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Introduction to the second edition

by George Novack and Joseph Hansen*

I

For more than forty years Leon Trotsky defended and developed the ideas and methods of Marxism. In early manhood he undertook their defense against the tsarist regime and the whole bourgeois world. During the First World War he defended revolutionary internationalism against the social patriots and revisionists of the Second International. In the Russian revolution, side by side with Lenin, he defended the program of bolshevism against the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. After the victorious October 1917 revolution, as the leading Soviet propagandist he defended Marxist principles in the field of political polemics as vigorously and brilliantly as he led the defense of the workers state on the military fronts. With Lenin he founded the Third International to spread the ideas of Marxism throughout the world.

Trotsky's greatest battles in defense of Marxism came after

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Lenin's death. When the first signs of bureaucratic reaction appeared within the Russian Communist Party, Trotsky organized the Left Opposition, which sought to maintain the Bolshevik program against the backslidings toward petty-bourgeois politics of the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev bloc. Despite his deportation to Alma-Ata, he continued the struggle of the Russian Communist Left Opposition against the growing revisionist tendencies of the degenerating Stalinist clique. In exile in Turkey he organized the Communist Left Opposition on an international scale. When the Third International capitulated to fascism without a struggle in Germany in 1933, Trotsky called for the formation of the Fourth International, which was founded in 1938.

During the last decade of his life, Trotsky defended Marxism against fascism, against bourgeois-democratic public opinion, against all varieties of petty-bourgeois politics from the virulent Stalinism of the Third International and the senile social reformism of the Second International to impotent centrism, ultraleftism, and anarcho-syndicalism. There was no significant anti-Marxist tendency that did not have to reckon with Trotsky and that he did not analyze and answer in his writings. In the universal reaction culminating in the Second World War, Trotsky stood forth as the foremost champion of revolutionary socialism.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Trotsky was again called upon to give battle in defense of Marxism. This time the struggle took place in the ranks of the American section of his own Fourth International. Unbalanced by the impact of the war in Europe and the pressure of alien class influences and ideas, a group of leaders within the Socialist Workers Party made what Trotsky characterized as "an attempt to reject, disqualify, and overthrow the theoretical foundations, the political principles and organizational methods of our movement." (See page 177 of this volume.)

They and their followers failed. They failed because Trotsky, basing himself upon the experiences of the Bolshevik Party and its predecessors, had forewarned the Trotskyist movement that the outbreak of another imperialist war would inevitably precipitate a crisis in its ranks; that under the onslaught of bourgeois public opinion the petty-bourgeois elements in the party would become disoriented; that the proletarian wing must prepare itself against the dangers of this demoralization. They failed because, when that crisis did break out Trotsky detected its first symptoms, diagnosed the nature of the disease, and prognosticated its further development. They failed because Trotsky was able to lead the proletarian majority in the ensuing factional conflict.

This volume is the most valuable product of that struggle which tested and tempered the ranks of our party. Here are many of Trotsky's most mature contributions to Marxist thought. To this last battle in defense of Marxism, Trotsky devoted the best energies of the last year of his life. He wrote the final item in this collection on August 17, 1940—three days before the Stalinist assassin struck him down.

II

As Trotsky demonstrated in his article, "From a Scratch—To the Danger of Gangrene," the elements of a petty-bourgeois deviation had long been germinating within the American Trotskyist movement. This tendency did not dare assert itself in an organized and open political shape until it was impelled to do so by the events leading up to and directly following the outbreak of the Second World War.

The immediate occasion for the formation of the petty-bourgeois opposition and its assault upon Marxism revolved around the question of the USSR. This was no accident. Since November 7, 1917, the question of the Russian revolution—and the Soviet state, which is its creation—has drawn a sharp

dividing line through the labor movement of all countries. The attitude taken toward the Soviet Union throughout all these years has been the decisive criterion separating the genuine revolutionary tendency from all shades and degrees of waverers, backsliders, and capitulators to the pressure of the bourgeois world—the Mensheviks, Social Democrats, anarchists and syndicalists, centrists, Stalinists.

