

ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE AGAIN

(Concluded in this issue)
By KARANDASH

Bittleman Takes the Swing this Time in Pamphlet "Going Left"

One year after Hitler's assumption of power in Germany, the gangs of reaction raised their razors and guns in Paris on February 6, 1934 against the "corrupt" Daladier government. On this day, l'Humanite, the central organ of the French Communist Party, appealed for a demonstration in the very midst of the reactionary gangs, and with practically the self-same slogans, against the "corrupt" and "Fascist" Daladier. This was a repetition on a minor scale of the Red Referendum in Germany, where the Stalinists appealed to the workers to cast their votes against the Socialist (social-fascist) government of Braun and Severing together with the Nazis. In France the Stalinists did not mix their votes with the Fascists, instead they staged a demonstration which could not be distinguished from that of the Fascists, thus sowing confusion among the workers.

On February 7 and 8 the French working class was treated to the spectacle of a Socialist Party proposing a united front to the C.P., and the latter refusing the proposal. L'Humanite replied to the S.P. in substance as follows: If you want to struggle against fascism, you should apply to the Amsterdam-Pleyel Committee whose particular speciality this is. A few months later the "line" was changed.

That is why in 1936, Bittleman has to write, "It is strange that the Left elements . . . should have allowed this Old Guard and Trotskyite slander to creep into the draft program" (p. 20).

Bittleman devotes fully two-fifths of his pamphlet to a "criticism" of the draft program on the question of Fascism and War. On these central questions the Left Socialists have moved closest to the revolutionary Marxist position. On the other hand, the degeneration and betrayal of the Third International stand out most sharply precisely in the struggle against Fascism and War. The Stalinist record and policy in this sphere are only too clear. It is hardly surprising therefore that the Stalinists should concentrate their efforts upon trying to check any further clarification or evolution of the Socialists on these burning questions of our epoch.

The draft expresses the fundamental thesis of the Marxist position on war: only the overthrow of capitalism can put an end to war. Unable to criticize the Left Social-

ists for what they say, Bittleman attacks them for what they allegedly fail to say. According to Bittleman, they are guilty of failing to mention the central task of the anti-war struggle. A serious charge, indeed!

In the school of Marx and Lenin we have been taught that history has put the following alternative to the advanced capitalist countries: Either socialism—or a new series of imperialist wars. And that therefore the central task of the struggle against war is the proletarian revolution, the only means of overthrowing the bourgeoisie.

An American Austro-Marxist

But Bittleman wants to instill in the minds of the Left Socialists the idea that "the central task in the anti-war struggle today is the struggle for peace" (p. 27). Offering the foreign policy of Stalin-Litvinoff in place of revolutionary Marxism, Bittleman insists that: "The Communists propose to fight against imperialist war under the central slogan of the struggle for peace" (p. 28). This is the central slogan not of Marxism but of Austro-Marxism. Bittleman, whether he knows or not, is a true disciple of Max Adler.

Back in 1915, Max Adler wrote a pamphlet *Prinzip oder Romantik* (also in criticism of "sectarians") in which he advanced the idea that socialism after the war must make peace its central slogan, otherwise socialism will cease to exist. Zinoviev, at that time closely collaborating with Lenin, replied to Adler as follows:

Zinoviev on Adler and Bittleman

"For those Socialists who see no other perspectives—the revolutionary perspective of the transformation of the imperialist wars into civil wars—for them there is really no other way out. . . . Die Friedensidee zum Mittelpunkt." "The idea of peace must be made our central slogan!" . . . This is what the events have taught them. . . . "Not a Friedensidee, but the Buergerkriegsidee, one feels like shouting to these great utopians who are running around with such a petty utopia. Not the idea of peace—but the idea of civil war, citizen Adler! That is what must become the central point of our program. . . . We say to you: either socialism will become the organizer of civil war

or it will cease to exist (Against the Stream, pp. 145-146 Russian edition. Emphasis in original).

One need change only a few names, places, and incidental remarks to have practically everything that Lenin and the Bolsheviks wrote on this subject apply directly to citizen Bittleman, and his associates. The Marxists never approached the question of peace in the abstract. Writing in the darkest days of the war (at a time when the workers were certainly "vitaly interested in the maintenance of peace," to use Bittleman's terminology), Lenin and Zinoviev kept stressing that peace under capitalism "today" as well as tomorrow can only mean an interval between two imperialist wars. Peace under capitalism is an imperialist peace. Anyone who is for peace under capitalism is in reality for peace with the bourgeoisie. Those who today cry, Long live imperialist peace, will tomorrow cry, Long live imperialist war! This is the position of revolutionary Marxism.

