

# The Questions of Wendelin Thomas

The following letter was written in reply to questions put to the author by Wendelin Thomas, who argued for the view that there was a basic identity between Bolshevism and Stalinism, as shown by Lenin's attitude towards opponents like the Mensheviks, the Kronstadt insurgents and the independent Makhno bands in the Ukraine during the Civil War. Thomas is a former Communist deputy of the German Reichstag and now a member of the International Commission investigating the Moscow Trials. —Ed.

Esteemed Comrade:

I do not think that the questions which you asked me have a direct relationship to the investigations of the New York Commission and can have an influence on its conclusions. Nevertheless I am fully prepared to reply to your questions in order to acquaint with my actual views all those who are interested in them.

## "End Justifies Means"

Like many others, you see the source of evil in the principle: "The end justifies the means". This principle is in itself very abstract and rationalistic. It permits most varied interpretations. But I am prepared to take upon myself the defense of this formula—from the materialistic and dialectical viewpoint. Yes, I consider that there are no means that are good or bad in themselves or in connection with some absolute supra-historical principle. Those means that lead

to the raising of the power of man over nature and the liquidation of the power of man over man are good. In this broad historical sense the means can only be justified by the end.

Does not this mean, however, that falsehood, treachery, betrayal are permissible and justified if they lead to "the end"? All depends on the nature of the aim. If the aim is the liberation of mankind then falsehood, betrayal, and treachery can in no wise be appropriate means. The Epicureans were accused by their opponents of sinking to the ideals of a pig when they advocated "happiness". To which the Epicureans, not without foundation, replied: that their opponents understand happiness... in a pig-gish way.

You make reference to Lenin's words that a revolutionary party has the "right" to make its opponents hated and despised in the eyes of the masses. In these words you see a principled defense of amoralism. You forget, however, to point out where, in which political camp are the representatives of lofty morals. My observations tell me that political struggle in general utilizes widely exaggeration, distortion, falsehood and slander. The revolutionists are always the most slandered: in their time Marx, Engels and their friends; later—the Bolsheviks, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg; at the present time—the Trotskyists. The hatred of the possessors toward the revolution; the dull conservatism of the petty bourgeoisie, the conceit and superciliousness of the intellectuals; the material interests of the labor

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bureaucrats—all these factors combine in the hounding of the revolutionary Marxist. At the same time the Messrs. Slanders do not forget to be indignant at the amoralism of the Marxists. This hypocritical indignation is nothing but a weapon of the class struggle.

## Lenin's Position

In the words quoted by you, Lenin merely wanted to say that he no longer considers the Mensheviks proletarian fighters and that he makes it his task to make hateful in the eyes of the workers. Lenin expressed his thought with his characteristic passion and opened the possibilities for ambiguous and unworthy interpretations. But on the basis of the complete works of Lenin and his life's work I declare that this irreconcilable fighter was a most loyal opponent, for despite all exaggerations and extremes he always strove to tell the masses what is. The struggle of the reformists against Lenin, on the contrary, was thoroughly penetrated with hypocrisy, falsehood, trickery and forgeries under the cover of universal truths.

Your evaluation of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 is basically incorrect. The best, most sacrificing sailors were completely withdrawn from Kronstadt and played an important role at the fronts and in the local Soviets throughout the country. What remained was the gray mass with big pretensions ("We are from Kronstadt"), but without political education and unprepared for re-

volutionary sacrifice. The country was starving. The Kronstanders demanded privileges. The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations. The sailors had cannon and battleships. All the reactionary elements, in Russia as well as abroad, immediately seized upon this uprising. The white emigres demanded aid for the insurrectionists. The victory of this uprising could bring nothing but a victory of counter-revolution, entirely independent of the ideas the sailors had in their heads. But the ideas themselves were deeply reactionary. They reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry to the worker, the conceit of the soldier or sailor in relation to the "civilian". Petersburg, the hatred of the petty bourgeois for revolutionary discipline. The movement therefore had a counter-revolutionary character and since the insurgents took possession of the arms in the forts they could only be crushed with the aid of arms.

