

Stalinism and World War Three

Susan Green

Editors Introduction: In *Demokratiya* 5 (Summer 2006) we published an article on the Korean war written in 1950 by ISL member Susan Green in *Forum: Discussion and Information Bulletin of the Independent Socialist League*. The Independent Socialist League (called the Workers Party from 1940-49) was a small American democratic socialist organisation that published the weekly newspaper *Labour Action*, edited by Hal Draper (and, before him, Irving Howe), and the magazine *The New Internationalist*, edited for much of the 1950s by Julius Jacobson, who went on to found and edit *New Politics* with his wife Phyllis Jacobson. Stanley Aronowitz has justly called the WP-ISL, led by Max Shachtman, 'the most intellectually vital of all the radical formations [in the United States] in the 1940s and 1950s.'

We argued that Green's article was no exercise in antiquarianism. The question it raised this: should democratic socialists extend critical support to capitalist democracies in their wars against totalitarian threats, while continuing the fight for socialism, as Susan Green thought, or should democratic socialists refuse support of any kind to capitalist democracies – 'Neither Washington Nor Moscow' – as the ISL Political Committee thought?

We are pleased to publish two more pieces by Susan Green dating from 1949 and addressed to a related question: how should socialists act in the event of a military conflict between the Soviet Union and the West? The debate centred on whether or not socialists should extend critical support to the democratic West against the totalitarian East. Green thought they should. 'It seems to me we have to admit the lesser evil, or take the suicidal view of the Stalinists toward a Hitler victory in Germany. Can we afford to indulge in a formalistic righteousness which in effect says: 'After Stalinism will come our turn?'

'Capitalism, Stalinism and War' appeared in *Convention Bulletin* No.6, January 14, 1949. 'More about Stalinism, Capitalism and War' appeared in *Forum*, Vol.1, No.1, June 15, 1949. The first piece excerpted from the writings of Marx and Engels to show that 'consideration of how the victory of one side or the other in an impending war would affect the working class and the revolutionary movement, is not unknown in classical Marxism.' In the second, she responded to criticisms of

that article made by Hal Draper at the 1949 Workers Party convention, and in the process summed up what was at stake in this dispute. 'If the Workers Party emerges from the convention as a pure and simple propaganda group, whose function is to "preach the revolutionary message" without regard to the compulsion of actual life, with the faith that eventually socialism must come – even come an atom war and a Stalinist victory first – then consideration of various tactics has no place. If, however, we still consider ourselves as part and parcel of the working class and of life as it is and as it may become, we must weigh every aspect of this perplexing question of capitalism, Stalinism, and war.'

Faced with the desperate weakness of the forces of the 'Third Camp', Susan Green asked this simple question: 'Suppose there is no such revival of international socialism, suppose as we evaluate the political tenor and political groupings we do not see sufficient development along the lines we had hoped, to make any impression at all on the war situation, what then? Do we still say that the military outcome is a matter of indifference to us, to the future of the working class and of Socialism?' Fifty years have passed since Green asked those questions. They are, to say the very least, relevant still.

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Capitalism, Stalinism and War

January 14, 1949, Susan Green

Letters in 'The Correspondence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' (International Publishers) from which the following quotations are taken, show two things:

In the first place, we see that Marx and Engels, never accused by anyone of social patriotism or of corruption by bourgeois ideology, took the side of Germany in the France-Prussian War of 1870.

In the second place, the following excerpts are invaluable because they reveal the motives behind the policy. How, Marx and Engels asked, will the working class movement fare under the brutal reality of a Bonapartist victory over Germany? *Without approving or disapproving their conclusions, it has to be registered that Marx*

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and Engels, having in mind the interests of the developing socialist movement, were for supporting the Germany military effort.

Marx-Engels Position in Franco-Prussian War

The first quotation is from a letter Marx wrote from London to Engels on July 20th, 1870: 'The French need a thrashing. If the Prussians win, the centralization of the state power will be useful for the centralization of the German working class. German predominance would also transfer the centre of gravity of the workers movement in Western Europe from France to Germany, and one has only to compare the movement in the two countries from 1866 till now to see that the German working class is superior to the French both theoretically and organizationally. Their predominance over the French on the world stage would also mean the predominance of our theory over Proudhon's, etc.'

Engels replied from Manchester on August 15th, 1870: 'The position seems to me to be this: Germany has been driven by Badinguet (Napoleon III) into a war for her national existence. If Badinguet defeats her, Bonapartism will be strengthened for years to come and Germany broken for years, perhaps generations. In that case there can be no more question of an independent German working-class movement either, the struggle to restore the national existence will absorb everything, and at best the German workers will be dragged in the wake of the French. If Germany wins, French Bonapartism will at any rate be smashed, the endless row about the establishment of German unity will at last be got rid of, the German workers will be able to organize themselves on a national scale, quite different from that hitherto, and the French workers, whatever sort of government may succeed this one, are certain to have a freer field than under Bonapartism. The whole mass of the German people of every class have realised that this is first and foremost a question of national existence and have therefore at once flung themselves into it. That in these circumstances a German political party should preach total obstruction a la Wilhelm (Liebknecht) and place all sorts of secondary considerations before the main consideration, seems to me impossible.'

What could be clearer? *The defeat of Bonapartism would leave 'a freer field' for both the German and the French working class and Marx and Engels were for a German victory.* As the war progressed and involved the people of Paris in insurrection, these men of course changed their views (though it can be noted parenthetically they did not particularly favour the insurrection). Their views on the Franco-Prussian War are

important. Today, as we face World War III, some of us, considering that question of 'a freer field' for the working class movement, conceive of the possibility of having a preference as to victors. Are we therefore victims of social patriotism?

