

Roundabout Roads to Trotskyism

The sincerity with which a view is held does not validate it, a fact which is of special importance just at present

An Editorial

AFTER months of sharp controversy, it has become evident that the defense of Leon Trotsky has taken the form of a division of labor among his defenders. One theme has emerged with three chief variations. It is important to distinguish between the various arguments proffered in Trotsky's behalf; it is equally important to discern the essential agreement of all the various lines of approach in terms of their political implications.

1. Trotsky and his special pleaders subordinate their attacks upon the validity of the Moscow trials to their general offensive, of long standing, against the whole Soviet leadership and policies. According to the familiar Trotskyist formula, the trials were "frame-ups" of "old Bolsheviks" perpetrated by Stalin as the head of a "totalitarian" state or a "mad-house" (both from Trotsky's speech at the New York Hippodrome).

2. Some dissociate themselves from, or even deprecate, Trotsky's general line, while they profess to find the charges against Trotsky "fantastic," "incredible," or "inconceivable." This outlook is especially characteristic of the Socialist members associated in Trotsky's "defense" committee.

3. Some liberals have tried to dissociate themselves both from Trotsky's general line and from his personal defense, while they argue in favor of an "impartial commission of inquiry."

Each or all of these positions may be held with various degrees of sincerity; in any case, the sincerity with which an idea is held does not validate it. Neither are these positions so neatly boxed off that one person may not hold all three, shuttling on demand from one to the other, although it is true that Norman Thomas, for example, identifies himself with the second, and some liberals with the third. Our purpose is to indicate the full political implications of these three lines of approach to the Moscow trials in order to find where they converge.

Those who defend Trotsky personally, but carefully dissociate themselves from him politically, are guilty of a flagrant, untenable dichotomy. Trotsky the man cannot be severed from Trotskyism, the system of ideas and actions. The NEW MASSES has maintained that the crimes of the Trotskyists in the Moscow trials were not acts of sudden, isolated aberration; they were, on the contrary, the fruit of long years of stubborn opposition to the policies and leadership which have made the Soviet Union great. For example, we have reminded those who found it "incredible" that

Trotsky should seek to restore capitalism in the U. S. S. R., that Trotsky never thought it possible to build socialism there anyway, failing revolutions in the most important countries of Europe. Incidentally, these same incredulous individuals never seem to consider the perpetration of "the greatest frame-up in history" by the genuine old Bolsheviks at the head of the Soviet state similarly "incredible."

This artificial separation between Trotsky and Trotskyism is responsible for the second position enumerated. Those who make this separation permit the Trotskyists to start where they leave off. For the Trotskyists draw political conclusions, even if others don't. The Trotskyists talk, write, and broadcast about "degeneration" in the Soviet Union, "madhouse," "totalitarian state," etc. They do this by posing the question: if Trotsky could not be guilty of such monstrous crimes, the Soviet leadership is guilty of monstrous crimes for "persecuting" him! The Norman Thomases cannot disavow responsibility for the conclusion when they agree to the premise.

Analysis shows the same to be true of position No. 3.

The Trotskyists, original inspirers of the campaign for an "impartial commission of inquiry," have tried to present the issue thus: are you for or against an impartial inquiry? Now, nobody is against an impartial inquiry. A partial trial is no trial at all. As raised by the Trotskyists, the issue is a false one because it has only one possible side.

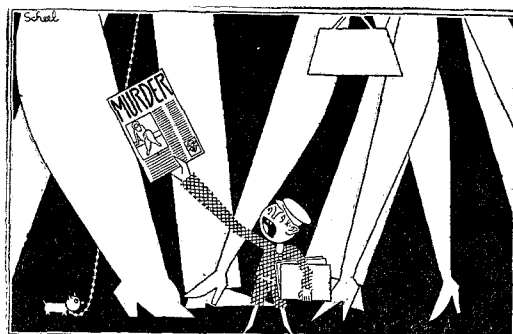
The true issue is: what agency is competent to hold an impartial inquiry and mete out justice? If the Soviet courts are truly the courts of a workers' state, then they are pre-eminently competent to hold such an inquiry. Now, two warrants for the arrest of Leon Trotsky have been issued by Soviet courts after extended trials of Trotsky's confessed accomplices. Two trials have already been held. There is no justification for an inquiry outside the Soviet courts unless the Soviet courts have been partner to a "frame-up," as

charged by the Trotskyists. It is significant that the committee most interested in this "impartial investigation" is called "The American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky."

In the final analysis, the true issue is: are the Soviet courts competent to hold an impartial inquiry? Are the courts of the only workers' Power to be impugned in favor of a trial in a capitalist court? (Trotsky has declared his desire to take his case into capitalist courts by suing Communist papers.) Those who answer no to the first question and yes to the second demand an "independent" investigation. But the political implications of this demand must not be slighted; they are just what the Trotskyists need for their whole campaign against the U. S. S. R. Trotsky indicts the whole socialist system and leadership in the Soviet Union. Liberals who become partner to his attack against the Soviet judiciary cannot disclaim responsibility for their share of the blame in the whole campaign, waged by Trotsky in the capitalist press and eagerly sought by that press, of slander against the U. S. S. R.

A subsidiary question is: are any agencies, other than the Soviet courts, competent to hold an impartial inquiry? It is significant that the Trotskyists have carefully avoided naming names. If we think of Socialists, is Norman Thomas to be a member of the commission? But Thomas has long been on record with prejudgments against the Soviet leadership and the Soviet system. If we name liberals, are those on the Trotsky "defense" committee competent to pass judgment? But they have already passed judgment by impugning the good faith of the Soviet court in an inquiry which comes clearly within its jurisdiction. Are capitalist lawyers to pass judgment? Is the capitalist press to pass judgment?