It was Karl Kautsky who insisted that the International was 'in the nature of things an instrument of peace. . . . The struggle for peace is the international organization of the working class.' This is the position of the social-patriots whom Lenin and the Bolsheviks attacked.

From the instrument of the world proletarian revolution, the Third International has been transformed by Stalin into an "instrument for peace," that is, of betrayal.

New Converts for the League

Every day, almost every hour, brings added proof of the Stalinist treachery, over which the Stalinists unflinchingly throw the usurped banner of the October revolution. In his pamphlet, Bittleman patronizingly compliments the Socialists for breaking with the "traditional Socialist Party attitude on the League of Nations." He forebears to mention that he and his colleagues have now taken over this "traditional" attitude. Thus, in the June 5 issue of the Daily Worker, Gabriel Peri, while on the subject of the "Fight for the Defense of Peace" has the following to say:

"It seems to us that France must now declare: It is not the League of Nations that was defeated but the inadequacies and shortcomings

of the League. It is not that sanctions were defeated, but their sabotage and betrayal." This is printed in bold type, as the "revolutionary" position on the League of Nations!

In the Camp of Revisionism

In every sphere the Stalinists have taken over the views of the revisionists of Marxism, their precursors in betrayal. As is well known, Bernstein and his associates proceeded by subtly altering the Marxist theory of the State. How do the Stalinists stand with regard to this mainspring of revisionism? The Stalinist theory of the state is a rehash of the views of revisionists, not to be distinguished from them, except in ignorance and clumsiness.

The essence of the revisionist theory of the state does not lie in the denial that the state is an instrument of class rule but in the assertion that there are stages in the evolution of the state. At a certain stage the state can lose its specific class character, cease to serve as the instrument of class oppression, and therefore can be utilized to advance the interests of other classes. The revisionists never denied that the state was an instrument of class oppression, or even that the democratic state could be utilized by the bourgeoisie for its rule. But, said they, once the state has evolved to a democracy, then it has reached that stage when a transition is possible, when the state need no longer serve as the instrument of bourgeois rule.

The machinery of the state can be taken over by the majority of the people, and legislation introduced to inaugurate a different social system.

The Capitalist Transition

The Stalinists do not deny that the democratic state is an instrument of bourgeois rule either. But, they say, under certain conditions (as laid down by Dimitroff) it is possible to have extraordinary governments which can serve not the interests of the bourgeoisie, but those of its class enemies. Such a "transitional" government on coming into power would carry through "a number of fundamental revolutionary measures (control of production and of the banks, disbandment of the police and its replacement by an armed workers' militia) . . . It would so weaken the bourgeoisie and so strengthen the working class and its allies, that the working class would become ready to make the proletarian revolution" (p. 8).

This remarkable government, according to Bittleman, would not be the government that is set up by the proletarian revolution, but a different kind of a "workers' and farmers' government"—the kind which is set up within the framework of capitalism, a government of "the united and people's front against fascism and war . . . a united front government, a people's front government, a workers' and farmers' government." Whose class interests would such a "workers' and farmers' government" serve? Certainly not those of the bourgeoisie. How else could it introduce "a number of fundamental revolutionary measures, and weaken" the bourgeoisie while "strengthening" the working class and its allies!

At a time when the bourgeoisie is no longer able to maintain a stable parliamentary regime and must resort to Fascism because the ruling class is no longer able to provide the most miserly concessions to the oppressed classes in society, the Stalinists propose to set up under capitalism a government that would pass fundamental revolutionary measures, etc. . . .

What have we here if not the revisionist myth that the machinery of bourgeois oppression can be utilized by the working class for its emancipation?

Left Is Anti-Stalinist

The only difference between the above formulation of Bittleman and the classic formulation of the revisionists is that Bernstein would have insisted that such a government could proceed to "build a socialist society" instead of to "make a proletarian revolution." But Bernstein could afford to be much more logical and consistent. He did labor under the necessity of palming off his revisionist garbage as "revolutionary Marxism."

