

# Once More on Centrism

Editor's Note—The following article by comrade Trotsky was written in reply to a criticism of his previous article on "Centrism and the Fourth International" (Militant, March 17) which appeared in De Fakkel, organ of the Independent Socialist Party of Holland (O.S.P.). De Fakkel disputed comrade Trotsky's contention that centrism has replaced reformism as the main tendency in the international labor movement. De Fakkel also defended the adherence of the O.S.P. to the London-Amsterdam Bureau and its relations with the Norwegian Labor Party (N.A.P.).

## Trotsky Answers the Criticism of Dutch O.S.P. Paper

ponent part. Precisely because they feel their principled weakness and their inability to give the working class a clear answer they must divert the attention of workers from centrism sickness to reformist danger. In this they resemble old liberalism which always scared the workers with reaction in order to hold them back from the fight against liberalism itself. Therefore, for instance, the declarations of the O.S.P. and S.A.P. to the Youth conference contain nothing or almost nothing on centrism. However, it is well known that precisely those parties that did not permit themselves in the past to be held back from a merciless fight against liberal vacillations, always proved to be the bravest fighters against reaction. The same holds true now. Those revolutionists will fight reformism best who are absolutely independent of centrism and view it critically and intrinsically.

### The London-Amsterdam Bureau

The London-Amsterdam Bureau is unable to fight against reformism since it is a mutual aid society for the vacillating and hesitant. De Fakkel says: "The aim of the Bureau is to win for the Fourth International as many adherents as possible". The O.S.P. could have joined the Second International with the same justification. That we must fight for the Fourth International wherever possible is clear. This task, however, means an irreconcilable struggle against the treacherous policy of Trammuel and certainly not a brotherhood in

arms with him. That they "criticize" Trammuel meanwhile makes matters worse, since he is criticized only to the extent that the working agreement with him remains unbroken, that is, apparent criticism is made which only serves as a cover for the out and out reactionary bloc. The gallant Shakespearean actor who was supposed to play the lion at the court feared to frighten the beautiful ladies and therefore roared as softly, as tenderly as a dove. Our highly respectable left centrists become very gruff to Bolshevik "sectarians"; to the Trammuels they coo like doves.

### Old Arguments of the Stalinists

De Fakkel acknowledges our characterization of the Comintern as that of bureaucratic centrism. This, however, is only lip service, since the whole working alliance with the Amsterdam Bureau is nothing else but a willed, sickly edition of the infamous Anglo-Russian Committee. There also were found British "lefts" of the type of Finn Moe who were used as bait by the real leaders. In defending their brotherhood with Trammuel De Fakkel, as well as the Neue Front, repeats all the old arguments of Stalin and Bukharin ("Masses", "Masses", and again "Masses") but in a worse form if anything.

Thus, I cannot recognize the validity of a single argument which De Fakkel brings against my article, by which, however, I do not want to say that there are no flaws in the article. Thus, for instance, one could point out correctly that the article does not reveal sufficiently the practical and organizational

\* Besides its left Finn Moe who face the O.S.P. and the S.A.P. Trammuel has also his right Finn Moe whose face is turned towards the King's palace.

"De Fakkel" on Centrism  
De Fakkel's criticism of my article (Centrism and the Fourth International) is highly characteristic of the make up of the leadership of the O.S.P. as well as of left centrism in general. It therefore deserves to be analyzed.

Is it correct that the main tendency of the working class movement of the world consists in the transformation of reformism into centrism? De Fakkel disputes it. It believes that everywhere is to be observed simultaneously the striving to orient the movement towards the right. It points thereby to the French Neo-Socialists, the Belgian Workers' Party, the English Labor Party and the Dutch Social Democracy. The facts indicated by De Fakkel only confirm—when one knows how to interpret them in Marxian fashion—my assertion.

Why were the Neo-Socialists ejected from the old party? Because it was clothing itself with centrism. The right wing changes into a conservative, nationalistic clique that has nothing more to do with the working class movement. The Belgian example is also a case in point. De Fakkel reminds us of Vandervelde's recent avowal of allegiance to the King. But there is nothing new in this. The plan of de Man is new. In substance as well as by its author's admission the plan is but an attempt to obliterate the line of demarcation between reform and revolution. In this precisely consists the essence of centrism.

### Centrism and Centrism

Monarchistic servility indicates only that we must distinguish between centrism and centrism. There are honest centrists mood of the masses and there are consciously lying centrist designs of old parliamentary cheats of the masses. But such designs have become necessary precisely because of the shift of the party base to the left. In essence the matter stands no differently also with the English Labor Party although in tempo and in phenomenal form it is quite different. The going over of the MacDonald clique to the reaction, on the one hand, the expulsion of the I.L.P. from the Labor Party on the other, are two very significant symptoms of the above mentioned process.

