

The Negro Question

by Robert L. Birchman

Conditions of Florida Negro Drivers

The Negro taxi drivers of Jacksonville, Florida, have formed a Transport Workers Union. The 175 drivers work for the Lincoln and New Deal companies, the only ones that provide taxi service for Negroes.

The union has made a survey of the living and working conditions of the men. The survey shows that the men work 12 hours daily, seven days a week with no time off for holidays. Their average wage is \$10 a week or approximately 12 cents for each hour they work.

The Negro taxi driver pays a daily rental of \$3.50 for the use of a cab, and he must buy his gasoline from the company at a price of 19 1/2 cents a gallon. In contrast to this the white drivers rent their cabs for \$3.35 a day and pay 18 cents for gasoline. Drivers of both races use taxis of the same type, offer the same service and charge the same for their services, 10 cents per passenger.

The union reports that two-thirds of its members are married men with an average family of five. The average rent paid for an apartment is \$3 a week. Because of the heavy demands on their small salaries, the men have little to spend on proper food for their children, medical care, clothing and recreation.

If a driver fails to report for work on account of illness or some other reason, he must pay the company \$3.50 for each day he misses.

The union aims to transform these conditions. This is one more incident of the growth of unionism among the Negro workers in the South. But in order to really succeed, this union—now independent—must seek affiliation with the organized drivers on a national scale and bring about solidarity between the Negro and white drivers in order to solve the common problems that face both. Only on the basis of such unity and with the support of organized labor nationally can they hope to successfully secure better wages and working conditions.

A Negro Paper on Africa

The July 6 Chicago Defender in an editorial "Africa Changes Hands" states in part:

"Yes, Africa is the spoil of the imperialist robbers, whether they be French, German, Italian or English. Now it goes to Italy. After the last war the loot went to France and England.

"Are there black men who cannot yet see that a free Africa will come only with the defeat of all the imperialists? Is this not now clear?"

"The Negro people the world over can only hope for the defeat of both imperialist groups. There is no choice between them. Both are bad."

Republicans and the Negro

The plank in the Republican platform on the Negro is but a mere jumble of words promising much but not telling in the least how the Negro people can secure "a square deal in the economic and political life of the nation."

The Pittsburgh Courier (July 6) comments on the plank:

"It is axiomatic that political party platforms are traditionally honored in the breach and that after election day they are promptly forgotten in the general scramble for political spoils. . . .

"It is stated that discrimination in government departments 'must cease,' but not that it 'SHALL cease,' which is something quite different: the former being a statement of conviction; the latter a statement of intention.

"The statement on universal suffrage is, as it stands, a mere platitude which even Negroes might accept in principle."

Roy Wilkins in his column "Watchtower" in the Amsterdam News (July 6), comments:

"Does the platform promise that the Republican party will do anything to improve the lot of the Negro? What does the vague phrase 'economic and political life' mean? Are the Republicans, who have controlled vast enterprises, now pledging their party to see that the Negro gets employment and opportunity to rise without restriction as to color? Of course they are not. The Big Business men of this country, many thousands of whom are to be found in the Republican party, have kept the doors of employment tightly shut in the faces of Negro workers. . . .

"Suffrage? Wasn't it a Republican President who spoke at Elizabethton, Tenn., and told the South that there was 'an insuperable difference between the races,' and by this statement said in effect that the GOP would let the South handle the Negro as it saw fit?"

The Republican platform has in every election year from 1920 on had a plank in its platform, either urging or recommending the passage of an anti-lynch bill but at no time have they fought for the adoption of such legislation.

Wilkins continues: "Except for the Negro dyed-in-the-wool Republicans or those on the party payroll, Wilkie and the GOP are going to have a hard time convincing the brother.

"But the Democrats who meet in Chicago in a few days have not got the brother hogtied either. . . the balance sheet will show that the New Deal, while improving the Negroes lot in many respects has not done as well as it could.

"It would seem that a high school boy could write a better platform than that of the Republicans, but the Democrats may fool us and write a worse one, especially the plank on the Negro."

The record of both the Republican and Democratic parties, is one of mere lip service as far as the interests of the Negro people and the workers of the country are concerned. It could be nothing else, since they are the political representatives of capitalism—America's Sixty Families.

The only way for the Negro people to end Jim-crowism, lynching, job-discrimination, etc., is to join hands with the working class in building their own party—a party that will have as its aim the abolition of the capitalist system, which is the cause of all the economic, social and political problems of the Negro people. Only such a party will secure full economic, political and social equality for the Negro.

