

Who Is Trotsky's Foe?

He says he campaigns against Stalin and "Stalinism," but an examination of his political career tells a very different story

An Editorial

"Something always remains and sticks from the most impudent lies, a fact which all bodies and individuals concerned in the art of lying in this world know only too well, and hence they stop at nothing to achieve this end." Adolf Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, after asserting his faith in "the very correct principle" that "the bigger a lie, the more quickly it will be believed." (1935 German edition, p. 252-3.)

THE most carefully cultivated historical lie of Hitlerism is that which places the whole responsibility for the cruelties and indignities forced upon the German people after the World War upon the Weimar republic. The lie was necessary in order to claim a succession of "successes" for the Nazi regime.

The most carefully cultivated historical lie of Trotskyism is that which asserts his opposition to be exclusively against the leadership and policies of Stalin. This legend was necessary to give Trotsky the appearance of having the blanket endorsement of Lenin; for if it could be shown that Trotsky's opposition was directed, at its origin, against Lenin, then it would follow that his conflict is with bolshevism, not merely with Stalin—that Trotsky would have clashed with whomever was chosen to carry on the Bolshevik tradition. An examination of the historical record shows that had Lenin lived, Trotsky's plots would have been directed against Lenin.

A knowledge of Trotsky's differences with Bolshevik theory on fundamental questions is essential to an understanding of the evidence against him at the recent terrorist trials in Moscow. There are some who find it "incredible" that Trotsky should seek to restore capitalism in the U.S.S.R. Such "incredibility" rests on acceptance of the premise that capitalism has been wiped out in the U.S.S.R. and that a totally new system has replaced it, for capitalism could not have been overthrown and an economic vacuum installed. But Trotsky has never for a moment accepted this premise. The denial of the possibility of building socialism in the Soviet Union is one of the foundation theories of Trotskyism. In 1922, in a postscript to his *A Program for Peace*, Trotsky wrote:

So long as the bourgeoisie remains in power in the other European countries, we are compelled, in our struggle against economic isolation, to seek for agreements with the capitalist world; at the same time, one may say with certainty that these agreements may at best help us to cure some of our economic ills, to take one or another step forward, but that genuine advance in the construction of socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the proletariat in the most important countries of Europe.

But the proletariat has not come to power in any other country in Europe, and Trotsky's defeatist conclusion still holds good, if one accepts his doctrine. It may be said that this was written in 1922, and that Trotsky may have changed his mind in the intervening period. Trotsky has changed his mind, but only to insist with increasing vehemence of expression that Soviet leadership and Soviet economy have "degenerated" and "decayed." As we shall see, he organized an opposition bloc in October 1923, on the charge of "bankruptcy." Fourteen years have passed, and conditions are still getting worse, according to Trotsky. Obviously the 1922 quotation from his writings is, from the Trotskyist viewpoint, too optimistic, and not too defeatist.

Compare Trotsky's position with the statement made by Lenin on November 20, 1922, at a plenary session of the Moscow Soviet, his last public speech:

At the present time, socialism has already ceased to be a question of the remote future, it has ceased to be some abstract picture, an icon. As regards icons we still hold our old opinion, and that is a bad opinion. We have dragged socialism into day-to-day life, and it is there that we must define our position. That is the task of our times, the task of our epoch. Permit me to close with an expression of my assurance that no matter how difficult this task may be, no matter how new it may be in comparison with our previous tasks, and no matter how many difficulties it confronts us with, we shall all of us together—not tomorrow, but within a few years—perform this task at all costs, so that out of N.E.P. Russia will come Socialist Russia.

This was the position adopted by Stalin and the majority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party after Lenin's death; it was the position which Trotsky categorically denied and defamed.

But this was no academic dispute. And the testimony at the Moscow trials shows its subsequent bearing on Trotskyism. It was agreement on this point that made possible the opposition bloc of the Trotsky faction and the Zinoviev faction in 1926. These factions had clashed in 1923-5, but gradually made peace with each other on the basis of the denial of the possibility of building socialism in the Soviet Union. An important part of Piatakov's testimony brought this agreement up to date. Said Piatakov:

When I asked how it was possible to establish contacts with the "Rights," Kamenev said directly that this in general was an exhibition of definite political childishness on my part, that yesterday's disagreement [the Trotsky-Zinoviev bloc temporarily split in 1928] could not divide us because there existed a unity of aim—the overthrow of the Stalinist leadership and the abandonment of con-

struction of socialism, with corresponding changes in the economic policy.

