

**Resistance Marxist Library**

# **Their Morals & Ours**

**The Marxist View of Morality**

**Leon Trotsky, John Dewey,  
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Engels, V.I. Lenin**

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# Introduction

*By Dave Holmes*

What is morality? It is a code of conduct for individuals or social groups, whether freely and consciously chosen or imposed by the pressure of peer group or wider public opinion. It can thus be distinguished from a code of conduct determined by law and imposed by the state. Marxism teaches us that there is no such thing as an absolute morality, a morality that is independent of or stands above or is derived from outside of society — in our age, a society divided into sharply antagonistic social classes.

As Frederick Engels puts it in the excerpt from *Anti-Dühring* appended here: ... morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed.

Thus, in capitalist society, with its manifold and obscene contrasts between the enormous wealth of a handful of plutocrats and the insecurity and poverty of the great mass of the people, official morality justifies this reality. It preaches that wealth is a reward for hard work or great talent, that private property is sacrosanct and that stealing is immoral.

Of course, there is also a lot of guff about care and compassion, helping the disadvantaged, the poor, the young, the sick, the aged and so on. But, as capitalist austerity bites ever deeper, it is clear that this is just humbug and that protecting and enhancing the wealth and power of the ruling rich is the supreme value in “free-market” societies. “Greed is good”, as the capitalist Gordon Gekko put it bluntly in the movie *Wall Street*.

On the international stage, the imperialist West makes a big play about human rights. This is indeed a noble concept but in the mouths of Western leaders it is mostly yet more humbug, as any examination of the real conduct of the imperialist powers makes abundantly clear.

How, for instance, can the United States lecture anyone about human rights given its support for repressive regimes around the world and its increasingly racist and repressive “justice” system at home — where minors (let alone adults) can be subjected to the death penalty and where some *two million* of its citizens (mainly black) are currently incarcerated?

For the US rulers, “human rights” is simply a tool of imperialist policy, a means to justify before public opinion the use of force against recalcitrants who aren’t toeing Washington’s line.

The morality of the ruling class is clear. But what should be the morality of the working class, striving to overthrow capitalist oppression and create a new society? Exiled Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky gives a clear answer:

Civilisation can be saved only by the socialist revolution. To accomplish the overturn, the proletariat needs all its strength, all its resolution, all its audacity, passion and ruthlessness. Above all, it must be completely free from the fictions of religion, “democracy” and transcendental morality — the spiritual chains forged by the enemy to tame and enslave it. Only that which prepares the complete and final overthrow of imperialist bestiality is moral, and nothing else. The welfare of the revolution — that is the supreme law!

Does this mean that Marxists are really “amoral”? Does it mean that anything goes? Do socialists believe that “the end justifies the means”? Are we no better than the capitalist class? Are we too prepared to sanction atrocities, repression and violence?

This book provides clear answers to such questions. It is centred around two articles by Trotsky. The first, “Their Morals and Ours”, was written in February 1938 and first published in English in the Socialist Workers Party’s magazine *New Internationalist* in June of that year.

The context was the 1930s, a decade when tremendous hopes were aroused only to be later dashed, often in the most bloody way, ushering in a period of “triumphant reaction”, as Trotsky put it.

- At the beginning of 1933 Hitler fascism triumphed in Germany, its rise to power essentially uncontested by the potentially powerful workers’ movement, its will to fight paralysed by the twin shackles of pro-capitalist social democracy and the Stalinist Communist Party with its ultraleft line that the victory of fascism would only demonstrate its bankruptcy and lead to majority support for the CP.
- In June 1936 a powerful upsurge of the French workers led to widespread factory occupations and the hoisting of the red flag. The situation had clear revolutionary possibilities yet it was brought back into safe channels by the combined action of the Socialist and Communist parties acting through the new Popular Front

government of SP leader Léon Blum.

- In Spain, the 1936 electoral victory of the Popular Front led to Franco's pro-fascist military revolt. This in turn was checked by the revolutionary upsurge of the masses. However, the tragedy of the Spanish working class unfolded over the next three years as the capitalist Popular Front government — an unholy alliance of bourgeois politicians, social democrats, Stalinists and anarchists — crushed the revolution and ensured Franco's victory. As Trotsky completed "Their Morals and Ours", the fascists were close to cutting the republic in two and their final victory was clearly only a matter of time.
- The Great Depression of 1929-33 shook the faith of broad masses in the West in the capitalist system. Millions looked to the Soviet Union, then embarked on the huge industrialisation of the first five-year plan. Yet, from the mid-thirties, the Soviet Union was gripped by the monstrous Stalinist terror. Three big show trials in Moscow (in 1936, 1937 and 1938) swept away the central leadership of the 1917 October revolution. Tukachevsky and most of the country's military leadership were wiped out, crippling the Red Army in the face of Nazi Germany. Millions of other Soviet citizens were killed or incarcerated in the mass purges.

In this environment of big defeats and disappointments for the working class and revolutionary movement, a section of intellectual fellow-travellers and disheartened activists began to become disoriented, soften up and move to the right. Their questioning of the revolutionary project expressed itself in a criticism of the morality and conduct during the Russian revolution and civil war of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. Trotsky wrote "Their Morals and Ours" in answer to these varied backsliders and deserters.

John Dewey, the eminent US philosopher and educationalist, chaired the 1937 commission of inquiry into the charges made against Trotsky in the Moscow trials, in which he was the chief defendant in absentia. Hearings were held in Coyoacan in Mexico where Trotsky was living. The commission's findings were a decisive repudiation of the Stalinist frame-up and a vindication of Trotsky. With his great reputation and prestige, Dewey played a tremendous role in ensuring the success of the inquiry and lending authority to its verdict.

Yet Dewey was a liberal, not a Marxist, and in August 1938 *New International* published a rejoinder by him to "Their Morals and Ours". Trotsky did not get around to making a reply to Dewey. That is done here by George Novack's article on "Liberal Morality", originally published in the Fall 1965 issue of the SWP's *International Socialist Review*. Novack was a longtime leader of the SWP and, as the national secretary of the American Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky, was intimately involved in the

establishment of the commission of inquiry and in convincing Dewey to head it.

In June 1939, Trotsky wrote “The Moralists and Sycophants Against Marxism”, a response to critics of “Their Morals and Ours”. It was published in *New Internationalist* in August of that year.

We have also included here as an appendix Lenin’s speech, “The Tasks of the Youth Leagues”, which emphasises the basic point that revolutionary morality is determined by the needs of the struggle to build a better world and all that flows from that. It cannot come from anywhere else.



*Leon Trotsky*



# Their Morals & Ours

*By Leon Trotsky*

## Moral effluvia

During an epoch of triumphant reaction, Messrs. Democrats, Social-Democrats, Anarchists, and other representatives of the “left” camp begin to exude double their usual amount of moral effluvia, similar to persons who perspire doubly in fear. Paraphrasing the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, these moralists address themselves not so much to triumphant reaction as to those revolutionists suffering under its persecution, who with their “excesses” and “amoral” principles “provoke” reaction and give it moral justification. Moreover they prescribe a simple but certain means of avoiding reaction: it is necessary only to strive and morally to regenerate oneself. Free samples of moral perfection for those desirous are furnished by all the interested editorial offices.

The class basis of this false and pompous sermon is the intellectual petty bourgeoisie. The political basis — their impotence and confusion in the face of approaching reaction. Psychological basis — their effort at overcoming the feeling of their own inferiority through masquerading in the beard of a prophet.

A moralising philistine’s favourite method is the lumping of reaction’s conduct with that of revolution. He achieves success in this device through recourse to formal analogies. To him tsarism and Bolshevism are twins. Twins are likewise discovered in fascism and communism. An inventory is compiled of the common features in Catholicism — or more specifically, Jesuitism — and Bolshevism. Hitler and Mussolini, utilising from their side exactly the same method, disclose that liberalism, democracy, and Bolshevism represent merely different manifestations of one and the same evil. The conception that Stalinism and Trotskyism are “essentially” one and the same now enjoys the joint approval of liberals, democrats, devout Catholics, idealists, pragmatists, anarchists and fascists. If the Stalinists are unable to adhere to this “People’s Front”, then it is only because they are accidentally occupied with the extermination of

Trotskyists.

The fundamental feature of these approximations and similitudes lies in their completely ignoring the material foundation of the various currents, that is, their class nature and by that token their objective historical role. Instead they evaluate and classify different currents according to some external and secondary manifestation, most often according to their relation to one or another abstract principle which for the given classifier has a special professional value. Thus to the Roman pope, Freemasons and Darwinists, Marxists and anarchists are twins because all of them sacrilegiously deny the immaculate conception. To Hitler, liberalism and Marxism are twins because they ignore “blood and honour”. To a democrat, fascism and Bolshevism are twins because they do not bow before universal suffrage, etc., etc.

Undoubtedly the currents grouped above have certain common features. But the gist of the matter lies in the fact that the evolution of humanity exhausts itself neither by universal suffrage, not by “blood and honour”, nor by the dogma of the immaculate conception. The historical process signifies primarily the class struggle; moreover, different classes in the name of different aims may in certain instances utilise similar means. Essentially it cannot be otherwise. Armies in combat are always more or less symmetrical; were there nothing in common in their methods of struggle they could not inflict blows upon each other.

If an ignorant peasant or shopkeeper, understanding neither the origin nor the sense of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, discovers himself between the two fires, he will consider both belligerent camps with equal hatred. And who are all these democratic moralists? Ideologists of intermediary layers who have fallen, or are in fear of falling between the two fires. The chief traits of the prophets of this type are alienation from great historical movements, a hardened conservative mentality, smug narrowness, and a most primitive political cowardice. More than anything, moralists wish that history should leave them in peace with their little books, little magazines, subscribers, common sense, and moral copy books. But history does not leave them in peace. It cuffs them now from the left, now from the right. Clearly revolution and reaction, tsarism and Bolshevism, communism and fascism, Stalinism and Trotskyism — are all twins. Whoever doubts this may feel the symmetrical skull bumps upon both the right and left sides of these very moralists.

### **Marxist amoralism & eternal truths**

The most popular and most imposing accusation directed against Bolshevik “amoralism” bases itself on the so-called Jesuitical maxim of Bolshevism: “The end justifies the means.” From this it is not difficult to reach the further conclusion: since

the Trotskyists, like all Bolsheviks (or Marxists), do not recognise the principles of morality, there is, consequently, no “principled” difference between Trotskyism and Stalinism. Q.E.D.

One completely vulgar and cynical American monthly conducted a questionnaire on the moral philosophy of Bolshevism. The questionnaire, as is customary, was to have simultaneously served the ends of ethics and advertisement. The inimitable H.G. Wells, whose high fancy is surpassed only by his Homeric self-satisfaction, was not slow in solidifying himself with the reactionary snobs of *Common Sense*. Here everything fell into order. But even those participants who considered it necessary to defend Bolshevism did so, in the majority of cases, not without timid evasions (Eastman): the principles of Marxism are, of course, bad, but among the Bolsheviks there are, nevertheless, worthy people. Truly, such “friends” are more dangerous than enemies.

Should we care to take Messrs. Accusers seriously, then first of all we would ask them: what are your own moral principles? Here is a question that will scarcely receive an answer. Let us admit for the moment that neither personal nor social ends can justify the means. Then it is obviously necessary to seek criteria outside of historical society and those ends which arise in its development. But where? If not on earth, then in the heavens. In divine revelation the priests long ago discovered infallible moral criteria. Petty secular priests speak about eternal moral truths without naming their original source. However, we are justified in concluding: since these truths are eternal, they should have existed not only before the appearance of half-monkey-half-man upon the earth but before the evolution of the solar system. Whence then did they arise? The theory of eternal morals can in no way survive without God.

Moralists of the Anglo-Saxon type, in so far as they do not confine themselves to rationalist utilitarianism, the ethics of bourgeois bookkeeping, appear conscious or unconscious students of Viscount Shaftesbury, who — at the beginning of the 18th century! — deduced moral judgments from a special “moral sense” supposedly once and for all given to humanity. Supraclass morality inevitably leads to the acknowledgment of a special substance, of a “moral sense”, “conscience”, some kind of absolute which is nothing more than the cowardly philosophical pseudonym for God. Independent of “ends” — that is, of society — morality, whether we deduce it from eternal truths or from the “nature of man”, proves in the end to be a form of “natural theology”. Heaven remains the only fortified position for military operations against dialectic materialism.

At the end of the last century in Russia there arose a whole school of “Marxists” (Struve, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and others) who wished to supplement the teachings of Marx with a self-sufficient, that is, supraclass moral principle. These people began, of

course, with Kant and the categorical imperative. But how did they end? Struve is now a retired minister of the Crimean Baron Wrangel, and a faithful son of the church; Bulgakov is an orthodox priest; Berdyaev expounds the Apocalypse in sundry languages. This metamorphosis which seems so unexpected at first glance is not at all explained by the “Slavic soul” — Struve has a German soul — but by the sweep of the social struggle in Russia. The fundamental trend of this metamorphosis is essentially international.

Classical philosophical idealism in so far as it aimed in its time to secularise morality, that is, to free it from religious sanction, represented a tremendous step forward (Hegel). But having torn itself from heaven, moral philosophy had to find earthly roots. To discover these roots was one of the tasks of materialism. After Shaftesbury came Darwin, after Hegel — Marx. To appeal now to “eternal moral truths” signifies attempting to turn the wheels backward. Philosophic idealism is only a stage: from religion to materialism, or, contrariwise, from materialism to religion.

### ‘The end justifies the means’

The Jesuit order, organised in the first half of the 16th century for combating Protestantism, never taught, let it be said, that *any* means, even though it be criminal from the point of view of the Catholic morals, was permissible if only it led to the “end”, that is, to the triumph of Catholicism. Such an internally contradictory and psychologically absurd doctrine was maliciously attributed to the Jesuits by their Protestant and partly Catholic opponents who were not shy in choosing the means for achieving *their own* ends. Jesuit theologians who, like the theologians of other schools, were occupied with the question of personal responsibility, actually taught that the means in itself can be a matter of indifference but that the moral justification or condemnation of the given means flows from the end. Thus shooting in itself is a matter of indifference; shooting a mad dog that threatens a child — a virtue; shooting with the aim of violation or murder — a crime. Outside of these commonplaces the theologians of this order made no promulgations.

In so far as their practical moral philosophy is concerned the Jesuits were not at all worse than other monks or Catholic priests, on the contrary, they were superior to them; in any case, more consistent, bolder, and perspicacious. The Jesuits represented a militant organisation, strictly centralised, aggressive, and dangerous not only to enemies but also to allies. In his psychology and method of action the Jesuit of the “heroic” period distinguished himself from an average priest as the warrior of a church from its shopkeeper. We have no reason to idealise either one or the other. But it is altogether unworthy to look upon a fanatic warrior with the eyes of an obtuse and

slothful shopkeeper.

If we are to remain in the field of purely formal or psychological similitudes, then it can, if you like, be said that the Bolsheviks appear in relation to the democrats and social-democrats of all hues as did the Jesuits — in relation to the peaceful ecclesiastical hierarchy. Compared to revolutionary Marxists, the social-democrats and centrists appear like mental defectives, or a witch doctor alongside a physician: they do not think one problem through to the end, but believe in the power of conjuration and cravenly avoid every difficulty, hoping for a miracle. Opportunists are peaceful shopkeepers in the socialist idea while Bolsheviks are its inveterate warriors. From this comes the hatred and slander against Bolsheviks from those who have an abundance of their historically conditioned faults but not one of their merits.

However, the juxtaposition of Bolshevism and Jesuitism still remains completely one-sided and superficial, of a literary rather than of a historical nature. In accordance with the character and interests of those classes upon which they based themselves, the Jesuits represented reaction, the Protestants — progress. The limitedness of this “progress” in its turn found direct expression in the morality of the Protestants. Thus the teachings of Christ “purified” by them did not at all hinder the city bourgeois Luther from calling for the execution of revolting peasants as “mad dogs”. Dr. Martin evidently considered that “the end justifies the means” even before that maxim was attributed to the Jesuits. In turn the Jesuits, competing with Protestantism, adapted themselves ever more to the spirit of bourgeois society, and of the three vows — poverty, chastity, and obedience — they preserved only the third, and at that in an extremely attenuated form. From the point of view of the Christian ideal, the morality of the Jesuits degenerated the more they ceased to be Jesuits. The warriors of the church became its bureaucrats and, like all bureaucrats, adequate enough swindlers.

## Jesuitism & utilitarianism

This brief review is sufficient, perhaps, to show what ignorance and narrowness are necessary to consider seriously the contraposition of the “Jesuit” principle, “the end justifies the means”, to another seemingly higher moral, in which each “means” carries its own moral tag like merchandise with fixed prices in a department store. It is remarkable that the common sense of the Anglo-Saxon philistine has managed to wax indignant at the “Jesuit” principle and simultaneously to find inspiration in the utilitarian morality, so characteristic of British philosophy. Moreover, the criterion of Bentham-John Mill, “the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number”, signifies that those means are moral which lead to the common welfare as the highest end. In its general philosophical formulations Anglo-Saxon utilitarianism thus fully coincides

with the “Jesuit” principle, “the end justifies the means”. Empiricism, we see, exists in the world only to free us from the necessity of making both ends meet.

Herbert Spencer, into whose empiricism Darwin inculcated the idea of “evolution” as a special vaccine, taught that in the moral sphere evolution proceeds from “sensations” to “ideas”. Sensations impose the criterion of immediate pleasure, whereas ideas permit one to be guided by the criterion of *future, lasting and higher pleasure*. Thus the moral criterion here too is “pleasure” and “happiness”. But the content of this criterion acquires breadth and depth depending upon the level of “evolution”. In this way Herbert Spencer too, through the methods of his own “evolutionary” utilitarianism, showed that the principle, “the end justifies the means”, does not embrace anything immoral.

It is naive, however, to expect from this abstract “principle” an answer to the practical question: what may we, and what may we not do? Moreover, the principle, the end justifies the means, naturally raises the question: and what justifies the end? In practical life as in the historical movement the end and the means constantly change places. A machine under construction is an “end” of production only that upon entering the factory it may become the “means”. Democracy in certain periods is the “end” of the class struggle only that later it may be transformed into its “means”. Not embracing anything immoral, the so-called Jesuit principle fails, however, to resolve the moral problem.

The “evolutionary” utilitarianism of Spencer likewise abandons us halfway without an answer, since, following Darwin; it tries to dissolve the concrete historical morality in the biological needs or in the “social instincts” characteristic of gregarious animals, and this at a time when the very understanding of morality arises only in an antagonistic milieu, that is, in a society divided into classes.

Bourgeois evolutionism halts impotently at the threshold of historical society because it does not wish to acknowledge the driving force in the evolution of social forms: *the class struggle*. Morality is one of the ideological functions in this struggle. The ruling class forces *its* ends upon society and habituates it to considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality. It pursues the idea of the “greatest possible happiness” not for the majority but for a small and ever-diminishing minority. Such a regime could not have endured for even a week through force alone. It needs the cement of morality. The production of this cement constitutes the profession of the petty bourgeois theoreticians and moralists. They radiate in all colours of the rainbow but in the final analysis remain apostles of slavery and submission.

### **'Moral precepts obligatory upon all'**

Whoever does not care to return to Moses, Christ or Mohammed; whoever is not satisfied with eclectic *hodge-podges* must acknowledge that morality is a product of social development; that there is nothing immutable about it; that it serves social interests; that these interests are contradictory; that morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character.

But do not elementary moral precepts exist, worked out in the development of humanity as a whole and indispensable for the existence of every collective body? Undoubtedly such precepts exist but the extent of their action is extremely limited and unstable. Norms "obligatory upon all" become the less forceful the sharper the character assumed by the class struggle. The highest form of the class struggle is civil war which explodes into midair all moral ties between the hostile classes.

