The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party—Part 4

2 October 2008

The Socialist Equality Party (US) today continues publication of The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party. *The document was discussed extensively and adopted unanimously at the Founding Congress of the SEP, held August 3-9, 2008. (See "*Socialist Equality Party holds founding Congress*") The WSWS will serialize the publication over two weeks. (Click here for parts* 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 *and* 11*)*

The WSWS has published the Socialist Equality Party Statement of Principles, *which was also adopted at the Founding Congress. Click here to download a* PDF version *of the* Statement of Principles.

To find out more about how to join the SEP, contact us here.

The Outbreak of World War II and Trotsky's Last Struggle

72. The signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in August 1939 and the subsequent outbreak of World War II led to a political crisis inside the Socialist Workers Party in the United States.[47] A political faction led by Max Shachtman, James Burnham and Martin Abern argued that the Soviet Union could no longer be designated a workers' state. Flowing from this change in their definition of the class nature of the Soviet State — which Burnham now characterized as "bureaucratic collectivist" — they stated that the Fourth International should not call for the defense of the USSR in the event of war.

73. Trotsky replied that the characterization of the Stalinist regime as "bureaucratic collectivist" — a new and unprecedented form of exploitative society, unforeseen by Marxism — had far-reaching political and historical implications. At issue, in the final analysis, was the historical viability of the Marxist project itself. The premise that underlay the Burnham thesis (adopted somewhat later by Shachtman) was that the working class had exhausted its potential as a revolutionary social force. The development of modern society was leading not in the direction of socialism, achieved on the basis of an international working class revolution. Rather, a form of "bureaucratic collectivism" was emerging, in which society was controlled and directed by a managerial elite. If Burnham was correct, it followed that Marxism understood incorrectly the processes of modern history; and had been mistaken in attributing to the working class a revolutionary role. But Burnham's revisionist perspective was less the product of a materialist analysis of the economic foundations and social dynamics of modern capitalist society, let alone of the Soviet Union, than it was a cry of despair. From the defeats of the 1920s and 1930s, Burnham and Shachtman had concluded that the socialist revolution was impossible. Trotsky rejected this impressionistic and pessimistic position. The Fourth International, he wrote, upheld the revolutionary perspective of Marxism, and explained that the defeats suffered by the working class were the outcome of the political betrayals of its mass organizations. In opposition to this analysis, wrote Trotsky:

> ...All the various types of disillusioned and frightened representatives of pseudo-Marxism proceed on the contrary from the assumption that the bankruptcy of the leadership only "reflects" the incapacity of the proletariat to fulfill its revolutionary mission. Not all our opponents express this thought clearly, but all of them — ultra-lefts, centrists, anarchists, not to mention Stalinists and social-democrats — shift the responsibility for the defeats from themselves to the shoulders of the proletariat. None of them indicate under precisely what conditions the proletariat will be capable of accomplishing the socialist overturn.[48]

74. Trotsky insisted that the conflict within the SWP over program reflected two irreconcilably opposed conceptions of contemporary social processes:

> If we grant as true that the cause of the defeats is rooted in the social qualities of the proletariat itself then the position of modern society will have to be acknowledged as hopeless. ... Altogether differently does the case present itself to him who has clarified in his mind the profound antagonism between the organic, deep-going, insurmountable urge of the toiling masses to tear themselves free from the bloody capitalist chaos, and the conservative, patriotic, utterly bourgeois character of the outlived labor leadership. We must choose one of these two irreconcilable conceptions.[49]

75. The Fourth International was to confront again and again, in diverse forms, political and theoretical tendencies that proceeded from the premise that the working class was not a revolutionary force. Whether in the form of Pabloism or other demoralized radical and "New Left" tendencies influenced by the theoreticians of the "Frankfurt School" (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, et al.), the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class formed the basis of their opportunist political outlook. As for Shachtman and Burnham, their subsequent evolution vindicated Trotsky's analysis. In April 1940 Burnham and Shachtman split from the SWP and formed the "Workers Party." Within a month, Burnham resigned from his own creation and declared that he no longer considered himself a Marxist or a socialist. This marked the beginning of a rapid evolution to the extreme right. He became an advocate of preemptive nuclear war against the USSR, and, by the 1950s, the principal ideologist of the emerging neo-conservative movement. In 1982, several years before his death, Burnham was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan. Shachtman's movement to the right proceeded at a somewhat slower pace, but was no less fundamental. He became a political adviser to the anti-communist AFL-CIO bureaucracy and to the most reactionary Cold War wing of the Democratic Party. Before his death in 1972, Shachtman supported the bombing of North Vietnam by the United States.

