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# The Conflict in Poland

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### From Abstentionism to Active Intervention – In the Camp of the Class Enemy{}}

(November 1946)

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The Workers Party of the United States broke with the American Trotskyist organization in 1940 following a difference on the question of defense of the USSR. Since then the Workers Party has developed positions alien to those of the Fourth International on numerous political and theoretical problems. The absence of a rounded Shachtmanite program, opposing the Trotskyist program as a whole, is only an expression of the inertia in the theoretical thinking of the WP. Like all empiricists, Shachtman is content to accumulate tactical "novelties," without feeling the need to generalize them into a new program.

The policy of the WP towards the resistance organizations which appeared in Europe under the occupation of German imperialism combined a similar eclecticism with a new abandonment of the Marxist class criterion. Shachtman obstinately refused to answer the question : "What is the social character of the various organizations towards which it is necessary to take a position ? Is it necessary, on the basis of a distinction between mass organizations led by petty-bourgeois leaders and bourgeois organizations directed by White Guards, to have a different tactic towards these different organizations ?" He waxed indignant however when he was shown that under these conditions his slogan of "Unconditional support of the resistance movement" (in general ? of all the organizations ?) implied, by its lack of precision, a support of *bourgeois* organizations. Discussion on this subject is not yet ended, but Shachtman has already had the opportunity to prove in practice how accurate is this implication. An editorial in the **New International** magazine of September 1946 defends the position of "critical support to the Mickolajczyk camp" in Poland.

## For a "Democratic Revolution" in Poland ?

Having abandoned Marxist methodology, Shachtman is compelled to select his criteria from a granary of stale abstractions. A swift glance at Poland shows him that there are Russians present in the country. These Russians "exploit" and "oppress." Consequently, the Polish workers must follow a tactic similar to the one that Shachtman proposed to them under German occupation : take the road towards a "national-democratic political revolution," conducted under the slogans : "Out with the Russians !" "Long live a Free Poland !"

At least that is what you can read on page 198 of the foregoing issue of **NI**. On pages 215 to 218 of the same magazine, A. Rudzienski, in a study labeled "Marxist," as opposed, perhaps, to the rest of the publication, arrives in effect at analytical results diametrically opposed to those of the editorial writer. Rudzienski condemns the STALINIST strategy of a "so-called democratic revolution," which might have been on the agenda at the moment of the "liberation" of Poland, and counter-poses the strategy of socialist revolution to it :

Before the proletariat and the people of Poland is a socialist, not an agrarian or democratic revolution. Only this revolution can save Poland from the hateful foreign yoke, from colonial exploitation and economic and national annihilation. This revolution can conquer only in the common struggle together with the German and European proletariat, in the struggle for the Socialist United States of Europe, basing itself on the defeat of capitalist imperialism

and the reactionary Stalinist counter-revolution.

Let us disregard the question of whether or not Poland is at present subject to "colonial exploitation." Let us similarly lay aside the author's tactical ideas – in our opinion erroneous. It is obvious that his *strategy* is a Marxist strategy, resting on the dynamics of the class struggle and on a social analysis of the country's stage of development. But the thesis of the "national and democratic revolution," which the Stalinist lackeys of the Kremlin defended at the moment when the Polish proletariat was ready to overturn the capitalist regime and had occupied the factories, isn't that the very same thesis which Shachtman is defending at this moment ? Didn't the Stalinists also fight under the slogans "Out with the Boches," and "Long live a Free Poland," for which Shachtman was yesterday ready to fight against the Germans ? Doesn't the entire argument of Rudzienski, demonstrating the *treacherous* character of this Stalinist strategy toward the German "occupier," apply point by point to the analagous strategy of Shachtman as regards the "Russian occupier ?"

Shachtman is a severe critic of morals. Fie on the vulgar Polish workers who support the Stalinist regime "under the illusion that socialism is being constructed or out of purely opportunist (!) motives, like jobs or food rations" (**NI**, Sept. 1946, p.198). Fie upon the materialistic peasants who are pro-Stalinist because they have received land ! The American petty bourgeois – now there you have people who don't let themselves be guided by such ignoble material interests. They have far loftier motives. They desire above all the right to express themselves freely and to struggle energetically against Stalinism all their lives by writing articles. That is why the idealist Shachtman demands of the Polish workers, famished and exhausted by seven years of war, following upon twenty years of uninterrupted misery, that they should in the first place think about driving "the Russians" out of the country and of struggling for a "free Poland." After that, the matter of "food rations" and of finding work will of course be taken care of – isn't that so, Shachtman ? – just as splendidly as was done in the time of the "free Republic." What a fine Marxist adviser is he who proposes to the proletariat that it replace its immediate struggle for its own material interests with a struggle for empty and abstract slogans reflecting petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist ideology !

The "liberty" which Shachtman demands for "Poland" has a very different meaning for the different social classes. The "free Poland" of General Anders and Cardinal Hlond, that is the Poland where the gentry and colonels are free to exploit the peasants, assassinate strikers, and organize pogroms. The "freedom" which the workers and the landless peasants require, is the freedom to drive out the land-owning clergy, the capitalists and the "managers" forced on them by the State ; it is the freedom to manage industry and the land themselves. Petty-bourgeois politicians think that they can for the moment disregard this difference in content, remaining satisfied with the similarity in formulation of the slogan. But to drag the bourgeoisie and the proletarians, landless peasants and exploiting peasants behind one and the same banner, means, in the Twentieth Century, to fill an empty form with *bourgeois* content ! The task of the revolutionary party is exactly the contrary – to formulate its program and its slogans in such a way as to rally *around itself* all the exploited masses in the struggle against all their exploiters. It leans on the dynamics of the class struggle and not upon the depth of chauvinist feelings, because it knows that in the last analysis the struggle of the masses for their national democratic aspirations can be victorious only by colliding with bourgeois nationalism, can be victorious only through the realization of the socialist revolution, which will require the expulsion of the "occupier" as well as the destruction of the "native" reactionary classes. A "bloc" with bourgeois nationalism must fatally lead the masses to follow bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians to the building of a new "free Republic," completely under the yoke of foreign capital. It is in this direction that clever shysters are trying to drag the masses while imitating their cries of indignation. Does the editorial writer of the **NI** desire to join this malodorous association ?