What Really Happened In France?

THE "NEW LEADER" INVENTS SOME FACTS TO FIT ITS THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

During the unfolding of the complete story of the French capitulation, the New Leader, organ of the Social Democratic Federation, has provided us each week with an astonishing example of sheer desperation in politics. How explain the surrender? How explain it, that is to say, in terms of the mythology, to which the New Leader subscribes, that the Second Imperialist World War is an ideological war between democracy and fascism?

The first explanation offered by the New Leader, before the main circumstances of the surrender became known and at a time when it could still plausibly speak of the French defeat as mainly a matter of overwhelming technical superiority of the Nazis, was that it was the fault of the 40-hour week and other social concessions of the Popular Front governments. Incredible as it may seem, this "socialist" paper devoted its leading article (by Willy Schlamm, graduate of Muenzenberg's Stalinist school of corruption and hence an obvious choice for leader-writer of a Social Democratic paper) to such an interpretation. Anything rather than to question the nature of bourgeois democracy!

That interpretation was too much for even the trained stomach of New Leader columnist Charles Yale Harrison (he has not yet had the opportunity to help betray a people into the hands of fascism, like Schlamm, and is therefore not as hardened). Harrison wrote a protesting column. During that week moreover came the first details of the circumstances of the French capitulation. Schlamm's interpretation was therefore dropped by the New Leader though without repudiating it. Then came a new interpretation, even more astounding. To realize how astounding, one must first summarize the facts which have now emerged, assess their meaning—and then read the New Leader.

WEYGAND'S ARGUMENT FOR SURRENDER WAS POLITICAL

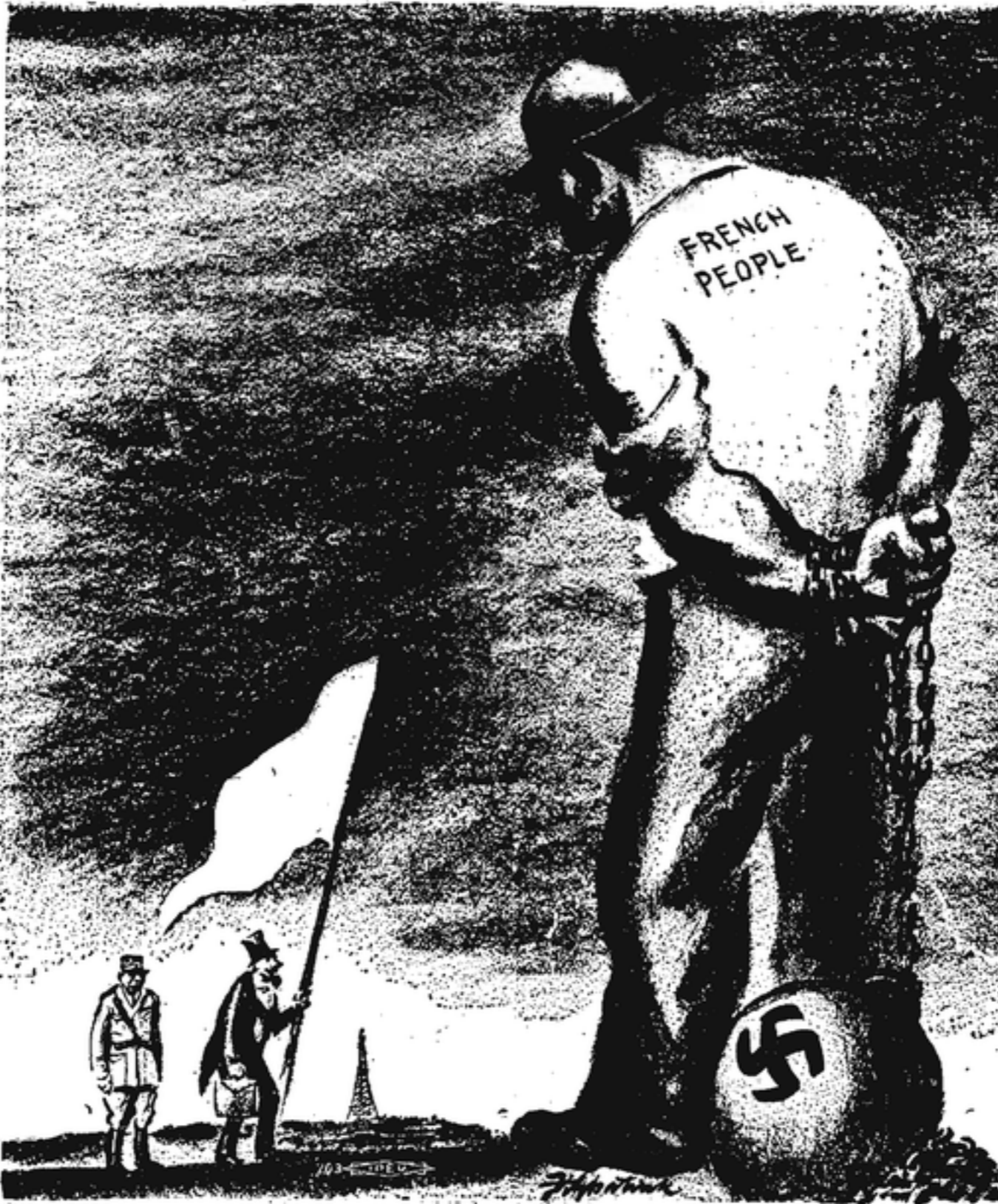
Weygand, appointed by the "liberal" Reynaud government to displace the "defeatist" Gamelin, had scarcely concluded reorganizing the army before he demanded of the cabinet, June 15, an end to the war. His argument was primarily not military but political, i.e., the class-struggle politics of the French bourgeoisie. The defeats had engendered unrest among the French masses, and the developing situation was likened by Weygand to the situation in Russia in 1917: military defeats and unrest eventually culminating in proletarian revolt. "It must not come to that," Weygand said. How prevent it? Not, naturally, by surrendering to the revolt of the French workers. Instead surrender to Hitler, and thereby (with Hitler's blessing) save the remaining French armies to "maintain order and quiet in the country."