Trotsky's Defense of Materialist Dialectics

© World Socialist Web Site

76. Another element of the 1939-40 struggle requires attention: its explicitly theoretical-philosophical dimension. Burnham, a professor of philosophy at New York University, declared himself an opponent of materialist dialectics. Like many others who opposed dialectical materialism from the standpoint of philosophical idealism (especially in its neo-Kantian form), Burnham dismissed the materialism defended by Marx and Engels as merely a product of outdated nineteenth century science and its excessive reverence for Darwin's evolutionary theory. As for dialectics, Burnham ridiculed Hegel as "the century-dead arch-muddler of human thought."[50] In his reply to Burnham, Trotsky provided a succinct characterization of both materialist dialectics and the professor's theoretical method, explaining the relationship between Burnham's pragmatic outlook and his political conclusions:

Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers' state, etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism; morals are equal to morals, etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which ‘A' ceases to be ‘A', a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state.

The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretization, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers' state in general, but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc.

Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism, but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality. Hegel in his *Logic* established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality, development through contradictions, conflict of content and form, interruption of continuity, change of possibility into inevitability, etc., which are just as important for theoretical thought as is the simple syllogism for more elementary tasks.

Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of science. But because it was only an anticipation, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies.

We call our dialectic, materialist, since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depths of our ‘free will,' but in objective reality, in nature. Consciousness grew out of the unconscious, psychology out of physiology, the organic world out of the inorganic, the solar system out of the nebulae. On all the rungs of the ladder of development, the quantitative changes were transformed into the qualitative. Our thought, including dialectical thought, is only one of the forms of the expression of changing matter. There is place within this system for neither God, nor Devil, nor immortal soul, nor eternal norms of laws and morals. The dialectic of thinking, having grown out of the dialectic of nature, possesses consequently a thoroughly materialist character.[51]

77. Shachtman asserted that no one had demonstrated "that agreement or disagreement on the more abstract doctrines of dialectical materialism necessarily affects today's and tomorrow's concrete political issues — and political parties, programs and struggles are based on such concrete issues." Trotsky replied:

...What parties? What programs? What struggles? All parties and all programs are here lumped together. The party of the proletariat is a party unlike all the rest. It is not at all based upon "such concrete issues." In its very foundation it is diametrically opposed to the parties of the bourgeois horse-traders and petty-bourgeois rag patchers. Its task is the preparation of a social revolution and the regeneration of mankind on new material and moral foundations. In order not to give way under the pressure of bourgeois public opinion and police repression, the proletarian revolutionist, a leader all the more, requires a clear, far-sighted, completely thought-out world outlook. Only upon the basis of a unified Marxist conception is it possible to correctly approach ‘concrete' questions.[52]

The Petty-Bourgeois Opposition and Party Organization

78. At an early stage of the factional struggle inside the SWP, Trotsky defined the Shachtman-Burnham-Abern minority as "a typical petty-bourgeois tendency." This was not a gratuitous insult. Rather, on the basis of political experience spanning more than 40 years, and which included leading two revolutions (in 1905 and 1917) and creating and commanding the Red Army, Trotsky detected in the minority features characteristic of "any petty-bourgeois group inside the socialist movement." The list included: "a disdainful attitude toward theory and an inclination toward eclecticism; disrespect for the tradition of their own organization; anxiety for personal ‘independence' at the expense of anxiety for objective truth; nervousness instead of consistency; readiness to jump from one position to another; lack of understanding of revolutionary centralism and hostility towards it; and finally, inclination to substitute clique ties and personal relationships for party discipline."[53]

79. The minority relentlessly denounced the organizational practices of the SWP, all-but-depicting Cannon as an emerging Stalin, the boss of a ruthless party bureaucracy dedicated to stamping out all expressions of individuality. Cannon, not one to mince words, remarked that