## The Class Nature of the Polish State

Please tell us the nature of the state that rules in Poland today. Is it a degenerated workers State, already degenerated as it issued from the Russian womb ? Or is Poland not a workers state despite the nationalized

property, because the proletariat never made a revolution *before* losing State power to a bureaucracy ? Then is Poland ruled by a bourgeois State ? Without a bourgeoisie ? Or is there a bourgeoisie ? Who composes it ? The "fascist" guerrilla bands in the forest ? But then it could not be *their* state, for the state shoots them wherever it can. Or does Mickolajczyk represent an expropriated bourgeoisie fighting a war of restoration against the workers state ? ... (**Loc. cit.**, p.199.)

As this long quotation again demonstrates, Shachtman has the habit of posing "embarrassing" questions in order to "confound" his adversaries. Introducing this lawyer's technique into the present debate, he nevertheless carefully abstains from replying himself to all the questions which he poses to us. Allow us in turn to pose an embarrassing question to Shachtman. How were you able to write an editorial of close to 4,000 words on Polish policy WITHOUT TELLING US EXPLICITLY what is the CLASS NATURE of the state and of the society in that country ?

Shachtman is in error when he expects to confound the militants of the Fourth International by posing the problem of the nature of the Polish state to them. Unlike Shachtman, the question of the state is not for us a subject for cheap jokes but one for study, often very laborious. Trotsky needed 20 pages of his book **The Revolution Betrayed** to clarify the problem of the nature of the Soviet state ; he needed 40 additional lines to summarize his position. Of course Shachtman required just one simple line to ridicule to perfection all these labors of Trotsky in "defending the established program." But what Trotsky defends is not solely the "program," it is the entire *Marxist methodology* which, for example, recoils from the hypothesis that it is possible to create new social classes "intentionally." That is why we will continue, until we have sufficient proof to the contrary, to consider as absurd the theories of a "bureaucratic State" or of a capitalist state issuing from a proletarian revolution or of a degenerated workers' state being installed in a country where there has not previously been a proletarian revolution.

The nature of the state is dependent in the last analysis on the class structure of society. But this structure is in turn reflected in the structure of the State itself and can impose *forms* upon it which are in contradiction with the class interests of the ruling class. In this case, this contradiction reflects a contradiction which is present in the nature of the society itself. Lenin and Trotsky have many times insisted on the fact that the structure of the "consolidated" Soviet state, even prior to the victory of the Stalinist bureaucracy, retained many of the characteristics of the bourgeois state. The contradiction between the proletarian interest dictating the establishment of the widest workers' democracy and the proletarian interest necessitating the defense of the workers' state against its domestic and foreign enemies, often with the bloodiest dictatorial means, only reflected, in the last analysis, the contradictions inherent in the victory of the socialist revolution isolated in a backward country.

When German imperialism occupied the countries of Western Europe, the bourgeois state apparatus split into two blocs : one group "collaborated" with German imperialism ; another went into emigration in order to maintain continuity in case of an "Allied" victory, or went into "illegality" in order to channelize a part of the resistance movement and to prepare White Guards in the event of proletarian movements. In Poland, a similar process was produced not at the moment of the German conquest, but rather at the moment of Soviet occupation.

German imperialism tried to transform all Poland into a colony in the strictest sense of the word. The entire state administration of the country was placed in German hands. These measures were accompanied by a transfer of Jewish and state property, comprising altogether more than 50 per cent of industrial and commercial capital, into the hands of German capitalists. Insofar as the Hitler state was a bourgeois state – has Shachtman any doubts on this score ? – it is clear that there was not, at the moment of the German conquest, any fundamental change in property relations in Poland, despite the disappearance of three-fourths of the individuals composing the former Polish bourgeoisie.

When the Red Army approached Poland, this country was caught up in the whirlwind of a revolutionary upsurge. The workers occupied the factories, established workers' control over production, set up factory committees, etc. At that

moment, it could be said : the proletarian revolution in Poland has begun. But the *political* intervention of the Soviet bureaucracy was primarily *counter-revolutionary*. The Soviet Army was used to "restore order," "re-establish the authority of employers" and to rapidly rebuild a *bourgeois* Polish State apparatus. The former caste of Polish *bourgeois* officers and bureaucrats split into two groups : one group remained in emigration awaiting the moment when the pressure of imperialism would permit of establishing a more "solid" bourgeois power, or went into illegality to prepare this moment more actively ; another group "collaborated" with the Soviet bureaucracy, that is to say, occupied, together with innumerable Stalinist agents, places in the State apparatus reconstructed after 1944. The *structure* of this State remains unchanged : the same ministers encounter the same gendarmes who more than once previously led them into prison like common law criminals ; the same officers profess the same extreme nationalism ; the whole business is sanctified by the same clergy. The very division among the agents of the bourgeoisie is not so much a difference of opinion on the question "how can we best defend the interests of our class," as a necessary division of labor in order to maintain the continuity of bourgeois power.

