

S. W. P. Resolution On Proletarian Military Policy

Adopted At Plenum-Conference Held
In Chicago, September 27 to 29

1. Capitalism has plunged the world into a horrible vortex of war and militarism. This testifies not to the vitality of capitalism but to its fatal weakness, its incapacity to regain stability. The epoch of the death agony of capitalism and the beginning of social transformation is an epoch of universal militarism. It can be brought to an end only by the definitive victory of the proletariat. This is the essential feature of the present world situation.

2. The intervention of the United States in the present war, or its clash with a victorious Germany or Japan at a later date, is predetermined by all the circumstances. All the realistic leaders of American capitalism clearly understand this. Only a few pacifist fools have the slightest doubt about it. The two main groups in the camp of U. S. imperialism—interventionist and so-called isolationists—differ only in regard to military strategy. Both are agreed on the policy of preparing to fight and grab. The stupendous armament program adopted by Congress has and can have only one meaning: military aggression in the near future on a world scale.

The question whether German imperialism, having conquered Europe, can or cannot "attack" the United States has nothing to do with the real issue. The very existence of one aggressive and expanding imperialist power in the modern world is an "attack" on the others. The United States, as an imperialist power having its foundations throughout the world, is "attacked" anywhere a rival power attempts to seize a market, a piece of territory or a sphere of influence.

Whether the United States directly intervenes in the present European war, or defers open military action for another point of attack is only a secondary consideration in evaluating the perspective. The real course is clear: U. S. imperialism is preparing with all possible speed to put its strength and its weakness to the test of war on a colossal scale.

THE FUNDAMENTAL LESSON

3. In the epoch of militarism great questions can be decided only by military means—this is the fundamental lesson of the developments of the present war.

The agents and apologists of democratic imperialism—the social democrats, the centrists, the trade union reformists and the pacifists—all the air which laments over the smashing military victories of Hitler and spread the sentiments of pessimism and prostration.

Our Fourth Internationalists thrust aside these traitors and panic mongers with hatred and contempt. Our task is to ascertain what has been destroyed and what has been proved by the momentous events in Europe and to draw the necessary conclusions for the future struggle.

REFORMISM CANNOT LIVE TODAY

In the first place the victories of the fascist war machine of Hitler have destroyed every plausible basis for the illusion that a serious struggle against fascism can be conducted under the leadership of a bourgeois democratic regime. The war in Europe, as previously in the Spanish rehearsal, has shown up the hollowness, the rottenness and the contemptible cowardice and greed of the whole ruling stratum of the bourgeois democrats. They are unwilling to sacrifice anything but the lives of the duped masses. To save their personal lives and their property they were ready in one country after another to capitulate to fascism and seek its protection against the wrath of their own people.

No less complete and devastating has been the destruction of the traditional reformist labor movement. At best, this traditional movement—the parties and the trade unions—was pacifist in character. That is, it was designed for peace, not for war. Parties which confined themselves to protests against the horrors of war, and did not seriously conduct a struggle for power to end the system which causes war—such parties were completely helpless when submitted to the test of war. The same proved true of the outwardly imposing trade unions. All concepts of peaceful, gradual, reformist progress within the framework of capitalism, and all parties and organizations which represented these concepts in any degree, were smashed like a house of cards.

BOLSHEVISM ALONE STANDS UP

The war in Europe has once again, and more categorically than ever, posed the fundamental alternative of the epoch of wars and revolutions: either the dictatorship of fascist capitalism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. The attempt of the European workers, under the influence of the reformist labor bureaucracies, to find in democratic capitalism a third alternative, led to catastrophe. The third alternative has been destroyed in blood and fire. But the program of the workers' fight for power has not been destroyed. When the workers of Europe rise again—and rise they will—that program will be their banner. These are the fundamental lessons of the war.

4. Bolshevism alone, which aims to direct the workers' movement to the seizure of political power by revolutionary means, stands up and gains strength under the test of the great new events. War and militarism which crush all other organizations and discredit all other programs, only provide a new verification of the premises of Bolshevism. The military epoch has room only for parties which inspire the workers to scorn all half measures, to stop at nothing, and to carry their struggle through to the very end. These are parties of a new type having nothing in common with the reformist-pacifist parties of the traditional labor movement. Such a party is the Socialist Workers Party. Its program can be described in one phrase: dictatorship of the proletariat.