The petty-bourgeois intellectuals are introspective by nature. They mistake their own emotions, their uncertainties, their fears and their own egoistic concern about their personal fate for the sentiments and movements of the great masses. They measure the world's agony by their own inconsequential aches and pains.[54]

80. Cannon pointed out that the petty-bourgeois minority's denunciation of the party's organizational practices followed a familiar pattern:

...The history of the revolutionary labor movement since the days of the First International is an uninterrupted chronicle of the attempts of petty-bourgeois groupings and tendencies of all kinds to recompense themselves for their theoretical and political weakness by furious attacks against the "organizational methods" of the Marxists. And under the heading of organizational methods, they include everything from the concept of revolutionary centralism up to routine matters of administration; and beyond that to the personal manners and methods of their principled opponents, which they invariably describe as "bad," "harsh," "tyrannical," and — of course, of course, of course — "bureaucratic." To this day any little group of anarchists will explain to you how the "authoritarian" Marx mistreated Bakunin.

The eleven year history of the Trotskyist movement in the United States is extremely rich in such experiences. The internal struggles and faction fights, in which the basic cadres of our movement were consolidated and educated, were, in part, always struggles against attempts to replace principled issues by organizational quarrels. The politically weak opponents resorted to this subterfuge every time.[55]

81. Trotsky warmly endorsed Cannon's analysis of the "organization

© World Socialist Web Site

question" and his struggle for a "proletarian orientation" by the SWP. He wrote: "Jim's pamphlet is excellent: It is the writing of a genuine workers' leader. If the discussion had not produced more than this document, it would be justified."[56]

The Fourth International and the Outbreak of World War II

82. The Second World War erupted in September 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. Hitler's bloody assault was facilitated by the signing of a "Non-Aggression Pact" with the Stalinist regime only one week earlier. The immediate political and military impulse for the launching of the conflagration came from the strategic objectives of the Third Reich. However, at a more fundamental level, the war arose out of the economic and geo-political contradictions generated by the First World War and, beyond that, the historic obsolescence of the nation-state system and the general economic breakdown of world capitalism. Trotsky dismissed attempts to portray the war as a conflict between democracy and fascism. "The present war," he wrote, "which its participants started before they signed the treaty of Versailles, grew out of imperialist contradictions. It was as inevitable as the crash of trains which are let loose one toward the other on the same track."[57] In *The Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War*, written in May 1940, Trotsky placed responsibility for the global catastrophe on the imperialist bourgeoisie of all the major capitalist countries. The belated denunciations by France, Britain and the United States of Hitler's totalitarian regime reeked of cynicism. Trotsky wrote:

The democratic governments, who in their day hailed Hitler as a crusader against Bolshevism, now make him out to be some kind of Satan unexpectedly loosed from the depths of hell, who violates the sanctity of treaties, boundary lines, rules, and regulations. If it were not for Hitler the capitalist world would blossom like a garden. What a miserable lie! This German epileptic with a calculating machine in his skull and unlimited power in his hands did not fall from the sky or come up out of hell: he is nothing but the personification of all the destructive forces of imperialism. ... Hitler, rocking the old colonial powers to their foundations, does nothing but give a more finished expression to the imperialist will to power. Through Hitler, world capitalism, driven to desperation by its own impasse, has begun to press a razor-sharp dagger into its own bowels.

The butchers of the second imperialist war will not succeed in transforming Hitler into a scapegoat for their own sins.

Before the judgment bar of the proletariat all the present rulers will answer. Hitler will do no more than occupy first place among the criminals in the dock.[58]

83. The *Manifesto* drew attention to the role of the United States. At the time (in 1940), it remained outside the direct sphere of conflict. But, Trotsky predicted, the American bourgeoisie would soon exploit the opportunity offered by war to secure for the United States a hegemonic position in the affairs of world capitalism. This was not simply a matter of ambition, but of economic and political necessity:

The industrial, financial, and military strength of the United States, the foremost capitalist power in the world, does not at all insure the blossoming of American economic life, but on the contrary, invests the crisis of her social system with an especially malignant and convulsive character. Gold in the billions cannot be made use of, nor can the millions of unemployed! In the theses of the Fourth International, *War and the Fourth International*, published six years ago, it was predicted:

"US capitalism is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of ‘organizing Europe.' The United States must ‘organize' the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism."[59]

84. The *Manifesto* analyzed the driving forces guiding American imperialism:

Under one or another pretext and slogan the United States will intervene in the tremendous clash in order to maintain its world dominion. The order and the time of the struggle between American capitalism and its enemies is not yet known — perhaps even by Washington. War with Japan would be a struggle for ‘living room' in the Pacific Ocean. War in the Atlantic, even if directed immediately against Germany, would be a struggle for the heritage of Great Britain.

The potential victory of Germany over the Allies hangs like a nightmare over Washington. With the European continent and the resources of its colonies as her base, with all the European munitions factories and shipyards at her disposal, Germany — especially in combination with Japan in the Orient — would constitute a mortal danger for American imperialism. The present titanic battles on the fields of Europe are, in this sense, preparatory episodes in the struggle between Germany and America.[60]

85. The *Manifesto of the Fourth International* called on workers in the United States to oppose war, but explicitly denounced the pacifism of layers of the petty bourgeoisie:

Our struggle against United States intervention into the war has nothing in common with isolationism and pacifism. We tell the workers openly that the imperialist government cannot fail to drag this country into war. The dispute within the ruling class involves only the question of when to enter the war and against whom to level the fire first. To count upon holding the United States to neutrality by means of newspaper articles and pacifist resolutions is like trying to hold back the tide with a broom. The real struggle against war means the class struggle against imperialism and a merciless exposure of petty-bourgeois pacifism. Only revolution could prevent the American bourgeoisie from intervening in the second imperialist war or beginning the third imperialist war. All other methods are either charlatanism or stupidity or a combination of both.[61]

86. In opposition to petty bourgeois pacifists who counseled individual passive resistance to the war, the Fourth International called for the training of workers in military arts, but under the control of the trade unions and with working class officers. Within the United States and among its allies, the ruling class sought to sell the war by presenting it as a "war for democracy," exploiting the hatred felt by broad sections of the working class for the Nazi regime. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, this slogan would be taken up by the Stalinists as part of their alliance with the Allied imperialist powers. The Fourth International rejected it from the outset:

No less a lie is the slogan of a war for democracy against fascism. As if the workers have forgotten that the British government helped Hitler and his hangman's crew gain power! The imperialist democracies are in reality the greatest aristocracies in history. England, France, Holland, Belgium rest on the enslavement of colonial peoples. The democracy of the United States rests upon the seizure of the vast wealth of an entire continent. All the efforts of these "democracies" are directed toward the preservation of their privileged position. A considerable portion of the war burden is unloaded by imperialist democracies onto their colonies. The slaves are obliged to furnish blood and gold in order to insure the possibility of their masters remaining slaveholders.[62]

87. Trotsky insisted that the Stalin regime's initial wartime alliance with Germany, and its brutal policy in occupied Finland and Poland, did not alter the social character the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state. Despite the crimes and treachery of Stalinism, the Fourth International still called for the defense of the USSR against imperialism.

Many petty bourgeois radicals, who only yesterday were still ready to consider the Soviet Union as an axis for grouping the "democratic" forces

© World Socialist Web Site

against fascism, have suddenly discovered, now that their own fatherlands have been threatened by Hitler, that Moscow, which did not come to their aid, follows an imperialist policy, and that there is no difference between the USSR and the fascist countries.

"Lie!" will respond every class conscious worker — there is a difference. The bourgeoisie appraises this social difference better and more profoundly than do the radical windbags. To be sure, the nationalization of the means of production in one country, and a backward one at that, still does not insure the building of socialism. But it is capable of furthering the primary prerequisite of socialism, namely, the planned development of the productive forces. To turn one's back on the nationalization of the means of production on the ground that in and of itself it does not create the well-being of the masses is tantamount to sentencing a granite foundation to destruction on the ground that it is impossible to live without walls and a roof.

