

Two Discussion Articles on the National Question:

## Socialism and the National Question

### Socialist United States of Europe Is Nearer

Gates thinks that the question of the Socialist United States of Europe is "a programmatic question, over which there is no fundamental dispute, and in which there is nothing new." (NEW INTERNATIONAL, June, 1943, page 187. The trouble is that Johnson misunderstands the rôle of the party. It isn't so simple.

*The National Committee resolution and Gates' exposition are based upon a false theoretical analysis of the national struggles in Europe.*

Lenin in 1915 suggested certain historical conditions that would once more make possible a great national war in modern Europe.

It is highly improbable that this imperialist war of 1914-16 will be transformed into a national war... Nevertheless, it cannot be said that such a transformation is impossible; if the European proletariat were to remain impotent for another twenty years; if the present war were to end in victories similar to those achieved by Napoleon, in the subjugation of a number of virile national states; if imperialism outside of Europe (primarily American and Japanese) were to remain in power for another

twenty years without a transition to socialism, say, as a result of a Japanese-American war, then a great national war in Europe would be possible. This means that Europe would be thrown back for several decades. This is improbable. But it is not impossible, for to picture world history as advancing smoothly and steadily without sometimes taking gigantic strides backward is undialectical, unscientific and theoretically wrong. (Emphasis in original, quoted by Gates, NEW INTERNATIONAL, June, 1943, page 187.)

#### The Viewpoint of Lenin

Lenin is here taking as a precedent the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. From 1793 to about 1807 revolutionary France fought a progressive war against monarchical and feudal Europe. About 1808 the progressive German aristocracy and the bourgeoisie reorganized Germany, introducing the reforms of the French Revolution (as far as was possible from above), in order to free the country from the imperialist domination of Napoleon (see my article, "Capitalist Society and the War," NEW INTERNATIONAL, July, 1940, page 115). The war thereupon changed its character, becoming, in 1813

next stage, on the part of Germany, a progressive war of national emancipation. Today, in the advanced countries, the progressive national rôle played by the German bourgeoisie can be played only by the proletariat. But the national war of the proletariat is the war for international socialism. Nothing that Hitler has done has changed this in the slightest degree.

We must see this very clearly. In 1792 the Paris workers compelled the French bourgeoisie to stay in Paris and fight. In 1814 the Paris workers asked Napoleon to defend Paris. Both the bourgeois emperor and the bourgeoisie refused. In 1871 the more mature Paris proletariat, in its eagerness to defend the country, armed itself and overthrew the Paris bourgeoisie, which fled—only to Versailles. In 1942 the French bourgeoisie runs to Algiers or joins the Germans, whereupon not the Paris but the fully matured French proletariat takes upon itself the liberation of France, leading the nation. But this is all on the basis of the advancing proletarian revolution and the struggle for workers' power. There is nothing bourgeois about it at all, nothing.

Lenin, and Trotsky after him, posed the transformation of the imperialist war into the national war on the basis of the incapacity of the proletariat to lead the nation, following the complete subjugation of Europe by a victorious dictator. That would be a terrible social retrogression, a genuine "hurling back of society." In my article I quoted, instead of Lenin, Trotsky, who outlined these conditions chiefly to show how impossible they were for any period that we could foresee. Lenin, then without our experiences, is not so sharp, but is clear enough. Look at that quotation again.

The first condition is that the European proletariat remains impotent. The whole question revolves around that. Secondly, the particular war must come to a stop without a revolution, owing to the impotence of the masses. Revolutions in the defeated countries there will be none, because instead of a bankrupt bourgeoisie, the European proletariat will have to deal with a European dictator like Napoleon. Lenin then looks to see if there is a socialist revolution abroad, to keep the European proletariat alive. If, however, there is no gleam of hope, then and only then, after many years, will the proletariat be in such a condition that the bourgeoisie would have to take the lead against the European dictator and fight a "truly national" war.

Study of the NC resolution convinced me that the resolution did not really know where it stood on this question. Indirectly but as emphatically as I could, I warned, "No such situation as Lenin envisaged is visible in Europe today." To this Gates replies: "We have merely to ask: If this is so, why, then, do you say that you support the slogan of national liberation?" He actually says: "It has not happened exactly as Lenin said, yet several important conditions cited by him have indubitably occurred." Instead of retreating, he plunges head foremost. Which are the "several important conditions" of Lenin which exist to keep the proletariat impotent and open out the possibility of a national war once more in Europe? There is absolutely not one. Being in confusion here, Gates is in confusion everywhere. And let me say in advance that this is a very dangerous question on which to take an unclear position and then attempt to justify it.

