

The *Nation* and Trotsky

*In which certain questions are raised
about a traditionally liberal journal*

An Editorial

A CURIOUS document has come to the attention of the NEW MASSES. The least curious thing about it is its source. At this moment, all the forces of darkness and reaction throughout the world are unleashing a violent campaign against communism in general and against the Soviet Union in particular. Hardly a week passes without some anti-Soviet blast from Hitler, Franco, or Mussolini. The Catholic hierarchy everywhere has called for a "holy" war against communism. Hearst and the Republican high command have been as unscrupulous as they have been indefatigable in their barrage of slander and hatred against the U.S.S.R. That is why the source of the document we have received is no surprise to us. We have by now become accustomed to seeing the Trotskyites add their share of libel, malice, and poison to the anti-Soviet campaigns of the reaction.

The document to which we refer comes directly from Trotskyite headquarters on Fifth Avenue, New York City. Otherwise it is disguised for the deception of the innocent and the unwary. It is headed "Provisional American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky," and is signed by Norman Thomas, Devere Allen, John Dewey, Horace Kallen, Freda Kirchwey, and Joseph Wood Krutch.

This document is trickily worded to convey the impression that Trotsky, an innocent man, has been accused of plotting the assassination of leading Soviet officials in collusion with Hitler's Gestapo without having an opportunity to clear himself, and that under pressure from the Soviet authorities and the Norwegian fascist press (ah, now you see who is *really* working with the fascists!) the Norwegian government has placed Trotsky under a prison regime. Trotsky, his American agents, and the few liberals they have misled want to aid in the formation of "an International Commission of Inquiry which shall examine all the available evidence and make public its findings."

This proposed body is described in the appeal as "neutral." If that were the case, the group which issued the appeal might have called itself the Provisional American Committee for the Neutral Investigation of Trotsky. But with unconscious frankness, the agents of Trotsky in this country have described it as a committee for the *defense* of Leon Trotsky.

This is an accurate description of any "neutral" body which could possibly be set up in this instance. The most likely candidates for the commission would be certain lead-

ers of the Second International and their conscious allies and unconscious dupes. How "neutral" these people are may be seen from their reactions to the Moscow trial. Even *before* the trial got under way, *before* the evidence became public, some of them rushed to the defense of the murderers of Kirov. And now, when that trial has established that Trotsky inspired and the sixteen accused worked out terror plots to kill Stalin and other Soviet leaders, the "neutral" Social Democratic leaders continue to defend these conspirators.

CONSIDER the conduct of the reactionary leaders of the Second International, men like de Brouckere, Adler, Citrine, and Schevenels. In October 1934 the Communist International proposed to them that joint aid be given to the Asturian miners defending their lives against armed fascism. Later the Communist International appealed for joint action in defense of the Ethiopian people assaulted by Italian Fascism.

In both instances, the reactionary Social

Democratic leaders showed their unwillingness to take realistic action to defend peace and civil liberties. They weaseled that they were not *competent* to enter into negotiations for these measures so vital to the well-being of mankind. They said they would have to convene the Executive of the Second International to discuss the matter.

Now, however, when it comes to defending the murderers of Kirov, when it comes to whitewashing Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their accomplices, these leaders of the Second International feel fully competent to act without hesitancy, without investigation. They did not have to consult their organizations or convene the Executive. Instead, de Brouckere, Adler, Citrine, and Schevenels rushed a telegram to Moscow in defense of the anti-Soviet terrorists. This is how "neutral" these people are on this question.

Here is another instance of this kind of "neutrality." D. N. Pritt is a leading British lawyer. He has never been a Communist. He was present at the Moscow trial. Like all the foreign eyewitnesses he thought the trial was



A. Ajay

"Mr. Trotsky says we must beware of lobster Thermidor and recapitulation to the bourgeoisie."

conducted, as the *Nation* would wish it, "according to the ordinary rules of evidence and the ordinary personal safeguards." On September 29 he was back in London. A reporter of the *Daily Herald*, Labor Party organ, interviewed him. Pritt said in the clearest possible terms that the trial had been authentic, objective, fair in every way. He spoke as a barrister trained in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence. The *Daily Herald* reporter begged him not to grant any other interviews; the Labor Party organ wanted an exclusive, a scoop. Five days passed and not a word of the interview appeared in the *Daily Herald*. Pritt then gave his statement to the *News-Chronicle*. What had happened was obvious. The "neutral" *Daily Herald* had suppressed what they thought would remain an exclusive interview with a British lawyer who had witnessed the Moscow trial and had found it fair.

Reactionary Socialist leaders in this country have been equally "neutral." The *Jewish Daily Forward* and the *New Leader*, Old Guard organs, have openly defended the murderers of Kirov. Norman Thomas, liberal front for a Socialist Party now rotting with the Trotskyite cancer, also whitewashed Trotsky and his accomplices. Before the trial was over, Norman Thomas said he would not "accept the results of the ordinary political trial as conducted in Russia. In this he echoed the arch-reactionary New York *Sun*, and other tory organs which wept bitterly over the fate of these "old bolsheviks."