88. Defense of the Soviet Union from imperialism, however, did not in the least imply any political concession to the Stalinist bureaucracy:

The Fourth International can defend the USSR only by the methods of revolutionary class struggle. To teach the workers correctly to understand the class character of the state — imperialist, colonial, workers' — and the reciprocal relations between them, as well as the inner contradictions in each of them, enables the workers to draw correct practical conclusions in every given situation. While waging a tireless struggle against the Moscow oligarchy, the Fourth International decisively rejects any policy that would aid imperialism against the USSR.

The defense of the USSR coincides in principle with the preparation of the world proletarian revolution. We flatly reject the theory of socialism in one country, that brain child of ignorant and reactionary Stalinism. Only the world revolution can save the USSR for socialism. But the world revolution carries with it the inescapable blotting out of the Kremlin oligarchy.[63]

89. The *Manifesto* concluded with the forceful reassertion of the Fourth International's strategy of world socialist revolution.

In contradistinction to the Second and Third Internationals, the Fourth International builds its policy not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists, on the overthrow of the ruling classes of all countries, on the world socialist revolution. The shifts in the battle lines at the front, the destruction of national capitals, the occupation of territories, the downfall of individual states, represent from this standpoint only tragic episodes on the road to the reconstruction of modern society.

Independently of the course of the war, we fulfill our basic task: we explain to the workers the irreconcilability between their interests and the interests of bloodthirsty capitalism; we mobilize the toilers against imperialism; we propagate the unity of the workers in all warring and neutral countries; we call for the fraternization of workers and soldiers within each country, and of soldiers with soldiers on the opposite side of the battle front; we mobilize the women and youth against the war; we carry on constant, persistent, tireless preparation for the revolution — in the factories, in the mills, in the villages, in the barracks, at the front, and in the fleet.[64]

Trotsky's Place In History

90. The outbreak of war placed Trotsky's life in greater danger than ever. The revolutionary consequences of World War I remained fresh in the memory of the imperialist powers and the Soviet bureaucracy. As long as he lived, Trotsky remained the leader of the revolutionary government in exile. Was it not possible, even likely, Stalin feared, that the upheavals of war would create a revolutionary movement that would restore Trotsky to power? To complete the elimination of the leadership of the Russian Revolution and prevent the development of the Fourth International, Stalinist agents infiltrated the Trotskyist movement. Their central goal was the assassination of Leon Trotsky. Among those working for the GPU in the Trotskyist movement were Mark Zborowski (the secretary for Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov), Sylvia Callen (the secretary for James Cannon), and Joseph Hansen (Trotsky's secretary and guard after 1937 and future leader of the SWP). Zborowski, who was known as "Etienne" inside the Trotskyist movement, assisted the GPU in the assassinations of Erwin Wolf, one of Trotsky's secretaries, (in July 1937), Ignace Reiss, a defector from the GPU who had declared himself a Trotskyist, (in September 1937), Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov (in February 1938) and Rudolf Klement, secretary of the Fourth International (in July 1938, less than two months before the Fourth International's founding congress). On May 24, 1940, Trotsky escaped one attempt on his life, which had been facilitated by a GPU agent working on his guard detail (Robert Sheldon Harte). On August 20, 1940, Trotsky was assaulted by a GPU agent, Ramon Mercader, at his home in Coyoacan, Mexico. He died the next day.

91. Trotsky's assassination was a devastating blow to the cause of international socialism. He was not only the co-leader of the October Revolution, the implacable opponent of Stalinism and the founder of the Fourth International. He was the last and greatest representative of the political, intellectual, cultural and moral traditions of the classical Marxism that had inspired the mass revolutionary workers' movement that emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. He developed a conception of revolutionary theory, rooted philosophically in materialism, directed outward toward the cognition of objective reality, oriented to the education and political mobilization of the working class, and strategically preoccupied with the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Fully engaged in the historic tasks of the new revolutionary epoch, Trotsky viewed with contempt those who sought to evade their political responsibilities under the banner of personal freedom. "Let the philistines hunt for their own individuality in empty space," he declared. Nor did he give an inch to those who claimed that the defeats suffered by the working class demonstrated the failure of Marxism itself. For Trotsky, such arguments were based on political demoralization, not theoretical insight. Those shouting loudest about the "crisis of Marxism" were precisely those who had capitulated intellectually to the spread of political reaction. They were translating their personal fears, Trotsky wrote, "into the language of immaterial and universal criticism." The innumerable critics of Marxism, however, had no alternative but demoralized resignation for the working class. The opponents of Marxism, observed Trotsky, "are disarming themselves in the face of reaction, renouncing scientific social thought, surrendering not only material but also moral positions, and depriving themselves of any claim to revolutionary vengeance in the future."[65]