The development of the discussion quickly revealed that all the fundamental issues were involved.

On August 22, 1939, came the announcement of the Soviet-German pact. Thereupon a great wave of anti-Soviet propaganda swept through the “democracies.” The petty-bourgeois wing of the Socialist Workers Party was shaken to the core. The same day at the meeting of the SWP Political Committee, Shachtman made the following motion: “That the next meeting of the Political Committee begin with a discussion of our estimate of the Stalin-Hitler pact *as related to our evaluation of the Soviet state* and the perspectives for the future.” Shachtman still affirmed defense of the USSR. But his motion indicated that he was now approaching James Burnham’s views on the nature of the USSR, which he had previously opposed. In several documents written two years before, Burnham—like Shachtman a member of the Political Committee—had already questioned the fundamental principle of the Fourth International that the Soviet Union is a workers state which, though degenerated under the Stalinist regime, must be unconditionally defended against imperialist attack by the world working class. Thus the pact which ushered in the war likewise ushered in our inner-party crisis.

A week later the Second World War began. The hitherto pent-up petty-bourgeois tendency now broke out of bonds. At the September 3 Political Committee meeting Burnham made a motion to convene a full session of the National

Committee the following week and to place on its agenda a reconsideration of the Russian question. The majority agreed and demanded that the opposition first put its new ideas in written form. The majority also asked for sufficient time to invite Trotsky to acquaint us with his views. Characteristic of the opposition's hostility to Trotsky from the outset was the fact that it voted against this proposal.

On September 5 Burnham submitted his document "On the Character of the War" for the plenum meeting of the National Committee. Its essence is in the following sentences: "It is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers state in any sense whatever. . . . Soviet intervention [in the war] will be wholly subordinated to the general imperialist character of the conflict as a whole; and will be in no sense a defense of the remains of the Socialist economy." A week later, in the letter with which this volume begins, Trotsky began laying bare the real implications of Burnham's doctrine: "that all the revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat are exhausted, that the socialist movement is bankrupt, and that the old capitalism is transforming itself into 'bureaucratic collectivism' with a new exploiting class."

Trotsky expanded upon Burnham's position in his first important document of the faction struggle, "The USSR in War," which arrived in time for discussion at the plenum. Since the petty-bourgeois opposition had not yet openly constituted itself as a faction, Trotsky utilized arguments similar to theirs that had been advanced by the Italian ex-communist Bruno R. and others, and he developed their logical conclusions. This document constituted a stern warning to Burnham and his followers that in challenging the program of the Fourth International on the Russian question, they thereby actually challenged the basic postulates of scientific socialism.

Three different groupings came together in the petty-

bourgeois opposition. Burnham was its ideological leader, expressing most completely its anti-Marxist character. Abern's clique ostensibly agreed with Trotsky's views and disclaimed Burnham's. Shachtman, occupying an intermediate position, was beset with doubts and reservations, which he applied indiscriminately to both Trotsky's and Burnham's positions.

These last two tendencies in the bloc—those of Abern and Shachtman—were not yet ready to take their stand on Burnham's ground. They still pretended allegiance to the program of the Fourth International. How did they get around these contradictions in their position in order to form a common faction with Burnham? They conspired with Burnham to suppress his real views. Then they found a common formula for their unprincipled combination by refusing to consider basic principles and demanding that the discussion be limited to immediate "concrete" issues.

At the plenum which convened on September 30, when the time came for Burnham to speak for his document, he blandly announced that he had withdrawn it! Instead, his attorney Shachtman produced a resolution as to the joint platform of the opposition which attempted to evade and postpone discussion of the fundamental dispute on the class nature of the Soviet state by limiting the struggle to "immediate answers to the concrete questions raised by the Hitler-Stalin pact." The resolution nevertheless failed to adhere to its own aims and conditions. The Red Army invasion of Poland was termed an act of "*imperialist policy*" which necessitated a "revision of our previous concept of the 'unconditional defense of the Soviet Union.'"