**The Proletariat and the War**

The NC resolution and Gates have what I called "a deep, profound miscomprehension of the European crisis." After study of the NC resolution I thought it imperative to draw

sharp attention to the tremendous experiences which made the European proletariat of 1939 so different from the proletariat of 1914. I pointed out also that, to crown all this, bourgeois Europe was being battered to pieces, thus relieving the proletariat of any sense of allegiance to the existing society. I emphasized the tremendous historical developments of the war. But the NC resolution then and Gates now understand neither the deep revolutionary temper of the masses today nor its relation to the successive shocks of the war. Let us briefly analyze the relation:

a) Hitler begins with a tremendous "dynamism." He knows and all history teaches that in his situation he must win and keep on winning. As I explained in July, 1940: his blitzkrieg dared not fail, "for failure and a war of stalemate meant certain disaster." (NEW INTERNATIONAL, July, 1940, page 121.) If even he had conquered Britain, he still had America to deal with. There is no peace for him. But for the time being the masses are stunned.

b) In June, 1941, he attacks Russia. *The moment he does so the European proletariat stirs itself.* Hitler's aim is to capture Leningrad, Moscow and Kharkov in one sweeping campaign. His dramatic failure in front of Moscow lifts the European proletariat still higher. So does the entry of America.

c) The unexpected and superb defense by Russia during 1942 has a tremendous cumulative influence on the revolutionary development of the European proletariat. In this war every month is equal to a year. In the second half of my article (NEW INTERNATIONAL, May, 1943), I wrote: "Let there be no mistake about this. Stalingrad and the American invasion of Africa marked a new stage of the war—the impending defeat of Germany." And, in opposing the idea that the workers were sluggish, not organized, etc., and that the revolutionary movement was non-existent, I wrote: "These arguments, apart from their theoretical invalidity, lag behind the tremendous speed of development in Europe and the contradictory dynamics of the actual conditions." The NC resolution states that "... the working class, as a whole, is still in a sort of stupor."

And (even if this were true) how will it come out of the stupor? "The intensity of the exploitation and oppression of the conqueror, rising constantly, helps to enlarge the ranks of these groups [who struggle] by driving the more spirited workers to join them; and the indications are that this trend will continue." (NEW INTERNATIONAL, February, 1943, page 39.) Nothing could be more misleading. Not intensity of exploitation, but the whole past of the last twenty-five years and what Lenin calls "military decisions of a violent nature" are the decisive factors on the revolutionary aspirations and actions of the masses today. Does this need proof now? Today, not a year after the NC resolution, all occupied Europe is poised for revolution.

**The Socialist United States of Europe**

All these commissions and omissions reach their culmination in the treatment of the slogan, the Socialist United States of Europe, and that is why I concentrated on it. I wrote: "Behind any proposals to make a change in the application of the socialist slogan..." and Gates interpolates "What kind of change and who proposes it?" It seems now that Johnson does not understand even the rôle of the language. The NC resolution says that "to believe that this slogan should occupy the same place in the Marxian program and, above all, in the Marxian platform, in the revolutionary transitional demands, now, when Europe is divided into one independent state and

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a whole series of subject nations, is the sheerest kind of abstractionism and dogmatism, and represents a failure to understand the radical change that has taken place in the European situation."

That, I say, is not only false but theoretically ruinous. I am going to state the difference now so that there can be no possibility of misunderstanding.

The NC resolution believes that inasmuch as the proletariat is compelled to take upon itself the national defense against a foreign power it thereby becomes less class-conscious, less concerned with socialism, less militantly determined to achieve the socialist revolution. *I state unequivocally that exactly the opposite is the case, that inasmuch as the proletariat, particularly in France and Poland, now has to take upon itself the national defense in place of the bankrupt bourgeoisie, it is more class-conscious, it is more socialistic, and more determined than ever before in its history to achieve the socialist revolution.* Every step forward for national liberation sharpens the demand for social liberation. In 1943 it could not be otherwise. This, a theoretical premise, has been abundantly justified by the facts.

#### The Tasks of the Vanguard

What, then, must we do? We can learn from our enemies. As soon as Hitler realized that his "dynamism" was over and that this could not be hidden from the German proletariat and the people of Europe, he and Goebbels began to tell the German people: "We are in peril—national defense or ruin." It is just at this stage that the revolutionary movement everywhere, understanding the proletariat of Europe better than Hitler, must begin to reinforce the revolutionary sentiments of the German people and the German soldiers by saying: "You are in peril—socialist revolution or ruin." This, I say, for occupied Europe, was central to any analysis of the national question.