In 1890's Marx-Engels Wanted German Victory if War came with Russia

Twenty years later, discussing the position to be taken if a war broke out with Russia, Engels wrote from London to Bebel on October 25th, 1891: 'If however the French bourgeoisie begin such a war nevertheless, and for this purpose place themselves in the service of the Russian tzar, who is also the enemy of the bourgeoisie of the whole of Western Europe, this will be the renunciation of France's revolutionary mission. We German Socialists, on the other hand, who if peace is preserved will come to power in ten years, have the duty of maintaining the position won by us in the van of the workers movement, not only against the internal but against the external foe. If Russia is victorious we shall be crushed. Therefore if Russia begins war – go for her. Go for the Russians and their allies, whoever they may be. Then we have to see to it that the war is conducted by every revolutionary method' and so on.

Engels saw the possibility of such a war with Russia, ending with the German Socialists taking power, *but at least for the beginning of the war, he would not have shunned the military establishment of the German state.* In an earlier letter to Bebel he stated: 'You are right, if it comes to war we must demand the general arming of the people. But in conjunction with the *already existing organisation or that specially prepared in case of war.*'

This anticipated war between Russia and Germany never occurred and the German Socialists never had to decide whether Engels' position should be the official party position. Obviously the German working class did not take power within ten years, even though there was continued peace. (Engels' prediction was unfortunately wrong).

Some Bone Fide Questions

It is of course all too obvious that all these quotations relate to events of a historical period far different from today. But the fundamental is there, namely, that Marx and Engels, because they thought the free development of the revolution demanded it, were willing to fight in the side of the German government and with the German military establishment to defeat an external foe whose victory would setback the revolutionary movement.

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In the case of the Franco-Prussian War Marx said that the Germans were fighting for national existence. Certainly, if and when World War III comes, the whole of Western Europe will be fighting for national existence against the Stalinist juggernaut. (It cannot be said that American Imperialism takes away national existence as does the Russian variety. Witness the Netherlands, freely following a unilateral colonial policy – a dastardly policy to be sure – which flies directly in the face of all American interests.)

Again, Marx and Engels argued that bourgeois German centralization would be beneficial to the development of the working class movement; that a Bonapartist conquest would, on the other hand, hamper that development. *Today we must consider carefully that bourgeois democracy, even abridged as it will be during World War III, holds out a chance for the restoration of the working class movement, whereas a Stalinist conquest would mean the annihilation of all revolutionists and the end of all independent working class action for this period.*

Concerning a possible war with Russia in the 1890's, Engels was for fighting for a German victory to maintain 'the position won by us (the German Socialists) in the van of the workers' movement.' The onrush of Russian czarism into Western Europe would have thrown the working class movement back. So Engel took sides. *Why is it not correct today to consider the necessity of supporting the military victory of the capitalist nations because they will afford the working class movement at least a chance of survival?*

If World War III Were to Break Out Now

If World War III were to break out now – say within months – which everyone believes unlikely, consideration of whether or not to give support to the military efforts of the Western alliance would become compelling, it seems to me. This necessity would arise from the shattered state of world revolutionary socialism, and from the incontestable truth that a Stalinist victory would eliminate all possibility for the restoration of revolutionary socialism in this period. Unless we wish to deceive ourselves, we must admit that the revolutionary Third Camp is nowhere on the horizon. Where are the revolutionary cadres, where the revolutionary parties, needed for teaching this idea, for organizing and leading the masses to fight for it? *Between World War I and today, the forces of revolutionary socialism have been decimated by war, by counterrevolution, by Stalinism, by Nazism. There is left in*

Democratiya 16 | Spring/Summer 2009

Europe only the sorriest trickle of a revolutionary movement, and that confused and ineffectual. Who can rally the masses into a third camp?

The European masses, to be sure, abhor war in the very marrow of their bones – and they have no use for capitalism. But if war breaks out now, there being no third alternative strong enough to afford the hope of success, the brutal realities of military attack will make military protection first in importance; sides will be taken for elemental self protection. (Such a thing as self protection seems impossible in atomic warfare. Perhaps the wizards of science, now at work on it, will develop a counter weapon to the atomic bomb. If so, the country that has such a weapon first will have all the chips on its sides. We shall have to see). The point is that as things look now, with no Third Camp movement in existence, the first urge of Europeans will be for cover, either to the East or to the West. One, of course, does not have a static approach to events, especially not to wars. New developments will take place. These will have to be awaited.

It is asked: Would you support the armament program now? Would you support the subjugation of the western European countries by the United States as part of the military program? These questions are foolish. We Socialists are not advocating war. We are not preparing for war. We do not cease acting as socialists on a socialist program. We have a program of domestic demands. We pursue the struggle for an independent labour party. We call for workers' government with workers' control of industry. We push for the utmost extension of democracy. We fight for full national independence for small nations. We support every independent action of the working class. We condemn the waste of wealth and life in war. We expose both imperialist camps. We propagate the world socialist revolution – the Third Camp – as the alternative for world war. This we continue to do, now as always.

If war should break out in the immediate future and if we should decide that the interests of the working class, of the revolutionary movement and of humanity, would be served better by a victory of the bourgeois governments over the Stalinist police state, we still do not cease being Socialists. We do not surrender our political integrity. We distinguish ourselves from the Western imperialist governments in every possible way. We explain how our position differs from theirs. We fight every effort to subjugate small nations. We oppose every attempt at home to regiment the people and impose police measures. We ally ourselves with every insurrectionary effort of the peoples on both sides of the iron curtain. Above all, if their alignment of social forces changes during the war, so that a change of position of the Socialists

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becomes the order of the day, we would make that change – even as Marx and Engels did in the Franco-Prussian War when the insurrection of the Paris communards altered the whole picture.