The Abern clique exposed its unprincipled character by voting for both Shachtman's resolution and the motion of the party majority to "reaffirm our basic analysis of the nature of the Soviet state and the role of Stalinism" and to

“endorse the political conclusions” of Trotsky’s “The USSR in War.”

From all appearances, at this stage of their flight from Marxism, the opposition simply differed with Trotsky’s interpretation of current events and the “organizational methods” of the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party, which they attributed to Cannon. But Trotsky and his co-thinkers discerned the anti-Marxist tendency concealed within this entire unprincipled combination. The ideological parentage of Shachtman’s resolution was clear. Its question mark over the class nature of the Soviet Union was a bridge leading to Burnham’s answer. That answer was foreshadowed in his characterization of the Red Army’s actions as “acts of imperialist policy.” As Trotsky explained in his first letter to Sherman Stanley and in his article, “Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the USSR,” *imperialism* is a term Marxists reserve for the expansionist politics of monopoly capitalism. The plenum accordingly condemned the resolution of the opposition “as an attempt in part to revise the fundamental position of the party, and in part to shield the position of those who aim at a revision of our policy on the question of the Soviet Union in a fundamental sense,” and accepted the position put forward in Trotsky’s article “The USSR in War.”

The opposition organized on a national scale and sought support in other national sections of the Fourth International. At a series of membership meetings in New York, the majority continued its efforts to bring the fundamental issues to the surface.

In his next article “Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the USSR,” Trotsky dealt more specifically and sharply with the arguments being circulated by Burnham’s followers, warning those who cared to heed: “If we are to speak of a revision of Marx, it is in reality the revision of

those comrades who project a new type of state, ‘nonbourgeois’ and ‘nonworker.’” Stenograms of a speech by James P. Cannon in support of the Fourth International position and of a speech by Shachtman which tried to cover up Burnham and maintain the highly unstable position of his plenum resolution were sent to Trotsky. Upon receipt of the two stenograms, Trotsky immediately dictated a letter to Shachtman, printed on page 99 of this volume, answering in detail the revisionist ideas which Shachtman had up to this time tried to palm off as being in agreement with Trotsky’s “The USSR in War.”

The majority printed articles in the internal bulletin of the Socialist Workers Party during the next weeks further clarifying the deep-going character of the differences, but the opposition stubbornly refused to accept battle on this principled basis. Trotsky decided that the time had come to cut through the rationalizations of the minority and to open up the abscess from which the infection was flowing—Burnham’s ideological leadership. In the famous first paragraph of his next article, “A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party” (page 108), he declared:

“It is necessary to call things by their right names. Now that the positions of both factions in the struggle have become determined with complete clearness, it must be said that the minority of the National Committee is leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency. Like any petty-bourgeois group inside the socialist movement, the present opposition is characterized by the following features: a disdainful attitude toward theory and an inclination toward eclecticism; disrespect for the tradition of their own organization; anxiety for personal ‘independence’ at the expense of anxiety for objective truth; nervousness instead of consistency; readiness to jump from one position to another; lack of understanding of revolutionary centralism and hostility toward it; and

finally, inclination to substitute clique ties and personal relationships for party discipline. . . .”

These words cut like a scalpel through the pretensions of the minority. The full implications of the faction struggle had now been posed point-blank by the leader of the Fourth International. The article, mainly directed against Burnham, brought forward before the entire Fourth International the question of Burnham’s method in arriving at his theoretical and political conclusions. Trotsky showed that Burnham and Shachtman’s rejection of dialectics and their substitution of the pragmatic method had inexorably led to incorrect political conclusions. For the benefit of workers unacquainted with dialectical materialism, Trotsky outlined the elementary ideas of the method in lucid terms.