*The perspectives of the war in December, 1942, and the chaos of Europe offered special opportunities for persistent work in this field.* I emphasized that the barriers between the workers of Europe were down. The workers were all thrown together, irrespective of nationality, millions of German soldiers scattered over Europe, not only on battlefields but among the population, millions of oppressed nationalities in Germany. The vanguard had now to pose before them the question of unity and leave the rest to the rapidly developing situation.

Having this in mind, I offered the example of a leaflet which the French workers might address to the German workers. The leaflet must be reread. Here are extracts with emphasis added. "From the French workers to the German workers." The leaflet tells the German soldiers that they are hated and will be fought mercilessly as long as they do Hitler's work. But it says also: "We the common people of France," "You, the soldiers and the other workers seize the power in Germany. . . . Why don't you and the other workers of Germany try your hand at ruling the country? Every other class has tried. That is the true socialism. Workers' power, not Hitler's Germany and Hitler's crimes."

After a workers' victory the European workers would all protect the German workers from Roosevelt and Churchill. "We have to . . . build a new Europe . . . all of us as workers together . . . We shall be invincible." At the end I say: "Long live Free France! Long live Free Germany! Long live the power of the workers. For the Socialist United States of Eu-

rope." Then I put in a postscript, reminding the German workers of the great socialist movement in old Germany and asking them to give a sign to help rebuild the socialist movement in France. Gates may not know what the leaflet means. The German workers would.

Gates gives no sign that he recognizes the German question or the twelve million foreign workers in Germany, all burning to liberate themselves. I asked a series of questions in connection with the leaflet. No answer.

For Gates the leaflet is a "compound of bourgeois nationalism in the tradition of de Gaullism." The liberals call this ex-monarchist a democrat but Gates makes de Gaulle into an international socialist. For Gates "there is not the slightest harmony between the content of the leaflet and the slogans attached thereto."

There are here two mistakes. The first is a profound misconception which does not distinguish between the abstract concept of "nationalized property" and the concrete struggle of the workers against intolerable conditions and a hated enemy, which drives them to take the power into their own hands. If the proletariat seizes power, for whatever reason, for land, bread and peace, or only for bread and water, then, in Lenin's words, we have left capitalism behind and are on the very threshold of socialism. And the struggle for the power of the workers everywhere, what is that but the struggle for the Socialist United States of Europe? It is there that we begin.

The second mistake is the stubborn ignoring of the international political tasks flowing from the rôle of German imperialism in Europe today. This is no question of a doctrinaire internationalism but *organic to the national liberation of occupied Europe.* In 1939 and 1940 the French proletariat, for instance, had as its main objective task the political preparation of the French proletarian revolution. Today the course of events has made the defeat of German imperialism the conscious predominating concern of hundreds of millions in Europe. That is the great change that has taken place. Vital political consequences flow from it. The demoralization and disintegration of the German army and the stimulation of the German proletariat to unite with the foreign workers and overthrow Hitlerism is a concrete task which, in the large areas of Western Europe, achieves the national liberation at least from German imperialism. The danger for a revolutionary grouping is not that it will ignore national liberation. The danger is exactly the opposite. It is that it will forget that once the masses are in motion, particularly such masses, at such a time as this, their consciousness does not keep pace with their actions. In the common struggle for national liberation, *our* task is the clarification of ends and *means* for the power of the masses. In the common struggle against German imperialism, *our* task is the international solidarity of the proletariat. That is Bolshevism. It is very easy to see Bolshevism in the past and, still more, in the future. In the present, however, it is always hard. To see differences to their roots and to formulate them is not easy and requires more than Gates gives to it.

#### National Liberation

Yet in occupied Europe any political organization which fumbles or hesitates about presenting the national emancipation to the workers as the first question before them and be-

for it, is crazy and fittingly doomed. In the whole wide world only the Cannonites think otherwise and but for their confusion on the subject I would not have thought it possible that such people could exist. There is no contradiction between the struggle for the power of the workers and the slogan of national liberation as the main agitational slogan.

On this question, however, nine-tenths of the NC resolution takes one position and one-tenth of it talks almost one-half of another position. Excepting for the section on the dual power, the NC resolution envisages a struggle for national liberation, and as a subsidiary to this, the raising of the slogans, right of free press and right to organize. But suddenly in the section on the dual power the resolution speaks for the struggle for power. Very revealing is the manner in which this is done. The resolution says that the old owners who fled when the Germans came will put in appearance and claim the ownership of the property. Now: "It is incredible that in all or even in most cases the workers will simply bow to these claims, and without another word, resume work," etc. It is good to know that this is incredible. That being so, the business of the resolution from start to finish should have been the preparation of national struggles with the seizure of these factories and similar revolutionary activities, as their immediate culmination. The vanguard must struggle for factory committee and peasant committees to be the centers of the national resistance, to work for the coordination of all these groups in the struggle against the invader. *At the same time* it must pose unhesitatingly and without equivocation the question of the power of the workers through the workers' organizations which, however camouflaged, will in reality achieve the national liberation. Will there be a "democratic interlude"? History will decide.