Those who find it "incredible" that Trotsky should seek to "restore" capitalism in the U.S.S.R. simply exhibit their ignorance of one of the fundamental issues in the conflict between Trotskyism and Leninism. Trotsky always denied the possibility of building socialism in the Soviet Union without victorious proletarian revolutions "in the most important countries of Europe." It might be hard to conceive that a man who recognizes socialist construction in the U.S.S.R. should plot capitalist restoration; but the development of Trotskyism from the position denying the possibility of building socialism in one country, such as the U.S.S.R., to the position of conspiring with capitalist powers in order to hoist himself into power, is clear.

THE FACT that Trotskyism clashes with the main body of Communist thought and action can be shown historically, as well as theoretically.

To get to the origins of the conflict between Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, represented by Lenin, we must go back to the year 1903, the year of the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. At this Congress, the right and left wings of the R.S.D.L.P. parted company in a sharp theoretical struggle on the organizational nature of their party. The Bolsheviks, in a resolution drafted by Lenin, contended for a strongly centralized, highly disciplined, compact party; the Mensheviks, represented by Martov's resolution, wanted a loose, undisciplined party. Trotsky sided with Martov against the Bolsheviks. In his pamphlet *Our Political Tasks*, written the very next year, he denounced the "anti-democratic" tendencies of Lenin. He called Lenin "the leader of the reactionary wing of the party." He assailed the "morally repugnant suspiciousness of Lenin." He wrote: "For Lenin, Marxism is a dishrag." The pamphlet was dedicated to "my dear teacher, Paul Borisovich Axelrod," leader of the Mensheviks.

After the abortive 1905 revolution, an influential Menshevik group came to be known as "Liquidators," because they demanded the liquidation of the Bolshevik form of organization, adopted by the 1903 congress. They favored a parliamentary party styled after German Social Democracy. Trotsky again sided with the Mensheviks as a "Liquidator." He gave the Menshevik position a characteristic twist, however, a fact which did not escape Lenin, who wrote:

Trotsky and the Trotskyists and compromisers who resemble him are more harmful than any of the Liquidators, since the convinced Liquidators elucidate their views straightforwardly and it is easy for the workers to make out their mistakes, but the Messrs. Trotsky deceive the workers, conceal the evil, render its exposure and cure impossible. Whoever supports Trotsky's group supports the policy of falsehood and deception of the workers, the policy of screening liquidationism.

On all questions, Trotsky's policy was to appear to the left of the main body of Mensheviks while making common cause with them and with other groups against the Bolsheviks. This policy finally culminated in the formation of a bloc in August 1912, under the leadership of Trotsky and Martov, against the Bolsheviks. Lenin counter-attacked in a famous article, "Violation of Unity Under Cover of Unity," in which he wrote:

Trotsky avoids facts and concrete indications just because they mercilessly refute all his angry exclamations and pompous phrases.

After the collapse of the "August bloc," Lenin wrote:

Trotsky has never had a "physiognomy" and has none now; he flutters about, he comes and goes from liberals to Marxists; he flings about pompous phrases torn from this source or that. Trotsky deceives the backward workers, for he defends the Liquidators when he raises hypocritical questions about the illegal apparatus, when he asserts that there is no liberal working-class politics among us, etc. Trotsky, who has broken his own August bloc, who has rejected all decisions of the Party, who has cut himself off both from the illegal apparatus and the organized workers, is a splitter of the worst variety.

Trotsky, in the midst of the controversy, told his Menshevik friend, N. S. Chkheidze, in a letter dated August 1, 1913, what he thought of Lenin:

And what a senseless obsession is the wretched squabbling systematically provoked by the master squabbler, Lenin, that professional exploiter of the backwardness of the Russian working-class movement. . . . The whole edifice of Leninism at the present time is built on lies and falsifications, and bears within it the poisoned seed of its own disintegration.

Substitute "Stalin" for "Lenin" and it is obvious that Trotsky has made many of his old phrases do multiple duty.

