expense of the revolutionary training indispensable to the workers present. Were the "counter-revolutionary Trotskyists" the "danger" at the Conference, or was the danger constituted by the stifling pacifist vapors which rose to drug the senses of the workers? Obviously, the latter, for the pacifists are the outstanding leaders of the movement. . . . and adopted with Stalinist assistance. The duty of a Communist leader was to center his criticism on the pacifists and not on Lenin.

In deriding our resolution, the Stalinists not only took up the cudgels for pacifism, but brought out the graveyard of the Communist International those sorry remnants of sham radicalism against which Lenin and Trotsky fought such a terrific battle at the Third Congress of the Communist International, and in the event of whose victory at the Congress, Lenin said, the International in February 1922, on the question of the conference of the three Internationals proposed by the Vienna (Two-and-a-Half) International, the "ultra-Leftist" opposition was represented by the Spanish, French and Italian delegations. In their name, Cachin, the progenitor of Olgin and Co., moved:

"The enlarged Executive, after discussing the invitation addressed to the Communist International by the Vienna International for the participation in a common conference of the Second, Two-and-a-Half, and Amsterdam Internationals, decides not to accept." And after this motion was defeated, the 1922 Olgin and Manuilsky's declared: "It

seems to us that the reformists of all countries are parting more and more with the working class and that they follow a policy contrary to the daily defense and welfare of the proletariat. We do not doubt that they will be, under any conditions, the adversaries and saboteurs of the real united front of the working masses."

Like Olgin at the Conference, and like his masters in the Politbureau, they could not understand how the Comintern could denounce the reformists as traitors and at the same time join in a united front "from the top" (Horror of horrors!) with the same traitors. They could not understand it, because they simply neglected to notice that the reformists had millions of workers behind them, just as they have today—the social democratic parties, and not the Sinclairs and Barbusse and Wells!

## Lenin's Comintern in 1922

What was the Comintern resolution adopted against the standpoint of Cachin? What was its attitude towards the International headed by such proven traitors and social patriots as Vandervelde, Henderson, Wells and Co.? It declared:

"The Enlarged Executive of the C. I., taking note of the proposition of the Vienna International declares for the participation of the parties of the Communist International in the projected Conference. The Enlarged Executive of the Communist International also proposes the participation in the Conference of all the Industrial federations and associations, both national and international; of the Red International of Labor Unions; of the International Federation of Trade Unions (Amsterdam International); of the C. G. T. U. of France; of the Italian Syndicalist Union; of the American Federation of Labor (even Gompers you see!) and of other autonomous industrial associations. The Communist International also considers it necessary to invite the principal anarcho-syndicalist organizations; the I. W. W., the Shop Stewards, etc. . . . The Communist International accepts the agenda of the Conference as proposed by the Vienna International, viz., a defensive fight against the capitalist offensive and a struggle against reaction, as an addition it proposes to complete the agenda with the following items:

"1. Preparations of the fight against new imperialist wars.  
"2. Relief action for the reconstruction of the economic life of Soviet Russia." Etc., etc., etc., to the permanent discomfiture of all past, present and future Cahunis and Olginis!

We can still hear, ten years after wards, the echo of the words of a Markoff of those days: "How? You denounce Vandervelde as Belgian imperialism's war minister, Henderson as His Majesty's war minister, Weis and Scheidemann as the Kaiser's war ministers, the Georgian Mensheviks as the armed counter-revolutionary agents of Allied imperialism—and yet you propose to sit around one table with them to discuss as point 1 on the Agenda 'Preparations of the fight against new imperialist wars'? Down with the Executive Comintern of the Communist International! Down with Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and all the other Trotskyist renegades! How then down, workers of the world!"

And yet, on April 2, 1922, comrades Radek, Bucharin, Zetkin, Rosmer, Katayama, Vuyovitch and the rest of the delegation of the Communist International literally sat down in Berlin with such confirmed and tested social patriots as Hlysmans, Vandervelde, Stauning, Otto Wels, Ramsay MacDonald, Tseretelli (the Georgian Menshevik, whose party had shot down scores and hundreds of revolutionary workers and peasants of Georgia), for the Second International, and Crispin Longuet, Martov, Abramovitch, Adler and Bauer of the Two-and-a-Half International to discuss a united front against war and the capitalist offensive. Isn't it strange, Dr. A. Markoff, D. D. S.?