No less erroneous is your estimate of Makhno. In himself he was a mixture of fanatic and adventurer. He became the concentration of the very tendencies which brought about the Kronstadt uprising. The cavalry in general is the most reactionary part of the army. The equestrian despises the pedestrian. Makhno created a cavalry of peasants who supplied their own horses. These were not downtrodden village poor whom the October Revolution first awakened, but the strong and well-fed peasants who were afraid of losing what they had. The anarchist ideas of Makhno (the ignoring of the

State, non-recognition of the central power) corresponded to the spirit of this kulak cavalry as nothing else could. I should add that the hatred of the city and the city worker on the part of the followers of Makhno was complemented by a militant anti-Semitism. At the very time when we were carrying on life and death struggle against Denikin and Wrangel, the Makhnovists, attempted to carry on an independent policy. Straining at the bit, the petty bourgeois (kulak), thought he could dictate his contradictory views to the capitalists on the one hand and to the workers on the other. This kulak was armed, we had to disarm him. This is precisely what we did.

## Stalin and the Bolsheviks

Your attempt to conclude that Stalin's forgeries flow from the "amorism" of the Bolsheviks is basically false. In the period when the revolution fought for the liberation of the oppressed masses it called everything by its right name and was in no need of forgeries. The system of falsifications flows from the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy fights for the privileges of the minority and is compelled to conceal and mask its real aims. Instead of seeking for an explanation in the material conditions of historical development, you create the theory of "the original sin", which fits the church but not the socialist republic.

Respectfully yours,

L. Trotsky.

Coyoacan, July, 6, 1937.

## Once More: The Altman Thomas Finances

Last week, the Appeal printed the story of the shady deal proposed in the Altman-Thomas group by Girolamo Valenti for raising a slush fund from the bureaucracy of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers for the purpose of financing the split drive against the left wing.

This week we are printing the proof of our assertions. It is presented by comrade Robert O. Menaker, an officer of the League for Industrial Democracy and editor of its official periodical. We have received it in the form of a letter to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, which we print in full.

## The Menaker Letter

"August 11, 1937.

"National Executive Committee, Socialist Party, U. S. A., 549 Randolph Street, Chicago, Ill.

"Dear Comrades:

"I wish to call the attention of the N. E. C. to the Party situation in Local New York.

"As a member of the Altman caucus since its inception, I have followed closely the conspiratorial actions of that body which I feel are against the best interests of the independent future of the Party. These actions, in my opinion, are a distinct corruption of Party principles.

"I have attended numerous meetings of the Altman caucus including meetings of 'key people' who number 25 or 30 and it was the last meeting of the latter group which motivates me in severing all relations with this group and informing the Party as a whole as to the situation.

"I charge and will cite hereafter my proof of the following:

"1. That expulsions of the left wing in mass were decided upon in advance of the action.

"2. Authorization was given to raise a fund of from \$5,000.00 to \$10,000.00 to finance the Altman caucus in a national expulsion drive.

"3. The caucus tolerates members who openly sabotage the publishing of the Socialist Call and advocate that it cease to be published.

"As to point 1:

"At every meeting of the Altman caucus that I attended, including the most recent one of 'key people' held at Norman Thomas' home on Tuesday, August 3, all members of the caucus decided that the Trotskyists must be expelled in whatever manner the action could be taken. Before the meeting of the City Executive Committee, which was held on Monday, August 2, it had already been announced to a prior meeting of the Altman caucus by Hal Siegel that this committee would take action to expel 54 members of the Appeal group at that City Executive meeting.

"Norman Thomas made the statement at the meeting of August 3, which was held at his home, that he had made a mistake in approving the entry of the Workers Party into the Socialist Party.

"Assurance was given to this same group of key people at this same meeting by Jack Altman that the City Central Committee would have two-thirds majority for expulsion of the Appeal members that had been brought up on charges.