Under "normal" conditions a "normal" person observes the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill!" But if one kills under exceptional conditions for self-defence, the jury acquits that person. If one falls victim to a murderer, the court will kill the murderer. The necessity of courts, as well as that of self-defence, flows from antagonistic interests. In so far as the state is concerned, in peaceful times it limits itself to legalised killings of individuals so that in time of war it may transform the "obligatory" commandment, "Thou shalt not kill!" into its opposite. The most "humane" governments, which in peaceful times "detest" war, proclaim during war that the highest duty of their armies is the extermination of the greatest possible number of people.

The so-called "generally recognised" moral precepts in essence preserve an algebraic, that is, an indeterminate character. They merely express the fact that people, in their individual conduct, are bound by certain common norms that flow from their being members of society. The highest generalisation of these norms is the "categorical imperative" of Kant. But in spite of the fact that it occupies a high position in the philosophic Olympus this imperative does not embody anything categoric because it embodies nothing concrete. It is a shell without content.

This vacuity in the norms obligatory upon all arises from the fact that in all decisive questions people feel their class membership considerably more profoundly and more directly than their membership in "society". The norms of "obligatory" morality are in reality filled with class, that is, antagonistic content. The moral norm becomes the more categoric the less it is "obligatory upon all". The solidarity of workers, especially of strikers or barricade fighters, is incomparably more "categoric" than human solidarity in general.

The bourgeoisie, which far surpasses the proletariat in the completeness and irreconcilability of its class consciousness, is vitally interested in imposing *its* moral

philosophy upon the exploited masses. It is exactly for this purpose that the concrete norms of the bourgeois catechism are concealed under moral abstractions patronised by religion, philosophy, or by that hybrid which is called “common sense”. The appeal to abstract norms is not a disinterested philosophic mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception. The exposure of this deceit which retains the tradition of thousands of years is the first duty of a proletarian revolutionist.

### The crisis in democratic morality

In order to guarantee the triumph of their interests in big questions, the ruling classes are constrained to make concessions on secondary questions, naturally only so long as these concessions are reconciled in the bookkeeping. During the epoch of capitalistic upsurge especially in the last few decades before the World War these concessions, at least in relation to the top layers of the proletariat, were of a completely genuine nature. Industry at that time expanded almost uninterruptedly. The prosperity of the civilised nations increased, partially, too, that of the toiling masses. Democracy appeared solid. Workers’ organisations grew. At the same time reformist tendencies deepened. The relations between the classes softened, at least outwardly. Thus certain elementary moral precepts in social relations were established along with the norms of democracy and the habits of class collaboration. The impression was created of an ever more free, more just, and more humane society. The rising line of progress seemed infinite to “common sense”.

Instead, however, war broke out with a train of convulsions, crises, catastrophes, epidemics, and bestiality. The economic life of humankind landed in an impasse. The class antagonisms became sharp and naked. The safety valves of democracy began to explode one after the other. The elementary moral precepts turned out to be even more fragile than the democratic institutions and reformist illusions. Lying, slander, bribery, venality, coercion, murder grew to unprecedented dimensions. To a stunned simpleton all these vexations seem a temporary result of war. Actually they were and remain manifestations of imperialist decline. The decay of capitalism denotes the decay of contemporary society with its laws and morals.

The “synthesis” of imperialist turpitude is fascism, directly begotten of the bankruptcy of bourgeois democracy confronted with the problems of the imperialist epoch. Remnants of democracy continue still to exist only in the rich capitalist aristocracies: for each “democrat” in England, France, Holland, Belgium there is a certain number of colonial slaves; “60 Families” dominate the democracy of the United States, and so forth. Moreover, shoots of fascism grow rapidly in all democracies. Stalinism in its turn is the product of imperialist pressure upon a backward and isolated



workers' state, a symmetrical complement in its own genre to fascism.

While idealistic philistines — among whom anarchists of course occupy first place — tirelessly unmask Marxist “amoralism” in their press, the American trusts, according to John L. Lewis (CIO) are spending not less than \$80 million a year on the practical struggle against revolutionary “demoralisation”, that is, espionage, bribery of workers, frame-ups, and dark-alley murders. The categorical imperative sometimes chooses circuitous ways for its triumph!

Let us note in justice that the most sincere and at the same time the most limited petty-bourgeois moralists still live even today in the idealised memories of yesterday and hope for its return. They do not understand that morality is a function of the class struggle; that democratic morality corresponds to the epoch of liberal and progressive capitalism; that the sharpening of the class struggle in passing through its latest phase definitively and irrevocably destroyed this morality; that in its place came the morality of fascism on one side, on the other the morality of proletarian revolution.

### ‘Common sense’

Democracy and “generally recognised” morality are not the only victims of imperialism. The third suffering martyr is “universal” common sense. This lowest form of the intellect is not only necessary under all conditions but under certain conditions is also adequate. Common sense's basic capital consists of the elementary conclusions of universal experience: not to put one's fingers in fire, whenever possible to proceed along a straight line, not to tease vicious dogs ... and so forth and so on. Under a stable social milieu common sense is adequate for bargaining, healing, writing articles, leading trade unions, voting in parliament, marrying and reproducing the race. But when that same common sense attempts to go beyond its valid limits into the arena of more complex generalisations, it is exposed as just a clot of prejudices of a definite class and a definite epoch. A simple capitalist crisis is enough to bring common sense to an impasse; and before such catastrophes as revolution, counterrevolution and war, common sense proves a perfect fool. In order to understand the catastrophic violations of the “normal” course of events higher qualities of intellect are necessary, and these are philosophically expressed as yet only by dialectic materialism.

Max Eastman, who successfully attempts to endow “common sense” with a most attractive literary style, has fashioned out of the struggle against dialectics nothing less than a profession for himself. Eastman seriously takes the conservative banalities of common sense wedded to good style as “the science of revolution”. Supporting the reactionary snobs of *Common Sense*, he expounds to humanity with inimitable assurance that if Trotsky had been guided not by Marxist doctrine but by common sense then he

would not ... have lost power. That inner dialectic which until now has appeared in a succession of determined stages in all revolutions does not exist for Eastman. Reaction displacing revolution, to him, is determined through insufficient respect for common sense. Eastman does not understand that it is Stalin who in a historical sense fell *victim* to common sense, that is, its inadequacy, since that power which he possesses serves ends hostile to Bolshevism. Marxist doctrine, on the other hand, permitted us to tear away in time from the Thermidorian bureaucracy and continue to serve the ends of international socialism.

Every science, including the “science of revolution” is verified by experience. Since Eastman well knows how to maintain revolutionary power under the condition of world counterrevolution, then he also knows, we may hope, how to conquer power. It would be very desirable that he finally disclose his secrets. Best of all that it be done in the form of a *draft program for a revolutionary party* under the title: How to Conquer and Hold Power. We fear, however, that it is precisely common sense which will urge Eastman to refrain from such a risky undertaking. And this time common sense will be right.

Marxist doctrine, which Eastman, alas, never understood, permitted us to foresee the inevitability under certain historic conditions of the Soviet Thermidor with all its coils of crimes. That same doctrine long ago predicted the inevitability of the downfall of bourgeois democracy and its morality. Meanwhile, the doctrinaires of “common sense” were caught unaware by fascism and Stalinism. Common sense operates with invariable magnitudes in a world where only change is invariable. Dialectics, on the contrary, takes all phenomena, institutions, and norms in their rise, development and decay. The dialectical consideration of morals as a subservient and transient product of the class struggle seems to common sense an “amoralism”. But there is nothing more stale, narrow, self-satisfied and cynical than the morals of common sense!

## Moralists & the GPU

The Moscow trials provided the occasion for a crusade against Bolshevik “amoralism”. However, the crusade was not opened at once. The truth is that in the majority the moralists, directly or indirectly, were friends of the Kremlin. As such they long attempted to hide their amazement and even feigned that nothing unusual had occurred.

But the Moscow trials were not at all an accident. Servile obedience, hypocrisy, the official cult of lying, bribery, and other forms of corruption had already begun to blossom luxuriantly in Moscow by 1924-25. The future judicial frame-ups were being prepared openly before the eyes of the whole world. There was no lack of warning. The “friends”, however, did not wish to notice anything. No wonder: the majority of

these gentlemen, in their time irreconcilably hostile to the October Revolution, became friends of the Soviet Union merely according to the degree of its Thermidorian degeneration — the petty-bourgeois democrats of the West recognised in the petty-bourgeois bureaucracy of the East a kindred soul.

Did these people really believe the Moscow accusations? Only the most obtuse. The others did not wish to alarm themselves by verification. Is it reasonable to infringe upon the flattering, comfortable, and often well-paying friendship with the Soviet embassies? Moreover — oh, they did not forget this — indiscreet truth can injure the prestige of the USSR. These people screened the crimes by utilitarian considerations, that is, openly applied the principle, “the end justifies the means”.

The king’s counselor, Pritt, who succeeded with timeliness in peering under the tunic of the Stalinist Themis and there discovered everything in order, took upon himself the shameless initiative. Romain Rolland, whose moral authority is highly rated by the Soviet publishing house bookkeepers, hastened to issue one of his manifestos where melancholy lyricism unites with senile cynicism. The French League for the Rights of Man, which thundered about the “amoralism of Lenin and Trotsky” in 1917 when they broke the military alliance with France, hastened to screen Stalin’s crimes in 1936 in the interests of the Franco-Soviet pact. A patriotic end justifies, as is known, any means. *The Nation* and *The New Republic* closed their eyes to Yagoda’s exploits since their “friendship” with the USSR guaranteed their own authority. Yet only a year ago these gentlemen did not at all declare Stalinism and Trotskyism to be one and the same. They openly stood for Stalin, for his realism, for his justice and for his Yagoda. They clung to this position as long as they could.

Until the moment of the execution of Tukhachevsky, Yakir, and the others, the big bourgeoisie of the democratic countries watched the execution of the revolutionists in the USSR, not without pleasure, though feigning abhorrence. In this sense *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, not to speak of Duranty, Louis Fischer, and their kindred prostitutes of the pen, fully responded to the interests of “democratic” imperialism. The execution of the generals alarmed the bourgeoisie, compelling them to understand that the advanced disintegration of the Stalinist apparatus lightened the tasks of Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado. *The New York Times* cautiously but insistently began to correct its own Duranty. The Paris *Le Temps* opened its columns slightly to shed light upon the actual situation in the USSR. As for the petty bourgeois moralists and sycophants, they were never anything but servile echoes of the capitalist class. Moreover, after the International Commission of Inquiry, headed by John Dewey, brought out its verdict it became clear to every person who thought even a trifle that further open defence of the GPU signified peril of political and moral death. Only at this moment

did the “friends” decide to bring the eternal moral truths into God’s world, that is, to fall back to the second-line trench.

Frightened Stalinists and semi-Stalinists occupy not the last place among moralists. Eugene Lyons during several years cohabited nicely with the Thermidorian clique, considering himself almost-a-Bolshevik. Withdrawing from the Kremlin — for a reason that is to us a matter of indifference — he rose, of course, immediately into the clouds of idealism. Liston Oak until recently enjoyed such confidence from the Comintern that it entrusted him with conducting its English propaganda for republican Spain. This did not, naturally, hinder him, once he had relinquished his post, from likewise relinquishing the Marxist alphabet. Expatriate Walter Krivitsky, having broken with the GPU, immediately joined the bourgeois democracy. Evidently this too is the metamorphosis of the very aged Charles Rappoport. Having tossed Stalinism overboard, people of such ilk — they are many — cannot help seeking indemnification in the postulates of abstract morality for the disillusionment and abasement of ideals they have experienced. Ask them: “Why have you switched from the Comintern or GPU ranks to the camp of the bourgeoisie?” They have a ready answer: “Trotskyism is no better than Stalinism.”

### The disposition of political chessmen

“Trotskyism is revolutionary romanticism; Stalinism — practical politics.” Of this banal contraposition with which the average philistine until yesterday justified his friendship with Thermidor against the revolution, there remains not a trace today. Trotskyism and Stalinism are in general no longer counterposed but identified. They are identified, however, only in form not in essence. Having recoiled to the meridian of the “categorical imperative”, the democrats actually continue to defend the GPU except with greater camouflage and perfidy. He who slanders the victim aids the executioner. In this case, as in others, morality serves politics.

The democratic philistine and Stalinist bureaucrat are, if not twins, brothers in spirit. In any case they belong politically to the same camp. The present governmental system of France and — if we add the anarchists — of republican Spain is based on the collaboration of Stalinists, social-democrats, and liberals. If the British Independent Labour Party appears roughed up it is because for a number of years it has not withdrawn from the embrace of the Comintern. The French Socialist Party expelled the Trotskyists from their ranks exactly when it prepared to fuse with the Stalinists. If the fusion did not materialise, it was not because of principled divergences — what remains of them? — but only because of the fear of the social-democratic careerists over their posts. Having returned from Spain, Norman Thomas declared that

“objectively” the Trotskyists help Franco, and with this subjective absurdity he gave “objective” service to the GPU executioners. This righteous man expelled the American Trotskyists from his party precisely as the GPU shot down their cothinkers in the USSR and in Spain. In many democratic countries, the Stalinists in spite of their “amoralism” have penetrated into the government apparatus not without success. In the trade unions they cohabit nicely with bureaucrats of other hues. True, the Stalinists have an extremely lightminded attitude toward the criminal code and in that way frighten away their “democratic” friends in peaceful times; but in exceptional circumstances, as indicated by the example of Spain, they more surely become the leaders of the petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

The Second and Amsterdam Internationals naturally did not take upon themselves the responsibility for the frame-ups; this work they left to the Comintern. They themselves kept quiet. Privately they explained that from a “moral” point of view they were against Stalin, but from a political point of view — for him. Only when the People’s Front in France cracked irreparably and forced the socialists to think about tomorrow did Léon Blum find at the bottom of his inkwell the necessary formulas for moral indignation.

If Otto Bauer mildly condemned Vyshinsky’s justice it was only in order to support Stalin’s politics with greater “impartiality”. The fate of socialism, according to Bauer’s recent declaration, is tied with the fate of the Soviet Union. “And the fate of the Soviet Union”, he continues, “is the fate of Stalinism as long as [!] the inner development of the Soviet Union itself does not overcome the Stalinist phase of development.” All of Bauer, all of Austro-Marxism, and the full mendacity and rot of social-democracy are summed up in this remarkable sentence! “As long as” the Stalinist bureaucracy is strong enough to murder the progressive representatives of the “inner development”, Bauer sticks with Stalin. When in spite of Bauer the revolutionary forces overthrow Stalin, then Bauer will generously recognise the “inner development” — with not more than 10 years delay.

Behind the old Internationals, the London Bureau of the centrists trails along, happily combining in itself the characteristics of a kindergarten, a school for mentally arrested adolescents, and a home for invalids. The secretary of the Bureau, Fenner Brockway, began with the declaration that an inquiry into the Moscow trials could “harm the USSR” and proposed instead an investigation into ... the political activity of Trotsky through an “impartial” commission of five irreconcilable enemies of Trotsky. Brandler and Lovestone publicly solidarised with Yagoda; they retreated only from Yezhov. Jacob Walcher, upon an obviously false pretext, refused to give testimony which was unfavourable to Stalin before the International Commission headed by

John Dewey. The putrid morals of these people is only a product of their putrid politics.

But perhaps the most lamentable role is that played by the anarchists. If Stalinism and Trotskyism are one and the same, as they affirm in every sentence, then why do the Spanish anarchists assist the Stalinists in revenging themselves upon the Trotskyists and at the same time upon the revolutionary anarchists? The more frank anarchist theoreticians respond: this is payment for armaments. In other words: the end justifies the means. But what is their *end*? Anarchism? Socialism? No, merely the salvaging of this very same bourgeois democracy which prepared fascism's success. To base ends correspond base means.

That is the real disposition of the figures on the world political board!

### Stalinism — a product of the old society

Russia took the greatest leap in history, a leap in which the most progressive forces of the country found their expression. Now in the current reaction, the sweep of which is proportionate to the sweep of the revolution, backwardness is taking its revenge. Stalinism embodies this reaction. The barbarism of old Russian history upon new social bases seems yet more disgusting since it is constrained to conceal itself in hypocrisy unprecedented in history.

The liberals and the social-democrats of the West, who were constrained by the Russian Revolution into doubt about their rotted ideas, now experienced a fresh influx of courage. The moral gangrene of the Soviet bureaucracy seemed to them the rehabilitation of liberalism. Stereotyped copybooks are drawn out into the light: "every dictatorship contains the seeds of its own degeneration"; "only democracy guarantees the development of personality"; and so forth. The contrasting of democracy and dictatorship, including in the given case a condemnation of socialism in favour of the bourgeois regime, stuns one from the point of view of theory by its illiterateness and unscrupulousness. The Stalinist pollution, a historical reality, is counterposed to democracy — a suprahistorical abstraction. But democracy also possesses a history in which there is no lack of pollution. In order to characterise Soviet bureaucracy we have borrowed the names of "Thermidor" and "Bonapartism" from the history of bourgeois democracy because — let this be known to the retarded liberal doctrinaires — *democracy came into the world not at all through the democratic road*. Only a vulgar mentality can satisfy itself by chewing on the theme that Bonapartism was the "natural offspring" of Jacobinism, the historical punishment for infringing upon democracy, and so on. Without the Jacobin retribution upon feudalism, bourgeois democracy would have been absolutely unthinkable. Contrasting the concrete historical stages of Jacobinism,

Thermidor, Bonapartism, to the idealised abstraction of “democracy”, is as vicious as contrasting the pains of childbirth to a living infant.

Stalinism in turn is not an abstraction of “dictatorship”, but an immense bureaucratic reaction against the proletarian dictatorship in a backward and isolated country. The October Revolution abolished privileges, waged war against social inequality, replaced the bureaucracy with self-government of the toilers, abolished secret diplomacy, strove to render all social relationships completely transparent. Stalinism reestablished the most offensive forms of privilege, imbued inequality with a provocative character, strangled mass self-activity under police absolutism, transformed administration into a monopoly of the Kremlin oligarchy and regenerated the fetishism of power in forms that absolute monarchy dared not dream of.

Social reaction in all forms is constrained to mask its real aims. The sharper the transition from revolution to reaction; the more the reaction is dependent upon the traditions of revolution, that is, the greater its fear of the masses — the more is it forced to resort to mendacity and frame-up in the struggle against the representatives of the revolution. Stalinist frame-ups are not a fruit of Bolshevik “amoralism”; no, like all important events in history, they are a product of the concrete social struggle, and the most perfidious and severest of all at that: the struggle of a new aristocracy against the masses that raised it to power.

Indeed, boundless intellectual and moral obtuseness is required to identify the reactionary police morality of Stalinism with the revolutionary morality of the Bolsheviks. Lenin’s party has long ceased to exist — it was shattered between inner difficulties and world imperialism. In its place rose the Stalinist bureaucracy, transmission mechanism of imperialism. The bureaucracy has, on a world scale, replaced class struggle with class collaboration and internationalism with social-patriotism. In order to adapt the ruling party to the tasks of reaction, the bureaucracy “renewed” its composition through executing revolutionists and recruiting careerists.

Every reaction regenerates, nourishes and strengthens those elements of the historic past which the revolution struck but which it could not vanquish. The methods of Stalinism bring to the highest tension, to a culmination and at the same time to an absurdity all those methods of untruth, brutality and baseness which constitute the mechanics of control in every class society including also that of democracy. Stalinism is a single clot of all monstrosities of the historical state, its most malicious caricature and disgusting grimace. When the representatives of old society puritanically counterpose a sterilised democratic abstraction to the gangrene of Stalinism, we can with full justice recommend to them, as to all of old society, that they take a good look at themselves in the warped mirror of Soviet Thermidor. True, the GPU far surpasses

all other regimes in the nakedness of its crimes. But this flows from the immense amplitude of events shaking Russia under the influence of world imperialist demoralisation.