In the same letter of August 15th, 1870, quoted above, Engels gave a rough outline of how the Socialist movement was to conduct itself whilst supporting the Prussian side of the Franco-Prussian War: ‘I think our people can,’ he wrote, ‘join the national movement...in so far as and for so long as it is limited to the defence of Germany (which does not include an offensive, in certain circumstances, before peace is arrived at); at the same time emphasize the difference between German-national and dynastic Prussian interests; work against any annexation of Alsace and Lorraine,,,; as soon as non chauvinistic republican government is at the helm in Paris, work for an honourable peace with it, constantly stress the unity of interest between the German and French workers, who did not approve of the war and are also not making war on each other..’

Here, then, is some indication of how a Socialist party might support the military victory of one side in an imperialist war, and at the same time further the ends of the Socialist movement and fight for the Socialist program.

The argument is made that if Socialist should come out for the victory of the Western powers, the workers of Europe would be driven into the arms of Stalinism. This argument holds no water. Such workers as have broken with Stalinism have been able to do so, up to now at any rate, because of the sense of reliance on the western power. But primarily this argument is *not applicable because the military support of the Western nations by Socialists would go hand in hand with a political fight against capitalism and war.*

Bourgeois Democracy – Would it Survive?

We are told that there will not be much if any difference between Stalinist totalitarianism and what will be left of bourgeois democracy after another war. As to such a prediction *let us recall that our prediction regarding the end of bourgeois democracy with World War II, was far off the beam.*

Confining ourselves to post-war America, there are many trends allowing of an interpretation that democracy has been deepened rather than lessened. This has happened because no war today can be fought without the ideological appeal to the

people. In fighting the Nazi the agencies of the American government had to spread an understanding of dictatorship, to implant a horror of its methods, to stimulate a loyalty to democratic ways. This has made it harder to abrogate the civil rights of the population and to impinge on the accomplishments of labor.

The fate of the Taft-Hartley Law in the last election is an illustration. This was the great post-war effort of big business for the curtailment of labour's rights in preparation for World War III. However, not only labor but farmers, professional and middle class people voted it down. Now it will be difficult indeed for big business to prevent the abolition or drastic revision of the law. Again, when the Democratic Party convention this year adopted the civil rights plank against the old guards of the party, this reflected the general trend towards more democracy. One might say that the emergence of a liberal movement in the South since the war is, with all its limitations, is the spread of more democratic concepts. The attempts to 'democratize' the army are noteworthy. The current move to change court martial procedure, with all its flaws, is a measure of democratic pressure.

There are, of course, the activities of the Un-American Activities Committee, the spy hunts and the infringements on individual rights. Just because such actions are tolerated as they are believed by most people to be necessary for national security, they are very dangerous. *But if one wishes to be comprehensive, other trends must be reckoned with, too.*

We can see now how preparation for World War III has increased the propaganda exposing the conditions under totalitarianism and emphasizing the ways of democracy in contrast. As seen in World War II, some of this propaganda sticks so that it will not be so easy for the ruling class to fasten those very conditions of totalitarianism upon the people.

The indignant response of the entire press to the Dutch butchery in Indonesia also shows a marked change in public reaction to undemocratic actions. In condemning the Stalinist conquest of Russia's European empire, a concept has been implanted that operates in all directions. While formerly such brutal imperialism was blasted mainly by Socialists, today even the staunchest supporters of American capitalism oppose the action of the Dutch. It is not merely a case of wanting to save 'democratic face' or the face of the UN. Wider sections of the people feel such undemocratic actions are wrong.

GREEN | Archive: Debating World War Three

Of course the new tasks thrust upon the government by World War III and the strain of the economic structure, will necessarily mean the projecting of more and more bureaucratic and autocratic devices. However, this does not happen in a vacuum, but against the background of the people and the political-social customs. Even big business itself has enough virulent individualism and 'private enterprise' left in its bones to resist the development of a police state. In a resolution at its convention just hold, NAM [National Association of Manufacturers – Ed] went on record as opposed to all peacetime controls, and demanded the very speedy removal of government controls as soon as possible after a war, with the constant review of all controls by Congress to see if they can be relaxed even before the end of the war. Though the NAM is not primarily motivated by democratic principles, the resistance to totalitarianism is there. Who can say now how much more American capitalism can stand before it has to start using the knout in good earnest?

At any rate, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the totalitarianism of the West will be one of the outcomes of World War III. Even with considerable regimentation in this country, probabilities are that remaining civil liberties would far exceed the absolute lack of them behind the iron curtain. There can be the kind of suppression and persecution which makes life for the revolutionist and for the revolutionary movement more difficult; and there is the Stalinist variety that makes life for the revolutionist and for the movement impossible.

If War Comes in the Future

But all prophets predict that the war is not to be fought immediately. Time brings great changes, as we all know. Five, ten or fifteen years will make a drastic difference in the revolutionary prospect. A new cadre of revolutionists will arise, new parties will be formed, and a leftward movement of the masses will take on more definiteness. Revolutionary ideology will have had an opportunity again to penetrate the masses and to be accepted by the most militant workers who are now Stalinists. Workers' revolution, the revolutionary third camp, may then have been taught widely enough and have made such an appeal that its success can be hoped for. There may then have arisen insurrectionary movements in the lands of Stalin to join hands with the Western workers, an absolute necessary development for a true third camp.

If then such developments will have taken place before the outbreak of World War III so that Socialists may realistically see a hope for the success of the revolutionary third camp, there will be no need for even considering giving the Western alliance critical military

support in order to save Socialism from annihilation by Stalinism. In fact in five, ten or fifteen years, the Socialist aim could be, by revolutionary means, to stop war from breaking out.