Trotsky followed up his analysis of the petty-bourgeois opposition with “An Open Letter to Comrade Burnham.” This was designed as a deliberate challenge to force Burnham into the open and compel him to defend his real views. Burnham did not dare remain silent any longer under Trotsky’s concentrated fire for fear of losing influence over his personal following. Moreover, Trotsky’s thrusts had hit him in the vitals. As Burnham subsequently confessed in his letter of resignation, Trotsky dealt with the very beliefs that were determining Burnham’s course and of which he was conscious long before his public break with the Fourth International.

Why did not a large part of the opposition leave Burnham and return to Marxism at this point? The answer can be found in the social pressure bearing down upon them as the war encircled the globe. This was the period when Baron Mannerheim’s “poor little Finland” was the object of commiseration and the Soviet Union the object of virulent hatred in England and the United States.

Shachtman came out in defense of Burnham in an open letter attacking Trotsky. In line with Burnham's contention that the method of dialectical materialism—the method employed by Trotsky—was of no use in answering the political problems of the day, he utilized the Polish and Finnish events to cast aspersions upon Trotsky's interpretations of current events.

Trotsky answered Shachtman in "From a Scratch—To the Danger of Gangrene." In this article Trotsky's attack on Burnham—always his main attack throughout the fight—is supplemented by a powerful and devastating analysis of Shachtman's past and his role as Burnham's attorney. Burnham now came out in his own defense. He replied to Trotsky's open letter with his notorious document "Science and Style," which has been appended to this volume.*

"Science and Style" was the crassest expression of the anti-Marxist character and tendency of the opposition. Trotsky's success in smoking Burnham out and forcing him to divulge his real views was the turning point in the struggle. With Burnham's answer the struggle became clearly defined for

* Burnham's "Science and Style" was issued by the opposition in mimeographed form during the factional struggle in the Socialist Workers Party, but they never ventured to make it public after the split although challenged by Trotsky to do so.

Trotsky wrote: "Let the readers demand of these editors that they publish the sole programmatic work of the minority, namely Burnham's article, 'Science and Style.' If the editors were not preparing to emulate a peddler who markets rotten merchandise under fancy labels, they would themselves have felt obliged to publish this article. Everybody could then see for himself just what kind of 'revolutionary Marxism' is involved here. But they *will not dare* do so. They are ashamed to show their true faces. Burnham is skilled at hiding his all-too-revealing articles and resolutions in his briefcase, while Shachtman has made a profession of serving as an attorney for other people's views through lack of any views of his own." (page 279)

the whole Fourth International. Here was empirical proof that the fight centered between revisionism and Marxism! Burnham's document, which appeared on the crest of the wave of Anglo-American war hysteria against the Soviet Union, rendered *explicit* what Trotsky and others with a dialectical understanding of the deeper structure of the party had seen as *implicit* for a long time.

Trotsky had achieved his main aim: to prove to the Fourth International that the heavy proportion of petty-bourgeois elements in its membership had thrown the SWP into a crisis with the outbreak of the Second World War and that this crisis concerned the most fundamental propositions of scientific socialism. When "Science and Style" appeared, Trotsky explicitly stated this in his letter of February 23: "The abscess is open. Abern and Shachtman can no longer repeat that they wish only to discuss Finland and Cannon a bit. They can no longer play blindman's buff with Marxism and with the Fourth International. Should the Socialist Workers Party remain in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Franz Mehring, Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg—a tradition which Burnham proclaims 'reactionary'—or should it accept Burnham's conceptions which are only a belated reproduction of pre-Marxian petty-bourgeois socialism?" He invited Abern and Shachtman to speak up: "What do you think of Burnham's 'science' and of Burnham's 'style'? . . . Comrades Abern and Shachtman, you have the floor!" They remained silent.