## Has Capitalism Been "Abolished ?"

The character of the State which appears in its structure must rest, however, on a well defined social base. "Since the bourgeoisie has, for all practical purposes, been expropriated," says Shachtman, "how can you call the state a bourgeois state, even if it preserves a similar structure ?" Shachtman runs a little bit ahead of his chore. A combination of historical conditions was such that the Stalinist bureaucracy, upon entering the country, no longer found any proprietors whatever for numerous industrial and commercial enterprises. The workers themselves had already in fact expropriated many of these enterprises. The Polish bourgeoisie, which has always been extremely poor in capital, was unable, even in the past, to assemble sufficient capital on the basis of private accumulation to create large-scale industry. The problem of the annexed territories with their numerous mines and factories could not find a solution outside of state management – even without Soviet occupation and without the revolutionary upsurge, these industries would have been nationalized. Finally, the tendency of the Soviet bureaucracy towards the "progressive" incorporation of the economic structure of the "buffer" countries into the structure of the USSR has unquestionably influenced the economic measures of the Osubka-Morawski government. We may therefore conclude that the nationalization of *credit* and that of the *key industries* promulgated by the laws of January 3, 1946 are the result of the interaction of the following forces : workers' pressure ; the tendency towards statism inherent in Polish capitalist industry ; the tendency towards structural assimilation inherent in the policy of the Soviet bureaucracy in the "buffer" countries.

But we cannot, in any degree, equate the nationalizations to an "expropriation of the *bourgeoisie*," or to the destruction of capitalism, which Shachtman seems seriously to imply. The former proprietors are to be indemnified up to the end of 1946. A part of these indemnities can be invested in new *private* industrial and commercial enterprises, explicitly authorized by the law. A system of special credit is functioning for the "private sector" of industry and commerce, and is designed to favor the development of medium and large commercial enterprises, as well as medium industrial enterprises of certain sectors (the only ones which can at this time be created by the Polish bourgeoisie with the capital at its disposal). This credit is distributed by two private banks, which are share-owned corporations : "The Commercial Bank of Warsaw S.A." and the "United Bank of Cooperative Companies S.A." The nationalized enterprises themselves are managed like *private* enterprises, with separate profit and loss balances, without being united into "trusts" or "combines." There is no planning. There is no monopoly of foreign trade. The foreign trade of Poland is an integral part of capitalist world trade, with Russia far from playing even the role of "first client and first supplier" formerly played by Germany.

What must be noted on the other hand is that, given the *present* relationship of forces between classes, the total expropriation of the bourgeoisie after an eventual conquest of power by the proletariat presents itself as infinitely easier and requiring infinitely less expense than in 1939. The Polish workers can and must start from the present reforms in order to drive out the state functionaries and directors, the middlemen and speculators, to establish

*workers' management* of industry, to accomplish expropriation, cancel the indemnities, forbid all private acquisition of the means of production above the artisan level, establish cooperatives for distribution, introduce unified planning and the monopoly of foreign trade. It is because economically, socially and technically the reforms of 1945-6 *facilitate* the realization of the socialist revolution that the Polish workers have the duty to *defend* them against restorationist tendencies of the bourgeoisie. But an effective defense of these reforms is possible only along the road of mobilizing the masses in the defense of their *own interests*, which implies a violent struggle against the reactionary regime of Bjerut.

The situation in Poland, like that in Yugoslavia, is obscured by the fact that, as a result of specific historical causes, a large number of the individuals composing the former bourgeoisie have physically disappeared – while the majority of its political personnel remains in place. But in the other "buffer" countries, the situation is completely clear. No one can doubt for a moment that in Finland, in Hungary, in Romania or in Bulgaria, where wages are set by collective bargaining between employers' organizations and trade unions, that in these countries *capitalism* continues. Nevertheless, in these countries also the Stalinists have "conquered" numerous positions within the bourgeois State. Shachtman states more than once that Poland constitutes "the new political pattern" for all the countries occupied by the USSR. Does he perhaps think that King Michael finds himself at the head of – a bureaucratic State ? Does he really think that the Stalinist bureaucracy has succeeded in overthrowing capitalism in half of our continent ? Shachtman again finds himself in this hardly enviable position of having to share his views with the Stalinists !

## Our Central Slogan : For an Independent Soviet Poland !

The activity of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Poland inevitably exhibits a double character : on the one hand it has facilitated, in however limited a measure, nationalization, agrarian reform, the establishment of factory committees, etc. ; on the other side, it tends to establish a police regime which stifles all independent activity of the masses, it robs the country of the industrial material which it so badly needs for beginning reconstruction, it profoundly discredits, by all its odious actions, the name and ideas of Communism. Those who would deny this dual character of bureaucratic intervention are brought logically to this denial by the fact that they deny the dual character of the bureaucracy itself. There remains only one way out for them : to pretend that in view of the looting of equipment the nationalizations are only a "comedy." Rudzienski is nevertheless compelled to admit on page 217 of the September **NI** the "very limited progressive importance" of the reforms introduced in Poland since 1944, without, of course, drawing therefrom the conclusions on the character of the USSR which follow. Faithful to his habit of posing questions without himself giving any clear answers, Shachtman does not take a position on this subject. This rids him of the nuisance of having to answer yes or no to the question of whether the proletariat must oppose the restorationist tendencies of the Polish bourgeoisie.

From the dual character of the activity of the Soviet bureaucracy flows the necessity for the Fourth International to distinguish carefully between the actions of the bureaucracy which objectively constitute a step in the direction of expropriation of the bourgeoisie, and those which constitute solely a stab in the back of the revolutionary proletariat. For Shachtman, this distinction means to lead politics back to a "disingenuous formula." Unfortunately for him, this "disingenuous formula" comes from Trotsky himself who employs it among other places in his article *Again and Once Again on the Nature of the Soviet Union* (Leon Trotsky, **In Defense of Marxism**, p.30). Shachtman has the right to say : like teacher, like disciple ?. Until he has extirpated the roots of the bad influence of Trotsky's thought from the mind of the Fourth International, he will not so readily succeed in "re-educating" it ...