The conclusion therefore is that a stand on World War III need not be taken by revolutionary socialists right now. Shall we say that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, or to be more concrete the actual world conditions at the outbreak of the war would have to be weighed carefully before taking a stand. Above all the most realistic appraisal of the forces for a revolutionary third camp would have to be made, as this seems to be the factor most decisive.

The Cold War

Although we are not called upon at this time to commit ourselves on World War III itself (it not being here), in certain countries it is incumbent upon Socialists to take positions on aspects of the cold war now raging. For instance, the question arises both for America and for German Socialists whether to put forward the slogan for the withdrawal of the occupation troops. A Socialist program must, of course, call for a workers' government, for the arming of the German people, for all democratic rights, for national independence, for workers' control of industry, and so on. In national independence is naturally implied the withdrawal of the occupying troops; however, it would be the height of folly to push that demand now.

Every sane being knows that the withdrawal of troops now would not be on an equal basis. The Russians could technically comply with the demand, and have made it, but in actuality would leave a Russian trained and officered German puppet army that would swallow up the whole of Berlin – and eventually of Germany – as soon as the western troops left. *Therefore, for Socialists to emphasize today the slogan which, if carried into life, would mean the annihilation of the Socialists and the suppression of the working class that is just beginning to wake up from the blows of the war and to feel its way towards independent action. Furthermore, all the incipient anti-Stalinist stirrings in Eastern Europe would be discouraged and delayed if the Western troops withdraw.*

We often speak of what the masses learned during the war in their underground movements, but we never include that the masses may have learned that, with today's military techniques, military preponderance wins the final victory. Although the underground could harass and interfere with the occupying Nazi, open victory came only when the Allied forces arrived. Certainly the people behind the iron curtain

GREEN | Archive: Debating World War Three

also know the meaning of military might, taught them by the Russians. If there is anyone in Berlin today who is not a Stalinist and still wants the withdrawal of Western troops at this time, he has certainly not been heard from and must be in an insane asylum. Judging by the Stalinist obstructive efforts in the recent Berlin election even with the Western troops on hand, it is easy to picture the type of election, if any, that would have taken place if the Western troops were not on hand.

Berlin today shows, dramatically and graphically, the difference between bourgeois democratic methods and Stalinist totalitarian methods. In the Russian zone there is in progress the terror, the purges, the general suppression, forerunners of the clamping down of the total police state. All vestiges of independent working class action are fast disappearing. Whereas in the Western zone, after all is said and should be said against both the policy and the methods of occupying powers – and the German people are saying some of these things in actions – the life-size fact remains that the working people are beginning to find themselves, to organize industrially and politically in the exercise, though not full exercise, of democratic rights. *From this start, they have the chance to go further.*

It is imperative for revolutionists to know how not to commit suicide, as powerfully shown by Lenin in his arguments against Left Wing Communism (An Infantile Disorder). The underlying principle in Lenin's argument on recognizing the Versailles Treaty, is as applicable now as it was in the 1920's. The following quotation contains the main idea:

'But at present the position is obviously such that the German Communists should not bind themselves hand and foot and take upon themselves the irrevocable obligation of repudiating the Versailles Treaty in the case of victory of Communism. That would be foolish...The possibility of successfully repudiating the Treaty depends, not only upon the German, but also upon the international success of the Soviet movement...The Soviet revolution in Germany will strengthen then the international Soviet movement. This is the strongest bulwark – against the Versailles Peace, against international imperialism in general...'

'The imperialists of France, England, etc., are provoking the German communists, and laying a trap for them, 'Say that you will not sign the Peace of Versailles,' they say. And the Left Communists like children, fall into the trap laid for them, instead of manoeuvring skilfully against the treacherous and, for the moment, stronger enemy; instead of telling him 'Today we shall adhere to the Versailles Treaty.' To bind one's

hands beforehand, openly to tell the enemy, who is now better armed than we are, whether or not we shall fight him, is stupidity and not revolutionism. To accept battle when this is obviously profitable to the enemy, and not to oneself, is a crime; and those politicians of the revolutionary class who are unable to 'manoeuvre, temporize, compromise,' in order to evade an obviously unprofitable battle, are good for nothing.'

Again, of course, the situations are vastly different. Then the revolutionary possibilities were still at their peak. Then there was one enemy, capitalism; not two, capitalism and Stalinism. But the emphasis Lenin made was on the need to save the skin of the movement until strength flowed into all the limbs of international socialism. Anything else was 'a crime.' Today the world revolutionary movement is at very low ebb; it needs to be restored. In Germany the working class shows signs of political revival. *How stupid, then, in compliance with some compulsion of abstract leftist Puritanism that must say everything at once and quickly, to make the demand for the withdrawal of occupying troops from Germany, which is asking to open the gates to Stalin and to cut off the small stem of working class development that has been projected. Have no fear, as the German workers move towards the realization of their other democratic and revolutionary demands, are confident of their own strength, are aware of the support by workers of other countries, they will throw out the occupying armies.*

If the Workers Party emerges from the convention as a pure and simple propaganda group, whose function is to 'preach the revolutionary message' without regard to the compulsion of actual life, *with the faith that eventually Socialism must come* – even come an atom war and a Stalinist victory first – then consideration of various tactics has no place. If, however, we still consider ourselves as part and parcel of the working class and of life as it is and as it may become, we must weigh every aspect of this perplexing question of Capitalism, Stalinism and war.