The "August bloc" collapsed. Trotsky took an internationalist position during the war, but Lenin, in May 1917, still reckoned him as one filled with the "vacillations of the petty bourgeoisie." After the February revolution, Trotsky and his faction, now called "Interregionalists," appeared to be coming closer to the Bolshevik position. The whole faction entered the Bolshevik Party in August 1917, and three "Interregionalists," including Trotsky, were given important posts. As subsequent events showed, Trotsky had not become a Bolshevik; he had made his peace with Bolshevism by temporarily suppressing his differences.

It is seriously argued that Trotsky, once having been a member of the Bolshevik Party, could never have traveled so far away from Bolshevism as the testimony at the trials indi-

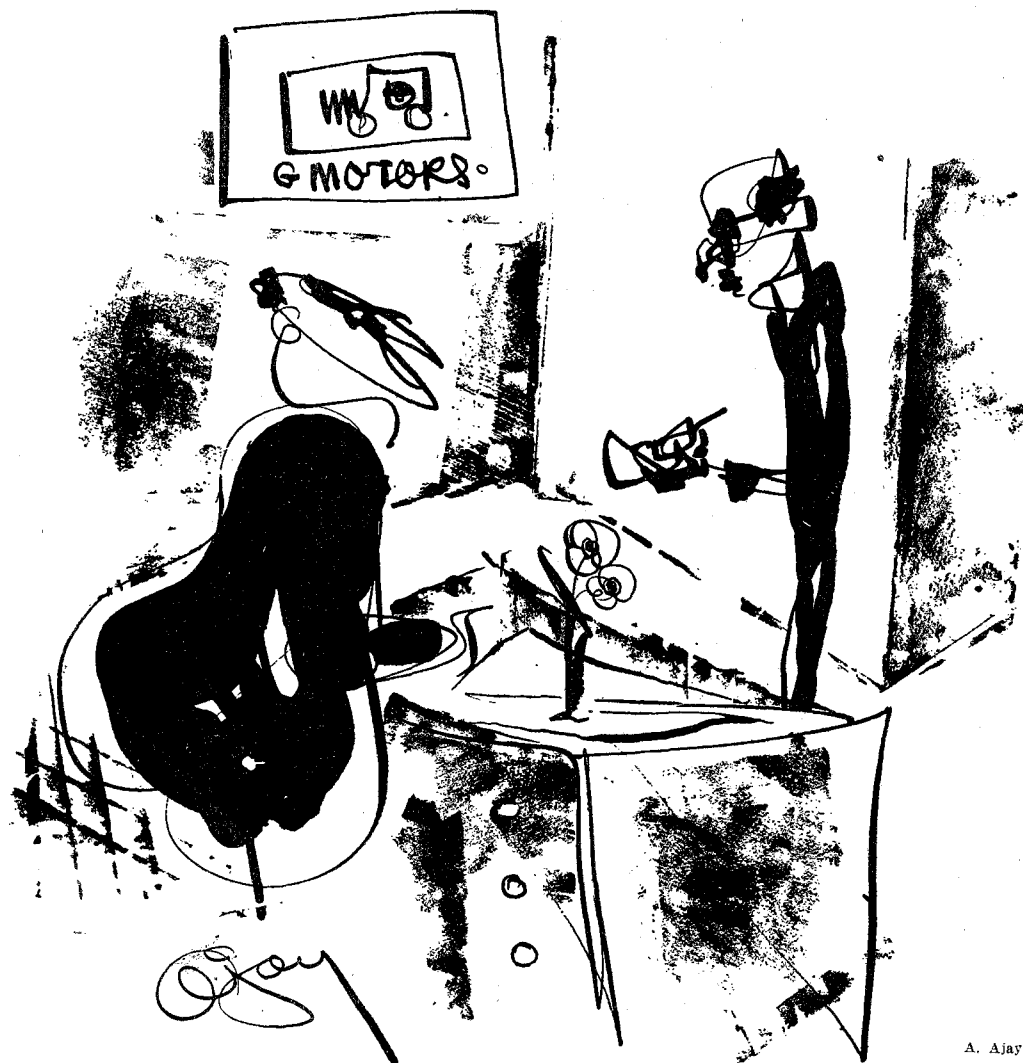
cates. By the same logic, Trotsky could never have joined the Bolshevik Party; once having been a Menshevik, it could be similarly argued, he could never travel so far away from Menshevism as to become a Bolshevik. But the truth is that the present cannot be wiped out by reference to some period in the past. Considering his entire career, Trotsky was a member of the Bolshevik Party for only a relatively short time; it would be just as foolish to confuse his Bolshevik period with his long career as a Menshevik as it is to confuse his opposition period with his short career as a "Bolshevik."