Bittleman and the other finkies of Stalin must resort to their shabby "revolutionary" subterfuges to be able to continue using the prestige and the traditions of the October revolution in order to bulldoze workers away from the revolutionary traditions and policies of the October revolution. To go left is in the first instance to go away from Stalinism. To be charged with being a counter-revolutionist by a Stalinist is a well nigh infallible proof that one is learning to differentiate between the revolutionary program of Marx and Lenin and the revisionism of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

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The Anti-Trotsky Cliques Fold Up

The disintegration which has been taking place within the various sectarian groups, which have made a common platform of fighting "Trotskyism," had several open manifestations during the past week. In addition to open splits, accompanied by the most disgraceful episodes, information is made public of the frightful decomposition and internal stagnation of these bankrupt cliques. The rank and file workers who were misled into these blind alleys on an ultra-"revolutionary" program are drawing a balance of their unfortunate experiences and returning to our ranks. This process is especially noticeable among the youth.

A statement made public last week by a majority of the clique of B. J. Field (who was expelled from the Communist League for treachery during the Hotel strike), operating under the pretentious title of "The League for a Revolutionary Workers Party," informs of a split in the organization and of an attempt by Field to impose "unity" by means of physical force. This method of persuasion was resorted to after representatives of the majority, F. L. Demby and S. Stanley, had submitted a statement to the "National Committee" declaring the organization to be "bankrupt" and announcing their intention to sever all relations with it. Thereupon, according to the statement, "the door was locked" and "Stanley and Demby were attacked, knocked to the floor and beaten about the head." Field participated in the attack, his group outnumbering the other members at the time. Eight out of the twelve members of the group support the position of Demby and Stanley in severing relations with Field.

Simultaneously with the disgraceful finale of the Field adventure came the announcement of secessions from the Oehler group, following upon previous expulsions and withdrawals. A total of ten comrades announced their repudiation of the platform of the Oehler group and their intention to follow the lead of the Workers Party in joining the Socialist Party. Five other members had previously left the Oehler group and returned to the W.P. Several others who have been expelled remain indecisive as to their next steps.

Meantime the world-shaking announcement is made by the "Revolutionary Workers League" (Oehler group) that the "disintegration of the entire group (of Field) makes it impossible to continue negotiations with the League for a Revolutionary Workers Party (Field group), looking toward a fusion with it." So that's off. But that is not all. The Oehlerites are very thoroughgoing people and when they start to break off negotiations they believe in doing a complete job. The same statement which pronounces the doom of the Field group also announces suspension of the momentous negotiations with the "Italian Left Fraction of Communism" in order to give the three members of the latter organization an opportunity "to conclude a discussion in their ranks in the U. S. and internationally over the class character of the Soviet Union." It is to be inferred that if and when this "small point" is cleared up one way or another the negotiations will either be resumed or finally broken off. We shall see what we shall see.

Diligent inquiry by our reporter failed to uncover any tangible information about the present status and whereabouts, if any, of the "Communist League of Struggle" (Albert Weisbord). The cafeterias are thick with rumors that Weisbord has departed for Chicago, that he has returned, that the bus broke down on the way there or back, that he has retired into seclusion in order to write a book about his life and labors, etc. Up to the moment of going to press our reporter was unable to locate any authorized spokesmen who could deny or confirm any or all of these rumors. Sic transit gloria mundi.

T. J. O'Flaherty Dead

The New Militant learns with great sorrow of the sudden death in Ireland of comrade T. J. O'Flaherty, an adherent of "Trotskyism" from the first days of the formation of the Left Opposition in the United States and a firm supporter to his dying day of the movement for the Fourth International. On his death-bed all his thoughts and interests were with his comrades in the United States and to the last he had hopes to recover his health and to return to the States to function actively in the movement. He gave full support to the Workers Party of America upon its formation and viewed it as the first step in the process of unification of the genuine revolutionary elements who based themselves on the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky.

His sister, Anna Johnson, in a letter to comrade Martin Abern, writes from the Aran Isles, Ireland:

Letter from His Sister

"You will be surprised to hear that Tom has passed away. He died on May 19 from heart trouble. He came back here on January 15 after 18 months between Dublin and England. He was ill when he got back and got worse every day. You know he always suffered from heart trouble.

"It is as very pitiful to see him suffer and he wanted so to get well. He lived those last months in New York and Chicago and was continually with you. He talked to all the other members of the Party and tried to persuade me in the morning that he actually was there. You see, I had to be continually with him night and day for the last five weeks. He was so nervous and was always fainting.

"It is now that his second book, 'Cliffmen of the West' (a book on the agrarian northwest in the U.S.) is being advertised. And two weeks ago the publishers wrote for permission to sell the language rights on a 50-50 basis.

"Tom received papers regularly from the U. S. but lately was unable to read them and was too weak to have them read to him. His sister Della spared nothing on him; but it was no use; he was already far too ill when he returned home. He was 47 years of age.