The Fourth International is opposed to lootings, deportations, national oppression and police terror. It calls upon the masses to struggle against these barbaric methods, with their own *class* actions. But it refuses to make common cause with those who are orienting towards restoration of the pre-war situation. It demands the immediate departure

of the Soviet occupation troops, linking this slogan with that of fraternization between the Polish workers and the Russian soldiers. But it strives at the same time to mobilize the masses for the defense and extension of the reforms of 1945-6. It demands the departure of the occupation troops *precisely because* their presence is a brake upon the struggle for the realization of the socialist revolution in Poland, is even a brake upon the struggle for the defense of the nationalizations. Obviously this position excludes in advance every possibility of a "united front" with the bourgeoisie, the big peasantry or its political agents against the Stalinist regime ; It is precisely the united front of the Stalinists with sections of the reactionary classes and strata which we take as one of our main arguments to demonstrate to the workers and poor peasants why the liberation of the workers' movement from the dead weight of Stalinism is an indispensable condition for the victorious conduct of their class struggle.

On the other hand it is not the duty of the revolutionary proletariat to "deny" the existence of national feeling but to try to profit from it by transforming it into a supplementary lever for the *revolutionary* mobilization of the masses. In order to be able to present the workers and poor peasants with a perspective which can win their sympathy and stimulate their spirit of struggle and devotion, we cannot involve them in struggle either for a new copy of the miserable Republic of 1919 or for a replica of the USSR, which they have mainly learned to evaluate through its bureaucratic excrescences. The duty of Polish revolutionists is to *explain patiently* to the masses that Stalinism constitutes the antithesis of Leninism ; that the struggle for the socialist revolution means the struggle for a *workers' democracy*, a genuine *Soviet democracy* ; that the activities of the Stalinist emissaries are a condemnation of the Soviet bureaucracy but not of the Communist ideal which the latter extirpate in Russia itself in rivers of blood ; that the Bolshevik-Leninists are resolute partisans of the right of peoples to self-determination ; that consequently the central slogan around which they must mobilize is that of an INDEPENDENT SOVIET POLAND, which would differentiate us as much from the conservative bourgeoisie as from the degenerate bureaucracy.

(The important thing is to fix the *nature* of the slogan, and not its actual wording. It may be that Polish conditions require the substitution of the word "worker," or "communist" or "socialist," etc., for the word "soviet" in the above slogan. This question can be decided only in Poland itself.)

## The Civil War in Poland

However, Shachtman is still not satisfied. He wants us to develop our position precisely and concretely regarding the civil war which is occurring in Poland. A civil war, it seems to us, is fundamentally a war between enemy *classes*. Only narrow-minded petty bourgeois try from time to time to convince us that civil wars are conducted over questions of "regime." Shachtman cannot share such an opinion. Then let him explain to us *what social classes* are at the foundations of the "two camps" in Poland. Is there on one side a "crystallizing bureaucratic class" and on the other side "the peasantry rallying around it the most divergent elements ?" This would mean that *neither* of the two decisive classes in modern society, the bourgeoisie or proletariat, is at the bottom of the civil war. Isn't this schematic pattern entirely too far-fetched ?

In reality the civil war which is smouldering in Poland is the continuation of the civil war which already raged there under German occupation. The illegal NSZ was then conducting a war to the death against the partisans "of the left," extending in their turn the civil war which Mikhailovich conducted against the Yugoslav partisans and that which the EDES conducted against the EAM in Greece. These civil wars reproduce in a general way the pattern of the Spanish civil war : on one side, the most determined and most conscious elements of the bourgeoisie and landed proprietors, together with the reactionary caste of career officers, the high and middle clergy, the rich peasants, etc., the whole resting on mercenaries and backward or declassed elements from the masses ; on the other side, the great mass of the proletariat and the poor peasants, led by an infamous coalition of Stalinists and petty-bourgeois politicians, and subjected at a certain moment in the struggle to the relentless police dictatorship of the GPU (just remember the days of May 1937 in Spain and those of December 1944 in Greece, the assassination in both cases of scores of

revolutionary militants). Because of that was it the task of the proletariat to support, even if "critically," Franco or the adversaries of the EAM ?

The world bourgeoisie hasn't wasted a single second in "choosing" between the two camps in Poland. Its class instinct appears to be a far surer instrument for political orientation than the impressionist thinking of Shachtman with its hesitant probings. The entire world press in the service of imperialism has been mobilized behind Mickolajczyk. Moreover, in all of Eastern Europe, one of the bloodiest civil wars in history has been conducted for years by the native bourgeoisie. Is it only against "Russian influence" that the possessing classes of these countries are struggling with such desperation ? Only dilettantes like Dwight Macdonald, or incorrigible sectarians like the Bordighists can claim that the *spontaneous* mobilization of hundreds of thousands of men and women is secretly "maneuvered" by the "great powers." The Polish workers who occupied the factories, the Greek partisans who entered Athens in September 1944 behind the red flag and singing the International, sincerely thought they were *struggling for socialism*, despite the betrayals of their Stalinist leaders. It was because their motives for action were *class motives*. Only this can explain the extraordinary passion with which the civil war is waged in these countries : social classes are there locked in struggle for their very existence.

Shachtman naively asks : If fascist bands represent the bourgeoisie, how can the state be a bourgeois state, since it shoots them wherever it finds them ? Astonishing question ! Was the state of Negrin a bourgeois state ? Nevertheless his army also shot the fascists "wherever they were found !" This took place because that "bourgeois state" was pushed along by the will of the *proletariat* to wage a relentless civil war against the bourgeoisie which was protecting itself with fascist bands. The fact that the state remains bourgeois, despite the workers pressure, is explained by the capitulation of the "workers" leaders to the bourgeoisie, or rather to its "democratic shadow" which has remained in the republican camp. But this state had not yet succeeded in breaking the fighting spirit of the workers to the point where it could capitulate to Franco. This however was implied in the logic of its policy, and that is exactly what took place later. It is precisely because the Polish Stalinists, like the Spanish Stalinists, want to force the workers to remain within the limits of a bourgeois society and state that we accuse them of betrayal. That is precisely the reason why the workers are increasingly breaking with the camp of Bjerut ; that is precisely the reason why the counterrevolutionary forces are being continuously strengthened. That is why we fight against Stalinism !