## Morality & revolution

Among the liberals and radicals there are not a few individuals who have assimilated the methods of the materialist interpretation of events and who consider themselves Marxists. This does not hinder them, however, from remaining bourgeois journalists, professors or politicians. A Bolshevik is inconceivable, of course, without the materialist method, in the sphere of morality too. But this method serves him not solely for the interpretation of events but rather for the creation of a revolutionary party of the proletariat. It is impossible to accomplish this task without complete independence from the bourgeoisie and their morality. Yet bourgeois public opinion actually now reigns in full sway over the official workers' movement from William Green in the United States, Léon Blum and Maurice Thorez in France, to Garcia Oliver in Spain. In this fact the reactionary character of the present period reaches its sharpest expression.

A revolutionary Marxist cannot begin to approach his historical mission without having broken morally from bourgeois public opinion and its agencies in the proletariat. For this, moral courage of a different calibre is required than that of opening wide one's mouth at meetings and yelling, "Down with Hitler!" "Down with Franco!" It is precisely this resolute, completely thought-out, inflexible rupture of the Bolsheviks from conservative moral philosophy not only of the big but of the petty bourgeoisie which mortally terrorises democratic phrasemongers, drawing-room prophets and lobbying heroes. From this derive their complaints about the "amoralism" of the Bolsheviks.

Their identification of bourgeois morals with morals "in general" can best of all, perhaps, be verified at the extreme left wing of the petty bourgeoisie, precisely in the centrist parties of the so-called London Bureau. Since this organisation "recognises" the program of proletarian revolution, our disagreements with it seem, at first glance, secondary. Actually their "recognition" is valueless because it does not bind them to anything. They "recognise" the proletarian revolution as the Kantians recognised the categorical imperative, that is, as a holy principle but not applicable to daily life. In the sphere of practical politics they unite with the worst enemies of the revolution (reformists and Stalinists) for the struggle against us. All their thinking is permeated with duplicity and falsehood. If the centrists, according to a general rule, do not raise themselves to imposing crimes it is only because they forever remain in the byways of politics: they are, so to speak, petty pickpockets of history. For this reason they consider



themselves called upon to regenerate the workers' movement with a new morality.

At the extreme left wing of this "left" fraternity stands a small and politically completely insignificant grouping of German emigres who publish the paper *Neuer Weg* (The New Road). Let us bend down lower and listen to these "revolutionary" indictors of Bolshevik amorality. In a tone of ambiguous pseudopraise the *Neuer Weg* proclaims that the Bolsheviks are distinguished advantageously from other parties by their absence of hypocrisy — they openly declare what others quietly apply in fact, that is, the principle: "the end justifies the means". But according to the convictions of *Neuer Weg* such a "bourgeois" precept is incompatible with a "healthy socialist movement". "Lying and worse are not permissible means of struggle, as Lenin still considered them." The word "still" evidently signifies that Lenin did not succeed in overcoming his delusions only because he failed to live until the discovery of *The New Road*.

In the formula, "lying and worse", "worse" evidently signifies violence, murder, and so on, since under equal conditions violence is worse than lying; and murder — the most extreme form of violence. We thus come to the conclusion that lying, violence, murder are incompatible with a "healthy socialist movement". What, however, is our relation to revolution? Civil war is the most severe of all forms of war. It is unthinkable not only without violence against tertiary figures but, under contemporary technique, without murdering old men, old women and children. Must one be reminded of Spain? The only possible answer of the "friends" of republican Spain sounds like this: civil war is better than fascist slavery. But this completely correct answer merely signifies that the *end* (democracy or socialism) justifies, under certain conditions, such *means* as violence and murder. Not to speak about lies! Without lies war would be as unimaginable as a machine without oil. In order to safeguard even the session of the Cortes (February 1, 1938) from fascist bombs the Barcelona government several times deliberately deceived journalists and their own population. Could it have acted in any other way? Whoever accepts the end: victory over Franco, must accept the means: civil war with its wake of horrors and crimes.

Nevertheless, do lying and violence "in themselves" warrant condemnation? Of course, even as does the class society which generates them. A society without social contradictions will naturally be a society without lies and violence. However there is no way of building a bridge to that society save by revolutionary, that is, violent means. The revolution itself is a product of class society and of necessity bears its traits. From the point of view of "eternal truths" revolution is of course "anti-moral". But this merely means that idealist morality is counterrevolutionary, that is, in the service of the exploiters.

“Civil war”, the philosopher caught unawares will perhaps respond, “is however a sad exception. But in peaceful times a healthy socialist movement should manage without violence and lying.” Such an answer however represents nothing less than a pathetic evasion. There is no impervious demarcation between “peaceful” class struggle and revolution. Every strike embodies in an unexpanded form all the elements of civil war. Each side strives to impress the opponent with an exaggerated picture of its resoluteness to struggle and its material resources. Through their press, agents, and spies the capitalists labour to frighten and demoralise the strikers. From their side, the workers’ pickets, where persuasion does not avail, are compelled to resort to force. Thus “lying and worse” are an inseparable part of the class struggle even in its most elementary form. It remains to be added that the very conception of *truth* and *lie* was born of social contradictions.

## Revolution & the institution of hostages

Stalin arrests and shoots the children of his opponents after these opponents have been themselves executed under false accusations. With the help of the institution of family hostages Stalin compels those Soviet diplomats to return from abroad who permitted themselves an expression of doubt upon the infallibility of Yagoda or Yezhov. The moralists of *Neuer Weg* consider it necessary and timely to remind us on this occasion of the fact that Trotsky in 1919 “also” introduced a law upon hostages. But here it becomes necessary to quote literally: “The detention of innocent relatives by Stalin is disgusting barbarism. But it remains a barbarism as well when it was dictated by Trotsky (1919).” Here is the idealistic moralist in all his beauty! His criteria are as false as the norms of bourgeois democracy — in both cases parity is supposed where in actuality there is not even a trace of it.

We will not insist here upon the fact that the decree of 1919 led scarcely to even one execution of relatives of those commanders whose perfidy not only caused the loss of innumerable human lives but threatened the revolution with direct annihilation. The question in the end does not concern that. If the revolution had displayed less superfluous generosity from the very beginning, hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved. Thus or otherwise I carry full responsibility for the decree of 1919. It was a necessary measure in the struggle against the oppressors. Only in the historical content of the struggle lies the justification of the decree as in general the justification of the whole civil war which, too, can be called, not without foundation, “disgusting barbarism”.

We leave to some Emil Ludwig or his ilk the drawing of Abraham Lincoln’s portrait with rosy little wings. Lincoln’s significance lies in his not hesitating before the most

severe means, once they were found to be necessary, in achieving a great historic aim posed by the development of a young nation. The question lies not even in which of the warring camps caused or itself suffered the greatest number of victims. History has different yardsticks for the cruelty of the Northerners and the cruelty of the Southerners in the Civil War. A slaveholder who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning and violence breaks the chains — let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!

After the Paris Commune had been drowned in blood and the reactionary knaves of the whole world dragged its banner in the filth of vilification and slander, there were not a few democratic philistines who, adapting themselves to reaction, slandered the Communards for shooting 64 hostages headed by the Paris archbishop. Marx did not hesitate a moment in defending this bloody act of the Commune. In a circular issued by the General Council of the First International, which seethes with the fiery eruption of lava, Marx first reminds us of the bourgeoisie adopting the institution of hostages in the struggle against both colonial peoples and their own toiling masses and afterwards refers to the systematic execution of the Commune captives by the frenzied reactionaries, continuing: "... the Commune, to protect their [the captives'] lives, was obliged to resort to the Prussian practice of securing hostages. The lives of the hostages had been forfeited over and over again by the continued shooting of prisoners on the part of the Versailles. How could they be spared any longer after the carnage with which MacMahon's praetorians celebrated their entry into Paris? Was even the last check upon the unscrupulous ferocity of bourgeois governments — the taking of hostages — to be made a mere sham of?" Thus Marx defended the execution of hostages although behind his back in the General Council sat not a few Fenner Brockways, Norman Thomases and other Otto Bauers. But so fresh was the indignation of the world proletariat against the ferocity of the Versailles that the reactionary moralistic bunglers preferred to keep silent in expectation of times more favourable to them which, alas, were not slow in appearing. Only after the definite triumph of reaction did the petty-bourgeois moralists, together with the trade union bureaucrats and the anarchist phrasemongers destroy the First International.

When the October Revolution was defending itself against the united forces of imperialism on a 5000 mile front, the workers of the whole world followed the course of the struggle with such ardent sympathy that in their forums it was extremely risky to indict the "disgusting barbarism" of the institution of hostages. Complete degeneration of the Soviet state and the triumph of reaction in a number of countries was necessary before the moralists crawled out of their crevices ... to aid Stalin. If it is true that the repressions safeguarding the privileges of the new aristocracy have the

same moral value as the revolutionary measures of the liberating struggle, then Stalin is completely justified, if ... if the proletarian revolution is not completely condemned.

Seeking examples of immorality in the events of the Russian Civil War, Messrs. Moralists find themselves at the same time constrained to close their eyes to the fact that the Spanish revolution also produced an institution of hostages, at least during that period when it was a genuine revolution of the masses. If the indicters dare not attack the Spanish workers for their “disgusting barbarism”, it is only because the ground of the Pyrennean peninsula is still too hot for them. It is considerably more convenient to return to 1919. This is already history, the old men have forgotten and the young ones have not yet learned. For the same reason pharisees of various hues return to Kronstadt and Makhno with such obstinacy — here exists a free outlet for moral effluvia!

### ‘Morality of the Kaffirs’

It is impossible not to agree with the moralists that history chooses cruel pathways. But what type of conclusion for practical activity is to be drawn from this? Leo Tolstoy recommended that we ignore the social conventions and perfect ourselves. Mahatma Gandhi advises that we drink goat’s milk. Alas, the “revolutionary” moralists of *Neuer Weg* did not drift far from these recipes. “We should free ourselves”, they preach, “from those morals of the Kaffirs to whom only what the enemy does is wrong.” Excellent advice! “We should free ourselves ...” Tolstoy recommended in addition that we free ourselves from the sins of the flesh. However, statistics fail to confirm the success of his recommendation. Our centrist homunculi have succeeded in elevating themselves to supraclass morality in a class society. But almost 2000 years have passed since it was stated: “Love your enemies”, “Offer also the other cheek.” However, even the holy Roman father so far has not “freed himself” from hatred against his enemies. Truly, Satan, the enemy of mankind, is powerful!

To apply different criteria to the actions of the exploiters and the exploited signifies, according to these pitiful homunculi, standing on the level of the “morals of the Kaffirs”. First of all such a contemptuous reference to the Kaffirs is hardly proper from the pen of “socialists”. Are the morals of the Kaffirs really so bad? Here is what the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says upon the subject:

“In their social and political relations they display great tact and intelligence; they are remarkably brave, warlike, and hospitable, and were honest and truthful until through contact with the whites they became suspicious, revengeful and thievish, besides acquiring most European vices.” It is impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that white missionaries, preachers of eternal morals, participated in the corruption of

the Kaffirs.

If we should tell the toiler-Kaffir how the workers arose in a part of our planet and caught their exploiters unawares, he would be very pleased. On the other hand, he would be chagrined to discover that the oppressors had succeeded in deceiving the oppressed. A Kaffir who has not been demoralised by missionaries to the marrow of his bones will never apply one and the same abstract moral norms to the oppressors and the oppressed. Yet he will easily comprehend an explanation that it is the function of these abstract norms to prevent the oppressed from arising against their oppressors.

What an instructive coincidence! In order to slander the Bolsheviks, the missionaries of *Neuer Weg* were compelled at the same time to slander the Kaffirs; moreover in both cases the slander follows the line of the official bourgeois lie: against revolutionists and against the coloured races. No, we prefer the Kaffirs to all missionaries, both spiritual and secular!

It is not necessary in any case, however, to overestimate the conscientiousness of the moralists of *Neuer Weg* and other blind alleys. The intentions of these people are not so bad. But despite these intentions they serve as levers in the mechanics of reaction. In such a period as the present when the petty-bourgeois parties who cling to the liberal bourgeois or its shadow (the politics of the "Peoples' Front") paralyse the proletariat and pave the road for fascism (Spain, France ...), the Bolsheviks, that is, revolutionary Marxists, become especially odious figures in the eyes of bourgeois public opinion. The fundamental political pressure of our time shifts from right to left. In the final analysis the whole weight of reaction bears down upon the shoulders of a tiny revolutionary minority. This minority is called the Fourth International. *Voilà l'ennemi!* There is the enemy!

In the mechanics of reaction Stalinism occupies many leading positions. All groupings of bourgeois society, including the anarchists, utilise its aid in the struggle against the proletarian revolution. At the same time the petty-bourgeois democrats attempt, at least to the extent of 50%, to cast the repulsiveness of the crimes of its Moscow ally upon the indomitable revolutionary minority. Herein lies the sense of the now stylish dictum: "Trotskyism and Stalinism are one and the same." The adversaries of the Bolsheviks and the Kaffirs thus aid reaction in slandering the party of revolution.

## The 'amoralism' of Lenin

The Russian Social Revolutionaries were always the most moral individuals: essentially they were composed of ethics alone. This did not prevent them, however, at the time of revolution from deceiving the Russian peasants. In the Parisian organ of Kerensky, that very ethical socialist who was the forerunner of Stalin in manufacturing spurious

accusations against the Bolsheviks, another old Social Revolutionary, Zenzinov writes: “Lenin, as is known, taught that for the sake of gaining the desired ends communists can, and sometimes must ‘resort to all sorts of devices, manoeuvres and subterfuge’ ...” (*New Russia*, February 17, 1938, p. 3) From this they draw the ritualistic conclusion: Stalinism is the natural offspring of Leninism.

Unfortunately, the ethical indicter is not even capable of quoting honestly. Lenin said: “It is necessary to be able ... to resort to all sorts of devices, manoeuvres, and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, *in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on communist work in them at all costs.*” The necessity for evasion and manoeuvres, according to Lenin’s explanation, is called forth by the fact that the reformist bureaucracy, betraying the workers to capital, baits revolutionists, persecutes them, and even resorts to turning the bourgeois police upon them. “Manoeuvres” and “subterfuge” are in this case only methods of valid self-defence against the perfidious reformist bureaucracy.

The party of this very Zenzinov once carried on illegal work against tsarism, and later — against the Bolsheviks. In both cases it resorted to craftiness, evasion, false passports and other forms of “subterfuge”. All these *means* were considered not only “ethical” but also heroic because they corresponded to the *political aims* of the petty bourgeoisie. But the situation changes at once when proletarian revolutionists are forced to resort to conspirative measures against the petty-bourgeois democracy. The key to the morality of these gentlemen has, as we see, a class character!

The “amoralist” Lenin openly, in the press, gives advice concerning military craftiness against perfidious leaders. And the moralist Zenzinov maliciously chops both ends from the quotation in order to deceive the reader — the ethical indicter is proved as usual a petty swindler. Not for nothing was Lenin fond of repeating: it is very difficult to meet a conscientious adversary!

A worker who does not conceal the “truth” about the strikers’ plans from the capitalists is simply a betrayer deserving contempt and boycott. The soldier who discloses the “truth” to the enemy is punished as a spy. Kerensky tried to lay at the Bolsheviks’ door the accusation of having disclosed the “truth” to Ludendorf’s staff. It appears that even the “holy truth” is not an end in itself. More imperious criteria which, as analysis demonstrates, carry a class character, rule over it.

The life-and-death struggle is unthinkable without military craftiness, in other words, without lying and deceit. May the German proletariat then not deceive Hitler’s police? Or perhaps Soviet Bolsheviks have an “immoral” attitude when they deceive the GPU? Every pious bourgeois applauds the cleverness of police who succeed through craftiness in seizing a dangerous gangster. Is military craftiness really impermissible

when the question concerns the overthrow of the gangsters of imperialism?

Norman Thomas speaks about “that strange communist amorality in which nothing matters but the party and its power” (*Socialist Call*, March 12, 1938, p. 5). Moreover, Thomas throws into one heap the present Comintern, that is, the conspiracy of the Kremlin bureaucracy against the working class, with the Bolshevik party which represented a conspiracy of the advanced workers against the bourgeoisie. This thoroughly dishonest juxtaposition has already been sufficiently exposed above. Stalinism merely screens itself under the cult of the party; actually it destroys and tramples the party in filth. It is true, however, that to a Bolshevik the party is everything. The drawing-room socialist, Thomas, is surprised by and rejects a similar relationship between a revolutionist and revolution because he himself is only a bourgeois with a socialist “ideal”. In the eyes of Thomas and his kind the party is only a secondary instrument for electoral combinations and other similar uses, not more. His personal life, interests, ties, moral criteria exist outside the party. With hostile astonishment he looks down upon the Bolshevik to whom the party is a weapon for the revolutionary reconstruction of society, including also its morality. To a revolutionary Marxist there can be no contradiction between personal morality and the interests of the party, since the party embodies in his consciousness the very highest tasks and aims of mankind. It is naive to imagine that Thomas has a higher understanding of morality than the Marxists. He merely has a base conception of the party.

“All that arises is worthy of perishing”, says the dialectician, Goethe. The perishing of the Bolshevik party — an episode in world reaction — does not, however, disparage its worldwide historic significance. In the period of its revolutionary ascendance, that is, when it actually represented the proletarian vanguard, it was the most honest party in history. Wherever it could of course, it deceived the class enemies; on the other hand it told the toilers the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Only thanks to this did it succeed in winning their trust to a degree never before achieved by any other party in the world.

The clerks of the ruling classes call the organisers of this party “amoralists”. In the eyes of conscious workers this accusation carries a complimentary character. It signifies: Lenin refused to recognise moral norms established by slave-owners for their slaves and never observed by the slave-owners themselves; he called upon the proletariat to extend the class struggle into the moral sphere too. Whoever fawns before precepts established by the enemy will never vanquish that enemy!

The “amoralism” of Lenin, that is, his rejection of supra-class morals, did not hinder him from remaining faithful to one and the same ideal throughout his whole life; from devoting his whole being to the cause of the oppressed; from displaying the

highest conscientiousness in the sphere of ideas and the highest fearlessness in the sphere of action, from maintaining an attitude untainted by the least superiority to an “ordinary” worker, to a defenceless woman, to a child. Does it not seem that “amoralism” in the given case is only a pseudonym for higher human morality?