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More about Stalinism, Capitalism and War

June 15, 1949, Susan Green

On Procedure

At the last Workers Party Convention, Comrade Draper, reporter for the National Committee on the international resolution, devoted more than half his time to an attack on my discussion article which appeared in Convention Bulletin No. 6, January 14, 1949. It is, on second thought, more accurate to say that he attacked what he pretended to be my article rather than what I actually wrote. This profuse attention to what was merely a discussion article, not a minority resolution, came clear out of the blue, not because I did not expect my political views to be discussed – on the contrary, I hoped they would. *However, I did not expect that they would become the main issue under this part of the agenda without my being informed of this intention and without my being [given] time.* As it was, I was completely unprepared, had to ask the convention to grant me at least fifteen or twenty inadequate minutes, and was amazed that the granting of time was far from unanimous.

Comrade Draper and the comrades who made up the convention agenda did not intend to be undemocratic. But the fact that they did not think of the necessity to inform me beforehand of the plan to use my article as the main target, and to ask me if I wanted time to reply, indicated that the instinct for democratic fair play was not functioning.

The above is called to the attention of the membership not to gnaw on a bone but simply that this sort of procedure may not occur again.

What I Wrote and What Was Read Into It

Above I state that Comrade Draper did not attack what I wrote but what he pretended I wrote. This suited his case, though it did not further the discussion one iota. I make a plea for discussion of issues raised instead of what boils down to name-calling.

For instance, without batting an eyelash, Comrade Draper stood up and said that I am FOR war, that I am FOR the subjugation of Western Europe to American imperialism – oh, well, if I didn't actually say it, I implied it. But what I actually meant, implied and said in my article was:

‘It is asked: Would you support the armament program now? Would you support the subjugation of the western European countries by the United States as part of the military program? These questions are foolish. We Socialists are not advocating war. We are not preparing for war. We do not cease acting as Socialists on a Socialist program. We have a program of domestic demands. We pursue the struggle for an independent labor party. We call for workers’ government with workers’ control of industry. We push for the utmost extension of democracy. We fight for full national independence for small nations. We support every independent action of the working class. We condemn the waste of wealth and life in war. We expose both imperialist camps. We propagate the world socialist revolution – the third camp – as the alternative for world war. This we continue to do, now as always.’

This quoted paragraph refers to the present pre-war period. As to a possible socialist stand when World War III actually comes, my previous article is equally clear:

‘If war should break out in the immediate future and if we should decide that the interests of the working class, of the revolutionary movement and of humanity, would be served better by a victory of the bourgeois governments over the Stalinist police state, we still do not cease being Socialists. We do not surrender our political integrity. We distinguish ourselves from the Western imperialist governments in every possible way. We explain how our position differs from theirs. We fight every effort to subjugate small nations. We oppose every attempt at home to regiment the people and impose police measures. We ally ourselves with every insurrectionary effort of the peoples on both sides of the iron curtain. Above all, if their alignment of social forces changes during the war, so that a change of position of the Socialists becomes the order of the day, we would make that change – even as Marx and Engels did in the Franco-Prussian War when the insurrection of the Paris communards altered the whole picture.’

In other words, I said that even if a Socialist should stand for the military victory of the bourgeois democratic west against the Stalinist totalitarian East, the class struggle must not be abandoned, but on the contrary every opportunity to further it must be taken. *Now it appears to me that, instead of calling ‘social patriot,’ a loyal opponent would have to prove that such a position, namely, maintaining the distinctive socialist character while giving critical military support to Bourgeois democracy, is untenable. Such proof no opponent has given.*

GREEN | Archive: Debating World War Three

There is no denying that such a task is very difficult under war conditions. But so is every alliance with one devil to fight a worse one, difficult. Still, the Bolsheviks united with Kerensky against Korniloff. The revolutionists fought with Spanish loyalists against Franco. Trotsky stated he would have joined with the devil himself – or with his grandmother – to defeat Hitler. I know, I know, these are internecine and not international imperialist wars – at least this is how we are supposed to evaluate all these struggles, in spite of doubts. To this point I will return later. *To be noted here is that there are ways of distinguishing oneself from an enemy with whom there is a temporary and partial alliance against a worse enemy.*

As a matter of fact, I cannot see why, supposing the ISL should favour western victory in World War III, LABOR ACTION could not carry on substantially the same kind of propaganda as during World War II. The issues of no-strike pledge, of wage ceilings, of costs of living, would have to be handled similarly. War profits and war scandals would be exposed. Infringements on civil liberties would not be in favor of strikes to cripple the government – which is accepted by all of us – we would back up strikers rebelling against the inequities they were suffering in the name of national security. In such strikes we would put the onus of responsibility on the capitalists and on the government. All of this, of course, supposes that we would not be suppressed – always a possibility.

On My Quoting Marx and Engels

Before going on to make some comments on Comrade Shachtman's arguments on the question of war in his reply to Erber, I want to take up briefly the quotations from Marx and Engels in my former article. [1]

This material was used for no other reason than this: *To indicate that consideration of how the victory on one side or the other on impending war would affect the working class and the revolutionary movement, is not unknown in classical Marxism.* I thought calling attention to this fact might forestall the facile epithet 'social patriotism' and might lead to arguing the points raised. I was mistaken. I made it as plain as tolerably good English could make it that I was fully aware of the difference in historical era and that I was neither approving nor disapproving the conclusions of these men – in fact, some of their language has a chauvinistic ring to my ears. Still, one comrade after another rose at the convention to prove, assuming that I didn't have the brains I was born with, that Marx and Engels lived in a different era. Consequently, whatever

Marx and Engels may have thought about the wars of their period, my views were still an example of classical social patriotism.

I refer to the fate of those quotations I used as a basis for asking for a more honest attempt to understand what a comrade is driving at – at least to read what is written.

Some Points Comrade Shachtman Missed

Now, in turning my attention to comrade Shachtman's answer to Erber's position on World War III, I must first definitely disassociate myself from Erber. I have not worked out my position with him, and there are probably major differences between us, which would come out if I had a discussion with him. Also, of course, I refer only to his stand on the war and not to his own other points, namely, the Russian Revolution and the nature of the state.