When Abern and Shachtman refused to disavow Burnham and his doctrines, including his "science" and his "style," it became obvious that they were preparing to split from the Fourth International. The majority endeavored to maintain unity, acting under the conviction that the unity of the revolutionary party and the inculcation of party patriotism are among its most precious assets. The majority

likewise had two objectives: (1) to keep wavering elements in the minority under the maximum influence of our program; (2) to prove conclusively to the other sections of the Fourth International that if matters came to a split the responsibility for the split rested wholly with the minority. “We must do everything in order to convince also the other sections that the majority exhausted all the possibilities in favor of unity,” Trotsky explained in his letter on page 265. “The happenings in the Socialist Workers Party have now a great international importance. . . . You must act not only on the basis of your subjective appreciations, as correct as they may be, but on the basis of objective facts available to everyone.”

All the objective facts demonstrate that the minority’s break with Marxism was the primary reason for the split. The discussion—which continued for more than six months—was the fullest ever undertaken in our movement. There was complete freedom for every viewpoint to express itself. The opposition was given every opportunity to win a majority and leadership in the party. “Even as an eventual minority,” Trotsky wrote to the majority on December 19, “you should in my opinion remain disciplined and loyal towards the party as a whole. It is extremely important for the education in genuine party patriotism, about the necessity for which Cannon wrote me one time very correctly” (page 136). At the convention where Trotsky’s followers succeeded in winning a majority of the party to their position, they did not expel the minority from the party, deprive them of a share in leadership, of responsible posts, or demand that they renounce their beliefs. On the contrary, representation corresponding to their actual strength was offered on all the bodies of the party; only observance of the principle of democratic centralism was demanded, that the minority abide loyally by the decision

of the majority and confine its activity to further attempts to win the party to its position. The convention majority even agreed to a continuation of the discussion in the internal bulletin.

The conduct of the majority in this respect, guided at every step by Trotsky, serves as a model of correct bolshevik tactics in building the proletarian party. Trotsky draws the balance sheet of this aspect of the struggle in his article, "Petty-Bourgeois Moralists and the Proletarian Party" (page 277).

At the SWP convention which convened on April 5, 1940, the majority of the party reaffirmed its support of the Fourth International program. On April 16 the Political Committee met and moved: "That the committee accepts the convention decisions and obligates itself to carry them out in a disciplined manner." The minority bloc leaders refused to vote for this motion. Instead of expelling them, as would have been wholly justified, the majority still waited. The record was made clear to the other sections of the Fourth International to the very end. Burnham and his followers were simply suspended until they would indicate "their intention to comply with convention decisions."

The minority, however, had already rented a separate headquarters. They set up a separate organization, which they named the "Workers Party," began printing a public newspaper, and stole the party's theoretical organ, the *New Internationalist*. These actions of the minority are dealt with in Trotsky's article, "Petty-Bourgeois Moralists and the Proletarian Party" (page 277) which, together with the "Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events" (page 283), tersely sums up the political lessons of the struggle.

Such was the sequence of events in the factional struggle from August 1939, when the minority leaders started

to attack and revise the Fourth International program, to April 1940 when they broke away from the Socialist Workers Party.

III

Burnham was far from an isolated figure. He not only had followers inside the Socialist Workers Party; he had a host of kindred spirits outside amongst the ex-radical petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Most prominent among them were Sidney Hook, Max Eastman, Lewis Corey, Louis Hacker. These forerunners of Burnham had already revised Marxism all along the line, beginning with its theoretical foundations and ending with its politics. They constituted the American section of an international brotherhood of renegades from Marxism headed by Souvarine, Victor Serge, Bruno R., etc.

As Trotsky pointed out in “A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party,” Burnham and Shachtman had endeavored to analyze this tendency in an article in the January 1939 issue of the *New Internationalist*: “Intellectuals in Retreat.” Their analysis proved inadequate for the same reasons that later induced them to join this procession of fugitives from the revolutionary movement. Hook, Eastman, Corey blazed the trail for Burnham and Shachtman. Indeed, the petty-bourgeois opposition drew their arguments and ideas and received moral encouragement and inspiration from this “League of Abandoned Hopes,” which they had previously criticized.