In the coming period we will inevitably observe a new development of centrist currents in the Labor Party. That the German S.P. leadership with Wels, as well as the leaders of Austro-Marxism, now clothe their phillistine prejudices in the language of "revolution", is widely known. In countries with a backward political development the social-democratic apparatus can afford, in the face of threatening dangers—the growth of Fascism and simultaneously of internal centrist opposition—the attempt to hold its positions by clinging to the right, to the state, and by repression against the left, against its own opposition. The formation of the O.S.P. in Holland was the first step in the open decomposition of the old Dutch social democracy. The development will proceed in this direction.

### Stages of Development

As a matter of practical policy in every country it is naturally very important not only to keep track of the general tendency of development but also of the stages through which it passes. For Holland as well as for every other country it is of importance, however, to recognize in time the centrist disguise of former reformism so that reformism itself be combatted not by centrist but by Marxian methods.

Viewed historically reformism has lost completely its social basis. Without reforms there is no reformism, without prosperous capitalism, no reforms. The right reformist wing becomes anti-reformist in the sense that it helps the bourgeoisie directly or indirectly to smash the old conquests of the working class. It is false to consider the Neo-Socialists as a working class party. The split did not weaken the old French Socialist party, it strengthened it since, after the cleansing, the party enjoys greater confidence on the part of the workers. But it must adapt itself to this confidence, and the form of this adaptation is called centrism.

### Left Centrist Groupings

Left centrist groupings such as the O.S.P. are not conscious of this process of which they form a com-

monopoly of centrism. The centrists like to speak of illegality, of conspirative, underground methods. As a rule, however, they do not take their own words seriously. They like to poke fun at bourgeois democracy; in practice however, they always show naive trust in it. For instance, when they call together an international conference it is handled as though it were a matter of a picnic; and the result is a catastrophe with a toll of heavy human sacrifices. If the matter should be looked into a little closer it will invariably be found that such organizational slovenliness is connected with the ideological looseness of centrism. Woe to those who cannot learn from experience!

### From Marxist Quality to Mass Quantity

It is true that the organizational base for the Fourth International is as yet very narrow. In 1914, however, the basis for the Third International was even narrower. The work of building up did not consist, however, of grovelling before opportunist organizations of the type of the N.A.P., but on the contrary, of struggling for the liberation of the workers from the influence of such organizations. The real initiators of the Fourth International begin with Marxist quality to turn it afterwards into mass quantity. The small but well hardened and sharply ground ax splits, hews and shapes heavy beams. We should begin with an ax of steel. Even here the means of production is decisive.

With regard to the O.S.P., as in all other cases, we draw a distinction between the centrism of the workers, which is only a transition stage for them, and the professional centrism of many leaders among whom there are also incurables. That we will meet with the majority of the O.S.P. workers on the road to the Fourth International—of this we are quite certain.

—L. TROTSKY.

March 23, 1934

So now a condition exists where there is no great gap between young and old workers; a gap which must be bridged by youth fractions and economic organizations. Virtually the same difference exists between men and women as between young and old. Why not women's shop committees and trade union fractions?

The logic of a position that supports youth trade union fractions is to go over to the support of the idea of youth trade union sections and youth trade unions. And this idea is not as far fetched as it sounds. It has its precedent. The Young Communist International, which promoted the idea of trade union youth fractions, had to deal with the logical results of its policy. The League members demanded youth sections in the trade unions. In certain countries where Red trade unions existed, such youth sections were born. These new-born sections in turn began to work for youth trade unions. The Y. C. I. realized the danger, and in the resolution on economic trade-union work adopted at its Fourth Congress, condemned the idea of youth trade unions and trade union sections.

—BERNARD M. LANDAU.

# The Tasks of the National Youth Committee

The entire development of our organization from its very inception, has been an abnormal one, not only by virtue of its political character, but even from the point of view of the elements composing the movement.

Coming from an organization (the Y. C. L.) isolated from the masses of American young workers, the offspring necessarily set about the task of converting the father to the cause of the Left Opposition (Marxism). For two or more years we strove in this way. For two or more years we concerned ourselves, and inevitably so, with faction activity with regard to the Y. C. L., and with the education of our membership in the spirit of orthodox Marxism.

When the vicissitudes of time demanded a change of character of our organization, we looked about and beheld a ghastly sight.