## The Kielce Example : An Illustration for Two Theses

The editorial writer of the **NI** himself explains to us that it is the Anglo-American imperialists who have imposed the participation of Mickolajczyk in the Osubka-Morawski government. British imperialism is very little interested, it seems to us, in the defense of the interests of the "small landowning peasants." Mickolajczyk, personally, is an ultra-reactionary politician who published an anti-Semitic paper **Narodowiec** at Lille during the war up to the arrival of the Germans. The fact that he can *deceive* the small peasant masses by appearing as head of the Polish Peasant Party (PPL) can only serve to make him the more adequate for the role that the bourgeoisie has chosen him to fill : to exploit the legality of Bjerut to the hilt, to defend each position important to his class, to serve as a shield for the underground bourgeois opposition up to the moment when the latter will be able, given a different national and international conjuncture, to overthrow the present regime. And who would be naive enough to believe that relations between the "legal" camp of Mickolajczyk and the "illegal" camp of the NSZ are limited to a spiritual agreement on articles of faith ?

Swept away by his anti-Stalinist passion, Shachtman pictures things as if the Stalinist government "is organizing" civil war against its "peaceful" adversaries. We are far from any desire to defend the GPU, even "critically" ! But historical objectivity compels us to say that Shachtman *reverses* reality. This reality is that the *fascist bands* are the ones who organize pogroms, attacks on isolated municipalities, the assassination of all State functionaries and of all "political



agents" of the legal parties. The reprisals of the Polish Stalinists are marked rather by their wavering, their stupidity and their useless cruelty. Far from exterminating its political adversaries, the government has perfected a complicated technique of provocations, tending to strengthen the fascist bands temporarily and materially, in order to justify a more massive Russian intervention before "Western" public opinion. Needless to say, we turn away in disgust from such dirty maneuvers. We condemn them "unconditionally." We similarly condemn all measures tending to suppress any tendency whatever in the workers' movement. But fundamentally we fight Stalinism by explaining to the masses that its *police* methods against reaction constitute the best method for strengthening the popularity of Mickolajczyk, and of throwing the peasant masses into the hands of reaction. WE COUNTERPOSE TO THE POLICE TERROR AND PROVOCATIONS OF THE STALINISTS THE *REVOLUTIONARY TERROR OF THE MASSES* as a thousand times more effective method of fighting fascism. We demand complete freedom of the *workers' movement* which includes not only freedom of press, of meetings, of organization, etc., but also and above all *the freedom to arm a powerful workers' militia*, which will eliminate the fascist bands far more speedily than is being done by the miserable counterfeit which the Stalinist "militia" constitutes. Not for a moment, however, do we undertake the defense of our *main enemy*, the Polish bourgeoisie and all its political lackeys. Just the contrary. We blame the Stalinists for their incapacity to secure satisfactory results in the struggle *against this bourgeoisie*, because the sole means of getting these results is to wage a relentless class struggle to the end, which can be done only if a Leninist policy is pursued.

The Shachtmanite thesis and the thesis of the Fourth International allow themselves to be compared best in the light of *concrete* incidents in the Polish civil war, such as the Kielce pogrom. As is well known, the fascist bands killed more than 50 Jews of all ages in this pogrom, holding them collectively responsible for the "crimes" of the Warsaw government in which several Jews are seated. While "officially" condemning the pogrom, the partisans of Mickolajczyk have not only excused it, but have also, beyond any doubt, participated in its material preparation. Every sincere revolutionist blames the Stalinists for their criminal provocation which consisted in not allowing the "militia" to intervene until there were enough victims to permit the episode to be converted into a propaganda issue of the first order against the opposition. But the disgust which we feel at such methods and at the useless sacrifice of tens of human lives cannot however lead us to – "critically" support the pogromists. Consequently, if the armed struggle between the militia and the illegal bands had been drawn out – as has already happened many times and will still occur often, Shachtman ! – there can be no doubt that we would have called upon the workers of Kielce to mobilize on their own, with their own formations and their elected leaders, in order to crush the fascists. Our place would be in the *opposite* camp to the pogromists, despite our irreconcilable political opposition to Stalinism, which we do not discontinue even for a moment.

On the other hand, if incidents like those of Kielce are prolonged and transformed into a lengthy armed struggle, the camps will be demarcated on a class basis. The clergy, the bourgeoisie, the more or less wealthy peasants will choose the camp *opposite* to that of the Stalinist militia. While he may be able to evade taking a position on an isolated incident, Mickolajczyk will have to choose "his" camp in the case of a prolonged armed struggle. Does Shachtman doubt that this "camp" will be the camp *opposed* to the militia, will be the camp of the pogromists ? And in this case what camp would Shachtman support ? Is he for the "critical support" of the pogromists ? Here is a "concrete" question that the civil war poses !

Harold Laski, one of the most dangerous lackeys of British imperialism, because he likes to drape himself in a red toga from time to time, has found a new elixir to rejuvenate decrepit Social Democracy : "We must combine Eastern collectivism with Western political democracy." Countless "thinkers" and charlatans, reflecting all the nuances of public opinion, have since then wisely ruminated upon this insipid platitude. The spokesmen of General Franco and the last survivors of the "Socialism and Liberty" crew have each found occasion to serve up this same dish, spiced according to personal needs. But here is Max Shachtman extending this strange confederation to the left and discovering, in his turn, that "the question of the relative weight of *nationalization of economy* against the relative weight of *political democracy*" has become "one of the touchstone questions of our times."