And do you know, Messrs Olgin, Browder and Markoff, what Mr. Emile Vandervelde said at the Conference to the Communists? "Whilst we are being told, for example, that men like Jouhaux, Merheim, and Henderson, Vandervelde or Longuet are serving the interests of the bourgeoisie, it is, to say the least of it, strange that these same men should be invited to take part in the defense of proletarian interests." Now, Citizen Olgin, do you see who is the originator of this argument? Is such flagrant plagiarism from a social democrat, a socialist-Fascist, so to speak, permissible for a "leader in the struggle against war"? And further do you know what reply Vandervelde and Confres received from the Communist representative? Radek declared:

"But then you say: 'If this is so, what do you want of this Conference, what tactical maneuvers are you after?' And I will tell you boldly and clearly to your face what you want. You came to this Conference because you had to; you were the instruments of world reaction, and now, whether you want it or not, you must be the instruments of the struggle for the interests of the proletariat. And without confidence we say to you: we sit down at the same table with you, we will fight with you, and this fight will decide whether it is a maneuver, as you say, in favor of the Communist International or a stream which will unite the working class. What you do will decide the meaning of our action. If you fight with us and with the proletariat of all lands—not fight for dictatorship, we do not expect so much, but fight for a crust of bread, fight against

further world ruin—then in this struggle the proletariat will come closer together, and then we shall judge you not on the ground of this terrible past, but on the ground of fresh facts. So long as these are not present, we go with cold hearts into these negotiations, and into this common action with deep mistrust that you may fail us ten times in this battle. But we will try to fight together, not for love of you, but because of the unprecedented need of the hour which drives us and compels you to confer in this hall with the very Communists you have treated as criminals." (Conference Minutes, pp. 32-33.)

Our readers will pardon our extensive quotations from the past. The Stalinist marauders have brought such de-education into the movement, they have so violently obliterated the past, the Leninist past, that the very foundations of our movement have become obscured and remain unknown to the new generation of Communist workers. The marauders compel us each time to dig up A B C truths out of the past, to elucidate them with painfully elaborate simplicity, not merely for the prematurely senile bureaucrats but primarily for the new Communist forces whom they are so cruelly miseducating.

In any case, the quotations we have cited—a few out of thousands—are enough to show that when Olgin and Markoff played upon the emotions and ignorance of the workers present, when they sought to whip up a mob spirit against the Left Opposition, they were actually jeering at—Lenin!

## Cheer Confusionists -Gag Oppositionists

Olgin and Markoff were not the only speakers, although they spoke officially in the name of the Communist party. The floor was also given freely to various other representatives. The terrible confusion existing among party members who spoke on this fundamental question of the struggle against war, could only leave a saddening impression upon Communists acquainted with the elements of Marxism. Few indeed spoke on the question from the standpoint of the class struggle and revolutionary policy. One was opposed to the war because a relative was killed in the last war. Another, an engineer who had been to the Soviet Union, and who continued to emphasize that he represented nobody but himself (and isn't that the case with the rest of the respectable window-dressing behind which the Stalinists are practising their opportunistic policy?) delivered a speech which was a disgrace, not so much to himself, but to the conference of Communist workers who cheered him. One of his relatives, too, had been wounded in a war and he demanded (and how militantly!) that we shall no longer petition our governments against war, but demand that they do not unleash the dogs of war. Is the distinction plain to you? Furthermore, proposed this ingenious representative-of-nobody-but-himself, this movement should carry on a campaign to enlighten the "soldiers, the police, the government spies" (we quote literally) to "humanitarian ideas against war." He was thickly applauded, but not one party member in his speech had a word to say about his standpoint—they were too occupied with defending the pacifists against the Left Opposition.

Another speaker was Roth, a member of the Socialist party from Ithaca, New York. The discovery of this or that isolated socialist worker who supports the Soviet Union, and his decorative presentation by the Communist party at its "united front" conferences, is the substitute which Stalinism offers today in place of winning the masses of reformist workers in a genuine united front. Roth's speech was also widely applauded and exempted from a word of comradely criticism by the party speakers. After having heard the sharp Communist criticism we made of the social democracy in our resolution, not only comradely with participation in a united front but quintessential, this Socialist declared: "I am glad to see that the fratricidal war in the Left wing movement of labor is confined to a few factions in the Communist and Socialist movements." By "fratricidal war", he evidently meant our revolutionary criticism. His gratification, too, was justified. He met with no such revolutionary criticism from the Stalinists; nor did the pacifists who have been imposed upon the "Anti-War Congress" as its leadership.