### An instructive episode

Here it is proper to relate an episode which, in spite of its modest dimensions, does not badly illustrate the difference between *their* morals and *ours*. In 1935, through a letter to my Belgian friends,\* I developed the conception that the attempt of a young revolutionary party to organise “its own” trade unions is equivalent to suicide. It is necessary to find the workers where they are. But this means paying dues in order to sustain an opportunist apparatus? “Of course”, I replied, “for the right to undermine the reformists it is necessary temporarily to pay them a contribution.” But reformists will not permit us to undermine them? “True”, I answered, “undermining demands conspirative measures. Reformists are the political police of the bourgeoisie within the working class. We must act without their permission, and against their interdiction ...” Through an accidental raid on Comrade D[auge]’s home in connection, if I am not mistaken, with the matter of supplying arms for the Spanish workers, the Belgian police seized my letter. Within several days it was published. The press of Vandervelde, de Man, and Spaak did not of course spare lightning against my “Machiavellianism” and “Jesuitism”. And who are these accusers? Vandervelde, president for many years of the Second International, long ago became a trusted servant of Belgian capital. De Man, who in a series of ponderous tomes ennobled socialism with idealistic morals, making overtures to religion, seized the first suitable occasion in which to betray the workers and become a common bourgeois minister. Even more lovely is Spaak’s case. A year and a half previously this gentleman belonged to the left-socialist opposition and came to me in France for advice upon the methods of struggle against Vandervelde’s bureaucracy. I set forth the same conceptions which later constituted my letter. But within a year after his visit, Spaak rejected the thorns for the roses. Betraying his comrades of the opposition, he became one of the most cynical ministers of Belgian capital. In the trade unions and in their own party these gentlemen stifle every critical voice, systematically corrupt and bribe the most advanced workers and just as systematically expel the refractory ones. They are distinguished from the GPU only by the fact that they have not yet resorted to spilling blood — as good patriots they

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\* “Suggestions for the Belgian Section” [March 27, 1936], *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1977), p. 287. Trotsky is mistaken here about the year. — *Ed.*



husband the workers' blood for the next imperialist war. Obviously — one must be a most hellish abomination, a moral deformation, a “Kaffir”, a Bolshevik, in order to advise the revolutionary workers to observe the precepts of conspiracy in the struggle against these gentlemen!

From the point of view of the Belgian laws, my letter did not of course contain anything criminal. The duty of the “democratic” police was to return the letter to the addressee with an apology. The duty of the Socialist Party was to protest against the raid which had been dictated by concern over General Franco's interests. But Messrs. Socialists were not at all shy at utilising the indecent police service — without this they could not have enjoyed the happy occasion of once more exposing the superiority of their morals over the amorality of the Bolsheviks.

Everything is symbolical in this episode. The Belgian social-democrats dumped the buckets of their indignation upon me exactly while their Norwegian cothinkers held me and my wife under lock and key in order to prevent us from defending ourselves against the accusations of the GPU. The Norwegian government well knew that the Moscow accusations were spurious — the social-democratic semi-official newspaper affirmed this openly during the first days. But Moscow touched the Norwegian shipowners and fish merchants on the pocketbook — and Messrs. Social-Democrats immediately flopped down on all fours. The leader of the party, Martin Tranmael, is not only an authority in the moral sphere but openly a righteous person: he does not drink, does not smoke, does not indulge in meat and in winter bathes in an ice hole. This did not hinder him, after he had arrested us upon the order of the GPU, from especially inviting a Norwegian agent of the GPU, one Jacob Fries — a bourgeois without honour or conscience — to calumniate me. But enough ...

The morals of these gentlemen consists of conventional precepts and turns of speech which are supposed to screen their interests, appetites and fears. In the majority they are ready for any baseness — rejection of convictions, perfidy, betrayal — in the name of ambition or cupidity. In the holy sphere of personal interests the end to them justifies any means. But it is precisely because of this that they require special codes of morals, durable, and at the same time elastic, like good suspenders. They detest anyone who exposes their professional secrets to the masses. In “peaceful” times their hatred is expressed in slander — in Billingsgate or “philosophical” language. In times of sharp social conflicts, as in Spain, these moralists, hand in hand with the GPU, murder revolutionists. In order to justify themselves, they repeat: “Trotskyism and Stalinism are one and the same.”

## Dialectic interdependence of ends & means

A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in its turn needs to be justified. From the Marxist point of view, which expresses the historical interests of the proletariat, the end is justified if it leads to increasing the power of humanity over nature and to the abolition of the power of one person over another.

“We are to understand then that in achieving this end anything is permissible?” demands the philistine sarcastically, demonstrating that he understood nothing. That is permissible, we answer, which *really* leads to the liberation of humanity. Since this end can be achieved only through revolution, the liberating morality of the proletariat of necessity is endowed with a revolutionary character. It irreconcilably counteracts not only religious dogma but all kinds of idealistic fetishes, these philosophic gendarmes of the ruling class. It deduces a rule for conduct from the laws of the development of society, thus primarily from the class struggle, this law of all laws.

“Just the same”, the moralist continues to insist, “does it mean that in the class struggle against capitalists all means are permissible: lying, frame-up, betrayal, murder, and so on?” Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoes, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that *not* all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means, then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organisation, replacing it by worship for the “leaders”. Primarily and irreconcilably, revolutionary morality rejects servility in relation to the bourgeoisie and haughtiness in relation to the toilers, that is, those characteristics in which petty-bourgeois pedants and moralists are thoroughly steeped.

These criteria do not, of course, give a ready answer to the question as to what is permissible and what is not permissible in each separate case. There can be no such automatic answers. Problems of revolutionary morality are fused with the problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics. The living experience of the movement under the clarification of theory provides the correct answer to these problems.

Dialectic materialism does not know dualism between means and end. The end flows naturally from the historical movement. Organically the means are subordinated to the end. The immediate end becomes the means for a further end. In his play, *Franz von Sickingen*, Ferdinand Lassalle puts the following words into the mouth of one of the heroes:

Do not only show the goal, show the path as well.  
For so closely interwoven with one another are path and goal  
That a change in one means a change in the other,  
And a different path gives rise to a different goal.

Lassalle's lines are not at all perfect. Still worse is the fact that in practical politics Lassalle himself diverged from the above expressed precept — it is sufficient to recall that he went as far as secret agreements with Bismarck! But the dialectic interdependence between means and end is expressed entirely correctly in the above-quoted sentences. Seeds of wheat must be sown in order to yield an ear of wheat.

Is individual terror, for example, permissible or impermissible from the point of view of "pure morals"? In this abstract form the question does not exist at all for us. Conservative Swiss bourgeois even now render official praise to the terrorist William Tell. Our sympathies are fully on the side of Irish, Russian, Polish or Hindu terrorists in their struggle against national and political oppression. The assassinated Kirov, a rude satrap, does not call forth any sympathy. Our relation to the assassin remains neutral only because we know not what motives guided him. If it became known that Nikolayev acted as a conscious avenger for workers' rights trampled upon by Kirov, our sympathies would be fully on the side of the assassin. However, not the question of subjective motives but that of objective efficacy has for us the decisive significance. Are the given means really capable of leading to the goal? In relation to individual terror, both theory and experience bear witness that such is not the case. To the terrorist we say: it is impossible to replace the masses; only in the mass movement can you find expedient expression for your heroism. However, under conditions of civil war, the assassination of individual oppressors ceases to be an act of individual terror. If, we shall say, a revolutionist bombed General Franco and his staff into the air, it would hardly evoke moral indignation even from the democratic eunuchs. Under the conditions of civil war a similar act would be politically completely effective. Thus, even in the sharpest question — murder of man by man — moral absolutes prove futile. Moral evaluations, together with those political, flow from the inner needs of struggle.

The liberation of the workers can come only through the workers themselves. There is, therefore, no greater crime than deceiving the masses, palming off defeats as victories, friends as enemies, bribing workers' leaders, fabricating legends, staging false trials, in a word, doing what the Stalinists do. These means can serve only one end: lengthening the domination of a clique already condemned by history. But they cannot serve to liberate the masses. That is why the Fourth International wages against Stalinism a life and death struggle.

The masses, of course, are not at all impeccable. Idealisation of the masses is

foreign to us. We have seen them under different conditions, at different stages and in addition in the biggest political shocks. We have observed their strong and weak sides. Their strong side — resoluteness, self-sacrifice, heroism — has always found its clearest expression in times of revolutionary upsurge. During this period the Bolsheviks headed the masses. Afterward a different historical chapter loomed when the weak side of the oppressed came to the forefront: heterogeneity, insufficiency of culture, narrowness of world outlook. The masses tired of the tension, became disillusioned, lost faith in themselves — and cleared the road for the new aristocracy. In this epoch the Bolsheviks (“Trotskyists”) found themselves isolated from the masses. Practically speaking, we went through two such big historic cycles: 1897-1905, years of flood tide; 1907-1913 years of the ebb; 1917-1923, a period of upsurge unprecedented in history; finally, a new period of reaction which has not ended even today. In these immense events the “Trotskyists” learned the rhythm of history, that is, the dialectics of the class struggle. They also learned, it seems, and to a certain degree successfully, how to subordinate their subjective plans and programs to this objective rhythm. They learned not to fall into despair over the fact that the laws of history do not depend upon their individual tastes and are not subordinated to their own moral criteria. They learned to subordinate their individual desires to the laws of history. They learned not to become frightened by the most powerful enemies if their power is in contradiction to the needs of historical development. They know how to swim against the stream in the deep conviction that the new historic flood will carry them to the other shore. Not all will reach that shore, many will drown. But to participate in this movement with open eyes and with an intense will — only this can give the highest moral satisfaction to a thinking being!

*Coyoacan, February 16, 1938*

PS: I wrote these line during those days when my son struggled, unknown to me, with death. I dedicate to his memory this small work which, I hope, would have met with his approval — Leon Sedov was a genuine revolutionist and despised the pharisees.

# The Moralists & Sycophants Against Marxism

*Leon Trotsky*

## **Peddlers of indulgences & their socialist allies, or the cuckoo in a strange nest**

The pamphlet “Their Morals and Ours” possesses merit at least in this, that it has compelled certain philistines and sycophants to expose themselves completely. The first clippings from the French and Belgian press received by me testify to this. The most intelligible of its kind is the review which appeared in the Parisian Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. These gentlemen have a system of their own, and they are not ashamed to defend it. They stand for absolute morality, and above all for the butcher Franco. It is the will of God. Behind them stands a Heavenly Sanitarian who gathers and cleans all the filth in their wake. It is hardly surprising that they should condemn as unworthy the morality of revolutionists who assume responsibility for themselves. But we are now interested not in professional peddlers of indulgences but in moralists who manage to do without God while seeking to put themselves in His stead.

The Brussels “socialist” newspaper *Le Peuple* — here is virtue’s hideout! — has been able to find nothing in our little book except a criminal recipe for building secret cells in the pursuit of the most immoral of all goals, that of undermining the prestige and revenues of the Belgian labour bureaucracy. It may of course be said in reply that this bureaucracy is smeared with countless betrayals and sheer swindles (we need only recall the history of the “Labour Bank”!); that it stifles every glimmer of critical thought in the working class; that in its practical morality it is in no way superior to its political ally, the Catholic hierarchy. But, in the first place, only very poorly educated people would mention such unpleasant things; secondly, all these gentlemen, whatever their petty sins, keep in reserve the highest principles of morality. To this Henri de Man sees personally, and before his high authority we Bolsheviks cannot of course expect any



Above: *Victor Serge*. Right: *Leon Sedov, Trotsky's son and close political collaborator.*



indulgence.

Before passing on to other moralists, let us pause for a moment on a prospectus issued by the French publishers of our little book. By its very nature, a prospectus either recommends a book, or, at least, delineates objectively its contents. We have before us a prospectus of an entirely different type. Suffice it to adduce only one example: “Trotsky is of the opinion that his party, once in power and now in opposition, has always represented the genuine proletariat, and he himself — genuine morality. From this he concludes for instance the following: Shooting of hostages assumes an entirely different meaning depending upon whether the order is issued by Stalin or Trotsky ...” This quotation is quite ample for an appraisal of the behind-the-scenes commentator. It is the unquestionable right of an author to supervise a prospectus. But inasmuch as in the present case the author happens to be on the other side of the ocean, some “friend”, apparently profiting from the publisher’s lack of information, contrived to slip into a strange nest and deposit there his little egg — oh! it is of course a very tiny egg, an almost virginal egg. Who is the author of this prospectus? Victor Serge, who translated the book and who is at the same time its severest critic, can easily supply the information. I should not be surprised if it turned out that the prospectus was written ... naturally, not by Victor Serge but by one of his disciples who imitates both his master’s ideas and his style. But, maybe after all, it is the master himself, that is, Victor Serge in his capacity of “friend” of the author?

### **‘Hottentot morality’!**

Souvarine and other sycophants have of course immediately seized upon the foregoing statement in the prospectus which saves them the bother of casting about for poisoned sophisms. If Trotsky takes hostages, it is good; if Stalin, it is bad. In the face of such “Hottentot morality”, it is not difficult to give vent to noble indignation. Yet there is nothing easier than to expose on the basis of this most recent example the hollowness and falsity of this indignation. Victor Serge publicly became a member of the POUM, a Catalan party which had its own militia at the front during the civil war. At the front, as is well known, people shoot and kill. It may therefore be said: “For Victor Serge killings assume entirely different meaning depending upon whether the order is issued by General Franco or by the leaders of Victor Serge’s own party.” If our moralist had tried to think out the meaning of his own actions before trying to instruct others, he

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\* We shall not dwell here on the shabby custom of referring contemptuously to the Hottentots in order thereby more radiantly to represent the morality of the white slaveholders. It was adequately dealt with in the pamphlet [“Their Morals and Ours”]. — LT.

would in all probability have said the following: But the Spanish workers fought to emancipate the people while Franco's gangs fought to reduce it to slavery! Serge will not be able to invent a different answer. In other words, he will have to repeat the "Hottentot" argument of Trotsky in relation to the hostages.

### Once again on hostages

However, it is possible and even probable that our moralists will refuse to say candidly that which is, and will attempt to beat about the bush: "To kill at the front is one thing, to shoot hostages is something else again!" This argument, as we shall shortly prove, is simply stupid. But let us stop for a moment on the ground chosen by our adversary. The system of hostages, you say, is immoral "in itself" Good, that is what we want to know. But this system has been practiced in all the civil wars of ancient and modern history. It obviously flows from the nature of civil war itself. From this it is possible to draw only one conclusion, namely, that the very nature of civil war is immoral. That is the standpoint of the newspaper *La Croix*, which holds that it is necessary to obey the powers-that-be, for power emanates from God. And Victor Serge? He has no considered point of view. To drop a little egg in a strange nest is one thing, to define one's position on complex historical problems is something else again. I readily admit that people of such transcendent morality as Azaña, Caballero, Negrín and Co. were against taking hostages from the fascist camp: On both sides you have bourgeois, bound by family and material ties and convinced that even in case of defeat they would not only save themselves but would retain their beefsteaks. In their own fashion, they were right. But the fascists did take hostages among the proletarian revolutionists, and the proletarians, on their part, took hostages from among the fascist bourgeoisie, for they knew the menace that a defeat, even partial and temporary, implied for them and their class brothers.

Victor Serge himself cannot tell exactly what he wants: whether to purge the civil war of the practice of hostages, or to purge human history of civil war? The petty-bourgeois moralist thinks episodically, in fragments, in clumps, being incapable of approaching phenomena in their internal connection. Artificially set apart, the question of hostages is for him a particular moral problem, independent of those general conditions which engender armed conflicts between classes. Civil war is the supreme expression of the class struggle. To attempt to subordinate it to abstract "norms" means in fact to disarm the workers in the face of an enemy armed to the teeth. The petty-bourgeois moralist is the younger brother of the bourgeois pacifist who wants to "humanise" warfare by prohibiting the use of poison gases, the bombardment of unfortified cities, etc. Politically, such programs serve only to deflect the thoughts of



the people from revolution as the only method of putting an end to war.

### The dread of bourgeois public opinion

Entangled in his contradictions, the moralist might perhaps try to argue that an “open” and “conscious” struggle between two camps is one thing, but the seizure of nonparticipants in the struggle is something else again. This argument, however, is only a wretched and stupid evasion. In Franco’s camp fought tens of thousands who were duped and conscripted by force. The republican armies shot at and killed these unfortunate captives of a reactionary general. Was this moral or immoral? Furthermore, modern warfare, with its long-range artillery, aviation, poison gases, and finally, with its train of devastation, famine, fires, and epidemics, inevitably involves the loss of hundreds of thousands and millions, the aged and the children included, who do not participate directly in the struggle. People taken as hostages are at least bound by ties of class and family solidarity with one of the camps, or with the leaders of that camp. A conscious selection is possible in taking hostages. A projectile fired from a gun or dropped from a plane is let loose by hazard and may easily destroy not only foes but friends, or their parents and children. Why then do our moralists set apart the question of hostages and shut their eyes to the entire content of civil war? Because they are not too courageous. As “leftists” they fear to break openly with revolution. As petty bourgeois they dread destroying the bridges to official public opinion. In condemning the system of hostages they feel themselves in good company — against the Bolsheviks. They maintain a cowardly silence about Spain. Against the fact that the Spanish workers, anarchists, and POUMists took hostages, V. Serge will protest ... in 20 years.

### The moral code of civil war

To the very same category pertains still another of V. Serge’s discoveries, namely, that the degeneration of the Bolsheviks dates from the moment when the Cheka was given the right of deciding behind closed doors the fate of people. Serge plays with the concept of revolution, writes poems about it, but is incapable of understanding it as it is.

Public trials are possible only in conditions of a stable regime. Civil war is a condition of the extreme instability of society and the state. Just as it is impossible to publish in newspapers the plans of the general staff, so is it impossible to reveal in public trials the conditions and circumstances of conspiracies, for the latter are intimately linked with the course of the civil war. Secret trials, beyond a doubt, greatly increase the possibility of mistakes. This merely signifies, and we concede it readily, that the circumstances of civil war are hardly favourable for the exercise of impartial justice. And what more

than that?

We propose that V. Serge be appointed as chairman of a commission composed of, say, Marceau Pivert, Souvarine, Waldo Frank, Max Eastman, Magdeleine Paz and others to draft a moral code for civil warfare. Its general character is clear in advance. Both sides pledge not to take hostages. Public trials remain in force. For their proper functioning, complete freedom of the press is preserved throughout the civil war. Bombardment of cities, being detrimental to public justice, freedom of the press, and the inviolability of the individual, is strictly prohibited. For similar and sundry other reasons the use of artillery is outlawed. And inasmuch as rifles, hand grenades, and even bayonets unquestionably exercise a baleful influence upon human beings as well as upon democracy in general, the use of weapons, firearms or sidearms, in the civil war is strictly forbidden.

Marvellous code! Magnificent monument to the rhetoric of Victor Serge and Magdeleine Paz! However, so long as this code remains unaccepted as a rule of conduct by all the oppressors and the oppressed, the warring classes will seek to gain victory by *every means*, while petty-bourgeois moralists will continue as heretofore to wander in confusion between the two camps. Subjectively, they sympathise with the oppressed — no one doubts that. Objectively, they remain captives of the morality of the ruling class and seek to impose it upon the oppressed instead of helping them elaborate the morality of insurrection.

### **The masses have nothing at all to do with it!**

Victor Serge has disclosed in passing what caused the collapse of the Bolshevik Party: excessive centralism, mistrust of ideological struggle, lack of freedom-loving (“*libertaire*”, in reality anarchist) spirit. More confidence in the masses, more freedom! All this is outside time and space. But the masses are by no means identical: there are revolutionary masses, there are passive masses, there are reactionary masses. The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves. To invest the mass with traits of sanctity and to reduce one’s program to amorphous “democracy”, is to dissolve oneself in the class as it is, to turn from a vanguard into a rearguard, and by this very thing, to renounce revolutionary tasks. On the other hand, if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the class is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself. All this is elementary; all this has been demonstrated by the experience

of Russia, and confirmed by the experience of Spain.

But the whole secret is this, that demanding freedom “for the masses”, Victor Serge in reality demands freedom for himself and for his compeers, freedom from all control, all discipline, even, if possible, from all criticism. The “masses” have nothing at all to do with it. When our “democrat” scurries from right to left, and from left to right, sowing confusion and scepticism, he imagines it to be the realisation of a salutary freedom of thought. But when we evaluate from the Marxist standpoint the vacillations of a disillusioned petty-bourgeois intellectual, that seems to him an assault upon his individuality. He then enters into an alliance with all the confusionists for a crusade against our despotism and our sectarianism.