## A Return to – Kautsky !

To view "political democracy" as a metaphysical idea above classes and their struggles, as the remarkable polemics of Lenin and of Trotsky already demonstrated 27 years ago, constitutes the essence of *Kautskyism* in the workers' movement. By his very acceptance of this *method of posing* the problem, the editorial writer of the **NI** shows us where the internal logic of his politics is dragging him. But he does not limit himself to posing the problem, he also formulates "his ideal" : "The revolutionary socialists, of course, want BOTH, nationalization AND democracy." Is this a Bolshevik "ideal" ? Or isn't this rather the purest kind of centrism ? Centrists always desire "sincerely" to combine "real" nationalizations of industry with "the broadest political democracy" in the abstract. The reformists cynically present the marriage of their imitation of nationalization with rotten bourgeois "democracy" as "socialism." But the difference between the two reduces itself to this : that the centrists deceive themselves whereas the reformists consciously deceive the masses.

"Nationalization" of industry means the state management of such industry. So long as this state remains a bourgeois state, it has as much in common with the "ideal" of revolutionary socialists as the municipal council of New York has in common with the Soviet of Petrograd. On the other hand, "democracy," – must we remind Shachtman of this ? – can have absolutely different social content. On the basis of the Shachtmanite definition, Great Britain is in the process of rapidly heading towards "the revolutionary socialist ideal," whereas the Russia of July 1918, where there were only few nationalizations and still less of "democracy" after the attempt upon Lenin's life, appears quite far removed from it. Doesn't Shachtman remember that Lenin himself once defined "the most burning question of our time, is that of the *revolutionary conquest of power* by the proletariat" ?

It is not only a question of an ideological controversy, but also of the *criterion* that Shachtman uses to take a position on the Polish civil war. When the abstract idea of "political democracy" is filled with its social content, it immediately appears that to support – critically – the camp of Mickolajczyk is to support "critically" the camp of BOURGEOIS democracy ! On the theoretical plane, Shachtman does not dare openly express the idea that BOURGEOIS democracy (implying the restoration of capitalist property relations) constitutes a STEP AHEAD over the "Stalinist dictatorship" in the USSR. But his *practical* attitude in Poland is obviously inspired by the premise that BOURGEOIS democracy (implying the complete restoration of the economic and social situation prior to 1939 ?) constitutes a step ahead of the Bjerut dictatorship ! That is what abandonment of the class criterion leads to ...

This struggle for BOURGEOIS democracy shoulder to shoulder with Mickolajczyk is, sad to say, a lamentable illusion in itself. It is no accident that the countries of Eastern Europe have never known "democratic" regimes in their past. The belated character, the poverty and abject dependence upon foreign capital on the part of the "national" bourgeoisie ; the sharpness of the social contradictions ; the absence of experience in municipal self-government on the part of the native petty-bourgeois masses provoked a situation wherein these countries constantly went from a state of pre-revolutionary crisis to that of more or less prolonged bloody dictatorships. To think that under present conditions, with social contradictions pushed to the point of convulsions ; with an unheard of accumulation of hatreds and passions over seven years – to think that under such conditions any kind of "bourgeois democratic" regime can be established, even for a brief period, means really to deceive oneself and to deceive the workers. A real "victory" for the Mickolajczyk camp, accompanied by a real withdrawal of the Soviet occupation troops, would only be possible after a crushing defeat of the *proletariat as a class* and would end in the reestablishment of a regime like that now ruling in Greece. Is this the "lesser evil" for which Shachtman appears inclined to struggle ?

## From Abstentionism to Active Intervention – in the Camp of the Class Enemy !

Refusing to take a position on the concrete civil war which developed in Poland in 1939, Shachtman then defended

the position of the "Third Camp." In his *Letter to Burnham*, Trotsky demonstrated how the various Shachtmanite positions could at that moment be reduced to a common denominator : *abstentionism* from all political activity, under cover of radical phrases.

But errors have their own implacable logic and develop according to a materialist dialectic which is rooted in the social nature of every ideology. Political abstentionism, expression of the bewilderment of the radical intellectual confronted by cataclysmic historical events, constituted a break with Marxist ideology which determines its line of activity according to its class criterion. Just as the petty bourgeoisie is incapable of remaining "neutral" for long between the proletarian camp and the bourgeois camp, neither can the ideology of the radical intelligentsia balance itself indefinitely in midair, between the socialist heaven and the earth of Capital, which radiates an irresistible attractive force. Shachtman has just given us an initial indication of how abstentionism and the theory of the "Third Camp" only constituted a transitional position towards a line of activity favoring and supporting – beg pardon : "critically" – the camp of the imperialist bourgeoisie !

The *conflict* between "nationalization of industry" and "political democracy" – their *combination* being the common ideal of both Laski and Shachtman – is neither an invention of Mickolajczyk, nor a formulation emanating from the minds of the Polish masses. It is the central propaganda theme of the American imperialist press, the English press being more discreet since experience is showing the British capitalists what marvellous profits a "nationalized" coal industry under a "democratic" regime can bring. To the small Yankee business man, whose theoretical ideas are backward even in relation to those of the lackeys of the London Stock Exchange, this formula is destined to summarize the struggle between world imperialism and the Soviet Union. However absurd this formula may be, taken by itself, it supplies the basis on which the existing forces in the United States and in the entire world are crystallizing. And it is likewise on this basis that Shachtman, partisan of the "Third Camp," discovers that it is better to support "critically" one of the existing camps and he chooses the very same camp which the imperialist bourgeoisie is supporting unconditionally, with the same slogan and under the same pretext ! We are compelled to state that the **NI** editorial constitutes an important, if not a decisive, step, towards social patriotism, towards support of the American imperialist bourgeoisie in its future war against the Stalinist bureaucracy, however "critical" this support may be.