Most of these renegades had begun their careers as revisionists with a *philosophical* struggle against materialist dialectics. To conceal the extent and profundity of their opposition to Marxism from themselves as well as from others, one and all protested that their differences were “purely philosophical” and that such abstract differences in theory

need not affect their specific political ideas and actions. Logic and philosophy in general, they held, had no organic connection with politics. Consequently, they argued, the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism had no bearing on concrete political parties, programs, and struggles. Burnham and Shachtman first enunciated this attitude in their article "Intellectuals in Retreat." They jointly maintained it during the faction struggle. Burnham disclosed his irreconcilable hostility to Marxist theory in "Science and Style" when he accused Trotsky of dragging dialectics into the political controversy as a "red herring." "There is no sense *at all*," declared Burnham, "in which dialectics . . . is fundamental in *politics*, none at all." Burnham and Shachtman had simply taken over this position from Eastman and Hook. Eastman had long contended that Marxism should purge itself of dialectical materialism which, he alleged, was nothing but a remnant of religion and Hegelian metaphysics, and adopt his "common sense" approach. Hook, echoing these arguments, scoffed at "the fancied political implications of the doctrine of dialectical materialism."

This divorce of logic from politics, this rejection of dialectical materialism as the theoretical foundation of Marxism, is alien to Marxist thought and tradition. Marxism is a unified, consistent, and comprehensive world conception. Its method of thought, the materialist dialectic, as distinguished from Hegel's idealist dialectics, is essentially the logic of *revolutionary* change. The principal laws of this logic rationally explain not only the course of gradual changes in natural, social, and mental processes but also the sharp breaks and qualitative leaps whereby things are transformed into their own opposites.

Why are bourgeois thinkers repelled from the materialist dialectic? Mainly because, as a logic of *history*, it recognizes the seeds and roots of *social revolutions* within gradual

changes in social life. At a certain stage in the accumulation of these changes, a qualitative leap occurs, a great break with the past, a revolution. Thus, according to the dialectic, social and political revolutions are not accidental aberrations or avoidable detours in history but materially caused and lawfully determined stages in the cycle of development of class societies. Finally—and to bourgeois ideologists and their petty-bourgeois shadows, this is its most horrifying feature—the materialist dialectic explains the *logical* evolution of the class struggles of our own epoch. It demonstrates why progressive capitalism became transmuted into reactionary monopoly capitalism with its imperialist politics and wars; it demonstrates the inevitability of the overthrow of monopoly capitalism by the social revolution of the international working class, and the transformation of dying capitalism into living socialism.

The materialist dialectic cannot be severed from social life or political thought because it formulates those general laws of social movement which give rise to the class struggle, govern its course, and determine its outcome. When Lenin remarked, and Trotsky in these writings reiterated, “There can be no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory,” they meant specifically: there can be no consistent revolutionary proletarian politics without the materialist dialectic which is the essence of scientific socialism.

This is the key to the significance of materialist dialectics to the revolutionary socialist movement and to the opposition it arouses among such enemies of that movement as the renegade petty-bourgeois doctrinaires. To accept the logic of Marxism—to study, master, and use it—is to embrace and advance the revolution. Indifference or opposition to the logical foundations of Marxism, if consistently developed, must and will lead to a repudiation of Marxism—as

it did in the cases of Burnham, Shachtman, Hook, Eastman, and other high priests of “common sense”—not simply in philosophical theory but in political practice. Their desertion of socialism and their prostration before bourgeois thought was implicit from the beginning, as Trotsky foresaw, in their hostility toward materialist dialectics. The antagonism to Marxism they first manifested in the apparently unrelated field of philosophical controversy reached fruition in their political program. Obviously logic and philosophy are not so far removed from practical reality as they claimed.