Founder of Communist Movement

Comrade O'Flaherty was a revolutionist of many years standing. He participated in the Irish movement prior to coming to the United States in 1912, immediately joining the Socialist Party in Boston. He remained in the S.P. till the split in 1919 when he joined with the Left Wing and was one of the founders of the Communist movement in America, and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party for many years. He was active during these many years particularly in the field of journalism, being one of the leading and popular writers in the revolutionary press. He was the first editor of the weekly, "Voice of Labor" in Chicago, official organ of the Communist Party. He was on the staff of The Worker and later on the Daily Worker, official organs of the Communist Party. He conducted, too, a special column in the Daily Worker under the caption, "As We See It."

Comrade O'Flaherty was one of the band of Communists under indictment in the famous Bridgeman, Mich. case. He participated in that renowned underground C.P. convention as well as other convention gatherings of the revolutionary movement. He participated in the work of the International Labor Defense, and was a delegate to the International Red Aid Congress (Labor Defense) in Moscow.

Expelled as Left Oppositionist

When the Left Opposition was

formed in November, 1928, upon the expulsion of three members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Cannon, Shachtman and Abern) for support of the position of the Russian Opposition, comrade O'Flaherty was one of the first to announce his unqualified support to the Left Opposition and to join it. He became a member of the Communist League of America and remained a firm supporter of the Fourth International movement led by L. D. Trotsky.

The December 15, 1928 issue of The Militant, organ of the Communist League (Opposition), announced comrade O'Flaherty's adherence to the cause of the Bolshevik-Leninists as follows:

"T. J. O'Flaherty, the most popular Communist propagandist in America and the writer of the famous Daily Worker column 'As We See It' and a revolutionist of many years standing, has issued a statement setting forth his unconditional support of the Platform of the Russian Opposition and his solidarity with all comrades expelled for these views:

"After studying new material on the question of the Trotsky line in the C.P.S.U. and the Comintern," said comrade O'Flaherty in his statement, "I have come to the conclusion that the line of the Russian Opposition led by comrade Trotsky is the correct Leninist line and therefore I associate myself with the position taken by comrade Cannon and his associates in the Workers (Communist) Party of America. They were unjustly expelled for attempting to explain to the membership of the Party the political line really advocated by Trotsky in the C.P.S.U. and the Comintern." Comrade O'Flaherty's statement then went on to set forth his agreement with the position of the Russian Opposition on the various issues (Anglo-Russian Committee, Chinese Revolution, etc.).

The Communist Party forthwith expelled him.

Wrote for The Militant

Comrade O'Flaherty wrote for the "Militant" from time to time and participated in other activities. Interested in the agrarian problems, he proceeded to function for some years in the Northwest and edited the farmers' publication, the Producer's News (Plentywood, Mont.). At the same time he was engaged in literary efforts. He was ill during all these years, particularly with his heart, for which he was taking treatment for many years. A little over two years ago he decided to pay a visit to his native home, on the wild spot, the Aran Isles, on which the famous film, Man of Aran, was made during the time. He lived the hard life that all must live on this barren place. During this time, he wrote and had published his first book, "Aranmen All," based on life on the Isles. After a time, he left the Aran Isles and lived and labored in Dublin, London and other places in Great Britain, contributing articles from time to time to the labor press. He returned to the Aran Isles upon the completion of his second book, "Cliffmen of the West" where his persisting illness soon thereafter brought the peace of death to him.

Comrade O'Flaherty in a recent letter to comrades in New York expressed the hope and belief that he would soon return to the United States, health greatly improved and be able to continue his revolutionary activity more fully. He remained a revolutionist, a Bolshevik, to the end, and all his friends and comrades, who are legion, are glad to honor the memory of a revolutionary stalwart.

Stalinists Hedge on Committees; Explain Non-Revolutionary Aims

From Revolution (Paris)

On the morning after the elections, the "communists" declared that they were going to devote themselves to the organization of Rank and File Committees of the People's Front.

Thorez wrote in l'Humanite, May 10:

"We will insist on the democratic election of Committees of the People's Front in the country, city and village."

Replying to questions asked by reporters, Duclos stated:

"That is why our friend Thorez emphasized our action for the democratic election of Committees of the People's Front throughout the country. Thus we give proof that we are a party which bases itself on the people."

A propaganda pamphlet of the C.P., which we have already cited, formally states:

"The C. P. recommends Committees of the People's Front, democratically elected in the entire country, in the neighborhoods and in the factories, and embracing not only members of organizations but the unorganized masses as well."