The internal democracy of a revolutionary party is not a goal in itself. It must be supplemented and bounded by centralism. For a Marxist the question has always been: democracy for what? For which program? The framework of the program is at the same time the framework of democracy. Victor Serge demanded of the Fourth International that it give freedom of action to all confusionists, sectarians, and centrists of the POUM, Vereecken, Marceau Pivert types, to conservative bureaucrats of the Sneevliet type or mere adventurers of the R. Molinier type. On the other hand, Victor Serge has systematically helped centrist organisations drive from their ranks the partisans of the Fourth International. We are very well acquainted with that democratism: it is compliant, accommodating, and conciliatory — *towards the right*; at the same time it is exigent, malevolent, and tricky — *towards the left*. It merely represents the regime of self-defence of petty-bourgeois centrism.

## The struggle against Marxism

If Victor Serge’s attitude toward problems of theory were serious, he would have been embarrassed to come to the fore as an “innovator” and to pull us back to Bernstein, Struve, and all the revisionists of the last century who tried to graft Kantianism onto Marxism, or in other words, to subordinate the class struggle of the proletariat to principles allegedly rising above it. As did Kant himself, they depicted the “categorical imperative” (the idea of duty) as an absolute norm of morality valid for everybody. In reality, it is a question of “duty” to bourgeois society. In their own fashion, Bernstein, Struve, Vorlander, had a serious attitude toward theory. They openly demanded a *return* to Kant. Victor Serge and his compeers do not feel the slightest responsibility towards scientific thought. They confine themselves to allusions, insinuations, at best, to literary generalisations ... However, if their ideas are plumbed to the bottom, it appears that they have joined an old cause, long since discredited: to subdue Marxism by means of Kantianism; to paralyse the socialist revolution by means of “absolute”

norms which represent in reality the philosophical generalisations of the interests of the bourgeoisie — true enough, not the present-day but the defunct bourgeoisie of the era of free trade and democracy. The imperialist bourgeoisie observes these norms even less than did its liberal grandmother. But it views favourably the attempts of the petty-bourgeois preachers to introduce confusion, turbulence, and vacillation into the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat. The chief aim not only of Hitler but also of the liberals and the democrats is to discredit Bolshevism at a time when its historical legitimacy threatens to become absolutely clear to the masses. Bolshevism, Marxism — there is the enemy!

When “Brother” Victor Basch, high priest of democratic morality, with the aid of his “Brother” Rosenmark, committed a forgery in defence of the Moscow trials, he was publicly exposed. Convicted of falsehood, he beat his breast and cried: “Am I then partial? I have always denounced the terror of Lenin and Trotsky.” Basch graphically exposed the inner mainspring of the moralists of democracy: some of them may keep quiet about the Moscow trials, some may attack the trials, still others may defend the trials; but their common concern is to use the trials in condemning the “morality” of Lenin and Trotsky, that is, the methods of the proletarian revolution. In this sphere they are all brothers.

In the above-cited scandalous prospectus it is stated that I develop views on morality “basing” myself “on Lenin”. This indefinite phrase, reproduced by other publications, can be taken to mean that I develop Lenin’s theoretical principles. But to my knowledge Lenin did not write on morality. Victor Serge wished in reality to say something altogether different, namely, that my immoral ideas are a generalisation of the practice of Lenin, the “amoralist”. He seeks to discredit Lenin’s personality by my judgments, and my judgments by the personality of Lenin. He is simply flattering the general reactionary tendency, which is aimed against Bolshevism and Marxism as a whole.

### **Souvarine, the sycophant**

Ex-pacifist, ex-communist, ex-Trotskyist, ex-democrato-communist, ex-Marxist ... almost ex-Souvarine attacks the proletarian revolution and revolutionists all the more brazenly the less he himself knows what he wants. This man loves and knows how to collect quotations, documents, commas, and quotation marks and how to compile dossiers and, moreover, he knows how to handle the pen. Originally he had hoped that this baggage would last him a lifetime. But he was soon compelled to convince himself that in addition the ability to think was necessary ... His book on Stalin, despite an abundance of interesting quotations and facts, is a self-testimonial to his own poverty. Souvarine understands neither what the revolution is nor what the

counterrevolution is. He applies to the historical process the criteria of a petty rationaliser, forever aggrieved at sinful humanity. The disproportion between his critical spirit and his creative impotence consumes him as if it were an acid. Hence his constant exasperation, and his lack of elementary honesty in appraising ideas, people and events, while covering it all with dry moralising. Like all misanthropes and cynics, Souvarine is organically drawn toward reaction.

Has Souvarine broken openly with Marxism? We never heard about it. He prefers equivocation; that is his native element. In his review of my pamphlet he writes: "Trotsky once again mounts his hobby-horse of the class struggle." To the Marxist of yesterday the class struggle is "Trotsky's hobby-horse". It is not surprising that Souvarine himself has preferred to sit astride the dead dog of eternal morality. To the Marxist conception he opposes "a sense of justice ... without regard for class distinctions". It is at any rate consoling to learn that our society is founded on a "sense of justice". In the coming war Souvarine will doubtless expound his discovery to the soldiers in the trenches; and in the meantime he can do so to the invalids of the last war, the unemployed, the abandoned children, and the prostitutes. We confess in advance that should he get mauled while thus engaged, our own "sense of justice" will not side with him ...

The critical remarks of this shameless apologist for bourgeois justice "without regard for class distinctions", are based entirely on ... the prospectus inspired by Victor Serge. The latter, in his turn, in all his attempts at "theory" does not go beyond hybrid borrowings from Souvarine, who, nevertheless, possesses this advantage: that he utters what Serge does not yet dare to say.

With feigned indignation — there is nothing genuine about him — Souvarine writes that inasmuch as Trotsky condemns the morality of democrats, reformists, Stalinists, and anarchists, it follows that the sole representative of morality is "Trotsky's party", and since this party "does not exist", therefore in the last analysis the incarnation of morality is Trotsky himself. How can one help tittering over this? Souvarine apparently imagines that he is capable of distinguishing between that which exists and that which does not. It is a very simple matter so long as it is a question of scrambled eggs or a pair of suspenders. But on the scale of the historical process such a distinction is obviously over Souvarine's head. "That which exists" is being born or dying, developing or disintegrating. That which exists can be understood only by those who understand its inner tendencies.

The number of people who held a revolutionary position at the outbreak of the last war could be counted on one's fingers. The entire field of official politics was almost completely pervaded with various shades of chauvinism. Liebknecht,

Luxemburg, Lenin, seemed impotent, isolated individuals. But can there be any doubt that their morality was above the bestial morality of the “sacred union”? Liebknecht’s revolutionary politics was not at all “individualistic”, as then seemed to the average patriotic philistine. On the contrary, Liebknecht, and Liebknecht alone, reflected and foreshadowed the profound subterranean trends in the masses. The subsequent course of events wholly confirmed this. Not to fear today a complete break with official public opinion so as on the *morrow* to gain the right of expressing the ideas and feelings of the insurgent masses, this is a special mode of existence which differs from the empiric existence of petty-bourgeois conventionalists. All the parties of capitalist society, all its moralists and all its sycophants will perish beneath the debris of the impending catastrophe. The only party that will survive is the party of the world socialist revolution, even though it may seem nonexistent today to the sightless rationalisers, just as during the last war the party of Lenin and Liebknecht seemed to them nonexistent.

### Revolutionists & the carriers of infection

Engels once wrote that Marx and himself remained all their lives in the minority and “felt fine” about it.\* Periods when the movement of the oppressed class rises to the level of the general tasks of the revolution represent the rarest exceptions in history. Far more frequent than victories are the defeats of the oppressed. Following each defeat comes a long period of reaction, which throws the revolutionists back into a state of cruel isolation. Pseudorevolutionists, “knights for an hour”, as a Russian poet put it, either openly betray the cause of the oppressed in such periods or scurry about in search of a formula of salvation that would enable them to avoid breaking with any of the camps. It is inconceivable in our time to find a conciliatory formula in the sphere of political economy or sociology; class contradictions have forever overthrown the “harmony” formula of the liberals and democratic reformers. There remains the domain of religion and transcendental morality. The Russian Social Revolutionaries attempted to save democracy by an alliance with the church. Marceau Pivert replaces the church with Freemasonry. Apparently, Victor Serge has not yet joined a lodge, but he has no difficulty in finding a common language with Pivert against Marxism.

Two classes decide the fate of modern society: the imperialist bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The last resource of the bourgeoisie is fascism, which replaces social and historical criteria with biological and zoological standards so as thus to free itself from any and all restrictions in the struggle for capitalist property. Civilisation can be saved

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\* Engels to Eduard Bernstein [November 28, 1882], Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 46 (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1992), p. 389. — *Ed.*

only by the socialist revolution. To accomplish the overturn, the proletariat needs all its strength, all its resolution, all its audacity, passion, and ruthlessness. Above all it must be completely free from the fictions of religion, “democracy”, and transcendental morality — the spiritual chains forged by the enemy to tame and enslave it. Only that which prepares the complete and final overthrow of imperialist bestiality is moral, and nothing else. The welfare of the revolution — that is the supreme law!

A clear understanding of the interrelation between the two basic classes — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the epoch of their mortal combat — discloses to us the objective meaning of the role of petty-bourgeois moralists. Their chief trait is impotence: *social* impotence by virtue of the economic degradation of the petty bourgeoisie; *ideological* impotence by virtue of the fear of the petty bourgeoisie in the face of the monstrous unleashing of the class struggle. Hence the urge of the petty bourgeois, both educated and ignorant, to curb the class struggle. If he cannot succeed by means of eternal morality — and this cannot succeed — the petty bourgeois throws himself into the arms of fascism, which curbs the class struggle by means of myths and the executioner’s axe. The moralism of V. Serge and his compeers is a bridge from revolution to reaction. Souvarine is already on the other side of the bridge. The slightest concession to these tendencies signifies the beginning of capitulation to reaction. Let these carriers of infection instil the rules of morality in Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier. As for us, the program of the proletarian revolution suffices.

*Coyoacan, June 9, 1939*

# Means & Ends

*By John Dewey*

The relation of means and ends has long been an outstanding issue in morals. It has also been a burning issue in political theory and practice. Of late the discussion has centred about the later developments of Marxism in the USSR. The course of the Stalinists has been defended by many of his adherents in other countries on the ground that the purges and prosecutions, perhaps even with a certain amount of falsification, was necessary to maintain the alleged socialistic regime of that country. Others have used the measures of the Stalinist bureaucracy to condemn the Marxist policy on the ground that the latter leads to such excesses as have occurred in the USSR precisely because Marxism holds that the end justifies the means. Some of these critics have held that since Trotsky is also a Marxian he is committed to the same policy and consequently if he had been in power would also have felt bound to use any means whatever that seemed necessary to achieve the end involved in dictatorship by the proletariat.

The discussion has had at least one useful theoretical result. It has brought out into the open for the first time, as far as I am aware, an explicit discussion by a consistent Marxian on the relation of means and ends in social action. At the courteous invitation of one of the editors of this review, I propose to discuss this issue in the light of Mr. Trotsky's discussion of the interdependence of means and ends. Much of the earlier part of his essay does not, accordingly, enter into my discussion, though I may say that on the ground of *tu quoque* argument (suggested by the title) Trotsky has had no great difficulty in showing that some of his critics have acted in much the same way they attribute to him. Since Mr. Trotsky also indicates that the only alternative position to the idea that the end justifies the means is some form of absolutistic ethics based on the alleged deliverances of conscience, or a moral sense, or some brand of eternal truths, I wish to say that I write from a standpoint that rejects all such doctrines as definitely as does Mr. Trotsky himself, and that I hold that the end in the sense of consequences provides the only basis for moral ideas and action, and therefore provides



the only justification that can be found for means employed.

The point I propose to consider is that brought up toward the end of Mr. Trotsky's discussion in the section headed "Dialectic Interdependence of Means and Ends." The following statement is basic: "A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in turn needs to be justified. From the Marxian point of view, which expresses the historic interests of the proletariat, the end is justified if it leads to increasing the power of man over nature and to the abolition of the power of man over man". This increase of the power of man over nature, accompanying the abolition of the power of man over man, seems accordingly to be *the end* — that is, an end which does not need itself to be justified but which is the justification of the ends that are in turn means to it. It may also be added that others than Marxians might accept this formulation of *the end* and hold it expresses the moral interest of society — if not the historic interest — and not merely and exclusively that of the proletariat.

But for my present purpose, it is important to note that the word "*end*" is here used to cover two things — the final justifying end and ends that are themselves means to this final end. For while it is not said in so many words that some ends are but means, that proposition is certainly implied in the statement that some ends "*lead to increasing the power of man over nature, etc.*" Mr. Trotsky goes on to explain that the principle that the end justifies the means does not mean that every means is permissible. "That is permissible, we answer, which really leads to the liberation of mankind."

Were the latter statement consistently adhered to and followed through it would be consistent with the sound principle of interdependence of means and end. Being in accord with it, it would lead to scrupulous examination of the means that are used, to ascertain what their actual objective consequences will be as far as it is humanly possible to tell — to show that they do "really" lead to the liberation of mankind. It is at this point that the double significance of *end* becomes important. As far as it means consequences actually reached, it is clearly dependent upon means used, while measures in their capacity of means are dependent upon the end in the sense that they have to be viewed and judged on the ground of their actual objective results. On this basis, an *end-in-view* represents or is an *idea* of the final consequences, in case the idea is formed *on the ground of the means that are judged to be most likely to produce the end*. The end-in-view is thus itself a means for directing action — just as a man's *idea* of health to be attained or a house to be built is not identical with *end* in the sense of actual outcome but is a means for directing action to achieve that end.

Now what has given the maxim (and the practice it formulates) that the end justifies the means a bad name is that the end-in-view, the end professed and entertained (perhaps quite sincerely) justifies the use of certain means, and so justifies

the latter that it is not necessary to examine what the actual consequences of the use of chosen means will be. An individual may hold, and quite sincerely as far as his personal opinion is concerned, that certain means will “really” lead to a professed and desired end. But the real question is not one of personal belief but of the objective grounds upon which it is held: namely, the consequences that will actually be produced by them. So when Mr. Trotsky says that “dialectical materialism knows no dualism between means and end,” the natural interpretation is that he will recommend the use of means that can be shown by their own nature to lead to the liberation of mankind as an objective consequence.

One would expect, then, that with the idea of the liberation of mankind as the end-in-view, there would be an examination of *all* means that are likely to attain this end without any fixed preconception as to what they *must* be, and that every suggested means would be weighed and judged on the express ground of the consequences it is likely to produce.

But this is *not* the course adopted in Mr. Trotsky’s further discussion. He says: “The liberating morality of the proletariat is of a revolutionary character ... It *deduces* a rule of conduct from the laws of the development of society, thus primarily from the class struggle, the law of all laws” (italics are mine). As if to leave no doubt of his meaning he says: “The end flows from the historical movement” — that of the class struggle. The principle of interdependence of means and end has thus disappeared or at least been submerged. For the choice of means is not decided upon on the ground of an independent examination of measures and policies with respect to their actual objective consequences. On the contrary, means are “*deduced*” from an independent source, an alleged law of history which is *the* law of all laws of social development. Nor does the logic of the case change if the word “alleged” is stricken out. For even so, it follows that means to be used are not derived from consideration of the end, the liberation of mankind, but from another outside source. The professed end — the end-in-view — the liberation of mankind, is thus subordinated to the class struggle as the means by which it is to be attained. Instead of *interdependence* of means and end, the end is dependent upon the means but the means are not derived from the end. Since the class struggle is regarded as the *only* means that will reach the end, and since the view that it is the only means is reached deductively and not by an inductive examination of the means-consequences in their interdependence, the means, the class struggle, does not need to be critically examined with respect to its actual objective consequences. It is automatically absolved from all need for critical examination. If we are not back in the position that the *end-in-view* (as distinct from objective consequences) justifies the use of any means in line with the class struggle and that it justifies the

neglect of all other means, I fail to understand the logic of Mr. Trotsky's position.

The position that I have indicated as that of genuine interdependence of means and ends does not automatically rule out class struggle as one means for attaining the end. But it does rule out the deductive method of arriving at it as a means, to say nothing of its being the *only* means. The selection of class struggle as a means has to be justified, on the ground of the interdependence of means and end, by an examination of actual consequences of its use, not deductively. Historical considerations are certainly relevant to this examination. But the assumption of a *fixed law* of social development is not relevant. It is as if a biologist or a physician were to assert that a certain law of biology which he accepts is so related to the end of health that the means of arriving at health — the only means — can be deduced from it so that no further examination of biological phenomena is needed. The whole case is prejudged.

It is one thing to say that class struggle is a means of attaining the end of the liberation of mankind. It is a radically different thing to say that there is an absolute *law* of class struggle which determines the means to be used. For if it determines the means, it also determines the end — the actual consequence, and upon the principle of genuine interdependence of means and end it is arbitrary and subjective to say that that consequence will be the liberation of mankind. The liberation of mankind is the end to be striven for. In any legitimate sense of "moral," it is a moral end. No scientific law can determine a moral end save by deserting the principle of interdependence of means and end. A Marxian may sincerely believe that class struggle is *the* law of social development. But quite aside from the fact that the belief closes the doors to further examination of history — just as an assertion that the Newtonian laws are the final laws of physics would preclude further search for physical laws — it would not follow, even if it were *the* scientific law of history, that it is the means to the moral goal of the liberation of mankind. That it is such a means has to be shown not by "deduction" from a law but by examination of means and consequences; an examination in which, given the liberation of mankind as end, there is free and unprejudiced search for the means by which it can be attained.

One more consideration may be added about class struggle as a means. There are presumably several, perhaps many, different ways by means of which the class struggle may be carried on. How can a choice be made among these different ways except by examining their consequences in relation to the goal of liberation of mankind? The belief that a law of history determines the particular way in which the struggle is to be carried on certainly seems to tend toward a fanatical and even mystical devotion to use of certain ways of conducting the class struggle to the exclusion of all other ways of conducting it. I have no wish to go outside the theoretical question of the

interdependence of means and ends, but it is conceivable that the course actually taken by the revolution in the USSR becomes more explicable when it is noted that means were deduced from a supposed scientific law instead of being searched for and adopted on the ground of their relation to the moral end of the liberation of mankind.

The only conclusion I am able to reach is that in avoiding one kind of absolutism Mr. Trotsky has plunged into another kind of absolutism. There appears to be a curious transfer among orthodox Marxists of allegiance from the ideals of socialism and scientific *methods* of attaining them (scientific in the sense of being based on the objective relations of means and consequences) to the class struggle as the law of historical change. Deduction of ends set up, of means and attitudes, from this law as the primary thing makes all moral questions, that is, all questions of the end to be finally attained, meaningless. To be scientific about ends does not mean to read them out of laws, whether the laws are natural or social. Orthodox Marxism shares with orthodox religionism and with traditional idealism the belief that human ends are interwoven into the very texture and structure of existence — a conception inherited presumably from its Hegelian origin.

*New York City, July 3, 1938*

# Liberal Morality

## The controversy between John Dewey & Leon Trotsky

By George Novack

American liberals are convinced that their positions are far stronger than those of the Marxists on both the lofty plane of ethical theory and in practical morality. They have persuaded many others that this is so. Stalin's terror regime, climaxed by the frame-up executions of the Old Bolsheviks in the Moscow trials, gave the democrats a field day to parade their moral superiority not only over the Stalinists but also over the revolutionary socialists who were their victims. In the late 1930s a debate boiled up in various intellectual circles throughout the globe on the problem of the relations between ethics and politics, until the blood-soaked exhibition of morality presented by capitalist imperialism in the Second World War cut it short.