Shachtman hasn't the excuse of taking a position under the despair provoked by the barbarous activity of the GPU ; he chooses the camp of Mickolajczyk not at Cracow confronted by Stalinist bayonets, but in New York, confronted by a monstrous press campaign *in favor of* Mickolajczyk. He does not have the excuse of not knowing the real character of the Mickolajczyk camp. He himself asserts that he finds himself looking at a "faker and a scoundrel, an agent of Anglo-American imperialism." He is "aware of this." He likewise "knows" that the Peasant party represents "restorationist tendencies as far as the nationalized property is concerned." While he himself removes all possible misunderstandings from the arena he takes a position – in favor of the class enemy ! While he himself speaks of civil war he chooses his position – in the camp of the bourgeoisie ! While he himself draws the line of the barricades, he passes over to the other side, to the side of capitalism. Divested of all pseudo-radical phraseology, of all the shoddy polemical artifices, of all the rhetorical questions and of all youthful reminiscences, Shachtman's position can be summarized as follows :

"I consider as primary my right to be able to express my own opinions. I abandon in advance the attempt to conquer this right *within the framework* of the defense, of the expansion, and of the consummation of expropriation measures against the old possessing classes. I refuse to get mixed up with those opportunistic workers who choose their camp solely on the basis of questions of food rations and of jobs. I am ready to return the factories to the bourgeois and the land to the landlords on condition that I have the freedom to smear as much paper every week as I desire."

This is a position which has lost all contact with the *workers' movement* and which this time classically denotes the fundamental tendencies of petty-bourgeois ideology. This is the lamentable bankruptcy of Shachtmanism.

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# Towards "Socialism and Liberty" or Towards the Fourth International

When Shachtman broke with defense of the USSR, he did not then take a position on the class character of the Russian State. An *ad hoc* theory was constructed only a year later. When he discovered the presence of a new class on the globe, he was careful to limit its possibilities : it was "unique," the result "only" of a victorious proletarian revolution which subsequently degenerated. Refusing to follow the theoreticians of bureaucratic collectivism, he thrashed in the contradictions of his own position and was forced to combat those among his own militants who, logically, consider the Stalinist parties in the whole world as "big totalitarian parties of a new bureaucratic class."

Now, however, Shachtman sees himself compelled to say B after having said A. According to the editorial writer of the **NI**, "the Stalinist regime is seeking (!) to compose (!) the new bureaucratic class from the state apparatus" (p.197). As a consequence, Shachtman asserts that the "unique" Russian bureaucratic class can produce children – "intentionally," of course, in order to insist on the determinist and historical character of this strange "sociology," which continues out of laziness of thought to call itself "Marxist" ! We have the right to ask him : And the French Stalinists, wouldn't they, too, like to form a "new bureaucratic class," if God furnishes the occasion ? The ideological road of Shachtman is that of Burnham. What he lacks is the courage to spell out the revisionist alphabet to the end.

Trotsky predicted a more rapid evolution of Shachtmanism on the road of revisionism than the one which actually took place. Experience shows us that the hesitations in the Shachtmanite evolution correspond with the presence of a *cursor*, of which there is no use determining the origin in a psychoanalytic way so long as we can determine its social origin. It is this, that the Shachtmanite party contains not a few honest militant workers who also exert a pressure on the leadership. This pressure is of infinitely less importance for this leadership than that of the petty-bourgeois circles in which pessimism and the revision of Marxism have been in style for the past ten years. But it is strong enough to make this leadership think twice before taking each too "daring" step. Shachtman takes hold of political subjects like a merchant who displays his "latest Parisian styles," devoured with ambition to beat "the competition" by "novelty." But he is still forced to reckon with the psychology of his militants who continue to judge policy according to the outmoded criterion which is called the class criterion. The resultant of this double contradictory pressure, is the vacillating course which the political evolution of the WP takes, the alternations of solemn protestations of "loyalty" to the "program of the Fourth International" with the elaboration of "tactics" which are more and more inspired by enemy programs. To bring these divergent points back on a common line, all that is necessary is to link them to each other, as Trotsky did with the Stalinist policy of the "Third Period." This line, connecting isolated ultra-left positions to an ever more opportunistic general position, is called the line of *centrism*. It is no accident that the column entitled *Fourth International Notes* has just been replaced in **Labor Action** by the heading *International Socialist Notes* and starts up again with excerpts from the POUM paper ...

The worker militants who have been able to draw up the balance sheet of Shachtmanism from inside of the WP must now make their choice. The path of Shachtman, the path of revisionism, leads right up to Kautskyism and will end in "Socialism and Liberty." The path of the Fourth International, contrary to what the slanderers say, is neither that of "conservative defenders of the program established once and for all," nor that of "fetishists on the Russian question." With the exception of the imperialist staffs, it would be difficult to find an organization where the slightest information concerning every possible aspect of Russian society is collected with so much care, analyzed with so much effort, discussed with so much disinterested passion as in the Fourth International. We bow neither before formulas nor before "sacrosanct" quotations no matter what the source. But the only thing we cling to and defend to the very end, whatever may be the events which press upon us, is our *method of work* : the Marxist method. That we refuse and will always refuse to abandon for unprincipled impressionism which daily discovers new "truths," throws itself in all directions at one and the same time, constructs the roof before having laid down the foundations, and passes from morning to evening through the whole gamut from beatific optimism to the blackest pessimism. Because the Fourth International is today the only organization which remains faithful to the Marxist method of analysis and understanding it is capable, not only of foreseeing events correctly, but also of correcting its errors and constantly

adjusting its line without having to upset its program at every moment. Experience has confirmed and will confirm this law : all organizations and all people who draw away from the Fourth International will complete their evolution in the camp of the imperialist bourgeoisie. The worker militants of the WP must choose. History gives them a last warning in the form of the editorial of the **New International**.

November 15, 1946

Ernest Germain{{}}

## P.S. : Shachtman Supports Adherence of Trieste to Italy (*New International*, December 1946)

On his journey over to the imperialist camp, Shachtman for six years had to build up strength to conquer the passive resistance in his party and the inertia in his own thinking. Now he is rushing ahead at a steadily accelerated pace. We note the acceleration, we characterize the direction, but let us never forget this fact : The initial impulse came six years ago when Shachtman took a position on the Russo-Finnish war independently of his analysis of the nature of the Russian state.