RIDDING OURSELVES OF PACIFISM

5. The certainty that the United States also will be dominated by militarism confronts the party with the categorical necessity to purge itself of all remnants of liberal, petty bourgeois pacifist tendencies and conceptions carried over from the past, in particular from the left social-democratic movement. Pacifism is a debilitating poison in

the workers' movement. Pacifism, in all its forms, is no more than a protest in time of peace against war; in the face of actual war it thrusts the workers like sheep, unarmed and defenseless and without a program, into the slaughter. In our epoch, which is completely dominated by militarism, negative protests against war are of no avail whatever. The proletariat requires a positive program which takes the facts of war and militarism, the characteristic features of decaying capitalism, as the starting point for practical actions.

The first impact of the war in Europe revealed a petty-bourgeois centrist tendency in the Socialist Workers Party which took shape as a faction. Under the leadership of Burnham and Shachtman this minority faction waged a disruptive struggle in the party and attempted to overthrow the Marxist doctrines in favor of journalistic improvisations. The disruptive struggle of the Burnham-Shachtman faction culminated in their desertion of the party in a typical petty bourgeois recoil against the discipline of the proletarian majority of the party. The open repudiation of socialism by Burnham within less than two months after he had deserted the party was only the logical sequel to the course he followed in the party struggle. Burnham's betrayal of socialism confirmed to the hilt the party's characterization of this pretentious mountebank and the petty bourgeois faction he organized and maneuvered into a split.

Since the party convention the seceding faction has evolved consistently in the direction of traditional left socialist anti-militarism which at bottom is only a form of pacifism. The resolute struggle of the party majority against the Burnham-Shachtman faction, and its decisive victory in the struggle, were the necessary conditions for the survival of the party. An unremitting antagonism to the deserters on every point is no less necessary. The party cannot have the slightest reason for conciliation on any point with the faction of deserters inspired by petty bourgeois fright before the stern realities and complexities of the developing war.

ADAPTING OUR TACTICS TO WAR

6. The imperialist war is not our war and the militarism of the capitalist state is not our militarism. We do not support the war and militarism of the imperialists any more than we support the capitalist exploitation of workers in the factories. We are against the war as a whole just as we are against the rule of the class which conducts it, and never under any circumstances vote to give them any confidence in their conduct of the war or preparation for it—not a man, not a cent, not a gun with our support. Our war is the war of the working class against the capitalist order.

But only with the masses is it possible to conquer power and establish socialism; and in these times the masses in the military organizations are destined to play the most decisive role of all. Consequently, it is impossible to affect the course of events by a policy of abstention. It is necessary to take capitalist militarism as an established reality which we are not yet strong enough to abolish, and adapt our practical tactics to it. Our task is to protect the class interests of the workers in the army no less than in the factory. That means to participate in the military machine for socialist ends. The proletarian revolutionists are obliged to take their place beside the workers in the military training camps and on the battlefields in the same way as in the factory. They stand side by side with the masses of worker-soldiers, advance at all times and under all circumstances the independent class point of view, and strive to win over the majority to the idea of transforming the war into a struggle for their socialist emancipation.

WE GO WHERE THE WORKERS GO

Under conditions of mass militarization the revolutionary worker cannot evade military exploitation any more than he can evade exploitation in the factory. He does not seek a personal solution of the problem of war by evading military service. That is nothing but a desertion of class duty. The proletarian revolutionist goes with the masses. He becomes a soldier when they become soldiers, and goes to war when they go to war. The proletarian revolutionist strives to become the most skilled among the worker-soldiers, and demonstrates in action that he is most concerned for the general welfare and protection of his comrades. Only in this way, as in the factory, can the proletarian revolutionist gain the confidence of his comrades in arms and become an influential leader among them.