The Radicals in a Panic

It is therefore clear that the C.P. adopted a demand which we have not ceased to defend: practical organization, from below, of People's Committees, democratically elected.

To that Vaillant-Couturier added that the Communists would constitute as well a "ministry of the masses."

That was enough for the entire Right and Radical Socialist press to set up a howl about the dictatorship of the proletariat, Soviets, etc.! Indeed, these gentlemen had the right slant!

In face of the impotence of Parliament, the People's Committees will appear as the only force capable of assuring the power of the working masses. The mass committees will set themselves against the arbitrary, dictatorial and police rule of the bourgeoisie state.

Intransigent and Jour published inflated articles against the proposed Committees. The bourgeoisie has learned something since 1917.

But what was remarkable was that immediately all the famous "Jacobins" of the Daladier stripe began to howl against the "dictatorship of the clubs"! All these capitalist democrats, who had just lost 500,000 votes in the election,

in effect revealed themselves as the hypocritical enemies of the people who do not fear anything as much as contact with the workers.

Front, May 16, organ of the party of Deat and Paul Boncour, warned its readers:

"The latest discovery of the C.P. consists in the creation of Committees in the cities and neighborhoods to which the member parties of the People's Front are invited to participate. . . . Without anticipating the decisions our central bodies will not fall to immediately adopt on this subject, we recommend the greatest circumspection to the secretaries of the groups. There will be enough difficulties for the republican government not to have to risk the creation of new ones by mass and street action which will get out of its control.

Bergery's paper, Fleche, makes similar comments. Mr. Bergery prefers the salons to the workers' meetings:

"If such a move can justify a frenzied campaign on the part of the trusts, it is certainly one which permits 'Temps' and other Right papers to declare that the Sovietization of France is being organized."

Izard, deputy from Briey, undoubtedly thinks that the workers who elected him will defeat De Wendel with newspaper articles.

Stalinists Retreat Under Fire

Confronted with these attacks, the Stalinists beat a quick retreat.

In l'Humanite, May 15, Vaillant-Couturier wrote:

"The point in question on the People's Front Committees is not of substituting itself for the parties, nor of substituting itself for the regular government bodies. The only question for them—ardent defenders of democracy—is to actively second a government which is about to take office—supplanting a ministry which in the last week has permitted the flight of three billions of gold—in face of very heavy tasks and for which the action of the masses should be of great assistance."

In effect, Herriot, Daladier and Co. immediately made known that they would have no part of it, just as they attacked the workers after the events of Brest and Toulon, as they will always attack every time real action is taken against the privileges of the bourgeoisie.

Thorez declared in turn (l'Humanite, May 19):

"We want to bring about the collaboration of the people with parliament and the government, as the program of the People's Organization stipulates. The Committees of the People's Front must be developed, strengthened, improved."

Thorez offered the following explanations in his speech at Grange-aux-Belles:

" . . . This firm desire to guarantee the support of the masses through the medium of the People's Front Committees has already been exploited by the reactionary press which is trying to divide us. What is involved, however, is to improve what already exists. . . .

"The bourgeois press pretends that this will be an intolerable control over parliamentary and governmental activity. . . . We, communists, think that only on the parliamentary and governmental plane one can obtain what the masses want and supported by their activity in the entire country.

"They pretend that such committees are revolutionary clubs, Soviets! The bourgeoisie is very well aware that this is not true, but it is faithful to its time-worn tactic: spread panic. . . .

Since then the C.P. has shelved the mass Committees. But that was not enough for Messieurs the Radicals.

The pro-fascist Dominique was still writing in Republique, May 10:

"If Mr. Vaillant-Couturier constitutes his Ministry of the Masses, neither parliament nor the cabinet will be free. And we want it to be."

In other words, the bourgeoisie will be less free to carry through its maneuvers against the working class, will be less free to horse-trade, to plot, to lie, to deceive in parliament. And that is what these gentlemen do not want!

But here also promises are made. We call upon the workers to put them into practice.

Let us begin the practical organization of the committees! Let us denounce the capitalists to the Radical blackmailers! The cardinal task of the hour is: 1) democratic election of the mass committees and 2) put the People's Front Government on the spot to execute its promises.

Do You Want to Know

- the sources of the social patriotism of the Third International
- the significance of the theory of "Socialism in one country"
- the relation of this theory to the working class movement in Russia, Germany, China, England and elsewhere
- the place of the Soviet Union in the world revolutionary movement
- the meaning of the so-called "Trotsky-Stalin" struggle
- the program for world Socialism

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