Shachtman has glided surreptitiously from the non-existent Third Camp into a non-existent Second Camp, that is, the camp of abstract "political democracy," without any class content. We said at that time : Shachtman does *not yet* dare take a position in favor of *bourgeois* democracy. Now his transition has been accomplished. The moralist has come down from the clouds – pardon us, from the Third Camp – and it must be with a sigh of relief that he finally feels solid ground under his feet, even if it is the ground of the imperialist camp !

But as so often happens, the "realist" Shachtman has chosen the most unreal and most unrealizable of positions. Even the correspondent of **Libre Belgique**, staid conservative sheet of Brussels, had to admit that in Trieste "all the workers, Slav or Latin, are for Tito." The reason for this is to be found both in their vigorous class instinct and in their immediate interests. Of all the countries occupied by the USSR, Yugoslavia is the one where the revolutionary upsurge was most wide-spread, where the civil war was pushed furthest, where the popular committees, before their bureaucratization were able to liquidate the greatest part of the bourgeois state apparatus and the capitalist economy. This constitutes an undeniable force of attraction for the Trieste workers, despite the subsequent establishment of an odious police regime. But the workers of Trieste also know that in Italy there are between 2 and 3 million unemployed. They know that adherence of Trieste to bankrupt bourgeois Italy would rob them of all hope of even minimum guarantees for existence. They don't want this "freedom to starve" that Shachtman is so eager to offer them.

In elaborating his position on the national question, Shachtman started from the necessity of "temporarily" subordinating the struggle of the working class itself to the "national aspirations of all the people." But here is the peculiar dialectic of deviations : he has now arrived at a position which is not only counter to the class interests of the proletariat, but also *counter* to the national aspirations of the masses. This "solid ground" of realism resembles nothing so much as quicksand.

## The Conflict in Poland

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In 1934 the workers in the Saar were called upon to choose by referendum between annexation to "democratic" France, return to Hitler Germany, or maintenance of the *status quo*. Not one Trotskyist, not even a reformist or Stalinist, took a position in favor of "democratic" France. In innumerable articles Trotsky, and Shachtman himself, explained that it was precisely the *decomposition* of "democratic" imperialism – with its corollaries of unemployment, high cost of living, political-financial scandals – which demoralized the proletariat and gave it, as well as all other layers of the population, the feeling that "we must get out of this" in one way or another. Hence Trotsky, and Shachtman, drew the conclusion : to pose this imperialist democracy – whose putrid decay every worker smells – as the alternative to fascism, means to guarantee the victory of fascism. If we re-read attentively Shachtman's articles of that period, we are compelled to repeat Trotsky's words : This man writes with equal facility on both sides of a question !

Italy in 1946 is a more rotten "democracy," more impotent and more despised by the masses, than France in 1934. And Tito, with all due respects to his secret police, is not Hitler. Will Shachtman tell us whether "bureaucratic totalitarianism" is "a greater evil" for the working class than fascism, since this totalitarianism leads Shachtman himself to take "defensive" positions which even the monstrous nature of Nazism could not bring him to ? On this position of his we can only repeat all the more emphatically what is true regarding the reformist position of the "lesser evil" : The more that bourgeois "democracy" in Italy reveals itself as rotten and incapable of satisfying any of the aspirations of the masses, the more the masses in Trieste will turn toward Tito and his five-year plan. The more any hypothetical "Shachtmanites" in Trieste follow a policy detached from the life and struggles and immediate interests of the workers and the more they guide themselves solely by their Stalinophobe paranoia, so much the stronger will the Stalinist grip on the masses become. Like rabbits hypnotized by a snake, they would be an easy prey for Tito's secret police !

We, on the other hand, have the duty of putting the Trieste workers on guard against any illusions about the "peaceful building of socialism" in Yugoslavia. We must tell them frankly that they cannot make a choice between two equal evils, since annexation even to a Yugoslavia structurally assimilated into the USSR would mean in reality the bureaucratic strangling of the workers' movement. There remains only one *realistic* position, in the most profound meaning of the word : to struggle for a Soviet Commune in Trieste. We must tell the workers of Trieste that they cannot march alone toward socialism, that they cannot march toward socialism even in an isolated socialist Italy or Yugoslavia. But we can also tell them that if, following the rising curve which their social struggles have taken for two years, they succeed in seizing power in Trieste itself, and if they give the entire European working class the example of a real *Soviet Democracy*, even for only a few weeks, the class struggle in Italy would be given a powerful impetus and this example would act as an irresistible magnet on the advanced masses of the countries occupied by the USSR. From the point of view of the relations of forces, in the present state of unstable equilibrium, the immediate crushing of such a Commune by Anglo-American or Yugoslav troops is most unlikely. In any case, from an internationalist point of view and from the point of view of the immediate interests of the masses, this solution offers infinitely more attractions and opens infinitely more attractive perspectives than adherence to the Republic of Monsieur de Gasperi.

Shachtman is always at the beginning of the revisionist alphabet. A Trieste belonging to Italy means also, incontestably, a Trieste in the hands of the Anglo-American General Staff. Why does Shachtman show so little consistency, why does he not frankly prefer a "bourgeois democratic regime" in Russia – with capitalist property restored, of course, but who is interested in such trifles ! – to a "totalitarian dictatorship" ? General Eisenhower and the Morgan bank have already dreamed aloud of giving the Russian workers this "unexpected opportunity" to choose "the slow poison" instead of "the bullet through the head." Whence this sudden timidity at taking a position on this "real" problem, Shachtman ? For after all, to struggle beside the workers for their material interests, to believe that expropriation of the capitalists means at all events an advance toward socialism which must be saved, to lead the proletariat through its immediate struggles to the overthrow of world capitalism and of the Stalinist dictatorship – all this is part of that dreadful "finished program" which Shachtman has decided to reject more and more completely.

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