The total wars waged by the modern imperialists, and likewise the preparations for such wars, require compulsory military training no less than the appropriation of enormous funds and the subordination of industry to the manufacture of armaments. As long as the masses accept the war preparations, as is indubitably the case in the United States, mere negative agitation against the military budget and conscription cannot, by itself, yield serious results. Moreover, after Congress had already appropriated billions for armaments and was certain to pass a conscription bill without serious opposition, such negative agitation against conscription was somewhat belated and easily degenerated into mealy-mouthed pacifism. This proved to be the case with the organizations (Thomasite Socialists, Lovestones, etc.) affiliated with the preposterous conglomeration which calls itself the "Keep America Out of War Committee"—a vile and treacherous tool of the "democratic" imperialists. The hypocrisy of their pacifism is indicated by the fact that, simultaneously, they declare themselves in favor of the victory of Britain. Equally treacherous is the purely pacifist agitation of the Stalinists, employed today on behalf of Stalin's foreign policy

under the Hitler-Stalin pact; and certain to be abandoned tomorrow when Stalin so orders, if he finds it necessary to switch partners. The pacifism of Browder and the pacifism of Thomas stem from different roots but are identical in their betrayal of the interests of the working class. Under the rule of a modern imperialism which is already eroding to the teeth, an abstract fight against militarism is at best quixotic.

OUR PROGRAM FOR THIS PERIOD

The revolutionary strategy can only be to take this militarism as a reality and counterpose a class program of the proletariat to the program of the imperialists at every point. We fight against sending the worker-soldiers into battle without proper training and equipment. We oppose the military direction of worker-soldiers by bourgeois officers who have no regard for their treatment, their protection and their lives. We demand federal funds for the military training of workers and worker-officers under the control of the trade unions. Military appropriations? Yes—but only for the establishment and equipment of worker training camps! Compulsory military training of workers? Yes—but only under the control of the trade unions!

Such are the necessary concrete slogans for the present stage of the preparation of U. S. imperialism for war in the near future. They constitute a military transitional program supple-

menting the general political transitional program of the party.

7. U. S. imperialism prepares for war, materially and ideologically, without waiting to decide in advance the date when actual hostilities shall begin or the precise point of attack. The workers' vanguard must likewise prepare for war without dependence on speculative answers to these secondary questions. The militarization of the country in preparation for war is taking place before our eyes. All our work and plans for the future must be based on this reality.

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US

The first stages of militarization and war present enormous difficulties to our party because we have to swim against the stream. The party will be tested in a preliminary way by its capacity to recognize these difficulties and hold firm when the struggle is hard and the progress slow. Only a party fortified by the great principles and world associations of the Fourth International will be able to do this.

We are not a party like other parties. We alone are equipped with a scientific program of Marxism. We alone retain an unshakable confidence in the socialist future of humanity. We alone are ready to meet the universal militarism of decaying capitalism on its own terms and lead the proletarian struggle for power accordingly.

The war in its course will utterly destroy all other workers' parties, all half-and-half movements. But it will only harden the bona fide party of the Fourth International and open the way for its growth and eventual victory.

The future belongs to the party of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the party of the Fourth International. It needs only to be true to itself, hold firm, dig in and prepare the future.

PLENUM-CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

On the 1940 Elections

Participation in the November elections is dictated to us by our Marxist conceptions of the tasks of a revolutionary party. Although the main energies of the party are devoted to the mobilization of the proletariat in mass action against the capitalist class and its state apparatus, that mobilization is served by participation in electoral activity. Revolutionary electoral activity takes the form of tribunes of the people, summoning the masses to struggle, not merely at the polls on election day, but everywhere at all times. Electoral activity is a secondary, but nevertheless important form of revolutionary activity.

RESTRICTIONS PREVENT US

One of the results of the capitalist preparations for the war has been the further development of almost insurmountable restrictions to "prevent minority workers' parties from finding a place on the ballot, especially for candidates for the presidency. The National Committee was compelled to recognize that our party is too small to expend the funds and forces necessary to secure a place on the ballot for our presidential candidates because of these restrictions.

If our party did not itself formally participate in the elections, it might under certain conditions give critical support to the candidate of another party. Such a candidate would never be that of a bourgeois party. We no more support a Willie or Roosevelt than support an employers' representative in a union election. The only candidate we could conceivably support is that of a party representing a section of the working class whose augmented vote would be generally understood to signify progress for the labor movement. Unfortunately, however, no such party is participating in the present election campaign.