The NC resolution actually says that after the national liberation, "the power will, so to speak, lie in the streets. The mass will incline instinctively to take hold of it in its own name." That is a tremendous thing to say. Power in the streets means the absolute bankruptcy of the bourgeois régime. This power the workers must seize and to get it more easily and to safeguard it, they must work on the German soldiers and encourage the German revolution.

The national struggle is here closely linked with the international. That is the outstanding feature of Europe. Why is this so hard to see? Let French, Poles, Czechs, Austrians join the Italians and Germans who a few weeks ago sang the *International* in Berlin and together shouted: "Down with the war!" As I pointed out in my article, a new road will have been opened for all. Despite their armies and their food, the United Nations would be in a terrible dilemma.

"Against Hitler. Here for national freedom, there for peace." Yes, but also: "Against Hitler. The unity of the workers. That brings us out of this mess. That stops the war. Why should we murder each other? All of us together. That, soldiers, brothers and sisters of all nationalities, is the beginning of the Socialist United States of Europe we have talked about for so long. This is it." This is the Bolshevik presentation of the national question. And the whole movement is toward this. Europe is very near to it. It may occur sooner or later. It may not occur. That is not the point. We are not prophets. The European vanguard and we must work with the trend and in theory at least command events. That is what my article, first and foremost, tried to show. Gates finds that "the resolution of the Workers Party... indicated the kind of epoch in which we live." But Johnson's conception

"has no relation to time and space. It is in the realm of fantasy where belief is substituted for reality." The gates of wrath which the wrath of Gates so incautiously opened should now be closed and kept closed while the inmate meditates upon the headlines in the evening paper.

The Socialist United States of Europe is not the main agitational slogan. In my article I wrote:

*Does this mean that in Poland, France or Estonia we try to organize a mass demonstration for the Socialist United States of Europe, as we would try to organize a strike against mass deportations? Such stupidity need not be theoretically refuted. If attempted by some lunatic, its ignominious failure would be refutation enough. Yet the slogan is closer to reality today than before. There is a task here of combination. (NEW INTERNATIONAL, May, 1913, page 152. Emphasis in original.)*

I shall not labor the point further.

#### The Building of the Party

I have left this to the last because the successful building of the party is the outcome of a correct political analysis and of nothing else. To say a party must be built is to say nothing. We have been saying that for a decade. The question is how to build it. On the question of the party, however, the NC resolution breaks new ground. Here it is: "Between the present day and the day the masses rise up against the beneficiaries of the war, a considerable period of time will in all probability elapse" (NEW INTERNATIONAL, January, 1943, page 9). This "considerable period of time" is not stated but from the general tenor of the resolution we may guess at it. However, its length "depends almost directly on how soon it will be possible to reestablish an independent mass labor movement..." (*ibid.*) Gates, and he merely repeats the NC resolution (NEW INTERNATIONAL, February, 1943, page 39), tells us with precision what this independent labor movement is: "The European labor movement... working class fraternal organizations... cooperative organizations." All these, says the NC resolution, must be reformed "under the leadership of a cohesive vanguard party" before the masses rise up against the war. The whole passage should be read to see how dogmatically this point is made. The ordinary mind spins itself dizzy seeking some basis for this fantastic proposition. I do not propose to argue about this unless some attempt is made to defend it.

In my article, again indirectly and with great moderation, I indicated the error. (I refuse to make capital about Italy because the falsity of this astonishing "discovery" should have been seen in advance of any concrete disproof.) I wrote:

*Let us not forget, as Marx has so carefully pointed out, that the working class is disciplined, united and organized by the very mechanism of capitalist production itself. Five thousand workers in a factory are in a most fundamental sense organized. They can transform themselves into a soviet in an hour, given the complete, the shameful bankruptcy and disgrace of the ruling class and the absence of any of its agents masquerading as workers' leaders. (NEW INTERNATIONAL, May, 1913, page 150. Emphasis in original.)*

My next two sentences show precisely the relation of the party to the "spontaneous" action of the masses. "The Labor Front\* may very well find the power thrust into its hands." Then I add: "What it will do with it is another question. Soviets do not necessarily mean soviet power." If (in my hypothetical case) the bankruptcy of the German bourgeoisie is shameful and complete, if the social-democracy does not exist, if the régime is in such crisis that only the workers in the So-