But if every well-intentioned muddle-head could get both the floor and acclaim of the Stalinists, a different attitude was adopted towards the delegation of the Left Opposition. Towards the end of the meeting, Brodsky, who manipulated the conference of the party with the skill and cynicism common to the legal profession, suddenly made a motion to bring the discussion to a close. Why? Because comrade Cannon had sent up his name to the chairman to speak in defense of our resolution which Stalinist speakers had been given extended time to attack and misrepresent, immediately, comrade Cannon rose, as did other delegates in various parts of the hall, to demand if he would be given the right to make a concluding defense of the resolution before the house. The hall was in an organized tumult. Stalinist "plants" sought to shout down comrade Cannon's request for a point of information from the chair as to the procedure on the resolution. Without paying the slightest bit of attention to his insistent calls to the chairman, the latter kept pounding the table with his gavel, admonishing all to sit down and remain silent.

The elementary right of a delegation

to speak at least once, not to mention a summary, on a resolution accepted by the chair for a vote by an assembly, was simply and literally ignored. The Stalinists were determined that the Left Opposition should not get the floor again to present its point of view, which had already caused so much embarrassment in their ranks. While comrade Cannon was still on the floor attempting to get a response from the chairman, the latter put the pacifist resolution to a vote. It was overwhelmingly adopted, with negative votes from less than ten percent of the delegates, and the chairman tried to proceed to the next order of business without putting our resolution to a vote, apparently under the impression that this was a party membership meeting. Voices of protest again were raised throughout the hall, and the steering committee decided to put our resolution forward. It received a small minority of the body, a voice vote which included over twenty delegates.

Thus the Conference, which gagged the Opposition speaker and cheered the pacifists, voted overwhelmingly for Barbusse and howled down the words of Lenin!

The gagging of the Opposition on the floor came only after an unsuccessful attempt to unseat the Opposition delegation. When the credentials committee met, Ludwig Landy, not a committee member, pointed to our credentials and observed: "That's from the Trotskyists. Unseat them!" Dryar, a committee member, turned upon him and demanded: "Are you a committee member? If not, we don't take any instructions from you." Nevertheless, the proposal to unseat us was made in the Committee, and were it not for the resistance of Dryar and his promise to the Stalinist members that he would bring the matter to the floor and fight to have us seated, their proposal for exclusion would undoubtedly have been reported. As it was, the report was brought in to "seat all delegates" and before you could say "Jack Robinson" the report was declared accepted and the chairman hurried on to the next order of business.

What they did not succeed in doing with us, they succeeded in doing with the delegate from the Weisbord group who presented his credentials at the door while the conference was in session. Upon his protests, the doors were immediately closed at the rear of the hall, a scuffle took place and he was barred—without any of our delegation inside the hall knowing what had happened until after the conference. In the course of the scuffle, when members of our League had come to the assistance of the excluded comrade who was being attacked by Stalinists, the police were called to "preserve order." They remained therefor at the credentials table near the entrance, supervising the newcomers to see that they conformed with the "requirements" established by the Committee! Their supervision was undoubtedly of great assistance in preserving the level of the conference at the point of unruffled peace so desirable to its organizers.

All doors open to petty bourgeois pacifists! Suppression of the Marxists! Cheers and applause for the liberals, the "honest", the "reliable" friends of Russia, the people who are, at best, weak feeds to lean on and, at worst, treacherous allies! Boos and hisses for the revolutionary Communists! This is the balance-sheet of the party's policy at the New York Conference.

## London in 1915 and New York in 1932

There is a striking analogy with our position contained in what happened at the obscure "London Conference" of February 14, 1915, called by the Allied social patriots and Centrists, to which Lenin's Central Committee sent as its representative, Maximovitch (Litvinov), to present the Bolshevik standpoint on war. His report is included in Lenin's article of March 3, 1915, "On the London Conference". Here is a brief, instructive quotation:

"I take the floor and protest against the official representative of our party not having been invited to the International Socialist Bureau. The chairman, interrupts me and contends that all those 'whose names are known' have been invited. I protest a second time against the failure to report on the actual representatives. Thereupon I refer to our manifesto which expresses our standpoint towards the war and which was sent to the I. S. B. Before we can speak of peace terms, we should establish with what means we shall strive for them and towards that end it must be established if a general revolutionary social democratic basis exists, if we are conferring as chauvinists, pacifists or as social democrats. I read our declaration, but the chairman does not let me conclude and declares that it is not yet made clear (!) if I am a delegate and that they have come together 'not for the purpose of criticizing the various parties' (!) . . . I . . . seek to continue the declaration in order to establish if I may remain. The chairman interrupts me and does not permit me to put 'conditions' to the conference." Etc., etc., in almost stupefying similarity to the New York Conference at which the Bolshevik delegates were also denied the right to present their standpoint in contrast to that of petty bourgeois liberalism.

Lenin's views on the question of war finally managed to make their way through the working class world despite the gavel of a whole race of "chairmen" who "interrupted". Our views, which we learned from Lenin, which we

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