The hearings held in April 1937 by the International Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials at Coyoacan, Mexico, had touched upon these questions in passing. Soon afterward Trotsky wrote an essay, "Their Morals and Ours," which appeared in the *New Internationalist* of June 1938. The philosopher-educator John Dewey, head of the commission which had cleared Trotsky of the charges against him, wrote a criticism of Trotsky's ideas entitled "Means and Ends," which was printed in the same magazine in August of that year. The press of other work prevented Trotsky from undertaking the rejoinder he wanted to make to Dewey's arguments.

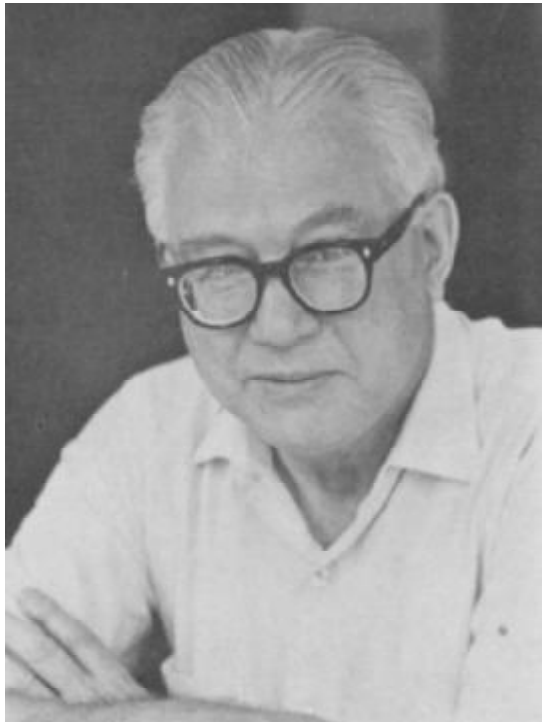
This inconclusive debate between the foremost spokesmen for pragmatism and Marxism was a rare direct confrontation of the fundamental views of the two philosophies on the moral aspects of social and political action. This question has not lost its pertinence or ceased to command the attention of liberals and rebels in the twenty-seven years since. Indeed, it is more timely today than then.

### Problems of ethics

Before coming to grips with the issues of method raised in that ideological



*Above: Dewey Commission  
hearings, Coyoacan: Suzanne La  
Follette and John Dewey (right).  
Right: George Novack*



encounter, it may be helpful to survey the fundamental problems involved in formulating a critical and rational ethics.

Theoreticians of morality confront two principal difficulties in arriving at a rational foundation or scientific explanation for standards of conduct. One is the extreme variability in the notions of right and wrong through the ages. It would be hard to find a human action which has not been subject to opposing moral judgments. Devouring human beings is today universally condemned and yet it was universally practiced in primeval times. Some food-gathering and hunting tribes put old people to death; nowadays we strive to prolong their lives.

Freedom in sexual relations, which is today illegal, was at one time prevalent and approved. Although it is considered wrong to lie, such paragons of ethics as doctors dispute, in general and concrete cases, whether it is right to tell the truth about his condition to a patient stricken with a fatal disease. The grossly unequal ownership and distribution of wealth which is taken for granted under capitalism would have been condemned by the primitive Indians. These illustrations could be multiplied.

Even worse for seekers of the absolute in morality is the fact that the very same features of an action which are the highest good for one set of people are at the very same time supreme evils for another. Strikebreakers are heroes to the bosses but villains to the workers. Stool pigeons are praised by the witch-hunters and execrated by their political and union victims. The atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which horrified Asia, was justified by the Allied powers. As Cuba has lately driven home to us, the expropriation of private property evokes contrary moral judgments from the defenders of capitalism and the proponents of socialism.

In view of such conflicting moral situations which involve the coexistence of contradictory appraisals of the same acts and actors, what solid grounds can there be for discriminating good from bad, right from wrong? Are stable moral standards at all possible?

Every school of ethics has presented its own answer to these questions. The traditional religions offer a divine justification for their mildewed moralities. The injunctions of their codes are claimed to be God's word as revealed by Moses, Christ, Mohammed and interpreted by rabbis, priests, and other authorised church officials. God's commandments are eternal and cannot be violated with impunity because they are the passports to heaven and immortality.

Morality has gradually been liberated from such religious sanctions. With the advance of civilisation, more enlightened culture, and scientific knowledge, philosophers have had to devise rational and secular bases for ethics. Once morality had been dislodged from anchorage in Heaven, it was necessary to find the reasons for its existence and evolution in the changing needs of human beings as these have progressed

on earth. Historical materialism finally provided the most valid scientific explanation for the origins and substance of moral codes, their social functions and their limitations.

### The Marxist conception of morality

“Men, consciously or unconsciously, derive their moral ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based — from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange”, stated Engels in his exposition of the Marxist theory of morality in *Anti-Dühring*. The morality of tribal life necessarily differs in its fundamental values from those of civilised societies because of the basic differences in their productive relations and forms of property. The commandment forbidding stealing or coveting a neighbour’s wife appears ridiculous to primitive people who are not bound by the customs of private ownership either in the instruments of production or the agents of reproduction.

Engels pointed out that three principal moralities are in vogue today. There is Christian-feudal morality, best exemplified by Catholicism; modern bourgeois morality; and proletarian morality. Their attitudes toward marriage and divorce can serve to illustrate the differences in these moral viewpoints. To the Catholic, marriages are “made in heaven” and should endure forever; to the ordinary bourgeois, wedlock is the result of a civil contract validated, regulated or terminated by government officials; to the socialist, it is a personal matter to be entered into or ended by the free will of the persons concerned.

These general moral outlooks represent three successive stages in the development of economic relations and express the needs and views of different class formations and social systems. They coexist and contend with one another in people’s minds and lives today.

Engels concluded that all moralities and their theoretical justifications have been products of the economic stage society reached at that particular epoch. Since civilised society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms and continues to do so, all morality has been and must necessarily be class morality. “It has either justified the domination and interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the oppressed class becomes powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed.” Thus his materialist explanation for the changes and diversity in moral judgments also provides the justification for new and higher ones.

### The ethical approach of pragmatism

The pragmatists consider themselves specialists on matters of morality. Moral theory is, on the one hand, their substitute for conventional religion; on the other hand, it



provides their major means of defence and offence against a thoroughly materialist approach to social problems.

The pragmatists do not lean upon any “eternal verities” as a sanction for moral standards. They understand that these have been irretrievably battered down by the theory of evolution and the acquisitions of modern knowledge. On what grounds, then, can the practice of any virtues be recommended and justified? They are not good in and of themselves, or divinely inspired like the Ten Commandments, or enforced by taboos. According to John Dewey, the worth of any action, any course of conduct or policy is to be judged solely and simply by its real consequences. What counts is not the intentions, motives, or aims of individuals but the concrete results which flow from people’s actions. Dewey conceives of morality as “overt activity having consequences instead of as mere inner personal attribute” (*The Quest for Certainty*, p. 6). This *objective* criterion separated Dewey from all the semireligious and sentimental souls for whom moral worth depends upon “goodness of heart”.

Whatever actions tend to increase wealth and equalise its distribution, extend democracy and freedom, institute peaceful relations, open more opportunities for more people, enhance their sensitivities, add to their understanding, etc., are good. If they have the contrary consequences, they must be condemned as immoral.

Thus exploitation is wrong because it robs, divides, and oppresses people — and the exploiters should be made to recognise that and either correct themselves or be corrected by the community. Force is wrong, or rather, far more often pernicious than helpful in its results. It must therefore not be resorted to — or at least employed only sparingly in case of overwhelming necessity. Class conflict is wrong — and ought to be replaced by class harmony and collaboration.

Such dicta show great good will and testify to the benevolence of the pragmatic moralist. But they do not promote a scientific understanding of the real situation which has created these social conflicts, nor do they indicate a practical solution for them. It is cheap to rail against the rich and say the privileged must consider the needs of the poor and take measures to relieve them. Religion has preached such sermons — and practiced such charity — for many centuries without eradicating the conditions which generate inequality.

There is a vast difference between such abstract moralising and a genuinely scientific investigation of morality and its development. A scientific approach to morality should be able to inform us, not only that exploitation is evil, but why the rich must act that way in the first place, and thereby indicate how the evils of exploitation can be removed. This is not an individual but a collective social problem.

The highest aim of any humanist ethics is the self-realisation of each individual, the

development and perfecting of the human personality. Dewey correctly recognised that individual conduct is perforce subordinate to social action and that morality is indissolubly bound up with social conditions, conduct, and consequences. He was willing to pose the issue and do battle with Marxism in behalf of his own viewpoint on that advanced arena.

### Means & ends in morality

The first question he tackled was the thorny one of the relation between means and ends in morality. Many liberal moralisers believe that such a maxim is the root of all evil. It may therefore come as a shock and surprise to them that Dewey agreed with Trotsky that the end justifies the means. The ends and means are interdependent.

But neither one, said Dewey, can be justified by “alleged deliverances of conscience, or a moral sense, or some brand of eternal truths.” They can be justified, he declared, only by their actual results. “I hold that the end in the sense of consequences provides the only basis for moral ideas and action and therefore provides the only justification that can be found for means employed.” Nothing else can make means good or bad but the outcome of their use.

Trotsky had stated that the ultimate ends of socialist action are the increase of the power of man over nature and the abolition, as a consequence, of the power of man over man (social oppression). Dewey, too, regarded these as the worthiest of objectives. Trotsky further stated that all those means that contributed to the realisation of these aims are morally justified. So far, there was no disagreement between the Marxist and the pragmatist.

Their positions parted when the questions of the agencies and roads through which these goals were to be achieved were brought under consideration. Trotsky asserted that the only force in modern society capable of carrying through this job was the organised working class. The only way labour can eliminate oppression and complete the conquest of nature was by developing to the very end its struggles against the capitalist beneficiaries and upholders of economic privilege.

Here Dewey took sharp issue with him. Both of these propositions were wrong, he replied. Trotsky was not warranted in entrusting the fundamental tasks of social reconstruction in our epoch to the workers. This is a matter of common concern which surpasses any special class interests. All people of good will from the topmost level of society to the lowest should be mobilised in joint effort to secure collective control over nature and our economy.

Trotsky also erred, claimed Dewey, in his exclusive reliance upon the prosecution of the class struggle as the means of arriving at the desired goals. Other ways and

means than hurling capitalists and workers against one another are not only as good but will bring better results.

Thus their differences over moral theory revolved around disagreements over the agents and the means of social advancement. In essence, it was a dispute over *method*: both method of thought and method of conduct.

Dewey himself deliberately elevated their dispute to the level of logical method and scientific procedure. Trotsky's method of reasoning is incorrect, Dewey said, because he *deduced* the means (the class struggle) from his reading (or misreading) of the course of social development. By illegitimately erecting the class struggle into the supreme and absolute law of history, Trotsky actually subordinated the ends to a particular means instead of permitting the ends to determine the means. How should Trotsky have derived the means? "By an examination of actual consequences of its use," wrote Dewey. This is the only genuinely scientific approach which takes into account the real interdependence of the two factors.

To *deduction*, the extraction of particular conclusions from general rules, Dewey counterposed the procedure of *induction*, the arriving at generalisations on the basis of repeated duplicated instances.

This antithesis is an unfounded one. Did Trotsky actually derive his means arbitrarily, as Dewey implied, through deductive processes alone? To be sure, Trotsky did explicitly evaluate means by reference to the laws and needs of the class struggle. These laws, however, were not freely created and imposed upon society by the Marxists. They had been drawn from a prior comprehensive study of social processes over many generations by strictly scientific methods. The laws of class struggle are first of all *empirical* generalisations developed from analysis of the *facts* presented by the history of civilisation, including American history.

## The logical status of the class struggle

The impressive array of factual materials regarding class conflict and its crucial role in history from which these laws are derived were observed and recorded long before Marx arrived on the scene. For instance, many ancient Greek writers and historians (Thucydides, Aristotle, Plato) noted and described them. What the historical materialists did was to give the first adequate and correct explanation of them. They explained how classes originated through the growth of the productive forces, the division of social labour, and the existence of a sizeable surplus of products, and why class conflicts have revolved around the mode of appropriation of this expanding surplus of wealth.

Is this no more than a hypothesis about social development? That is what Dewey, the instrumentalist, wished to say. But the class struggle has had a different role than

the dubious one liberals assign to it. It is much more than a mere possibility or a chance and episodic occurrence in civilised life. It is a necessity, a certainty. It proceeds according to a verified set of laws which formulate fundamental factors arising from the innermost constitution of class society. These apply to all types of class societies regardless of their levels of development and specific peculiarities.\*

Once the laws governing the class struggle had been discovered, formulated and verified, they could be applied like all other scientific laws. They enabled investigators to probe more deeply into the structure and inner movements of society, its groupings and leading personalities and thus anticipate and, under certain circumstances, direct its developments to a certain extent.

### The nature of concepts & laws

Instrumentalists like Dewey, however, have an iron preconception against even the most solidly based prejudgments. This aversion is a prime principle of their theory of knowledge which has a built-in contradiction. The instrumentalists rightly insist upon the universal changeability of all things. Yet for them ideas maintain a curiously static essence through thick or thin. Ideas do not lose their inherently *hypothetical* character and can never really change into certainties, whatever the course and results of social and scientific development.

This assumption is neither empirical nor rational. In reality, many ideas which begin as hypotheses turn into something quite different as the result of scientific inquiry and verified practice. They become tested truths, scientific laws. The theory of the existence of atoms and the inner atomic structure of matter was only a brilliant guess, an intuition, when it was first propounded in ancient Greece. Nowadays it has become a validated truth from which it is possible to derive the most explosive consequences. Yet for Dewey, like the positivist Ernst Mach, the atom was not a reality but only an “operational idea”. (See *Logic*, p. 153 and *The Quest for Certainty*, pp. 119 and 131.)

Dewey objected that the laws of the class struggle are not soundly based because they “prejudge the characteristic traits and the kinds of actual phenomena that the proposed plans of action are to deal with.” But they do so no more and no less than the

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\* This reality was recognised not long ago by certain worker-priests in France who had been sent by the Church among the workers to combat the godless materialist heresies of Marxism. “We have learned”, they wrote in a letter to Cardinal Feltin, October 5, 1953, “that the class struggle is not a mere principle that one can accept or refuse, but that it is a brutal fact which is imposed upon the working class.” Because of their refusal to recant, they were unfrocked. — GN.

laws of atomic activity or any other physical laws.

For pure pragmatists all conceptual generalisations remain perpetually on trial. No decisive verdict on their truth or falsity can ever be rendered by any judge, no matter how qualified, no matter how great the amount of evidence. Why? Because indeterminate elements can never be totally eliminated from reality and therefore what is provisional and inconclusive can never be excluded from scientific thought.

For them every conception has to be freshly evaluated, and every conclusion revalidated from top to bottom, in every new situation. Its thousandth repetition has no qualitatively different or more coercive character than the original occurrence. The instrumentalists talk as though it were possible, and necessary, for people to start afresh on every occasion, confronting the world around them empty-handed and empty-headed.

This is essentially a denial of the value of all acquired knowledge, all scientific methods, and even of the results of induction. No one but an infant reacts to the world and tackles the problems it presents without using the accumulated resources of social development, including the growing fund of prejudgments derived from historical experience and from the direct examination of reality.

These are not a mass of mere speculations; they consist by and large of authenticated information and tested generalisations. But in the eyes of the instrumentalists, for whom, if they are consistent, “ideas do not disclose reality”, the content of ideas remains essentially indeterminate and forever hypothetical.

The progress of science leads to the acquisition of knowledge of the real forces which determine the production of phenomena and their subsequent formulation into laws. Dewey immensely exaggerated the aspect of indeterminateness in reality and the uncertainty of genuine knowledge. He underestimated and even excluded on principle knowing in advance and acting on ascertained truths about real situations.

“Every measure of policy is logically, and should be actually, of the nature of an experiment”, he insisted in his *Logic* (p. 508). This sweeping assertion is neither logically correct nor factually complete. It is a dangerous and misleading half-truth.

It depends upon the concrete circumstances of a situation and the nature of the proposal made whether or not a given policy is essentially, or only incidentally, “in the nature of an experiment.” In most cases there is, to be sure, an inescapable measure of indeterminacy which endows the reaction to it with a questionable character. But this measure of uncertainty, of contingency, is quantitatively and qualitatively variable. The value of scientific theory and the aim of rational practice is to reduce this to the minimum.

Let us take two examples from industrial practice. A lathe operator in a factory can

know in advance whether a bit is too soft to cut steel of a certain hardness. He would not use a softer steel, and certainly not a wooden peg, for that purpose. In this case the end — the machining of metal to a certain shape and size — and the material reality — the hardness of the metal — reciprocally determine beforehand, both positively and negatively, the type of means for attaining the desired product.

Why cannot the same rules apply to industrial relations as to shop practice? Can't the same worker know in advance how his employer will react when he and his associates ask for a raise in wages? The employer is a social reality of a certain type. His material interests give him a specific degree of hardness, a determined resistance to having his costs of production increased and his profits cut. In order to attain their ends, his workers need social instruments of a certain kind, strong enough to overcome that resistance. That is why they have organised unions and engage in strikes instead of relying upon individual petition.

Here we come to the nub of the problem. Every wage negotiation is not and need not be a totally fresh experiment with unknown factors, whatever may be the uncertainties in any given situation. Workers and employers have been dealing with one another for many scores of years all over the world. An experienced union leadership and an informed membership can enter collective bargaining forearmed with knowledge of the bosses' nature gained from social science and everyday experience which helps to handle opposition to the just demands of the workers.

If every negotiation or every act of production were to be approached in theory or in practice as wholly or largely experimental, as Dewey demands, then no particular means can be regarded beforehand as necessarily better or more suited to the requirements of the struggle than any other. This excludes reliance upon verified procedures and leaves the field wide open to any capricious innovation.

Such unrestricted and uncontrolled experimentalism is utterly alien to the actual procedures of scientists and to the normal methods of modern industry. The aim of automated factory production is to leave nothing to chance, but to regulate all the factors in the process. Accidents, exceptions occur in the best-regulated systems. But even these are anticipated by instruments installed in advance to detect these variations when they depart from permissible limits and then to compensate for and correct them in time. Self-regulating systems are especially imperative for such industrial complexes as atomic nuclear plants which embody the highest union of scientific theory and production.

Dewey said he wanted the most up-to-date methods of science and industry extended into everyday affairs. If this is done, then the field of operation for random experiment in the most vital areas of social life ought to be reduced and itself made

subject to control. Experiment is necessary in all spheres of activity. Both science and industry take care of this need by providing special places for the conduct of experiments. In industry experimental work in pilot plants, laboratories, and in the field is carefully segregated from mass production which is carried out with already verified techniques and machinery.

In modern times there have been countless experiences, and even experiments, made by contending social forces in the domain of class relations. The positive and negative results of these various methods of action have been summarised by scientific socialism in the laws of the class struggle and codified in the programs of workers' parties. These have great practical value as guides to progressive social forces in their struggles.

The pragmatic viewpoint, on the other hand, is based upon the *formal* equality of all ideas rather than on their real material standing. Any idea is regarded as in itself just as true, useful, and effective as any other. In the same way the commodity market is presumed to rest upon the formal equality of exchanges; bourgeois law, upon the formal equality of all citizens before the bar of justice; and its democracy, upon the equally decisive vote of all citizens. All these assumptions contradict the real state of affairs in capitalist society with its economic inequalities and class differentials.

One idea is not in reality as good as another. Some are truer and better than others because they do not all reflect reality equally well or widely and therefore do not have the same consequences when used to direct activity.

## The mutual determinism of ends & means

For Dewey the ends and the means are interdependent. But he believed that these two terms merely *condition* one another; neither one can determine the other or be predetermined by sufficient material conditions. The one is as conditional and hypothetical as the other.