History itself speaks most strongly against any such attempts to split Marxist method from practical politics. Under Lenin and Trotsky the Bolshevik Party realized in social and political action what Marx and Engels with the aid of their dialectical method had explained and forecast in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*. What the Bolsheviks proved in the most positive manner in the Russian revolution of 1917—the harmonious integration of Marxist theory and revolutionary action—the subsequent careers of Hook, Eastman, Burnham, and Shachtman amply demonstrated in negative ways. Eastman and Burnham unreservedly repudiated Marxism and socialism while Hook and Shachtman espoused proimperialist policies as spokesmen for the right-wing Social Democracy in the United States. These renegades conducted a spiteful struggle against the revolutionary Marxist movement with which they once identified themselves.

Burnham’s flight into the camp of the class enemy was the most precipitate and thoroughgoing of them all. One month after departing from the Trotskyist movement he disdainfully resigned from his new “party.” Burnham’s resignation and his letter of apology to his dupes involuntarily confirmed all that Trotsky had said about Burnham

in the course of the controversy. This letter is republished in the appendix for the information and enlightenment of students of the dialectic.*

A few months later Burnham expounded his new ideas on world politics in the book *The Managerial Revolution*, which enjoyed wide popularity in big-business, bureaucratic, and petty-bourgeois intellectual circles. While Trotsky was warning of the impending assault by the Nazi armies and girding the class-conscious workers for the defense of the first workers state, Burnham set forth the thesis that Hitler and Stalin, the chief representatives of the coming managerial society, had joined forces in the August 1939 pact to “drive death wounds into capitalism.” This “concrete” political proposition was shattered by Hitler’s attack in June 1941 to “drive death wounds” into the Soviet Union.

In the following decades Burnham stepped forward as one of the most fanatical anti-Soviet ideologists. His calls for an armed crusade against the worldwide “Communist conspiracy” were proclaimed in a series of books extending from *The Struggle for World Power* (1947) to *The Suicide of the West* (1964). He gave anticommunist lectures at the U.S. War College and testified that Shachtman’s group was “subversive” at a U.S. Department of Justice hearing in the late 1950s. (Despite his efforts, the Independent Socialist League and its predecessor, the Workers Party, were removed from the Attorney General’s list.) Burnham is now editor

* During the faction fight in the SWP the opposition demanded the right to publish an organ of their own so that the public might be informed of their views. After they had established their own press, however, following the split, they never saw fit to publish this letter and thus to inform the public of the reasons their most prominent leader had given for deserting the ranks of socialism. Burnham’s letter of resignation was published for the first time in the *Fourth International*, August 1940.

of the *National Review*, an ultraright organ, where he has condemned the Nixon administration for its appeasement of Moscow and Peking and called for a benevolent reevaluation of fascism.

Whereas Burnham wholeheartedly embraced imperialism, Shachtman characteristically drifted step by step toward reconciliation with the powers that be. He went as far to the right as it is possible to go in the United States and retain the label of “socialist.”

In the article he and Burnham wrote in the January 1939 *New Internationalist* analyzing the retrogression of the anti-Stalinist intellectuals into anti-Leninism and anti-Trotskyism, they stated that “the main intellectual disease from which these intellectuals suffer may be called Stalinophobia, or vulgar anti-Stalinism. The malady was superinduced by the universal revulsion against Stalin’s macabre system of frame-ups and purges. And the result has been that most of the writing done on the subject since then has been less a product of cold social analysis than of mental shock, and where there is analysis it is moral rather than scientific and political.”

After warning others of its dire consequences, Shachtman himself became infected with this disease. Malignant Stalinophobia ravaged the remnants of his previous Marxist positions piece by piece until nothing was left of his former political self. He abandoned the defense of the Soviet Union in its hour of mortal peril during the Second World War. In justification he borrowed the theory of the nature of the Soviet Union as a country completely owned as well as politically controlled by a unique new class that was designated as “bureaucratic collectivist.”

He characterized the degenerated workers state as a retrogressive “new form of class society” that was neither capitalist nor socialist but something far below the level of a democratic capitalism. According to his view, all the

successful worker-peasant revolutions from the Russia of 1917 to the Cuba of 1959 have been not only anticapitalist but antisocialist.