### Sectarian Organization

Not only was the organization itself a sectarian one, devoid of all contact with the masses of young workers, but its membership, through its long isolation in a sectarian Y. C. L. and a more sectarian S. Y. C., had lost all of its connections with the American young workers; had lost the pulse beat, the temper and the mood of the young workers. And more, our comrades had forgotten how to work among the proletarian youth. Thus matters stand today. We are sectarian—our members have forgotten the elementary laws of work among the masses of youth—we have, so to speak, "developed" "above" the American working youth.

We have given our membership a good education, oft-times, I believe, "too good". We have introduced our comrades to fields of polemics in which only trained Marxists had heretofore dared to enter: we have offered our members good company to satiate their literary and musical appetites: all of which is good—excellent, were it not so. Every radical and "intellectual" youth has learned to look up to us—whilst our members have learned to look down upon every individual who cannot create six metaphors and eight similes in every paragraph of his writing. That is what we mean when we speak of

# Who Lost the National Income?

In 1929 the national income was \$1 billion dollars; in 1930 it was \$5 billion; in 1931—\$3 billion; in 1932—\$1 billion. Who lost the income?

Labor income, which includes both "salaries" and wages, decreased 40% in the three years. Incomes from real estate stood at \$1.4; Dividends at 97.2 and interest at 102.4.

Wages in 1931  
In 1931 wages fell to 61 and income from real estate to 65. Hooverville cities, two and three families of workers moving together, account for this decline of income of the real estate sharks. The wages of the workers have been driven down more than one third. "Salaries" in 1931 find the same level as wages found in 1930, recorded at \$3. Dividends drop to 72 and income to farmers to 76. Interest remains at 99, having suffered very little.

In 1932 wages went to a new low level—37%. "Salaries" fell to 50, dividends to 43, farmers 59. Interest held its own at 98.

While bourgeois economists separate dividends, interests and salaries and try to make us believe that they represent three different "classes" of income it is done only for the purpose of confusion and to throw dust in our eyes. "Salaries" are in many cases in reality only

## An Analysis of Facts and Figures Regarding Wages and Dividends

the amount which the boss decides he is going to pay himself for being the boss. While rent, interest and dividends are three different things and are derived differently, they are, nevertheless, the three categories into which the surplus value extracted from the hides of the workers is divided. In this light it would be well to reexamine the figures given above and see what they mean.

### Dividing the National Income

It is in fact necessary to divide the national income into two classes belonging to it—the amount that went to the bourgeois and petty bourgeois class, constituting about 32% of the people, and the amount that went to the workers comprising the remaining 68%.

Thus we find that while wages decreased in 1930 to 83% of the 1929 level the share of the boodle which went to the bosses decreased to only 95.5%. In other words the workers suffered a 17% loss while the bosses suffered only a 4.5% decrease. In 1931 the wages of the workers were driven down to 61% of the 1929 level. Not so the bosses. Their average income stands at approximately 80% of the 1929 figure. But in 1932 while the wages of the workers dropped to the starvation level of 39% of 1929 the average income for the boss class still remains relatively high at 61%.

It can safely be said that the income for the exploiting classes as a whole remained at 61% of what it was in 1929. Yes the bourgeois economist will admit and immediately try to say that the workers income level has sunk to 39%. But this is a falsehood as he no doubt knows. When we consider that at the end of 1932 at least one-third of the workers are unemployed, and that about one half of these were already out of a job in 1929 then it can be seen that the income level of the class as a whole has sunk to 32%. This is the unpalatable truth which even such "liberals" as Walter Lippmann prefer not to see.

### Bosses' Income Stood Up

For the three years 1930-31-32 the income of the boss class averages approximately 80% of the 1929 level. On the same basis it could be argued that the workers for the same three years averaged 61% of their 1929 income. However, if we accept that 25% will represent the average unemployment during this period (and it is, all in all, a conservative estimate) then the average wages of the working class as a whole has sunk to 45% of what it was in 1929. But these gentlemen will howl, this loss represents not a "real" loss but merely a monetary loss. The argument is that the real average wages of the workers has not sunk 39% (their figures); in reality

once discussion, reflects also the failure to comprehend the difference in youth age from the physical point of view as distinguished from the intellectual. A youth in the revolutionary movement remains a youth notwithstanding his age only to the degree that he is inexperienced intellectually. When once he advances to the stage where he can comprehend problems from a Marxian point of view, his period as a youth is "terminated" and he is ready for the adult movement. (I regret that I cannot elucidate.)