The mere date of Trotsky's entrance into the Bolshevik Party disposes of the myth that he is an "old Bolshevik." The violence of his denunciations of Lenin, and the severity with which Lenin criticized him from 1903 until 1917, dispose of the myth that the differences between the two were "superficial." Through the long, hard, dark, critical years before the October Revolution, years in which the Bolshevik Party developed into an irresistible fighting force, Trotsky was an enemy of Bolshevism. He made his peace with the Bolsheviks only on the eve of the revolution. But not for long.

On January 7, 1918, Lenin proposed that an independent and immediate peace be made with Germany despite very severe terms, be-

cause a "breathing-space" was critical to the continued life of the young Soviet republic. Opposition came from two directions. Trotsky put forth the slogan, characteristically useful as a two-edged weapon for political maneuvering, "Neither peace nor war." Bukharin and others called for a "revolutionary war," i.e., no peace, but an offensive. The Bukharin group, which included Radek and Piatakov among others, styled themselves "Left Communists" and denounced Lenin for selling out to the Germans. As Lenin pointed out, both Trotsky and Bukharin were in essential agreement, for neither position could lead to peace, the real point at issue.

As a result of the Trotsky-Bukharin opposition, the negotiations with the Germans were long drawn out; the Germans kept advancing farther and farther into Russia, and the harshness of their "peace" terms grew with their military progress. In February, while the negotiations with the Germans were dragging out at Brest-Litovsk, a delegation visited Lenin to discuss the treaty. Lenin told them, at one point: "I would first like to get the advice of Stalin before answering you." A little later, Lenin again answered the delegation: "Stalin has just arrived; we are in the midst of a discussion, and we will soon give you our answer." A reply was then forthcoming, signed jointly by Lenin and Stalin, in which



A. Ajay

"Why are we putting up such a battle against the union? Because we don't want our employees paying tribute for the right to work!"

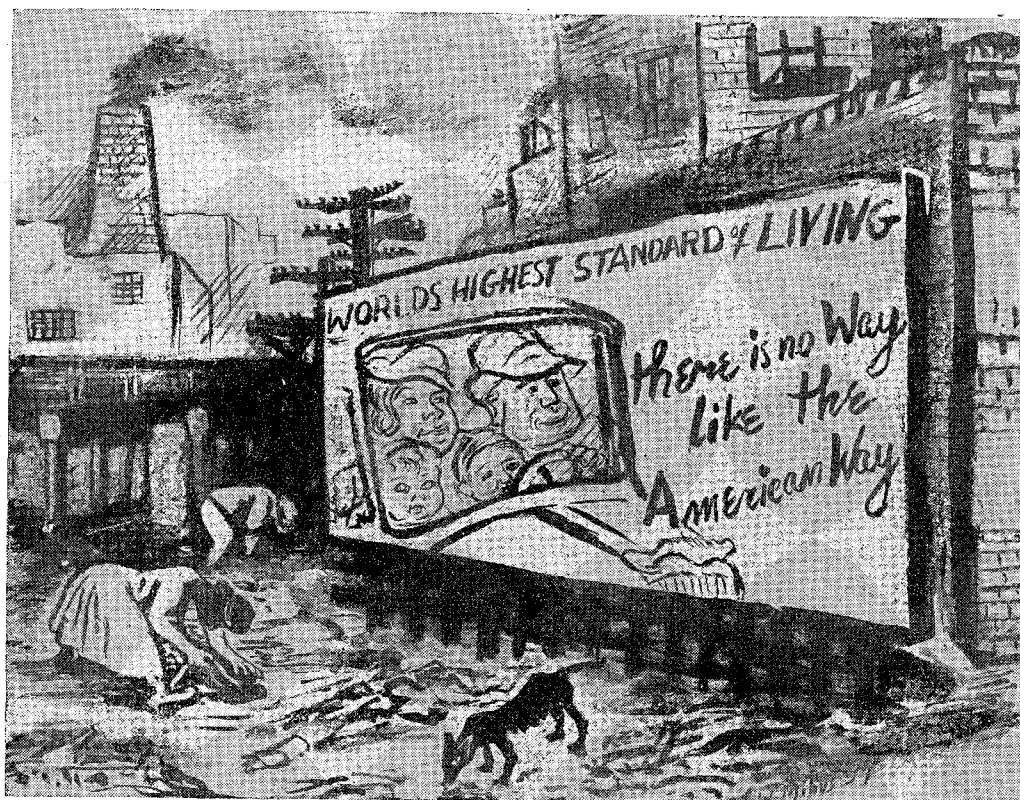
both maintained their original position: immediate signing of the peace treaty. A study of the voting in the Central Committee on the Brest-Litovsk issue shows that Stalin firmly supported Lenin against both the Bukharin and Trotsky factions from the very beginning.