Furthermore, in using Comrade Shachtman's arguments against Erber's war position, I am taking them as they have general application to the subject – not merely to Erber. I am also divesting Comrade Shachtman's arguments of the over-thick coating of – shall I say mildly – quips in which he saw fit to clothe a serious document.

To start, then, with Comrade Shachtman's omissions.

Omission No. 1

Why should not Socialists try to evaluate the effort on the working class and the revolutionary movement of the victory of one side or the other in World War III? It is incontestable that the victory of Stalinism will be followed by the complete suppression and enslavement of the working class all over the world and by the liquidation of the revolutionary movements in true Stalinist fashion. *Either our movement has been wrong in its evaluation of Stalinism, or by this evaluation we must all agree to the above stated effect of the victory of Stalinism. To face this ugly fact does not constitute thinking 'with their terrified bellies' – nor feeling any 'pistol in the back of their neck in the form of ideological corruption.'*

It is official policy of the ISL to so interpret infringements of liberties in this country as to make it appear that there will not be much difference between the liberties of the people under a warring and post war bourgeois democracy and those (which?) under Stalinism. This is a possibility, in the general sense that anything is possible, but it is not a probability. There is a far cry between an organized working class

GREEN | Archive: Debating World War Three

functioning with some restrictions, a Socialist movement operating with some difficulty, and the lack of all completely independent working class life and the liquidation of all opposition under Stalinism. That's the point.

It seems to me we have to admit the lesser evil, or take the suicidal view of the Stalinists toward a Hitler victory in Germany. Can we afford to indulge in a formalistic righteousness which in effect says: 'After Stalinism will come our turn.'

The third alternative is the Third Camp, but this can be a realistic alternative only if before the outbreak of the war the Third Camp idea has gained some ground both ideologically and organisationally in the form of definite groupings capable of giving leadership to the masses. Before World War I and World War II – at least that is the way we estimated the latter situation – there were such groupings. After World War II and now, everyone agrees that these groups have been dissolved, that hardly anything is left of them, that the pull towards one imperialist camp or the other is predominant, that the process of forming revolutionary centers again begins almost from scratch. Our movement has always held that leadership is of pivotal importance; therefore my contention that the determinant of Socialist policy for World War III is success or failure in propagating the idea of the Third Camp and in organising cadres to carry out this idea.

This is no argument for not spreading the Third Camp idea; on the contrary, it is a call to work at it overtime. The harder we work at it and the longer the pre-war period, the better seem to be the chances for growth of Third Camp nuclei, upon which would depend the successful fruition of any people's anti-war eruptions.

But suppose there is no such revival of international socialism, suppose as we evaluate the political tenor and political groupings we do not see sufficient development along the lines we had hoped, to make any impression at all on the war situation, what then? Do we still say that the military outcome is a matter of indifference to us, to the future of the working class and of Socialism?

Therefore, let us propagate the Socialist idea of the Third Camp – but work at it. And as for a position on World War III, that must depend on conditions when war comes.

Omission No. 2

A source of concern in everybody's mind, expressed or unexpressed, is that there is an iron curtain effectively cutting off the peoples of the Stalinist orbit from the western world – except for the radio programs of the United States, England and other western countries, which have, it is reported, considerable numbers of listeners behind the iron curtain. But I refer not to the weapons of the cold war – though to some extent we Socialists do benefit by this cold war propaganda weapon. I have in mind the inability of the Socialists of the western world to get together or even to communicate with kindred elements in Russia and in Eastern Europe. There is no Socialist International, no socialist groupings to include all nations; while there is, sad to relate, a very effective Stalinist international covering the globe.

The former Socialist policy of revolutionary defeatism was based on the mutuality of this tactic not only against but in both warring camps. The communication and consultation between the vanguards of the workers of the warring countries gave mutual help, courage and plan. However, already during World War II, because of both the Nazi and Stalinist tyranny, there was no international revolutionary movement – neither open nor underground, although the underground included many nationalities. The German people and the Russian people were effectively shut off from revolutionary information and contact.

Today also, in this pre-World-War-III period, there is practically no communication between the revolutionary groups of the west and such dissident groups as may exist behind the iron curtain. One must therefore, face the stark truth that, whilst propaganda for the Third Camp can go on in the Western countries, the means for such propaganda is barred in the Stalinist sphere. It does not follow from this that revolutionists throw their hands up and abandon their efforts to reach beyond the iron curtain – especially since no situation is ever static. But one must recognize that the international continuity of the revolutionary movement has been ruptured and never repaired.

Neither Comrade Shachtman nor anyone else gives open recognition to this fact and no one poses the problem.

Omission No. 3

Another question that has never been satisfactorily answered is this:

Why is it good Socialist policy to support bourgeois democracy against totalitarianism in a civil war, as in Spain, and not good Socialist policy to support bourgeois democracy against Stalinist totalitarianism in an international war? What magic is there in the words ‘imperialist war’ to make such a difference? *In a civil war, the Socialist forces not being able to take the lead and dominate the situation, unite with the lesser and less immediate enemy against the worse and more immediate. Why? For survival! For the survival of the working class as an independent political entity and for the survival of the Socialist forces as a revolutionary entity. The Socialist forces act so in a civil war without sacrificing their identity.* No one will argue that for Socialists to take sides in World War III by giving critical military support will not create great difficulties, difficulties in maintaining their Socialist identity and difficulties in maintaining support of the class struggle. But the difficulties entailed by a policy do not make it wrong. On the contrary, the challenge must be met.

