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An Open Letter to the Comrades of the Revolutionary Workers League

*American Fraction of the Left Communist International
1937*

Written as an appeal to the Trotskyist group the Revolutionary Workers League, who published the letter, along with a fairly standard Trotskyist response, in the October 1937 issue of their publication 'The Fourth International.' Some typos have been fixed but a scan of this issue that can be found at <https://archive.org/details/LCIvsRWL> shows that the remaining errors below were present in the original text.

Dear comrades:

It is almost nine years since we together broke definitely with the counter-revolutionary wing that once led the Communist Party. Our split was supposed to represent a Marxian reaction to the opportunist line that brought the world proletariat from one defeat to another. Although we broke together from the Stalinist-Bukharin line ideologically and organizationally, we stood apart from you for the reason that ideologically we were part of the left faction of the Italian Communist Party which fundamental documents are to be found in the Roma thesis. These documents were a contrast to all the political past of Cannon and Shachtman who at that time only borrowed from the Russian opposition. Under the leadership of Leon Trotsky the International Left Opposition from the beginning stood for the reform of the Communist International misjudging therefore, the fundamental reason that brought the opportunist to the head of the C.I. That fundamental reason was represented by the many defeats of the proletariat, upon which defeats the counter-revolution found strength. While the opposition was swimming in the illusion the ideological ground to dissolve itself into the rotten second international was laid down. You will agree with us that Trotsky did to destroy the Communist movement what Stalin was not able to do.

While the International Bureau was splitting groups, and liquidating the rest by sending them into the Socialist Party; from that time on they disappeared from the proletarian horizon. On the German situation Trotsky build up a theory that it was possible to have a proletarian Revolution with a centrist patriotic leadership. This negative conception of the nature of bureaucracy and opportunism, and the anti-Lenin concept of the historical significance and necessity of a Communist Party – all this brought a lot of confusion into the ranks of the Left Opposition, which consist of many sincere communists. Our faction fought all lines of Trotsky, politically as well as organizationally, and it cannot be otherwise because the organizational question is bound up with the political.

We will not mention the whole history of the Left Opposition which you all well know. We will merely call to your attention a few facts which characterize the entire Trotsky movement and line. The Leninist method of interpretation of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and the role of its historical guide is the opposite of

the methods of Trotsky ever since 1903. When we communist state that without the historical organ the proletariat cannot be victorious, we mean exactly what we assert. The whole post war experience and particular the Spanish conflict shows that this Marxian concept still holds.

When you comrades split with the Workers Party in order not to join the Socialist Party it was a healthy reaction against the line of Trotsky and you were on the road of Marxism on the conception of the independence of the Communist vanguard. When you broke off with Cannon and Shachtman outfit this brought us nearer. As a fact we had a long discussion on principle questions that concerned the proletariat movement as a whole. We all know the results of that discussion period. It was too mechanical and sectarian, not from the political point of view, but the way the groups were proceeding, to be of any help toward the establishment of a real American Left Faction of Communism, which is a preliminary necessity to build up, in the course of the class struggle and the revolutionary events, a real Communist Party. Anyway, we believe that the ideas and programs could show their ability when they were tested by events. The Spanish conflict offers the opportunity to each and every group the test for their theories and principles and to learn the strengths and weakness of their line; who ever lost their chance to learn from the Spanish events, the tactics and technique of a well developed capitalism is not a Marxists.

Our faction did not take anything from the Permanent Revolution and analysed critically the history of the labor movement; the great work of Lenin with a mighty experience of the October Revolution was the only one that seen from the beginning what was the situation in Spain. Our faction did not try to copy the historical movement that appeared from March to October in the Russian Revolution. We cannot apply anything but critically analyze each event. To apply to Spain what was good for the October Revolution it means not to understand the difference of a historical situation and the rule of the counter revolutionist that are dealing in the proletarian front. Immediately after the Spanish proletariat gave up their weapon (General Strike) the only weapon to lead and destroy the capitalist state, they became victims of the capitalist state.

When you start a insurrection either you strike hard and go forward and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the only weapon to destroy your enemy, or else you go back. In the Spanish situation when the proletariat instead of extending a general strike directed against the capitalist state gives up their weapon to turn in the territorial front that was a big blow to themselves, which can hardly be repaired on the immediate future. It is a fact that right after the fourth and fifth day of the general strike the capitalist class went on and on consolidating their power. Our fraction were the only ones under the slander and calumny of all parties and groups, and even at the cost of a split in the organization, stood for the class line.

For our fraction the counter-revolutionary situation in Spain came right after the proletariat gave up the general strike and not after the anti-fascists were dis[unreadable] or when the independent army was centralized under the Valencia government.

The fact that the anti-fascists committees as well as the independent militia those were controlled by the same political organizations which has shown the counter-revolutionary rule. The slogan that our fraction gave at that time was the following: "Away from the front, turn the imperialist war into a civil war" and all that goes with it. What is your position comrades of the R.W.L. Now, not in July 1936.

At the meeting at Irving Plaza when your Secretary, Hugo Oehler exposed the political line of the League, made us understand, that the official line is purely a left tail of the Popular Front. At that meeting we clearly saw the position of all the

American groups, the Trotskyites, the Weisbordites, the Fieldists and your position, which in our opinion, makes an American POUM, that is from the class point of view, the political line that comrade Oehler defended stands on the other side of the proletariat interest. Hugo Oehler, in his speech tried to avoid assuming any political position, but as we have expected, in the discussion period he did take a position. First of all he did not answer any questions that our comrades presented; he took plenty of time to answer all the other groups although in a sarcastic manner. In answering some other questions indirectly he gave an answer to our question and especially when he criticized the Trotskyites for giving material aid to Valencia Government. In this question he said the following: "We do not support the Valencia Government, but we do not sabotage those liberals and others that send their aid to the Valencia government." That means he remains neutral on this vital question, although he recognizes that this material aid is used against those who fight the reactionary government of Valencia.

This position is just the same as the one held by the Italian Socialist Party on the World War, "Neither support nor sabotage." This line is a lot to the right of the centrist Balabanoff line and Zimmerwald. On the question of insurrection also our friend Oehler made some very important statements.

He said, we do not stand for defeatism of the loyalist army. Then do you support the capitalist army? Or you stay in between? What is your conception of the revolution anyway? Can the proletariat be successful without destroying all those organs that makes the capitalist state of which the army is the essential factor? No revolutionary phraseology, no historical parallels will save you from a wrong position that you are holding. Objectively your line help to keep the workers in illusions and therefore you help the capitalist against the proletariat. If your organization justifies itself on the basis of the Permanent Revolution in fighting the reaction in Spain side by side with the democracy then you make a class distinction between fascism and democracy that means that if tomorrow Nazi Germany attacks democratic France or CechoSolaki [sic] then the duty of the proletariat is to fight to save democracy. That will bring us back to 1914.

Comrades, we know that all of your members of the RWL do not agree with what Oehler and the Political Committee say on the Spanish situation. We do not believe it. You may think that this is a matter that concerns only the RWL but we believe that this fundamental question concerns the proletariat in general and that you will not solve the problem through a internal discussion. When it comes a matter that concerns the class you must come out and fight openly just as our faction has done a year ago when the opposition appeared.

We are writing to you this letter for the reason that we believe it is our duty to say openly what we think of the political line of the R.W.L., and hope that we together will be able to form an American section of the International Fraction of Communism.

Comradely yours,

The New York Group of the Italian Section of the International Left Fraction of Communism