The policy of Lenin and Stalin finally prevailed only after a long and bitter internal struggle. A number of persons, including Bukharin and Piatakov, resigned from their leading positions in protest at the signing of the treaty. Later they, as well as Trotsky, admitted their mistake, but it is impossible to credit such people, as did the *Nation* recently, with being the "brains and consciences of the Russian revolution."

In 1920, the "Left Communist" faction adopted the name of "Democratic Centralism" (it was characteristic of the oppositionists to try to turn Leninist slogans against Lenin) and attacked Lenin for trying to foster a "dictatorship of party officialdom." The attacks against Lenin are in every case similar to the later attacks against Stalin. The pretext for the "Democratic Centralism" group's opposition was the effort made by the Central Committee, under Lenin, to overcome the prevailing anarchy and inefficiency in production through the introduction of one-man management, technical specialists, piece work, abolition of food quotas from the peasants, and the like.

The party sharply rejected the criticisms and proposals of this "left" opposition, only to be confronted with two other oppositions on the trade-union issue. One faction, the "Workers' Opposition," sought to convert the trade unions into the highest organs of the state on a syndicalist program. Trotsky adopted the same ruinous attitude towards the unions, in reverse. As head of the Railroad and Water Transport Workers' Union, his bureaucratic, despotic methods forced a split. In order to bend the disaffected workers completely to his will, Trotsky proposed that the unions be made appendages of the state and treated accordingly with military severity. So great was the distance between Lenin and Trotsky on the question, that Lenin wrote: "Trotsky's error, if not recognized and corrected, will lead to the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Trotsky did neither, but, instead, precipitated a furious debate when the party could least afford inner dissension. The interventionist armies were invading the Soviets on many fronts; famine was racking the home front. The whole controversy came to a head at the Tenth Party Congress, March 1921, which Lenin opened with the words: "We are going to put an end to opposition now, to put the lid on it; we have had enough of opposition." Both the Workers' Opposition and the Trotsky opposition were decisively defeated on the trade-union question. On a motion by Lenin, the Congress explicitly prohibited the continued existence of factions or groupings within the party. In his speech, Lenin said: "We will not permit disputes about deviations. We must put an end to this. The situation is becoming extremely



W. Millus

perilous, is becoming an outright menace to the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Stalin was elected secretary of the party in March 1922, prior to Lenin's first illness. The Trotskyist opposition, which had made public appearances on the Brest-Litovsk question, the trade-union question, and phases of the New Economic Policy (Trotsky submitted a proposal, which was rejected, to permit Soviet enterprises to mortgage their property to private capitalists), prepared for an open break with the party leadership. A new edition of the 1912 "August bloc" was in order. On October 8, 1923, forty-six oppositionists, led by Trotsky, filed a statement with the Central Committee which charged that the existing leadership was ruining the country. The forty-six signers constituted a heterogeneous bloc of Trotskyists and remnants of all the previous oppositions, "Left Communist," "Democratic Centralism," and "Workers' Opposition." Among the forty-six were Piatakov (an inveterate oppositionist and a member of the "Left Opposition" since 1918), I. N. Smirnov, and other of the defendants at the recent trials.

The key paragraph in this statement read:

The regime which has been set up within the party is absolutely intolerable. It destroys the initiative of the party, replacing the party by a selected bureaucratic apparatus, which does not fail to function in normal times, but which inevitably misfires at moments of crisis and which threatens to prove absolutely bankrupt in the face of the serious events which are approaching. The present situation is due to the fact that the regime of factional dictatorship within the party which objectively developed after the Tenth Congress had outlived its usefulness.