The United States Enters the War

92. From the beginning of the war, the United States was engaged — politically, economically and even militarily — in the global conflict. The Roosevelt administration exploited the desperate situation confronting British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, to extract political and financial concessions from British imperialism. In the long run, however, the United States could tolerate neither German dominance of Europe nor Japanese supremacy in Asia and the Pacific. In the latter case, the United States, since its bloody conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the 20th

© World Socialist Web Site

century, had come to regard the Pacific as an American lake, and China, since the crushing of the Boxer rebellion, as a US protectorate. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 provided Roosevelt the opportunity to realize the "rendezvous with destiny" that he had invoked just a few years earlier. The democratic pretensions used by American imperialism to justify its intervention were belied not only by the fact that millions of African Americans were deprived of their basic democratic rights throughout this period, but also by the anti-democratic measures employed during the war — including the internment of tens of thousands of Japanese and Japanese-Americans living in the United States. Much of the framework for the "national security state" was built up during the war years. Once the Soviet Union was attacked in June 1941 by Nazi Germany, the Stalinist parties became the most enthusiastic proponents of the "democratic" imperialist powers, shamelessly supporting a no-strike pledge in the United States.

93. In the aftermath of Trotsky's assassination, the Socialist Workers Party upheld the perspective of proletarian internationalism and opposed the subordination of the working class to the imperialist war aims of the Roosevelt administration. For this reason, the SWP was the sole tendency in the workers' movement in the United States whose leaders were imprisoned during the war, and they were the first to be tried under the Smith Act of 1940 (which was later ruled unconstitutional). In 1941, 18 leaders and members of the SWP were framed-up and convicted of sedition. In line with its wartime alliance with American imperialism and its ruthless opposition to the Trotskyist movement, the Communist Party supported the trials. When CP members were prosecuted under the Smith Act following the war, the SWP took the principled position of defending them against attacks by the bourgeois state.

94. The horrific events of World War II demonstrated the accuracy of Luxemburg's warning that the working class confronted only two options: socialism or barbarism. The crimes committed during the course of the war exposed before an entire generation the real face of capitalism. Six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust, along with some five million Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, and others targeted by the fascist regime. The United States government, which was indifferent to the Nazi program of mass extermination (refusing to bomb railroad tracks used to transport prisoners to their death) displayed its own barbaric potential through the dropping of two atomic bombs on civilian cities in Japan, killing between 200,000 and 350,000 people. The main purpose of this crime was to demonstrate to the world, and particularly the Soviet Union, the devastating potential of the new American weapon of mass destruction. In total, some 100 million people perished in six years of conflict. The war was the bitter price paid by the working class for the treachery of its leadership and the failure of the socialist revolution. The subsequent post-war boom was built upon this mountain of human corpses.

To be continued

Notes:

47. The SWP was founded in January 1938, almost a decade after Cannon initiated the fight for Trotskyism in the United States. During these 10 years, the American Trotskyists established a significant presence in the struggles of the working class. Their leadership of the Minneapolis General Strike in 1934 attracted national and worldwide attention.

48. Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (London: New Park, 1971), p. 15.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., p. 236.

51. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

52. Ibid., pp. 143-44.

53. Ibid., p. 56.

54. James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), p. 6.

55. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

56. *In Defense of Marxism*, p. 206.

57. "Who is Guilty of Starting the Second World War?" in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40* (New York: Pathfinder, 2001), p. 99.

58. "Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution," in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40* (New York: Pathfinder, 2001), p. 233.

59. Ibid., p. 227.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., p. 229.

62. Ibid., p. 231.

63. Ibid., p. 239-40.

64. Ibid., p. 265.

65. "Once Again on the ‘Crisis of Marxism,'" in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39* (New York: Pathfinder, 2002) pp. 238-39.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site