This theory misrepresented the highly contradictory reality of Soviet society under Stalinism, which combined the fundamental socialist achievements of the October revolution—the elimination of capitalist ownership and the establishment of a planned economy and foreign trade monopoly—with an antisocialist totalitarian political structure in which the ruling bureaucracy excluded the working class from all decision-making powers.

By making the possession of political authority the prime determinant of the class nature of a social formation, Shachtman broke with the Marxist method of historical materialism, which, as Trotsky emphasized, singles out the property forms based on the predominant relations of production as the decisive criterion. Italy, for example, has remained capitalist under the Savoy monarchy, Mussolini's fascism, and the present parliamentary republic; the Soviet Union has retained its essentially proletarian economic base under Stalin and his successors as well as under the regime of Lenin and Trotsky.

His arbitrary conception of the postcapitalist states facilitated the transition of Shachtman and his disciples from a "third camp" position, which presumably elevated them above the opposing class forces struggling on the world arena, over to direct support of imperialist policy. Since he maintained that "democracy" in the abstract took precedence over socioeconomic relations, and liberal capitalism was more democratic than the Stalinized regimes, Shachtman was led after the war to support the bourgeois nationalist Mickolajczyk against the Moscow-supported Osubka-Morawski government in Poland.

As the cold war deepened, Shachtman shifted further

and further to the right. After converting his Workers Party into the Independent Socialist League, he took part of his disintegrating forces into the Socialist Party in 1958. There he functioned as a spokesman for the right wing, which backed Washington's Bay of Pigs invasion, the intervention in Vietnam, and the bombing of North Vietnam—all in the name of defending the "free world" against totalitarianism. He nestled up to such ultraconservative union officials as AFL-CIO president George Meany and was an adviser to United Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker, the foe of Black and Puerto Rican control of the schools in their communities.

In 1972, the year of his death at the age of sixty-eight, Shachtman supported the Hubert Humphrey elements in the Democratic Party. (Hook voted for Nixon that year.)

The evolution of Shachtman and Burnham from 1940 on confirmed Trotsky's prediction that the abandonment of Marxism and rejection of solidarity with the workers state would logically lead to accommodation with the imperialists. In the end the difference in the positions of the two men came down to a matter of degree: Shachtman stood for a liberal capitalism under a pseudosocialist guise, Burnham for extreme capitalist reaction. The sole opposition leader who remained by and large faithful to his past, Martin Abern, faded from political activity and died in 1949.

The precedent of Trotsky's dialectical materialist approach to the 1939–40 events in Poland and Finland proved helpful as a guide to the Fourth International in interpreting the postwar developments in Eastern Europe. Trotsky carefully distinguished between the reactionary aims and actions of the Soviet bureaucracy and the revolutionary significance of the transformation of property relations in the territories occupied by its armed forces.

With this compass in hand, the Trotskyists were able to

discern the essential difference between the policies of the Kremlin bureaucrats and the progressive changes introduced in the economic foundations of the East European countries. These were defined as deformed workers states since, unlike the degenerated Soviet Union, their political structures were marred by grave bureaucratic distortions from birth.

The peoples in the Soviet bloc have ever since been struggling to throw off the despotic rule of the Kremlin and its satellite regimes and move forward to a “socialism with a human face” in which the masses of workers and peasants will actually exercise political and economic supremacy.

By repelling the assault of the petty-bourgeois opposition of 1939–40 upon dialectical materialism and the political program for the world socialist revolution, the Socialist Workers Party took a big step forward in assimilating the fundamental method of Marxism. In the third of a century since, our party has systematically educated its members in these ideas and defended them against philosophical revisionists on one side and sectarian phrasemongers on the other.

Trotsky’s writings during his last great ideological battle, gathered here in one volume, have been indispensable in accomplishing this work. They provide an exemplary case study, showing how an expert exponent of the Marxist dialectic applies its teachings to unravel the intricacies of some of the most puzzling phenomena and complex political problems of our era.

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