Weygand's argument was one which the cabinet understood very well. "Civil peace"—cessation of struggle between the workers and the capitalists—is a slogan very useful to the bourgeoisie in arranging, through traitors like Blum and Jouhaux, to chain the workers to the war machine. But the bourgeoisie itself never practices civil peace; it uses wars as the occasion to intensify its struggle against the workers at home; in the name of "national defense" the French bourgeoisie, first through the cabinet of Daladier, then through that of Reynaud, had outlawed the biggest of the workers' parties, dissolved hundreds of trade unions, arrested thousands of workers' militants, wiped out every vestige of trade union control of hours and wages. And now that further consequences of the war itself might revive working class activity, the bourgeoisie preferred to abandon the war, to surrender to the foreign invader rather than to make any concessions to the workers at home. "The main enemy is at home" is and always has been the slogan of the bourgeoisie toward the workers.

WHY REYNAUD AGREED TO GIVE WAY TO PETAIN

Weygand's argument therefore won a majority in the cabinet. Nor did the minority, of Reynaud and his associates, carry the argument any further. Had Reynaud thought the issue sufficiently important his course was clearly indicated: to denounce the capitulators as traitors to France, to refuse to yield to them, to convene the Chamber of Deputies and appeal to it for a majority against Weygand-Petain-Chau-

"We Feared You More Than We Feared Hitler"



Fitzpatrick in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

temps, and to ensure a majority in the Chamber by rousing all France against surrender. But to rouse all France—that meant to rouse the French proletariat, to join with the workers against the powerful and authoritative section of the bourgeoisie for which Weygand-Petain were speaking—that meant to precipitate precisely that great and decisive struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat which Weygand was seeking to avoid by surrendering to Hitler and getting Nazi bayonets to help hold down the French workers. Faced therefore with only two alternatives—either join the capitulators, by quietly resigning without convening the Chamber and by acquiescing in the formation of a government of capitulation headed by Petain.

CAPITULATION MEANT NOT PEACE, BUT CHANGING SIDES!

Once the regroupment of the bourgeoisie around the Petain-Laval cabinet had been completed, the full implications of the capitulation became clear. It was not to be the retirement of France from the war; by no means. It was to be the switching of France from the side of Britain to the side of Hitler.

How could those who had been fighting this war, as the New Leader had assured us, for the sake of democracy against fascism, now join Hitler? For that is what they did. If it had become impossible for the French democracy to continue the fight within the borders of France, there was nothing to prevent the French democracy from keeping the navy and the colonies in the war—if it was fighting for democracy.

It could have been easily arranged. If necessary the government could have formally abided by the armistice provisions, ordered the navy to return to France and the colonies to cease fighting, while privately arranging for the navy and the colonial governments to join the British in continuing the war. It could easily have been done—if the French bourgeoisie had been fighting for democracy, as the New Leader assures us.