This whole campaign for an "impartial inquiry" outside the Soviet courts masquerades under liberal phraseology, but it has nothing in common with true liberalism, whose interests lie in defending, not impugning, the Soviet Union. The Trotskyists have nursed the campaign along because they will draw the political implications, knifing the Soviet Union, which some liberals refuse to draw under cover of abstract principles of justice. Again we repeat that the sincerity with which some liberals may hold this demand does not justify it. Liberalism negates itself when it becomes the unwitting ally of those forces which would weaken the authority and prestige of the only workers' state in a world shadowed by war, fascism, and Reaction.



Theodore Scheel

NEW MASSES

ESTABLISHED 1911

Editorial Staff

M. R. BENDINER, THEODORE DRAPER, F. W. DUPEE, JOSEPH FREEMAN, MICHAEL GOLD, CROCKETT JOHNSON, BRUCE MINTON, ARNOLD REID, EDWIN ROLFE, ISIDOR SCHNEIDER, ALEXANDER TAYLOR, MARGUERITE YOUNG

Contributing Editors

GRANVILLE HICKS, JOSHUA KUNITZ, LOREN MILLER

Business and Circulation Manager

GEORGE WILLNER

Advertising Manager

ERIC BERNAY



The Supreme Court Conflict

THE hysteria over President Roosevelt's plan to outsmart the crafty Supreme Court, uncovers a strange and contorted idea of what constitutes political democracy. There are in Washington three branches of government. There is a Congress of 531 men and women, all elected by the vote of the people, 471 of them as recently as three months ago. Ostensibly this is the body that represents the political sentiment of the United States at the present time. Then there is a president, to carry out and administer the laws passed by the people's representatives. He, too, was chosen three months ago, and by a more overwhelming vote than any president had received since Monroe swept the country in 1820. And finally, there are nine men in the Supreme Court, men who were never elected, who are responsible to no one at all, who are secure in their positions for the rest of their lives, and who were handed those positions by presidents dating as far back as Taft.

Much has happened in the years since these men came to the Supreme Court. The world is a vastly different place from what it was in the war days of Wilson. And the presidents who followed him, representing the extreme of social reaction, have been thoroughly repudiated by the electorate. Yet the men those presidents placed on the country's highest bench remain, and they remain not as a detached group of beings devoted to preventing miscarriages of the expressed will of the people, but rather as a body of men with fixed social creeds, who systematically frustrate the will of the people through their interpretations of a complex document drawn up 148 years ago. These judges are constantly engaged in the business of making and remaking the Constitution, and they are not always gentle in their treatment of that sainted document. In the most literal sense, the Supreme Court has made itself, without the least authorization, a third house of the legislature, vastly more powerful than the other two because its decisions admit of no appeal.

Yet hypocrites bawl from every platform in the land, from the front pages of the press, over elaborate radio networks, that if the Court is "subordinated" to Congress or the executive, democracy will die. And democracy will live, presumably, only as long as the people's representatives are wholly under the thumb of this archaic and usurping oligarchy. What shameless pretense!

The one validly democratic criticism of the Roosevelt proposal is that it is faint-hearted, that it fails utterly to put the Court in its place. It attempts, wholly and solely, to secure an oligarchy of a more liberal brand, one more in accord with the present temper of the nation. Progressives

can afford to support the President in this only so long as they bear in mind the greater struggle that is involved. Packing the Court is no solution. It does not subordinate the Court to the popular will. That can be done only by stripping the Court completely of its veto power over acts of Congress.

Youth on the March

MORE than 2000 young Americans will assemble in Washington this weekend to dramatize their plea for passage of the American Youth Act. Coming from every state and every segment of the youth population, the "pilgrims" express two momentous tendencies in American life. The first is growing, irresistible pressure for fulfillment of the November election mandate. Accompanying this movement is an inescapable swing toward independent political action which is implicit in this journey to the nation's capital under the auspices of the American Youth Congress.

That the Youth Act, embodying a sweeping program of aid to millions of young people in need, is entirely in harmony with the election pledges of Mr. Roosevelt, must be plain by now. The measure, introduced last week by Senator Lundeen and Congressmen Maverick and Voorhis, has been redrafted with the coöperation of experts in every field. No one can challenge its "practicality." The real issue is the willingness of President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party to buck those interests which must pay the cost of a decent relief program for the nation's youth. In the past, politicians have never hesitated to pay lip-service to the "youth problem." Whether they will be compelled to carry that lip-service into the realm of action, will depend in large measure upon the strength of the movement behind the bill. In that sense, the pilgrimage is essentially a show of power; the membership of the participating organizations totals nearly two million.

The problem of the immediate future is the absence of any national political medium through which the aspirations of the American Youth Congress can be expressed. Undoubtedly, the preponderance of those who go to Washington are identified with the two old parties, whether directly or through traditional allegiance. In Washington they will discover that old-party lines cross in bewildering fashion on an issue so deep-seated and critical. Certainly the heaviest artillery against a meaningful youth aid program comes from those interests still centered around the Republican Party. No better illustration, however, of Roosevelt's timid and self-defeating "middle-of-the-road" policy can be found than his stand on the youth problem. But the deception and retreat which have prevailed thus far cannot be indefinitely prolonged. In this setting a new, independent party could make enormous inroads, as the very rise of an American youth movement testifies. It is the logical conclusion to which Americans are being driven by every successive betrayal of their trust.

The significance of the youth pilgrimage thus assumes greater proportions than the current congressional battle over the youth act. The fate of the act during this session is unpredictable. The Youth Congress has inspired more sweeping support for it than at any other time in the bill's history. What is plain is the consciousness and direction which young people are finding in this quest for a fighting legislative program. The consequences of their awareness must ultimately be written in the political arena.