For example, exploitation is bad and must be eliminated. But for Dewey it may be uprooted in any number of ways: by class struggle, by class agreement, or by a combination of both. None of these means is decisive for accomplishing the desired aim: the abolition of capitalist exploitation. Such is his abstract theoretical position.

This appears to be thoroughly impartial. But when it comes to practice — which, after all, is the decisive test for the pragmatist — the liberal is not so unbiased. By disposition he prefers, and in nine instances out of ten chooses, the methods of least resistance. The line of most resistance is always his last resort. This bias is not accidental. It flows from the necessity of his nature as a social being, his interests and outlook as a middle class intellectual, the ambiguity of being in the middle of opposing social

camps.

Sometimes the left liberal does take the road of struggle — but only grudgingly and under the compulsion of overriding circumstances. He feels that this method is somehow out of tune with reality and the best interests of all concerned, including his own. In reality, class struggle methods are simply inconsistent with his in-between position where he is pulled in opposite directions by the antagonisms between capital and labour, white and black.

Dewey's second major criticism of Trotsky is that Marxists are absolutistic in appealing to fixed laws for their choice of means of social action. Trotsky, he claimed, was not being empirical or scientific but idealistic and religious minded because he imposed his desired aims upon social development and acted as though "human ends are interwoven into the very texture and structure of existence".

How much justification is there to this criticism? As a materialist, Trotsky never believed that *human* ends are interwoven into *nature's* existence. He did assert, however, that *class* ends are objectively woven "into the very texture and structure" of *social* existence under certain historical circumstances.

Dewey denied this. For him society does not have so determinate a texture and structure that any general laws on the objectives of classes can be obtained from an analysis of social development and subsequently used to calculate their conduct as a basis for action.

If there are no definite laws governing the activities of classes, then there can be no necessary means, like the class struggle, to attain social objectives. If there are neither ascertainable laws nor prescribed means, then what takes their place? Tentative guesses, hopeful and wishful plans, experimental efforts. Before the act, many different kinds of means, and in principle almost any means, may achieve the ends-in-view. If you don't know where you are going or what you are really up against, any road will presumably take you there.

On what grounds, then, should one means be selected over others? Of course Dewey acknowledges that previous knowledge and experience is to be used in the process of selection. But these are never adequate or decisive. Their worth is demonstrated only by what flows from their use.

Unfortunately, the consequences emerge only after the choice of measures is made. Why, then, can't the choice of means be guided and determined by the lessons drawn from the accumulated consequences of the past? Although Dewey doesn't rule these out, he does not give them decisive weight. For the pragmatist no amount of predetermination is ever definitive; determination comes only after the act and only for that particular act.



This is a preposterous viewpoint. It dismisses as negligible the fact that everything which is determined after the fact thereupon becomes transformed into something determined before the next fact. Nothing remains indefinitely in the purely provisional state that Dewey's logic demands. When enough predeterminate material factors are piled up, the direction and outcome of developments can be foreseen.

### **Are social laws relative or absolute?**

Compare Dewey's out-of-this-world logic with the materialistic logic of Marxism, which conforms to the real course of development and state of affairs.

Every law, including the most necessary and universal, is limited by the nature of the reality it deals with and by its own nature as a human and historically developed formulation. These give it a relative and conditional character. But that is only one aspect of its content. If the law is true, it is absolute for the processes and phenomena covered in the area of its operation.

For example, in the case under discussion, the laws of the class struggle are valid only under the conditions of class society. Before primitive society was divided into classes, these laws were not only inapplicable but unthinkable. At the other end of the historical process, as class society disappears in the socialist future, these laws will gradually lose their field of operation and wither at the roots.

Thus these laws governing social relations are both relative and absolute in their application. Their relativity is based upon the changing and contradictory course of social evolution from primitive collectivism through civilisation on to socialism. Their absolutism is based upon the central role that the antagonism of class interests plays in the structure and activity of civilised society.

### **The material determinism of class aims**

Dewey agrees that the realities of social life have to be the starting point and the foundation of any genuine morality bound up with effective social action. This means that in a society split by antagonisms, it must be recognised that different moral demands will be invoked and different moral judgments enforced by contending classes. If this fundamental fact is waved aside, the resultant morality is bound to be fictitious or hypocritical, and any behaviour in accord with its prescriptions will give bad results.

Dewey understood that the individual functions in a given social-economic framework and that individual morality is bound up with public codes of conduct. For him social ends are ultimately decisive in moral matters. But what conditions actually do, and what ought to, decide what means will produce the desired ends? Dewey taught that informed or "creative intelligence" has to step in and do the job.

Without disputing this, it still does not answer the all important question. What determines how people behave in this society and what kind of behaviour is intelligent and creative? Here the real relations of classes and their roles in capitalist society are determinative.

The ends of classes, and of their members and movements, are actually determined by their material needs and interests. These arise from the parts they play in social production and their stake in specific forms of property. Thus the collective end of the capitalist class in the United States is to preserve and extend their economic system. That is their primary end. And it *determines* the conduct of persons belonging to that class, just as it *conditions* the lives of everyone in our society.

But the workers functioning in the same system have quite different ends, whether they are individually or fully aware of the fact or not. They are impelled by the very necessities of their living and working conditions under capitalism to try and curb their exploitation. In the long run they will be obliged to abolish its source: the private ownership of the means of production and exchange. In this struggle they have the right to use whatever means of combat they can devise for such worthy purposes. These weapons range from unionism to strike action, from political organisation to social revolution.

The clash of incompatible ends determines the means employed by the contending forces. Unionism begets anti-unionism; strike-making provokes strikebreaking. Faced with mass revolutionary political action with socialist objectives the capitalist rulers discard bourgeois democracy and resort to military dictatorship or fascism. The historical course of struggle leads toward the final showdown in which one of the decisive polar classes emerges victorious over the other. Marxists consciously work for the supremacy of the working people.

These class ends are definite and clear, even if they are not always grasped or stated with precision by the representatives of capital and labour who are obliged to act in accordance with them by the envioning circumstances of their socioeconomic situations, as these develop from one stage to the next.

## The role of middle class liberalism

But what is the objective historical end of the middle classes and of such of their intellectual representatives as Dewey? In the domain of theory their function is to deny the crucial importance of the class struggle, its necessity and its fruitfulness if properly organised and directed. In practice, they usually strive to curb its development by the working class while its enemies remain unrestrained and powerful. This is a hopelessly reactionary task in social science, politics, economics — and morality.

In his choice of means and in his obscuring of ends, Dewey fulfilled a specific social function as a philosophical representative of those liberal middle class elements who aspire to be the supreme mediators and moderators of class conflict in our society. In their choice of means and ends the revolutionary Marxists for whom Trotsky spoke likewise fulfil their role as champions of the fundamental, long-range interests of the working masses. The means and ends of both, in principle and in practice, are determined by their class functions and allegiances.

Many liberal moralisers contended that, if means were justified only through their usefulness in achieving ends, the most vicious practices were licensed and the gates opened to the totalitarian abominations of Stalinism. Trotsky met this argument by answering that all means were not proper in the class struggle but only those which really lead to the liberation of mankind.

Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilability to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle.

The claim of the pragmatic liberals that their morality is superior to that of the Marxists in theory and practice cannot be sustained. Their ethics lacks a sound scientific basis because it systematically disregards the most fundamental factor in the shaping of social relations and the motivating of individual conduct in modern life: the division and conflict of classes. Their moral injunctions are rendered ineffectual by failure to recognise these social realities. This not only hinders them from promoting the praiseworthy ideals of equality, cooperativeness, and peace they aspire to. Their blindness to the facts of life actually helps to reinforce reaction by restraining and disorienting the main counterforces against the evils of the existing system from taking the right road.

This is apparent nowadays when liberals and pacifists “impartially” condemn the terrorism of white supremacists and censure the measures of self-defence employed by Negroes against such attacks. This is part and parcel of the same moral-political position which places the aggressive violence of Washington on a par with the revolutionary actions of the Congolese, Dominican, and Vietnamese peoples in their anti-imperialist struggles for freedom, unity, independence, and social progress. Such false judgments come from applying abstract moral codes and categorical universals of conduct to real historical situations instead of analysing the specific class interests and political objectives of the contending sides.

The revolutionary morality of scientific socialism is effective and progressive because

it equips the labouring masses with the kind of outlook and values they need for emancipation. It generalises and vindicates in theory their feelings that the cause they strive for is just. It explains the aims of their efforts and illuminates the kind of means required for their realisation. In the simple words of the ancient moralist: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

*July 26, 1965*

## Appendix 1

# Engels on Morality

*By Frederick Engels*

But, a naive reader may ask, where has Herr Dühring expressly stated that the content of his philosophy of reality is final and even ultimate truth? Where? Well, for example, in the dithyramb on his system [...] Moral truths, in so far as their ultimate bases are understood, claim the same validity as mathematical theorems. And does not Herr Dühring assert that, working from his really critical standpoint and by means of those researches of his which go to the root of things, he has forced his way through to these ultimate foundations, the basic schemata, and has thus bestowed final and ultimate validity on moral truths? Or, if Herr Dühring does not advance this claim either for himself or for his age, if he only meant to say that perhaps some day in the dark and nebulous future final and ultimate truths may be ascertained, if therefore he meant to say much the same, only in a more confused way, as is said by “mordant scepticism” and “hopeless confusion” — then, in that case, what is all the noise about, what can we do for you, Herr Dühring?” If, then, we have not made much progress with truth and error, we can make even less with good and evil. This opposition manifests itself exclusively in the domain of morals, that is, a domain belonging to the history of mankind, and it is precisely in this field that final and ultimate truths are most sparsely sown. The conceptions of good and evil have varied so much from nation to nation and from age to age that they have often been in direct contradiction to each other.

But all the same, someone may object, good is not evil and evil is not good; if good is confused with evil there is an end to all morality, and everyone can do as he pleases.

This is also, stripped of all oracular phrases, Herr Dühring’s opinion. But the matter cannot be so simply disposed of. If it were such an easy business there would certainly be no dispute at all over good and evil; everyone would know what was good and what was bad. But how do things stand today? What morality is preached to us today? There is first Christian-feudal morality, inherited from earlier religious times;

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Written in 1877. The text is taken from *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science* by Frederick Engels, Ch. IX (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1969).

and this is divided, essentially, into a Catholic and a Protestant morality, each of which has no lack of subdivisions, from the Jesuit-Catholic and Orthodox-Protestant to loose “enlightened” moralities. Alongside these we find the modern-bourgeois morality and beside it also the proletarian morality of the future, so that in the most advanced European countries alone the past, present and future provide three great groups of moral theories which are in force simultaneously and alongside each other. Which, then, is the true one? Not one of them, in the sense of absolute finality; but certainly that morality contains the maximum elements promising permanence which, in the present, represents the overthrow of the present, represents the future, and that is proletarian morality.

But when we see that the three classes of modern society, the feudal aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, each have a morality of their own, we can only draw the one conclusion: that men, consciously or unconsciously, derive their ethical ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based — from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange.

But nevertheless there is great deal which the three moral theories mentioned above have in common — is this not at least a portion of a morality which is fixed once and for all? These moral theories represent three different stages of the same historical development, have therefore a common historical background, and for that reason alone they necessarily have much in common. Even more. At similar or approximately similar stages of economic development moral theories must of necessity be more or less in agreement. From the moment when private ownership of movable property developed, all societies in which this private ownership existed had to have this moral injunction in common: Thou shalt not steal. Does this injunction thereby become an eternal moral injunction? By no means. In a society in which all motives for stealing have been done away with, in which therefore at the very most only lunatics would ever steal, how the preacher of morals would be laughed at who tried solemnly to proclaim the eternal truth: Thou shalt not steal!

We therefore reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and for ever immutable ethical law on the pretext that the moral world, too, has its permanent principles which stand above history and the differences between nations. We maintain on the contrary that all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time. And as society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the

oppressed. That in this process there has on the whole been progress in morality, as in all other branches of human knowledge, no one will doubt. But we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life. And now one can gauge Herr Dühring's presumption in advancing his claim, from the midst of the old class society and on the eve of a social revolution, to impose on the future classless society an eternal morality independent of time and changes in reality. Even assuming — what we do not know up to now — that he understands the structure of the society of the future at least in its main outlines.

## Appendix 2

# The Tasks of the Youth Leagues

*By V.I. Lenin*

Comrades, today I would like to talk on the fundamental tasks of the Young Communist League and, in this connection, on what the youth organisations in a socialist republic should be like in general.

It is all the more necessary to dwell on this question because in a certain sense it may be said that it is the youth that will be faced with the actual task of creating a communist society. For it is clear that the generation of working people brought up in capitalist society can, at best, accomplish the task of destroying the foundations of the old, the capitalist way of life, which was built on exploitation. At best it will be able to accomplish the tasks of creating a social system that will help the proletariat and the working classes retain power and lay a firm foundation, which can be built on only by a generation that is starting to work under the new conditions, in a situation in which relations based on the exploitation of man by man no longer exist.

And so, in dealing from this angle with the tasks confronting the youth, I must say that the tasks of the youth in general, and of the Young Communist Leagues and all other organisations in particular, might be summed up in a single word: learn.

Of course, this is only a “single word”. It does not reply to the principal and most essential questions: what to learn, and how to learn? And the whole point here is that, with the transformation of the old, capitalist society, the upbringing, training and education of the new generations that will create the communist society cannot be conducted on the old lines. The teaching, training and education of the youth must proceed from the material that has been left to us by the old society. We can build communism only on the basis of the totality of knowledge, organisations and institutions, only by using the stock of human forces and means that have been left to us by the old society. Only by radically remoulding the teaching, organisation and

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A speech delivered at the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League, October 2, 1920. From V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31 (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1966).



training of the youth shall we be able to ensure that the efforts of the younger generation will result in the creation of a society that will be unlike the old society, i.e., in the creation of a communist society. That is why we must deal in detail with the question of what we should teach the youth and how the youth should learn if it really wants to justify the name of communist youth, and how it should be trained so as to be able to complete and consummate what we have started.

I must say that the first and most natural reply would seem to be that the Youth League, and the youth in general, who want to advance to communism, should learn communism.

But this reply — “learn communism” — is too general. What do we need in order to learn communism? What must be singled out from the sum of general knowledge so as to acquire a knowledge of communism? Here a number of dangers arise, which very often manifest themselves whenever the task of learning communism is presented incorrectly, or when it is interpreted in too one-sided a manner.

Naturally, the first thought that enters one’s mind is that learning communism means assimilating the sum of knowledge that is contained in communist manuals, pamphlets and books. But such a definition of the study of communism would be too crude and inadequate. If the study of communism consisted solely in assimilating what is contained in communist books and pamphlets, we might all too easily obtain communist text-jugglers or braggarts, and this would very often do us harm, because such people, after learning by rote what is set forth in communist books and pamphlets, would prove incapable of combining the various branches of knowledge, and would be unable to act in the way communism really demands.

One of the greatest evils and misfortunes left to us by the old, capitalist society is the complete rift between books and practical life; we have had books explaining everything in the best possible manner, yet in most cases these books contained the most pernicious and hypocritical lies, a false description of capitalist society.

That is why it would be most mistaken merely to assimilate book knowledge about communism. No longer do our speeches and articles merely reiterate what used to be said about communism, because our speeches and articles are connected with our daily work in all fields. Without work and without struggle, book knowledge of communism obtained from communist pamphlets and works is absolutely worthless, for it would continue the old separation of theory and practice, the old rift which was the most pernicious feature of the old, bourgeois society.

It would be still more dangerous to set about assimilating only communist slogans. Had we not realised this danger in time, and had we not directed all our efforts to averting this danger, the half million or million young men and women who would

have called themselves communists after studying communism in this way would only greatly prejudice the cause of communism.

The question arises: how is all this to be blended for the study of communism? What must we take from the old schools, from the old kind of science? It was the declared aim of the old type of school to produce men with an all-round education, to teach the sciences in general. We know that this was utterly false, since the whole of society was based and maintained on the division of people into classes, into exploiters and oppressed. Since they were thoroughly imbued with the class spirit, the old schools naturally gave knowledge only to the children of the bourgeoisie. Every word was falsified in the interests of the bourgeoisie. In these schools the younger generation of workers and peasants were not so much educated as drilled in the interests of that bourgeoisie. They were trained in such a way as to be useful servants of the bourgeoisie, able to create profits for it without disturbing its peace and leisure. That is why, while rejecting the old type of schools, we have made it our task to take from it only what we require for genuine communist education.

This brings me to the reproaches and accusations which we constantly hear levelled at the old schools, and which often lead to wholly wrong conclusions. It is said that the old school was a school of purely book knowledge, of ceaseless drilling and grinding. That is true, but we must distinguish between what was bad in the old schools and what is useful to us, and we must be able to select from it what is necessary for communism.

The old schools provided purely book knowledge; they compelled their pupils to assimilate a mass of useless, superfluous and barren knowledge, which cluttered up the brain and turned the younger generation into bureaucrats regimented according to a single pattern. But it would mean falling into a grave error for you to try to draw the conclusion that one can become a communist without assimilating the wealth of knowledge amassed by mankind. It would be mistaken to think it sufficient to learn communist slogans and the conclusions of communist science, without acquiring that sum of knowledge of which communism itself is a result. Marxism is an example which shows how communism arose out of the sum of human knowledge.

You have read and heard that communist theory — the science of communism created in the main by Marx, this doctrine of Marxism — has ceased to be the work of a single socialist of the nineteenth century, even though he was a genius, and that it has become the doctrine of millions and tens of millions of proletarians all over the world, who are applying it in their struggle against capitalism. If you were to ask why the teachings of Marx have been able to win the hearts and minds of millions and tens of millions of the most revolutionary class, you would receive only one answer: it was because Marx based his work on the firm foundation of the human knowledge acquired

under capitalism. After making a study of the laws governing the development of human society, Marx realised the inevitability of capitalism developing towards communism. What is most important is that he proved this on the sole basis of a most precise, detailed and profound study of this capitalist society, by fully assimilating all that earlier science had produced. He critically reshaped everything that had been created by human society, without ignoring a single detail. He reconsidered, subjected to criticism, and verified on the working-class movement everything that human thinking had created, and therefrom formulated conclusions which people hemmed in by bourgeois limitations or bound by bourgeois prejudices could not draw.

We must bear this in mind when, for example, we talk about proletarian culture. We shall be unable to solve this problem unless we clearly realise that only a precise knowledge and transformation of the culture created by the entire development of mankind will enable us to create a proletarian culture. The latter is not clutched out of thin air; it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in proletarian culture. That is all nonsense. Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner and bureaucratic society. All these roads have been leading, and will continue to lead up to proletarian culture, in the same way as political economy, as reshaped by Marx, has shown us what human society must arrive at, shown us the passage to the class struggle, to the beginning of the proletarian revolution.

When we so often hear representatives of the youth, as well as certain advocates of a new system of education, attacking the old schools, claiming that they used the system of cramming, we say to them that we must take what was good in the old schools. We must not borrow the system of encumbering young people's minds with an immense amount of knowledge, nine-tenths of which was useless and one-tenth distorted. This, however, does not mean that we can restrict ourselves to communist conclusions and learn only communist slogans. You will not create communism that way. You can become a communist only when you enrich your mind with a knowledge of all the treasures created by mankind.