\*The Nazis driven out, of course.

vies can hold society together, and yet I say that we do not necessarily have soviet power, isn't that bending over backward to show precisely how important is the rôle of the revolutionary party? But in the NC resolution, which, according to Gates, is supposed to teach the importance of the party, the relationship between mass action and soviets, mass labor parties and vanguard party, overthrow of the old régime (which brings the European war to an end and achieves the national liberation) and the dictatorship of the proletariat (which is something else)—this is so confused that for the masses to act it seems that you must build even a fraternal organization! Our theoretical structure is now all in pieces.

In reality, the building of the party can stem only from a clear theory and a firm grasp of the concrete situation. Nearly everybody is preparing for national revolution, even some fascists. The vanguard, foremost in the national struggle, and, like the rest, raising the slogan of national emancipation as the main agitational slogan, sharply differentiates itself from all the others in the resistance group by insisting that the workers are not fighting for the national emancipation in order that those who ruined or betrayed the country should come back and rule. The rule must be by the workers and peasants themselves." The vanguard summons all those who think so, and there are plenty, to prepare now for the power of the working class. That is the nucleus of the revolutionary party. Without that, no revolutionary party.

Such, in my view, is the revolutionary conception of national emancipation in its relation to the socialist revolution, which is the expressed theme of the NC resolution. Instead of that, what do we have? On March 15, seven months ago, the bourgeois and Stalinist National Resistance Committee of France called upon the French people to be ready to seize the government and to administer it. Naturally, they hope to control this, but that is for us to help the workers prevent and organize to prevent. In June, Eisenhower begs the French people not to act, please not to act, to wait. In July, The New INTERNATIONAL prints two extracts from Trotsky directed against "sectarians and phrase-lovers," proving that for the occupied countries the slogans, right of free press and right to organize, are correct. Johnson presumably does not know that in a fascist country, in general, you must use democratic slogans. Right to organize and programs of economic demands to educate the workers, that is what preoccupies the NC resolution which Gates so stoutly defends. The truth is that, in occupied Europe today, given the fierce hatred of the invader which characterizes the masses of the people, their feeling that the foreign government is not theirs and cannot last, such slogans push the masses back. When used by a revolutionary organization as the main slogans after the slogan of national liberation they are thoroughly reactionary and place those who use them, for whatever purpose, at the tail of the national movement. The slogan to emphasize after national liberation is the power of the workers in a workers' government. Going wrong here, the NC resolution then proceeds to push back the slogan of the Socialist United States of Europe. This is no "programmatic" question. Still less is it a question of Johnson's ignorance. It is a question of the socialist revolution in Europe. However restricted your topic, your conceptions of that revolution govern it.

The conceptual root of all this false policy is the original confusion as to whether Hitler has not "exactly" but partially created the conditions hypothetically posed by Lenin. To say that Hitler has hurled society back in any sense except the

purely agitational is wrong. He has so contributed to the ruin of bourgeois society in Europe as to bring the socialist revolution immeasurably nearer.

It is necessary to draw the analysis to its conclusion, particularly today.

(1) At the present moment the key to the European situation is more than ever Germany. With the defeat of Germany impending, the vanguard in the occupied countries, while struggling for the national liberation, must find ways and means to open out for the desperate German people and the doubting soldiers a new road by way of the proletarian revolution. That will be the national emancipation, in more senses than one.

(2) The United Nations and the German bourgeoisie will do their best to prevent this revolution. If there is a proletarian revolution in Germany, the revolution in the occupied countries will assume a dynamic force which will place squarely upon American imperialism the necessity of reinstating the native bourgeoisie to its former power. If peace is made before there is any revolt in Germany, or the revolt is stifled or deflected, the proletariat in the occupied countries will have a much harder road. But all signs point to the growing consciousness of their terrible situation among the German workers, confusion in the Germany bourgeoisie and looming catastrophe for the German bourgeois state. Great battles are ahead. The Nazis face destruction and, if allowed, may do strange things. But the question now for the German bourgeoisie is: How much more can the army and the people stand? Obviously, we are approaching a great historical climax, which will decide the relations in the next stage of the struggle for proletarian power. It may take a year. It may take a few months. No one can predict these concrete things. But, despite the innumerable varieties of historical experience, such a climax is now a legitimate expectation. It is next on the order of the day. For a revolutionary, that is sufficient. It is on such that we must build at home as well as abroad.

J. R. JOHNSON.

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