NO OTHER PARTY TO SUPPORT

The Socialist Party is not such a party. It is a hopeless anachronism, a fading vestige of the past, a petty-bourgeois pacifist sect. It has scarcely any influence in any section of the labor movement. It would indeed be absurd for us to support in the elections a party which has far less influence in the labor movement than we have. Norman Thomas is rightly understood to be a personality with a personal following which represents neither socialism nor the labor movement. Any form of support for his candidacy cannot, therefore, aid the labor movement in any way.

PLENUM-CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

On the Shachtman-Abern Group

By decision of the April, 1940 convention of the party, the National Committee was instructed to take disciplinary action against the Burnham-Shachtman-Abern group if that group failed to abide by the decisions of the convention.

In accordance with those instructions, the National Committee on April 22 suspended those members of the Burnham-Shachtman-Abern group who, following the convention, refused to accept the decisions of the convention. The National Committee by suspending rather than expelling the undisciplined members of the petty-bourgeois opposition, gave them an opportunity to reconsider their refusal to abide by convention decisions and to return to the party. In the course of the ensuing months a number of the suspended comrades have reconsidered their refusal, have declared their adherence in action to convention decisions while remaining free to defend their political views in subsequent party discussions, and have on this basis been restored to full membership rights.

The Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, convened in May, 1940, endorsed the decisions of the April convention of the S.W.P.

The same considerations hold for that grotesque sect, the Socialist Labor Party.

It is also impossible to give critical support in the elections to the Communist Party. Its union-smashing policies—which continue in its present pseudo-left period as in its openly pro-Roosevelt period—its role as Stalin's agent under the Hitler-Stalin pact, the subordination of the various Communist Parties to the GPU as was glaringly revealed in the assassination of Comrade Leon Trotsky, make the Communist Party the object of hatred to many of the most progressive workers. The hatred of the honest progressive workers against the Communist Party must be distinguished from the patriotic hostility of the chauvinists against the Communist Party. The hatred felt against the Communist Party by many honest progressive workers testifies to their profound class instinct. These factors make impossible any electoral activity in support of Stalinist candidates.

At the same time, especially in the present election campaign, we have the elementary class duty to defend the rights of the Communist Party against the chauvinists who are attempting to rule it off the ballot, hound its election campaign workers, etc. Against the capitalist class and its agents, we unconditionally defend the Communist Party. A firm policy of defending the democratic rights of the Communist Party will also go far to separate the red baiters from those progressive workers whose hatred of the Communist Party stems from their class consciousness.

OUR LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

So far as formal participation in this election is concerned the S.W.P. is participating in this election mainly through those state and local candidates whom some sections of the party have been able to place on the ballot. Our main activity on a national scale is to put forward our program on all the burning issues of this epoch of war and militarism.

We must recognize, however, that the 1940 election campaign means a lost opportunity for our party. The only way to prevent the loss of similar opportunities, not merely in the electoral field, but in others as well, is the speedy mobilization of our party to transform it from its present size and strength into a mass party of the working class.

TROTSKY MEMORIAL FUND LAUNCHED BY DELEGATES

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analogy between exploitation in the factory and exploitation in the army. "We're against the exploitation of the workers in the factory," said Comrade Cannon, "but as long as we can't end it, we go into the factory, adapt ourselves to reality, we go with the masses and share all their experiences in order to influence them in a revolutionary direction. We must defend the interests of the working class in the army as we do in the factory. We counterpose our program to that of the boss—in the factory, in the army

"Just as we don't want stoop-pigeons as officers of our unions, so we don't want them as officers in the military formations in which the masses are exploited. The firm, bold militants in the unions—men like the picket captain—are the men we want as officers of the worker-soldiers.

"We didn't want this war, any more than we want exploitation in the factories, but so long as the workers aren't ready to end it, we'll fight by their sides, we'll be the best officers as we are the best workers in the factory. We ask only the right to express our opinion, to have the right to win a majority to our opinion.

"Only those who go through hell with the soldiers will be able to influence them. We didn't want this war, but we are not afraid of the war."

The question of military policy had been discussed in the branches for nearly two months, on the basis of a draft resolution offered by the National Committee.

The discussion at Chicago showed that the question had been thoroughly clarified and that complete agreement prevailed in the party. The vote on the resolution was unanimous.

The organization report, made

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reminded forcibly that chickens do come home to roost.