Some of Comrade Shachtman’s Points

1. The Resistance Movements

Comrade Shachtman explains that we stood for the third camp in World War II not because we considered the emergence of the Third Camp a certainty, but a possibility. He points out that the Third Camp did emerge during the war, ‘in the form of underground national resistance movements in Europe.’ ‘These movements,’ writes Comrade Shachtman, ‘which were not imperialists fighting other imperialists, but authentic revolutionary struggles of the people against Fascist and imperialist oppression – we did not hesitate for one moment to give our ardent and enthusiastic support.’

Is this, I ask, an accurate picture of the resistance movements? Actually, they were pro-ally. Actually, much of their activity was connected with the military efforts of the allies. Definitely, the resistance movements took sides in the war, the side of the allies against Hitler. And no matter what leadership, even Trotskyite, this would have had to be so, for a reason the Comrade Shachtman does not deign to mention. There is such thing as the military factor in a war. There is such a thing as the decisiveness of a military victory. The unwavering bravery of the resistance movements in giving their help to the allied military efforts, proved beyond a doubt that they understood the Hitler heel would be lifted from their necks only if the allies won the military contest.

Would a Trotskyite leadership have agitated in the resistance movement against the practical alliance between them and the allied forces? Certainly not for long! The difference between a Trotskyite leadership and the Social Democratic plus Stalinist leaders would lie elsewhere. A Trotskyite leadership would try, within these movements, to build strong revolutionary groups; it would direct the eyes of the resistance movements to taking over power once the war was over; it would have to work out its political distinctiveness from both the Social Democrats and the Stalinists, while coordinating all parties in the immediate tasks of the movement. And, of course, a Trotskyite leadership would not have acted as the tools of allied imperialism in disarming the resistance movements after the war, as did the Stalinists in particular. A Trotskyite leadership would have known when the alliance with the allies was over. It would have defended the right of the people to arm themselves – and the right of the people to form their own revolutionary governments.

Therefore, we see in the resistance movements not the actual emergence of the Third Camp, but still only the possibility of the emergence of the Third Camp. Because of the military factor, this could have happened only after the allied victory – with proper leadership.

2. On Answering the Worker

Comrade Shachtman knows very well that no one in politics, not even the numbskull he tries to make Erber appear, would be such a moron as to say to a worker the equivalent of: ‘Go away, don’t bother us, we are not required to give a pledge of any kind. It’s an open question with us.’ Whenever it suits him, Comrade Shachtman can place voluntary limits on his understanding of an opponent’s position as well as limits on his usually fertile mind.

If I, speaking for myself and not for Erber, should want to make my position clear to a worker, I would say something like this:

‘I am and will be opposed to the third world war. It will be an imperialist war on both sides. It will be a contest for the conquest of the world between Russia and the United States, even at the cost of exterminating half the human race and wrecking all civilized life. The common people must rebel against this war and must organize themselves for action under the banner of the Third Camp against both Moscow and Washington, for peace. This is the task now in this pre-war period, to rally support

GREEN | Archive: Debating World War Three

for the third camp, so that people can give effective opposition to the war.’

‘if there has been no encouraging response to the appeal for the Third Camp when war actually comes, I do not change my opinion of the war nor my aim for the emergence of the Third Camp to stop the imperialists in their bloody tracks. However, not because I choose it but because history gives me no choice, I will have to favour a victory of the western powers over Stalinism. For the victorious Stalinist police state will abolish workers’ unions; will end civil liberties which means the right to speak, to write, to meet; will stop all political activity; will send me and fellow Socialists either to concentration camps or to death; will ruthlessly suppress all Socialist and other independent working class organizations. The Russian people will not be able to do a thing to check the enslavement of other working people because they are themselves slaves. While in the Western countries the capitalist rulers will make every effort to curtail our rights in the name of national security, if their interests require it, we can resist their efforts and prevent the imposition of a police state, because of the democratic rights which we have and which we must struggle to maintain throughout the war. So with a victory of the western powers, if there is such a thing as civilized life left after an atomic war, there may be a chance for the working people to continue their fight for betterment and for emancipation from all ruling classes. There is, of course, always a possibility of the workers trying to end the war exactly by such revolutionary aims; this we encourage and help along.’

‘We in this country would have to give certain types of support to the military efforts of the United States. Needless to say, we will be drafted into the armed forces and will fight – this everyone does, except the conscientious objectors. But that will not prevent us from trying to get the idea across to the soldiers in the Stalinist armies whenever opportunity presents itself, for the Third Camp forces must come from both warring camps. At home, because we favour the victory of the Western powers, we will not oppose the military budgets, but we will have something to say about who should pay for them, as well as about democracy in the armed forces. We will further demand that all war profits be confiscated, that workers’ wages be not regimented, that workers’ rights of collective bargaining, of strike, of civil liberties, be enforced.’

‘In other words, while giving critical support to the military efforts of the United States, we carry on, to the best of our ability, as Socialists knowing that in a war the temper of the peoples can change and the Third Camp idea take such hold of the masses as to alter the course of the war and of history.’

Such an explanation has nothing ‘dilettante and flannelmouth’ about it. Nor does this explanation give assurance to the ‘imperialists or their adepts in the labor movement’ that ‘he’s one of us already! We can count on him!’ No more than Kerensky could count on the Bolsheviks. Still speaking for myself, and not for Erber, the social program I outline is NOT ‘subordinated to the needs of American imperialism and its military program,’ for it never abandons the class struggle.