This statement reveals the true character of the Trotsky opposition. Its reference to the Tenth Congress is its essence. The Tenth Congress featured a bitter debate between

Lenin and Trotsky on the trade-union question. The Tenth Congress laid the basis for the New Economic Policy. Above all, the Tenth Congress prohibited opposition factions and groupings. The Congress antedated Lenin's illness by almost a year. It preceded Stalin's election as secretary of the party by a full year.

The Trotskyist attack on "the regime of factional dictatorship within the party which objectively developed after the Tenth Congress" could not have been an attack against "Stalinism," although Stalin supported Lenin on every issue. It was an attack against Lenin, who introduced every key resolution at the Tenth Congress, and who was in active leadership for almost another year.

From this time forth, Trotskyism came into sharp collision with bolshevism in quite the same way and on the same issues separating Trotsky from Lenin until 1917. The language which Trotsky has used against Stalin since 1923 is identical with the language he used against Lenin until 1917. With characteristic facility, he attacks Stalin in the name of Lenin just as he attacked Lenin in the name of Marx, just as the "Left Communist" and "Democratic Centralism" oppositions attacked Lenin in the name of "pure" communism. The strategy is as old as the revolutionary movement, and the condition for its effectiveness is ignorance of the history of the revolutionary movement.

Trotsky as the inheritor of Leninism is a historical legend concocted for reasons of political expediency. Trotsky's fight against the leadership and policies of Stalin is the natural continuation of his long fight against Lenin and Leninism. The relatively brief detour made by Trotsky in 1917 should not obscure his political development since 1903.

READERS' FORUM

Three more letters repudiating connections with the Trotsky "defense" committee

● Following are letters from three men, outstanding in their various fields, who have been named by the "American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky" as members of that committee. These letters of repudiation of the Trotsky committee were received by the New MASSES in response to requests for comment on the letter of resignation from Mauritz A. Hallgren which we published last week. Mr. Hallgren is associate editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, Mr. Gannett is literary critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Mr. Bowman is a member of the faculty of Columbia University, and a member of the executive committee of the League for Industrial Democracy, and Mr. Jaffe, star of the Broadway production of *Grand Hotel*, is now playing a leading role in *The Eternal Road*. The letter from Mr. Bowman to the *New York Times* has not, so far as we have been able to discover, been published by that paper. We are informed that several other members of the Trotsky "defense" committee have resigned, including Jacob Billikopf, an official of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and Paul Ward, Washington correspondent of the *Nation*. A number of other answers to our inquiry were received, some expressing private regret that their names had been included "by mistake," but asking us to keep the matter confidential, as they believed the mistake had been "honest"; others, like that of Professor E. A. Ross of Wisconsin University, declaring that Mr. Hallgren's letter had expressed "what some of us are beginning to think," but limiting their action to watchful waiting; still others, like Norman Thomas and Manuel Komroff, declaring that they expected to stand by the committee. We may have an opportunity to publish some of these other letters in future issues.—THE EDITORS.

From Critic Lewis Gannett

● You address me as a member of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, and ask my position on Mauritz Hallgren's letter.

I have never been a member of the Trotsky committee, though my name has appeared on its letterhead. I had expressed, informally, my belief that Trotsky should have free asylum, and full freedom of speech, at a time when he was gagged in Norway; and a member of the Trotsky committee apparently understood that to mean that I would join the group. While Trotsky was in difficulty in Norway I made no protest; when he landed in Mexico, and began exercising a liberal freedom of speech, I wrote the committee asking how my name got on their lists, and, when informed, assured them that it was a no doubt honest misunderstanding and asked them to remove it. They assured me they would; but they continue to send it out in their publicity.

The committee has ceased to be a committee for the defense of Leon Trotsky; it has become a committee for the propagation of Trotskyism, an organ of apparently indiscriminate attack upon the Soviet Union. I am not as clear in my mind about the facts of the recent Soviet trials as Mr. Hallgren appears to be; on the other hand, I have no faith in Mr. Trotsky's virginal innocence of the art of conspiracy, and no sympathy with the dogmatic fulminations of this misnamed committee.

Sincerely,

LEWIS GANNETT.

From Actor Sam Jaffe

● I have read the Hallgren letter with a great deal of interest. My own position in this whole matter—one that I have explained to your Mr. Freeman some weeks ago—was concern over the right of asylum for political prisoners. That part of the committee's work done, I too felt that my

connection with it was automatically brought to a close. When, however, I found my name in the *New York Times* linked with their further activities, I immediately called the secretary and asked that it be withdrawn, for the reason that I have already stated.