### Necessary Steps

The steps necessary to accomplish our tasks are two fold:—  
1. Training our members to act as young workers; training them to interest themselves in the problems of the young workers; training them to work with and among the young workers. That is the process of the Americanization of our organization.  
2. Making contact with the masses of American youth.

The success of all of our work, economic as well as anti-militarist (the resolution had not a word to say about anti-militarist work); depends largely upon our ability to make contact with the masses of youth. This can be realized only by advancing the slogan "Into the opponent mass youth organizations." This is the single slogan that can fill the gap of our transition period. Opponent work departments must be established. Comrades must be sent into mass youth organizations where they will be able to contact young workers, and where their knowledge can be utilized in winning over young workers to our point of view.

It is not easy to enter large factories or to contact young workers from the outside of the factory; it is easy to enter mass organizations where youths working in large factories gather. Draw them into our organization and you have a real base for collaboration with the adult organization in the economic field and the execution of the duties of a youth organization in every other field. ...—NATHAN GOULD.

55%). This is, of course, true and no doubt Mr. Lippmann is correct when he says that the 57 billion loss for the years 1930-31-32 was, in terms of prices, only 35 billion. However, it must be recorded for their sake that the two staple commodities for which the worker spends a large part of his wages, bread and milk, bear about the same price tag in 1932 as they did in 1929.

### Commodity Prices

It is, however, true that the commodity prices by 1932 had found low levels which they had not struck for years. In terms of commodity prices it would be hard to say to what point the real wages of the workers had been depressed, since we have not on hand any figures on 1929 commodity prices. If by 1932 the monetary wages of the workers had fallen to 61% it would be safe to say that the cut in real wages amounts to about 35 to 40% at the end of the third year.

It was on the basis of the 1932 dollar and its commodity purchasing power that the codes of the NRA were based. The NRA was supposed to do three things. First, increase the purchasing power of the workers by increasing wages. How this was accomplished may be read in the history of one of the biggest strike waves which the American boss class has ever faced. Secondly, it was supposed to increase production as a result of the increase in purchasing power. It has also failed to do this, due to the third thing the NRA was supposed to do and actually has done—increase prices of commodities. Since the price increase has exceeded the wage increase (wherever such wage increase has been obtained) the result is that the worker has accepted another wage cut. And, of course, we are speaking in terms of real wages which the bourgeois economist over emphasizes when he is apologizing for the Hoover regime, and which he doesn't like to mention at all when defending the Roosevelt "New Deal".

### The 59 Cent Dollar

But the end is not yet here. The 59 cent dollar, they tell you glibly, was designed primarily to force our dollars into foreign markets where the pound and the franc could not go, i.e., to increase our exports. This is true and leads to what the bourgeois economists are wisely silent on—the next imperialist world war for the purpose of repartitioning the world market. But the American worker, too, will feel the effects of the 59 cent dollar and when he begins to draw his pay in 59 cent dollars he will speedily realize that what he most of all needs is a substantial wage increase to offset the devastating wage-cut of the devaluated dollar. And he will find the NRA and its complicated legal machinery in his way.

### Wages and Interest

There are two significant things brought out by the statistics quoted in the previous paragraphs which we will call to your attention. First, that the actual wages of the employed workers dropped to 39% of the 1929 level, and that if you take the class as a whole, wages dropped to about 32%. But the bosses will say, we "feed" the unemployed. Not so. Even the miserable relief wages given out to the unemployed was made up in large part out of the pay envelopes of the workers already receiving starvation wages.

The second thing we would call to your attention is the high income level held by interest during the worst year of the depression. It never sunk below 95. The one % of the people who own 33% of the nation's wealth, the handful of banks dominated and controlled by the Rockefeller, Morgans, and Mellons, who in turn dominate through finance and credit the nation's industry—they must have their pound of flesh. The income of the 1% as expressed in interest, sunk less than 5%.

—G. ROBERTS.

## Dutch Aid Hitler

That the Dutch Government is favorably inclined toward the Nazis or at least underestimating the extent of poisonous Hitler propaganda in Holland, is amply proven by an investigation of Nazi activities by T. I. S. correspondents.

Official rules forbidding political activities of foreign residents in Holland are enforced only against the German emigres, while the activities of the Nazis and their sympathizers are benevolently overlooked. The incident at Laren, the recent prison sentence against the German emigrant writer Heinz Liepmann for alleged insults to Hindenburg, and many other instances are cases to the point. Nazis, on the other hand, are free to indulge in systematic propaganda. Recently German Nazis were permitted to cross the border in military formations and visit the Dutch border town Toetnechen. Nazi meetings and street parades were held under the protection and escort of the Dutch police.