3. The Military Budget

‘Do we tell the American workers to fight for improvements in their economic position and against deterioration of it, even though this conflicts with the needs of the war-preparations budget, or do you tell them to make just a little sacrifice for the military budget so that American imperialism is not weakened before Stalinist imperialism?’ asks Comrade Shachtman. Again, I don’t know about Erber, but if this question were directed at me, I would consider it a gratuitous vulgarization of my position. Of course we tell the workers to fight for improvements and against deterioration of their living conditions. Yes, we ‘do try to arouse the workers against the cold blooded preparations for the atom-bomb slaughter’ because we are in this pre-war period hoping to build a Third Camp against the war. Again, it would be a very wanton misconstruction to say that my position is that ‘it is an imperialist war, but one which I INTEND TO SUPPORT after breaks out.’ I do NOT intend to support the war at any point. I only consider the possibility of favouring a western victory if the war breaks out without there having been some measure of success for the Third Camp, so that it may become an anti-war, revolutionary rallying point.

The bourgeois would not admonish me, ‘if you really want to win the war, then quit playing with our preparations for it!’ They are astute enough to see that I am thinking in terms of organizing a peoples’ force to make war impossible, a peoples’ force for peace. They are astute enough to see that my approach is to work for the Third Camp in this crucial time before the actual hot war breaks out.

My interest in the war budget now is to compare its expenditures for war with the lack of expenditure for health, housing and education. My interest in it now is to lift its burden from the shoulders of the working people by propagandizing a tax program opposing the stiff pay-as-you-go income tax, and advocating higher taxes on profits and also certain forms of capital tax; in other words, a let-the-rich-pay-for-their-war tax program. The ISL should, in fact, get busy along this line.

4. On Historic Relationships

In his section on the historic relationship between Stalinism and capitalism, Comrade Shachtman engages in formalistic juxtaposition. But I ask: What if Capitalism is not 'the product of decay of Stalinism, born out of its womb' – what if capitalism is not called upon to 'perform the necessary and indispensable task of ridding man of the fetters of obsolete and dying Stalinism' – as was the historic relation between capitalism and feudalism? Neatly posing the historic relationship between capitalism and Stalinism does not meet the point that today counter-revolutionary Stalinism is a more immediate and more deadly menace to the survival of working class independence and of the Socialist movement than is western capitalism. I am not interested, however, in the survival of working class independence and of socialist movement, so that the working class may perform its historic mission of ending capitalism – and also Stalinism. [2]

Comrade Shachtman reiterates – of course correctly – that 'neither the decadent bourgeois nor the decadent social democratic parties have a social program, a political program, capable of defeating Stalinism or even weakening it seriously.' But who talks about the SOCIAL and POLITICAL programs of capitalists and of their supporters to defeat Stalinism? Indeed, only the revolutionary program of the working class has what it takes to defeat Stalinism as a social and political system. *But the fly in the ointment is: What becomes of the revolutionary program of the working class if Stalinism dominates the globe? Comrade Shachtman disposes of 'military programs' with an impatient gesture, but military programs determine many issues not only for the imperialists but also for the peoples – as witness the resistance movements of World War II.*

It is beclouding the issues of today to fall back on pure historic relationships. An instance in point is the belated revival of nationalism when it has no historic business to do so. First Nazism and the Stalinism turned back history and made nationalism once more a burning issue, so that our group has seen fit, and properly so, to support the nationalist movements – knowing full-well that INTERNATIONALISM should be the order of the day, historically speaking. *The saving grace is that we do not subordinate ourselves to nationalism, but use it as a stepping stone to higher things.*

The failure of the working class to overthrow capitalism and found Socialism betimes has, produced some monstrous results. It may be that World War III will come with the international working class still so disoriented from its class interests and goal, so without adequate leadership to guide it, that at least at the beginning

of the war it will follow one imperialist camp or the other. In that case, while doing whatever is possible for the building of a Third Camp, it will be necessary to support the victory of the capitalist democracies, as such a victory would offer some chance for the continuing development for the revolutionary potentialities of the working class. Here too the saving grace would be NOT to subordinate oneself to American imperialism, as Comrade Shachtman states Erber does, and as I would NOT do.

In Conclusion

The crux of the difference between my position and the official position of the ISL is that the latter holds that opposition to World War III as imperialist on both sides and advocacy of the Third Camp, preclude possible support of the military efforts of the capitalist democracies; whereas I hold that such opposition and such advocacy do not preclude this possibility.

Susan Green was a member of the Workers Party / Independent Socialist League.

Notes

- [1] Ernest Erber was a leading member of the Workers Party who, in 1949, wrote a critique of Lenin as an anti-democratic thinker. Shachtman replied in a book-length internal bulletin, 'Under the Banner of Marxism,' dismissing Erber as, amongst a great many other things, a renegade, a non-Marxist, and a latter-day Bernsteinian.
- [2] In this paragraph Green is responding to a series of gun-to-the-head questions that Max Shachtman had posed to Ernest Erber in 'Under the banner of Marxism.' Here are Shachtman's questions: 'Feudalism produced capitalism; capitalism was a product of the decay of feudalism; capitalism rid man of the fetters of feudalism, and in the performance of this historical task, it was necessary and indispensable. Capitalism and bureaucratic-collectivism are also two contending social orders. With what relations between themselves? Has Stalinism produced capitalism as its historical successor? Is capitalism the product of the decay of Stalinism, born out of its womb? Is capitalism called upon to perform the necessary and indispensable task of ridding man of the fetters of obsolete and dying Stalinism?'

Shachtman's purpose is to cause his reader to be so appalled at the apparent logic – granting capitalism a progressive social function – that he or she will recoil from any idea of granting critical support to the capitalist west in a military conflict with the Soviet Union. Green's response – that Shachtman's highly formalised argument 'does not meet the point that today counter-revolutionary Stalinism is a more immediate and more deadly menace to the survival of working class independence and of the Socialist movement than is western capitalism' – clears the way for socialists to offer critical support to the West.