May I add that I am no member of any political party or organization and that I feel myself a genuine friend of Soviet Russia.

Sincerely yours,

SAM JAFFE.

From Professor Le Roy Bowman

● I was glad to read the proofs of a letter by Mauritz A. Hallgren that you sent and also today to see his article in the *Daily Worker*, which I take it is identical. I doubt if it is necessary for me to comment on that at all since you will see my position from the two communications, carbons of which I am sending to you herewith. The first was sent to the *New York Times* on February 2 declaring that I had gone on the Committee only to help to get asylum for Trotsky and to work toward an impartial inquiry of the trials in Russia and Trotsky activities that would tend to clear up the questioning in people's minds. The other is a letter of resignation to the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, stating again the fact that I had joined the Committee for these two purposes, that I am not at all in sympathy with the implication of the report of their activities in the *New York Times*, and that I am certainly more in sympathy with the present Communist government in Russia than with any opposition. This is said, you will understand, as coming from a non-Communist.

I sent both these letters before reading Mr. Hallgren's statement, so you will understand that I have not needed to change my opinion. My position has been the same all along.

Very sincerely yours,

L. E. BOWMAN.

February 3, 1937.

To the American Committee
for the Defense of Leon Trotsky,
Dear Sirs:

I must ask that you let me resign from the committee. I was very heartily in sympathy with the two purposes that are printed at the top of your news bulletin and that I was told about in the letter that asked me to lend my name to the movement, namely: (1) To safeguard Trotsky's right to asylum;

and (2) to join in the organization of an impartial committee of inquiry.

The report that came out in the *New York Times*, February 1st, seems to me to indicate too strongly that the members of this committee were sympathetic with the political philosophy of Trotsky. The article certainly sounded as if the members of the committee were defending Trotsky's point of view, but I do not want to enter into that controversy. My sympathies are much more with the present Communist government in Russia than with the opposition.

Very sincerely yours,

L. E. BOWMAN.

February 2, 1937.

To the Editor of the *New York Times*
Dear Sir:

The article in the *Times* of February 1st telling of the pronouncements of the American Committee for the Defense of Trotsky raises an issue not unknown to defenders of democracy. It is the question of the right of a person to be heard if he is to be judged. The accusations that were detailed against this man in the Russian trials are startling. They aroused in a group of liberals and radicals the desire to get at the facts that might be revealed from sources not given much credence in the trials. I was one ready to support such a purpose of the American Committee for the Defense of Trotsky.

One other purpose of the Committee made appeal to a sense of justice, namely: the effort to get for Trotsky, the safe asylum due a political exile.

There is a real difference, however, between defense of a person's right to asylum and to be heard, and, on the other hand, defense of that same person's acts or the political philosophy behind the acts. Trotskyism is too much a bundle of intense feelings and extravagant accusations as well as defensive reactions, to let such a distinction go unheeded in the matter of the American Committee. I, for one, approve of the efforts of the Committee spoken of above. I can in no sense let it be thought that in so doing I am a defender or defamer of Trotskyism.

The statement of the Committee as included in your article of the 1st would indicate that those whose names were listed are attempting to "clear" Trotsky, and to prejudge before investigation the trials in Moscow as ex parte and unjust. I cannot subscribe to such imputation. There is much concerning Trotsky and the trials about which I would like to know more, and it was because the Committee seemed to be an impartial effort to get at those things that I joined it. Beyond that purpose I feel I cannot go with the Committee. I imagine the majority of American citizens would have something of the same reaction.

L. E. BOWMAN.

Terror in Jersey City

● It may perhaps be of interest to you to learn how easily it can happen here. Jersey City's esteemed Mayor Hague must have learned plenty on his visit to Germany last year, and now his Gestapo need not take a back seat compared with Hitler's organization. This week, a police lieutenant accompanied by a uniformed policeman visited the shop where I am employed and asked my employer if there were any Communists in the shop, or if there were any employees that he suspected of being Communists or "labor agitators."

It is not reasonable to assume that our shop was singled out for this purpose, as there has been no "labor trouble" since the establishment of the firm. The fate of any labor-union sympathizer, once the powerful Hague machine has put its finger on him, can be only too easily conjectured.

Q. M.



Dan Rice