"As to point 2:

"Girolamo Valenti, editor of La Stampa Libera, suggested at the August 3 meeting that a committee be formed to approach the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and the ILGWU for funds to finance the Altman group with the statement that he was certain that five to ten thousand dollars could be raised. This suggestion was unanimously accepted and Valenti appointed a committee of one to do the job.

"As to point 3:

"Sam Dewitt and G. Valenti, along with several others, suggested that no more financial support be given to the Call, which would result in its collapse. The suggestion was also made that Norman Thomas withdraw his weekly article from the Call. Though both of these suggestions were voted against, the people who made them are still tolerated in the Party and in the caucus.

"Included among those that attended this August 3 meeting were: Norman Thomas, Jack Altman, Hal Siegel, Aaron Levenstein, Rose and Morris Shapiro, Sam DeWitt, John Herling, G. Valenti and others.

"On the basis of the above statement I request the NEC, as the leading body in the Socialist Party to intervene in the New York situation. I am ready to appear at any time to substantiate this statement.

"Fraternally yours,

(Sgd.) "Robert O. Menaker.

"PS. In order to acquaint those most affected by the actions of the Altman caucus, I am handing a copy of this letter to Gus Tyler, editor of the Socialist Call and to Max Shachtman, representative of the group against whom this expulsion campaign is being organized."

The Socialist Appeal has only this question to put: what does the NEC intend to do about the malodorous scandal disclosed by the Menaker letter?

## Clarity Heads Oppose Independent SP Slate

Zam, Delson and the other leaders of the Clarity group in New York are carrying on a campaign of protest against the right wing decision to withdraw the regular socialist candidate for mayor in favor of La Guardia.

Good, so far as it goes!

But wherein is the city of Cleveland different from the city of New York? Are socialist principles one thing in New York and another in Ohio?

Frank Stern, Labor Secretary of the Socialist Party in Cleveland, writes as follows about the situation in that city:

"A new problem has come up here similar to the La Guardia situation in New York, but with added complications.

"Comrade Robert Dullea, as you know, is the regular Socialist candidate for Mayor in Cleveland. Filing date for candidates is two weeks off. Last week, the C. I. O. endorsed for Mayor an Independent Democratic named Martin. The Executive Committee of the SP then agreed to keep Dullea in the field and to issue a leaflet giving our position on the Martin business.

"Last night, at a special Executive Committee meeting, Ben Parker (a Clarity leader) brought the following matter up for discussion: that inasmuch as Bob Dullea is a supporter of the Appeal, it would be wrong for the S. P. to file for him because he would not be in the party by election day (September 28) and the S. P. would be placed in the position of filling for and supporting a non-party member who would probably be busy attacking the S. P.!

"Second, that inasmuch as the C. I. O. has endorsed a man,

we should withdraw our candidate and fight within the C.I.O. for Martin to adopt a program and platform as befits a warring class candidate.

"Bob Parker (another Clarity leader) supported Ben. Bill Kaufman, YPSL organizer here and a Clarityite, took issue with the Parkers. On our motion to reaffirm our support of Dullea the Clarityites split, Kaufman voting with us, carrying the motion through the Executive Committee. The Parkers will issue a minority report. The whole business is coming up at a general membership meeting Thursday night called for that purpose."

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As we go to press, we receive the latest news about the situation in the Cleveland Party organization. At a membership meeting of Cuyahoga County, the left wing motion "that the SP of Cuyahoga County reaffirms its support of Robert Dullea as candidate for mayor of Cleveland", was carried by a decisive majority. The Clarity group split in two, with the YPSL comrades, Bill Kaufman and Hy Weintraub, supporting the left wing stand.

Highly interesting was the fact that Sam Baron, traveling caucus organizer for the Altman group, took the floor in complete solidarity with the Parkers' position, showing that it was identical with the New York right wing's stand on La Guardia. In his concluding remarks, Bob Parker declared: "If Baron has a good idea, I am not ashamed of agreeing with him. I don't think it's a crime to agree with Baron. If I agree with Baron on the question of candidates, then I'm willing to be called an Altmanite."