But nothing of the sort happened. Instead we have witnessed a demonstration of the complete solidarity of the French bourgeoisie. The colonial governments to a man have obeyed the cabinet at Vichy. The navy obeyed, going to the length of fighting a great naval battle with the British at Oran, Algeria, rather than accept the alternatives of joining the British, being interned in British ports or scuttling their ships.

The French "National Committee" in London cannot claim the adherence of a single representative figure of the bourgeoisie! Seldom, indeed, has any class been as united as is the French bourgeoisie today in its new regroupment around the Petain-Laval government. United for fascism and for collaboration with Hitler.

ORAN A MIRROR OF THE FRENCH EVENTS

That dramatic clash at Oran deserves a closer glance. The armed forces are always a reflection of the class relations existing in a country. The officer caste is a carefully selected and trained body, class-conscious to the core. Admiral Gensoul was able to secure the carrying out of the orders of Petain-Laval only because these orders were recognized as truly authoritative by the fleet's officer body and because these orders corresponded with their deepest convictions concerning the needs of French bourgeois policy. Otherwise they could not possibly have agreed to enter a battle in which many of them died, and which they could have avoided to the plaudits of the British and American bourgeoisie.

And the rank and file of the fleet, a thousand of whom died in the battle? They certainly did not share the outlook of the officer caste. On the contrary, they were either class-conscious workers opposed to all the imperialists in this war, or, if not, they were workers who had accepted the democratic mythology and did not want to turn the ships over to Hitler-dominated French ports. Why could they not prevent the officers from carrying out the Petain-Laval orders?

Because for years the big workers' parties had mis-educated them into the impotence of this terrible moment. From 1935 on the Stalinist party had preached "national unity," i.e., obedience to the officers; and when the party had somersaulted after the war began, its belated reversal was completely compromised by Stalin's pro-Hitler orientation. The "socialists" of course preached obedience to law and order, consequently to officers, for aye and forever. For five years the two big workers' parties had thus joined hands to extirpate all thought of sailors' committees, of proletarian revolt. The result came at Oran when, in the face of all their beliefs, the sailors nevertheless obeyed their officers. And this was in the navy, where—it is manned by trained workers primarily—the specific weight of the proletariat is far higher than in the army. All the more certain, therefore, was it

Oran naval battle—as short as possible—it explains that event as being the result "of a fascist cabinet putsch." The mythology of bourgeois democracy needs, with each passing event, additional myths to sustain the verbal structure. Apparently the New Leader intends to invent whatever myths that will require.

Fortunately, the meaning of the French events cannot be so easily distorted and perverted. The widespread understanding of these events is indicated by Fitzpatrick's monumental cartoon in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, depicting the French bourgeoisie as fearing the French masses more than they did Hitler. That Fitzpatrick, a great artist with much social insight, but ideologically little more than a democrat, should see the French events so clearly, is a heartening fact, testifying that many who are not Marxists have understood the plain import of what has happened. That the St. Louis Post-Dispatch printed the cartoon is a happy accident! The active editor is a naive bourgeois. It would never have been published had he been a Social Democrat!

F.M.

STALINISTS IN ALIBI HUNT FOR TROTSKY ATTACK

(Continued from Page 1)

Serrano, whereas they would be the focal point of a defense campaign if it were feasible.

3. Revival of the "self-assault" theory, that Trotsky arranged the attack.

Fantastic as this may seem after the finding of Harte's body, it was attempted yesterday in court by Pavon Flores, attorney for Serrano and Martinez.

Trotsky In Court

It was in the course of an interrogation of Leon Trotsky by the Stalinists' defense attorney, (Mexican law provides for such interrogations of witnesses prior to actual trial.)

The attorney had asked a series of questions concerning the possibility of the assailants having been hidden in the cellar of Trotsky's house and then asked whether Sheldon Harte had told Trotsky, the day before the assault, that an attack was to take place that night.

When Trotsky saw the drift of the questions, he turned to the judge and said: "After the material assault on me, they are now attempting a moral assault!" And then, turning on the attorney, he said, in vibrant words which stirred the audience:

"It seems you are trying to revive the corpse of the theory of self-assault; it would be better to try to revive the corpse of my friend, Robert Sheldon Harte!"

On Serrano, Trotsky said: "Among the accused Stalinists, said Trotsky, 'are men and women who are more or less honest, but demoralized victims' of the GPU—such as the two women who were spies. There are others, like Rosendo Gomez Lorenzo or David Serrano, whose attitude denotes them to be agents of the GPU. That is my conviction; but I do not yet make the accusation because I do not have the concrete data; I merely express at this time my opinion. And that is that David Serrano is one of the most dangerous agents of the GPU, even though—a prominent member of the CP of Mexico—he may not have taken a personal part in the assault."