During hearings on the measure, Bill Schneidermann, state secretary of the Communist Party, whinily reminded Governor Olson that the governor had been elected with the active aid of the Communist Party. To his charges that Governor Olson had solicited the C. P.'s assistance in his campaign two years ago, the Governor replied coldly the next day that he didn't know Schneidermann, wouldn't recognize him if they happened to meet.

Despite telegrams of protest far outnumbering those of approval, the Governor declared immediately after the special session adjourned that he would sign the bill if it met with his idea of "what such a measure should be like."

The bill had the backing of both bourgeois parties, explicitly in an endorsement by the State Democratic Central Committee, implicitly through a plank in the platform of the Republican state organization.

"Fourth International" Trotsky Memorial Issue Out Next Week

Trotsky's last letters and articles make up most of the Trotsky Memorial Issue of the "Fourth International", monthly magazine of the Socialist Workers Party. It is the October number, out next week.

Joseph Hansen, secretary to Trotsky, has written for this memorial issue the moving story of the last days at Coyoacan. His article, "With Trotsky to the End," will undoubtedly remain the most authoritative account of the death of Trotsky.

Sixteen of Trotsky's letters, written in the last weeks of his life, include three which he wrote on August 29, the day that Stalin's murder machine struck him down.

An unfinished article, which he had been dictating that day, is published in its rough form; for despite the fact that it was never finished, it contains some of Trotsky's most profound and novel thoughts on the menace of fascism. It is especially important, as Trotsky pointed out in the text, for the workers of the United States.

Questions put to Trotsky concerning the new problems arising under the conscription law in the United States, and his answers, never before published, make another feature of this issue of the "Fourth International."

by Farrell Dobbs, National Labor Secretary, showed that the party was prepared to carry the new policy deep into the ranks of the working class. The systematic work of the last five months, since the April convention, in transforming the party into a proletarian organization, showed its good results. Perhaps the most striking example was the change in New York City, which before April had been the stronghold of the petty-bourgeois opposition, but which now has 43% of its membership in the trade unions, half of them worker-youth. The 148 participants in the Plenum-Conference, a cross-section of the party throughout the country, predominantly activists in the trade unions, were vivid evidence of the progress reported by Comrade Dobbs.

The party membership is the stuff of which revolutions are made—not only in its class composition but in its age. The average age is 29½ years. The party has experienced a 23% growth in the last five months.

One of the most heartening facts which Comrade Dobbs was able to report is that the circulation of the SOCIALIST APPEAL has been doubled during the period since the April convention.

Trotsky Memorial Fund

After a thorough discussion of the organizational problems faced by the party, the delegates decided to launch a Trotsky Memorial Fund to underwrite a realistic program for expansion of the party's work to carry out Comrade Trotsky's last words.

A total of \$3,195 was pledged on the spot by the various branch delegations, many of them stating that their branch quotas would probably be revised upwards when they returned home and explained the program of expansion to their branches. In addition, there were some branches which were not represented or did not name a quota. The final figure for this stage of the Trotsky Memorial Fund will, therefore, hit \$5,000 or more when all reports are in. The National Committee recommended that the fund drive be completed by the end of the year.

Not the least of the signs of the new stage of the party was the splendid efficiency with which the Chicago branches executed their duties as host to the Plenum-Conference. Arrangements for housing and feeding the delegates and halls for the Plenum and the Conference, a well-attended mass meeting Friday night to greet the delegates and a banquet Sunday night which gaily concluded the week-end—everything went off like clock-work.

Back to the Branches

Scattering to the four corners of the country to bring the new program of activity, first to their branches, then to the working class, the delegates went off with heads held high and minds and hearts resolved to carry out our enormous responsibilities in the spirit in which Leon Trotsky lived and died. "It is all on our shoulders now," Comrade Cannon had reminded us. But in truth no one among the delegates and participants needed that reminder. They had come to take it upon their shoulders. And they went off carrying that historic responsibility, not as a burden but a privilege.

Still another recent article by Trotsky is one, "We Do Not Change Our Course," written immediately after the capitulation of France.

Trotsky had devoted most of his time during the last period of his life—from the May 24th attempt on his life until August 29th—to exposing the murder machine of the GPU. Some of his letters and comments on the May 24th attempt are collected in the October issue of the "Fourth International."

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