In addition to Norman Thomas, who refused a united front with the Communists, but took the Trotskyites into his party, the committee for the defense of Leon Trotsky includes other people whose neutrality in this case is open to serious doubt. Joseph Wood Krutch has never, to our knowledge, defended the civil rights of the victims of American capitalism; he has been silent on Scottsboro and Angelo Herndon, to mention but two cases which needed defense. On the other hand, he has been notoriously anti-Communist both as a writer and as literary editor of the *Nation*. Many non-Communists have been shocked by his persistent prejudice in handing books by Communists to Trotskyite reviewers with one ax to grind.

We can only regret to find in such a "neutral" outfit a man like Professor John Dewey, whose sincerity no one can doubt. It is a pity he has been misled by some of his disciples who peddle diluted versions of pragmatism under a Marxist label.

THE MOST curious aspect of the curious document which we received is that it is signed by two editors of the *Nation*. And attached to the appeal as justification for slandering the Soviet Union and whitewashing Trotsky is a reprint of the editorial on the Moscow trial published by the *Nation* in its issue of October 10.

Evading the actual killing of Kirov and the plots to murder other Soviet leaders, the *Nation* editorial expounds the theory that an

underground opposition exists in the Soviet Union, and that Trotsky's criticism provides the "ideological basis of this opposition." The *Nation* bases this theory upon facts known to the entire world: the trial, confession, and conviction of sixteen terrorists. But it is precisely these facts which disprove the existence of any underground opposition. The eye-witness accounts of the open trial reveal that here was no political "opposition." Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Smirnov did not resort to murder until they had ceased to be the leaders of any opposition. The terrorists themselves admitted this at the trial in great detail. They themselves explained that *it was precisely because they lacked any mass support which could be led in opposition that they turned to murder.*

There is neither open rebellion nor underground opposition in the Soviet Union. A treasonable organization existed and functioned. It attempted to kill Stalin, Voroshilov, and others. It actually did kill Kirov. The leaders of the conspiracy were caught. They confessed. They were tried openly and fairly. They confessed again. They were convicted and executed. Accomplices are awaiting trial. More, no doubt, remain to be caught. Outside the Soviet Union others continue to plot and intrigue.

This is no underground opposition. It is not a political party or faction. The sixteen accused admitted they had no political program. They confessed that it was only a plot to seize power by assassination. As such it was doomed to failure. Why should the *Nation*, which has championed many good causes, describe an unprincipled band of killers as a political opposition?

THE MORE sensational organs of the reaction, in their eagerness to defend Trotsky and his agents, have resorted to weird inventions of "mesmerism" and "hypnotic" drugs to ex-



To Gilbert Seldes

After a Theme by A. E. Housman

When I was one and twenty
I heard a wise man say,
"Be careful who your boss is
If you should write for pay.
Write trash, lad, if you have to,
But keep your conscience free."
But Hearst was paying plenty
No use to talk to me!

When I was one and twenty
This wise man said once more,
"If you have brains to peddle
Don't knock at Hearst's back door.
Those who sell Hearst their talent
Sells pride and fair name, too."
And I'm still earning plenty
But O, 'tis true, 'tis true!

SLATER.



"Car 37. Car 37. Pick up a nut at the Literary Digest office. He keeps trying to buy the joint for two bits."

plain the confessions. The *Nation* falls victim to this journalistic mesmerism; in its editorial of October 10 it talks of "the mystery that veils the motives and conduct of the Moscow trials." To the *Nation* these were "strange trials."

What was strange? Where was the mystery? Sixteen confessed assassins were brought into open court. They were tried in the presence of foreign correspondents and the representatives of foreign embassies. They were given an opportunity to repudiate their confessions before the entire world. Instead, they corroborated their guilt, individually and collectively. After the prosecutor's summation, the accused again, each in his turn, were permitted to address the court and the world. Again they reaffirmed their guilt. The charge was murder, conspiracy to murder, and treason. The repeated confessions meant only one thing. They meant that those who confessed were guilty. Consequently, the verdict was guilty. What is there "mysterious" about such a trial? Who could find mystery in so clear and just a procedure except those who are intent upon the "defense of Leon Trotsky"?

THE BEHAVIOR of the accused, not only in the courtroom, but during their entire lives, offers valuable material for a study of political degeneracy. That degeneracy has been ably described by Joshua Kunitz in his NEW MASSES series concluded in this issue. We have first-hand evidence of it in the confessions of Kamenev and Zinoviev. But the *Nation* is suspicious because the accused seemed to "revel in confessions of guilt." Stuff and nonsense! The record shows the contrary. The prisoners confessed with the greatest reluctance. They evaded and dodged and lied whenever they could. They confessed only to the extent of the evidence produced against them.

Did Zinoviev at first confess that he had contrived the murder of Kirov—that little murder which the *Nation* considers too unimportant to mention? He did not. Instead, he tried to cover his guilt by sending the press a hypocritical obituary of his victim. When they were tried in 1935 for the killing