"The GPU has its authorized representatives within the parties. Not even the members of the executive committees know who these representatives are, even though they may be able to guess it from the exceptional power that these men have. The GPU always retains in these executive committees one or two direct representatives. Serrano is a resident of the GPU in Mexico, within the central committee of the party. He did not take part in the actual execution of the attack, but in its preparation. I am convinced that neither the CP or its central committee officially took part; for that would be completely contrary to all the rules of the GPU!"

Will Stalin Try To Seize the Dardanelles?

By ALBERT GOLDMAN

Will Stalin try to seize the Dardanelles? The answer is: "I do not know but I think it highly probable."

This question, which is discussed by everyone and on every occasion, affords an opportunity to repeat in concise form the propositions which best explain Stalin's foreign policy beginning with the Hitler-Stalin pact.

1. Stalin's main object is to avoid getting involved in a major conflict.
2. His secondary objective is to take advantage of the imperialist war to bring as much territory as he possibly can under his influence in order to strengthen his defensive position and to increase the prestige, power and revenue of the bureaucracy of which he is the leading figure.

Every step that he has taken since he entered into a pact with Hitler and the pact itself can be best explained by taking the foregoing two basic propositions as a guide.

Does his war against Finland conflict with this theory? Not at all. When his demands on Finland were refused by the Finnish government, Stalin's prestige was at stake. Thinking that the Red Army could settle with Finland in quick order, he took a chance on military action. The peace with Finland can be explained only by the fact that to continue the war would have risked being involved in a conflict with the Allied powers. In addition Hitler, anxious to make his coup in Norway, was impatient at the slowness of the Red Army which made possible Allied intervention, and probably exerted pressure on Stalin to make peace.

Against whom was Stalin, in the early stages of the war, preparing his defensive positions? Obviously against all possible enemies. He is not so foolish as to trust Hitler and he understood that the Allies would not feel very kindly towards him after he had double-crossed them.

Stalin Fears New Stage of War

But a new factor entered into the situation after Hitler made his spectacular drive westward and succeeded in laying low the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

That was as unexpected for Stalin as it was for everybody else and far more uncomfortable. For there looms before him a Hitler completely dominating Europe and having a common frontier with the Soviet Union.

Stalin's calculations when he signed the pact with Hitler were not fulfilled one hundred percent. The pact saved him from war but enabled Hitler to gain complete hegemony over Europe. Whereas Stalin expected either that England and France would not go to war over Poland or if they did it would be a prolonged and exhausting war.

From now on fear of an attack by Hitler will be another basic factor added to the above-mentioned two that will dictate Stalin's policies. When he sent additional troops into Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, he was not afraid of the Allies. There was nothing to be afraid of as far as they were concerned. That move can be explained only as motivated by fear of Hitler.

It is true that from the very beginning of the war Stalin had his eye on Bessarabia. Having once belonged to the Soviet Union and seized by Rumania it was most natural that it should be taken back whenever there was an opportunity. Stalin's seizure of northern Bukovina, however, clearly indicates a desire on his part to strengthen his defensive position against Hitler.

Stalinophobes Invent Fantastic Theories

The theory advanced by some people who see the class struggle only as a struggle against Stalin, to the effect that the march of the Red Army into Bessarabia was dictated by Hitler because the latter wanted Stalin to guard the Rumanian oil wells for him, has absolutely no sense whatever. Against whom must the oil wells be guarded by Stalin? Against France which has already capitulated? Against England, after Rumania has switched to Hitler and after Turkey has moved away from England?

Why should Hitler ask Stalin to guard the oil wells now when they need no guarding?

And should Stalin attempt to seize the Dardanelles, that seizure also will be explained by the two propositions first mentioned and the additional one of fear of Hitler.

While the question whether Stalin's present moves are made with the knowledge and consent of Hitler is an interesting one, it is absolutely irrelevant as far as explaining his motives in making those moves. That would be relevant only if Hitler today were in a position to stop Stalin and failed to do so.

It is important here to emphasize the point that we have stressed since Stalin began sending the Red Army outside of the Soviet Union. We defend the Soviet Union not because we think we have the correct explanation for Stalin's moves (although we do think so), but because nationalized property still exists in the Soviet Union and so long as it will exist we shall defend it regardless of Stalin's policies.

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