We have no need of cramming, but we do need to develop and perfect the mind of every student with a knowledge of fundamental facts. Communism will become an empty word, a mere signboard, and a communist a mere boaster, if all the knowledge he has acquired is not digested in his mind. You should not merely assimilate this knowledge, but assimilate it critically, so as not to cram your mind with useless lumber, but enrich it with all those facts that are indispensable to the well-educated man of today. If a communist took it into his head to boast about his communism because of the cut-and-dried conclusions he had acquired, without putting in a great deal of

serious and hard work and without understanding facts he should examine critically, he would be a deplorable communist indeed. Such superficiality would be decidedly fatal. If I know that I know little, I shall strive to learn more; but if a man says that he is a communist and that he need not know anything thoroughly, he will never become anything like a communist.

The old schools produced servants needed by the capitalists; the old schools turned men of science into men who had to write and say whatever pleased the capitalists. We must therefore abolish them. But does the fact that we must abolish them, destroy them, mean that we should not take from them everything mankind has accumulated that is essential to man? Does it mean that we do not have to distinguish between what was necessary to capitalism and what is necessary to communism?

We are replacing the old drill-sergeant methods practised in bourgeois society, against the will of the majority, with the class-conscious discipline of the workers and peasants, who combine hatred of the old society with a determination, ability and readiness to unite and organise their forces for this struggle so as to forge the wills of millions and hundreds of millions of people — disunited, and scattered over the territory of a huge country — into a single will without which defeat is inevitable. Without this solidarity, without this conscious discipline of the workers and peasants, our cause is hopeless. Without this, we shall be unable to vanquish the capitalists and landowners of the whole world. We shall not even consolidate the foundation, let alone build a new, communist society on that foundation. Likewise, while condemning the old schools, while harbouring an absolutely justified and necessary hatred for the old schools, and appreciating the readiness to destroy them, we must realise that we must replace the old system of instruction, the old cramming and the old drill, with an ability to acquire the sum total of human knowledge, and to acquire it in such a way that communism shall not be something to be learned by rote, but something that you yourselves have thought over, something that will embody conclusions inevitable from the standpoint of present-day education.

That is the way the main tasks should be presented when we speak of the aim: learn communism.

I shall take a practical example to make this clear to you, and to demonstrate the approach to the problem of how you must learn. You all know that, following the military problems, those of defending the republic, we are now confronted with economic tasks. Communist society, as we know, cannot be built unless we restore industry and agriculture, and that, not in the old way. They must be re-established on a modern basis, in accordance with the last word in science. You know that electricity is that basis, and that only after electrification of the entire country, of all branches of

industry and agriculture, only, when you have achieved that aim, will you be able to build for yourselves the communist society which the older generation will not be able to build. Confronting you is the task of economically reviving the whole country, of reorganising and restoring both agriculture and industry on modern technical lines, based on modern science and technology, on electricity. You realise perfectly well that illiterate people cannot tackle electrification, and that elementary literacy is not enough either. It is insufficient to understand what electricity is, what is needed is the knowledge of how to apply it technically in industry and agriculture, and in the individual branches of industry and agriculture. This has to be learnt for oneself, and it must be taught to the entire rising generation of working people. That is the task confronting every class-conscious communist, every young person who regards himself a communist and who clearly understands that, by joining the Young Communist League, he has pledged himself to help the party build communism and to help the whole younger generation create a communist society. He must realise that he can create it only on the basis of modern education, and if he does not acquire this education communism will remain merely a pious wish.

It was the task of the older generation to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The main task then was to criticise the bourgeoisie, arouse hatred of the bourgeoisie among the masses, and foster class-consciousness and the ability to unite their forces. The new generation is confronted with a far more complex task. Your duty does not lie only in assembling your forces so as to uphold the workers' and peasants' government against an invasion instigated by the capitalists. Of course, you must do that; that is something you clearly realise, and is distinctly seen by the communist. However, that is not enough. You have to build up a communist society. In many respects half of the work has been done. The old order has been destroyed, just as it deserved, it has been turned into a heap of ruins, just as it deserved. The ground has been cleared, and on this ground the younger communist generation must build a communist society. You are faced with the task of construction, and you can accomplish that task only by assimilating all modern knowledge, only if you are able to transform communism from cut-and-dried and memorised formulas, counsels, recipes, prescriptions and programs into that living reality which gives unity to your immediate work, and only if you are able to make communism a guide in all your practical work.

That is the task you should pursue in educating, training and rousing the entire younger generation. You must be foremost among the millions of builders of a communist society in whose ranks every young man and young woman should be. You will not build a communist society unless you enlist the mass of young workers and peasants in the work of building communism.

This naturally brings me to the question of how we should teach communism and what the specific features of our methods should be.

I first of all shall deal here with the question of communist ethics.

You must train yourselves to be communists. It is the task of the Youth League to organise its practical activities in such a way that, by learning, organising, uniting and fighting, its members shall train both themselves and all those who look to it for leadership; it should train communists. The entire purpose of training, educating and teaching the youth of today should be to imbue them with communist ethics.

But is there such a thing as communist ethics? Is there such a thing as communist morality? Of course, there is. It is often suggested that we have no ethics of our own; very often the bourgeoisie accuse us communists of rejecting all morality. This is a method of confusing the issue, of throwing dust in the eyes of the workers and peasants.

In what sense do we reject ethics, reject morality?

In the sense given to it by the bourgeoisie, who based ethics on God's commandments. On this point we, of course, say that we do not believe in God, and that we know perfectly well that the clergy, the landowners and the bourgeoisie invoked the name of God so as to further their own interests as exploiters. Or, instead of basing ethics on the commandments of morality, on the commandments of God, they based it on idealist or semi-idealist phrases, which always amounted to something very similar to God's commandments.

We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, duplicity, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists.

We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat.

The old society was based on the oppression of all the workers and peasants by the landowners and capitalists. We had to destroy all that, and overthrow them but to do that we had to create unity. That is something that God cannot create.

This unity could be provided only by the factories, only by a proletariat trained and roused from its long slumber. Only when that class was formed did a mass movement arise which has led to what we have now — the victory of the proletarian revolution in one of the weakest of countries, which for three years has been repelling the onslaught of the bourgeoisie of the whole world. We can see how the proletarian revolution is developing all over the world. On the basis of experience, we now say that only the proletariat could have created the solid force which the disunited and scattered peasantry are following and which has withstood all onslaughts by the exploiters. Only this class can help the working masses unite, rally their ranks and conclusively defend, conclusively

consolidate and conclusively build up a communist society.

That is why we say that to us there is no such thing as a morality that stands outside human society; that is a fraud. To us morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle.

What does that class struggle consist in? It consists in overthrowing the tsar, overthrowing the capitalists, and abolishing the capitalist class.

What are classes in general? Classes are that which permits one section of society to appropriate the labour of another section. If one section of society appropriates all the land, we have a landowner class and a peasant class. If one section of society owns the factories, shares and capital, while another section works in these factories, we have a capitalist class and a proletarian class.

It was not difficult to drive out the tsar — that required only a few days. It was not very difficult to drive out the landowners — that was done in a few months. Nor was it very difficult to drive out the capitalists. But it is incomparably more difficult to abolish classes; we still have the division into workers and peasants. If the peasant is installed on his plot of land and appropriates his surplus grain, that is, grain that he does not need for himself or for his cattle, while the rest of the people have to go without bread, then the peasant becomes an exploiter. The more grain he clings to, the more profitable he finds it; as for the rest, let them starve: "The more they starve, the dearer I can sell this grain." All should work according to a single common plan, on common land, in common factories and in accordance with a common system. Is that easy to attain? You see that it is not as easy as driving out the tsar, the landowners and the capitalists. What is required is that the proletariat re-educate a section of the peasantry; it must win over the working peasants in order to crush the resistance of those peasants who are rich and are profiting from the poverty and want of the rest. Hence the task of the proletarian struggle is not quite completed after we have overthrown the tsar and driven out the landowners and capitalists; to accomplish that is the task of the system we call the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The class struggle is continuing; it has merely changed its forms. It is the class struggle of the proletariat to prevent the return of the old exploiters, to unite in a single union the scattered masses of unenlightened peasants. The class struggle is continuing and it is our task to subordinate all interests to that struggle. Our communist morality is also subordinated to that task. We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat, which is building up a new, a communist society.

Communist morality is that which serves this struggle and unites the working people against all exploitation, against all petty private property; for petty property

puts into the hands of one person that which has been created by the labour of the whole of society. In our country the land is common property.

But suppose I take a piece of this common property and grow on it twice as much grain as I need, and profiteer on the surplus? Suppose I argue that the more starving people there are, the more they will pay? Would I then be behaving like a communist? No, I would be behaving like an exploiter, like a proprietor. That must be combated. If that is allowed to go on, things will revert to the rule of the capitalists, to the rule of the bourgeoisie, as has more than once happened in previous revolutions. To prevent the restoration of the rule of the capitalists and the bourgeoisie, we must not allow profiteering; we must not allow individuals to enrich themselves at the expense of the rest; the working people must unite with the proletariat and form a communist society. This is the principal feature of the fundamental task of the League and the organisation of the communist youth.

The old society was based on the principle: rob or be robbed; work for others or make others work for you; be a slave-owner or a slave. Naturally, people brought up in such a society assimilate with their mother's milk, one might say, the psychology, the habit, the concept which says: you are either a slave-owner or a slave, or else, a small owner, a petty employee, a petty official, or an intellectual — in short, a man who is concerned only with himself, and does not care a rap for anybody else.

If I work this plot of land, I do not care a rap for anybody else; if others starve, all the better, I shall get the more for my grain. If I have a job as a doctor, engineer, teacher, or clerk, I do not care a rap for anybody else. If I toady to and please the powers that be, I may be able to keep my job, and even get on in life and become a bourgeois. A communist cannot harbour such a psychology and such sentiments. When the workers and peasants proved that they were able, by their own efforts, to defend themselves and create a new society — that was the beginning of the new and communist education, education in the struggle against the exploiters, education in alliance with the proletariat against the self-seekers and petty proprietors, against the psychology and habits which say: I seek my own profit and don't care a rap for anything else.

That is the reply to the question of how the young and rising generation should learn communism.

It can learn communism only by linking up every step in its studies, training and education with the continuous struggle the proletarians and the working people are waging against the old society of exploiters. When people tell us about morality, we say: to a communist all morality lies in this united discipline and conscious mass struggle against the exploiters. We do not believe in an eternal morality, and we



expose the falseness of all the fables about morality. Morality serves the purpose of helping human society rise to a higher level and rid itself of the exploitation of labour.

To achieve this we need that generation of young people who began to reach political maturity in the midst of a disciplined and desperate struggle against the bourgeoisie. In this struggle that generation is training genuine communists; it must subordinate to this struggle, and link up with it, each step in its studies, education and training. The education of the communist youth must consist, not in giving them suave talks and moral precepts. This is not what education consists in. When people have seen the way in which their fathers and mothers lived under the yoke of the landowners and capitalists; when they have themselves experienced the sufferings of those who began the struggle against the exploiters; when they have seen the sacrifices made to keep what has been won, and seen what deadly enemies the landowners and capitalists are — they are taught by these conditions to become communists. Communist morality is based on the struggle for the consolidation and completion of communism. That is also the basis of communist training, education, and teaching. That is the reply to the question of how communism should be learnt.

We could not believe in teaching, training and education if they were restricted only to the schoolroom and divorced from the ferment of life. As long as the workers and peasants are oppressed by the landowners and capitalists, and as long as the schools are controlled by the landowners and capitalists, the young generation will remain blind and ignorant. Our schools must provide the youth with the fundamentals of knowledge, the ability to evolve communist views independently; they must make educated people of the youth. While they are attending school, they must learn to become participants in the struggle for emancipation from the exploiters. The Young Communist League will justify its name as the League of the young communist generation only when every step in its teaching, training and education is linked up with participation in the common struggle of all working people against the exploiters. You are well aware that, as long as Russia remains the only workers' republic and the old, bourgeois system exists in the rest of the world, we shall be weaker than they are, and be constantly threatened with a new attack; and that only if we learn to be solidly united shall we win in the further struggle and — having gained strength — become really invincible. Thus, to be a communist means that you must organise and unite the entire young generation and set an example of training and discipline in this struggle. Then you will be able to start building the edifice of communist society and bring it to completion.

To make this clearer to you, I shall quote an example. We call ourselves communists. What is a communist? Communist is a Latin word. *Communis* is the Latin for “common”.

Communist society is a society in which all things — the land, the factories — are owned in common and the people work in common. That is communism.

Is it possible to work in common if each one works separately on his own plot of land? Work in common cannot be brought about all at once. That is impossible. It does not drop from the skies. It comes through toil and suffering; it is created in the course of struggle. The old books are of no use here; no one will believe them. One's own experience of life is needed. When Kolchak and Denikin were advancing from Siberia and the South, the peasants were on their side. They did not like Bolshevism because the Bolsheviks took their grain at a fixed price. But when the peasants in Siberia and the Ukraine experienced the rule of Kolchak and Denikin, they realised that they had only one alternative: either to go to the capitalists, who would at once hand them over into slavery under the landowners; or to follow the workers, who, it is true, did not promise a land flowing with milk and honey, and demanded iron discipline and firmness in an arduous struggle, but would lead them out of enslavement by the capitalists and landowners. When even the ignorant peasants saw and realised this from their own experience, they became conscious adherents of communism, who had gone through a severe school. It is such experience that must form the basis of all the activities of the Young Communist League.

I have replied to the questions of what we must learn, what we must take from the old schools and from the old science. I shall now try to answer the question of how this must be learnt. The answer is: only by inseparably linking each stop in the activities of the schools, each step in training, education and teaching, with the struggle of all the working people against the exploiters.

I shall quote a few examples from the experience of the work of some of the youth organisations so as to illustrate how this training in communism should proceed. Everybody is talking about abolishing illiteracy. You know that a communist society cannot be built in an illiterate country. It is not enough for the Soviet government to issue an order, or for the Party to issue a particular slogan, or to assign a certain number of the best workers to this task. The young generation itself must take up this work. Communism means that the youth, the young men and women who belong to the Youth League, should say: this is our job; we shall unite and go into the rural districts to abolish illiteracy, so that there shall be no illiterates among our young people. We are trying to get the rising generation to devote their activities to this work. You know that we cannot rapidly transform an ignorant and illiterate Russia into a literate country. But if the Youth League sets to work on the job, and if all young people work for the benefit of all, the League, with a membership of 400,000 young men and women, will be entitled to call itself a Young Communist League. It is also a

task of the League, not only to acquire knowledge itself, but to help those young people who are unable to extricate themselves by their own efforts from the toils of illiteracy. Being a member of the Youth League means devoting one's labour and efforts to the common cause. That is what a communist education means. Only in the course of such work do young men and women become real communists. Only if they achieve practical results in this work will they become communists.

Take, for example, work in the suburban vegetable gardens. Is that not a real job of work? It is one of the tasks of the Young Communist League. People are starving; there is hunger in the factories. To save ourselves from starvation, vegetable gardens must be developed. But farming is being carried on in the old way. Therefore, more class-conscious elements should engage in this work, and then you will find that the number of vegetable gardens will increase, their acreage will grow, and the results will improve. The Young Communist League must take an active part in this work. Every League and League branch should regard this as its duty.

The Young Communist League must be a shock force, helping in every job and displaying initiative and enterprise. The League should be an organisation enabling any worker to see that it consists of people whose teachings he perhaps does not understand, and whose teachings he may not immediately believe, but from whose practical work and activity he can see that they are really people who are showing him the right road.

If the Young Communist League fails to organise its work in this way in all fields, it will mean that it is reverting to the old bourgeois path. We must combine our education with the struggle of the working people against the exploiters, so as to help the former accomplish the tasks set by the teachings of communism.

The members of the League should use every spare hour to improve the vegetable gardens, or to organise the education of young people at some factory, and so on. We want to transform Russia from a poverty-stricken and wretched country into one that is wealthy. The Young Communist League must combine its education, learning and training with the labour of the workers and peasants, so as not to confine itself to schools or to reading communist books and pamphlets. Only by working side by side with the workers and peasants can one become a genuine communist. It has to be generally realised that all members of the Youth League are literate people and at the same time are keen at their jobs. When everyone sees that we have ousted the old drill-ground methods from the old schools and have replaced them with conscious discipline, that all young men and women take part in subbotniks, and utilise every suburban farm to help the population — people will cease to regard labour in the old way.

It is the task of the Young Communist League to organise assistance everywhere, in village or city block, in such matters as — and I shall take a small example — public hygiene or the distribution of food. How was this done in the old, capitalist society? Everybody worked only for himself and nobody cared a straw for the aged and the sick, or whether housework was the concern only of the women, who, in consequence, were in a condition of oppression and servitude. Whose business is it to combat this? It is the business of the Youth Leagues, which must say: we shall change all this; we shall organise detachments of young people who will help to assure public hygiene or distribute food, who will conduct systematic house-to-house inspections, and work in an organised way for the benefit of the whole of society, distributing their forces properly and demonstrating that labour must be organised.

The generation of people who are now at the age of 50 cannot expect to see a communist society. This generation will be gone before then. But the generation of those who are now fifteen will see a communist society, and will itself build this society. This generation should know that the entire purpose of their lives is to build a communist society. In the old society, each family worked separately and labour was not organised by anybody except the landowners and capitalists, who oppressed the masses of the people. We must organise all labour, no matter how toilsome or messy it may be, in such a way that every worker and peasant will be able to say: I am part of the great army of free labour, and shall be able to build up my life without the landowners and capitalists, able to help establish a communist system. The Young Communist League should teach all young people to engage in conscious and disciplined labour from an early age. In this way we can be confident that the problems now confronting us will be solved. We must assume that no less than 10 years will be required for the electrification of the country, so that our impoverished land may profit from the latest achievements of technology. And so, the generation of those who are now 15 years old, and will be living in a communist society in 10 or 20 years' time, should tackle all its educational tasks in such a way that every day, in every village and city, the young people shall engage in the practical solution of some problem of labour in common, even though the smallest or the simplest. The success of communist construction will be assured when this is done in every village, as communist emulation develops, and the youth prove that they can unite their labour. Only by regarding our every step from the standpoint of the success of that construction, and only by asking ourselves whether we have done all we can to be united and politically-conscious working people will the Young Communist League succeed in uniting its half a million members into a single army of labour and win universal respect.

# Glossary

**American Civil War** (1861-65) — Fought to preserve the Union in the face of the secession of the southern Confederate states. In essence a struggle for supremacy between the northern industrial capitalists and the southern plantation owners. In order to prevail, the Republican government of Abraham Lincoln (1809-65) was forced to adopt more radical measures. The Emancipation Proclamation (1862) freeing all slaves in the Confederacy was the key element in making an active appeal to the black population of the South to join the struggle. By the war's end about one-eighth of the Union forces were black and proportionately more blacks than whites fought. More than 600,000 were killed — only slightly less than the total US deaths in the two World Wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined.

**Amsterdam International** (formal name: International Federation of Trade Unions) — Founded by Social-Democratic trade union officials in 1913. It collapsed during World War I, but was refounded in Amsterdam in July 1919. It disappeared with the outbreak of World War II.

**Austro-Marxism** — Refers to reformist politics of Austrian social democracy, led by Otto Bauer (1882-1938), its chief theoretician, and Friedrich Adler (1879-1960).

**Azaña, Manuel** (1880-1940) — Leading Spanish politician. Republican prime minister 1931-33; again following February 1936 victory of Popular Front; then president from May 1936 until 1939 defeat of republic in civil war by Francoist forces.

**Basch, Victor** — Head of the French civil liberties organisation, the League for the Rights of Man, which whitewashed the 1930s Moscow trials.

**Bauer, Otto** (1883-1938) — A leader of the right-wing Austrian Social-Democrats and the Second International; chief theorist of so-called Austro-Marxism, which used Marxist terminology to cover the non-Marxist, reformist politics of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. In 1918-19 Bauer was minister of foreign affairs of the Austrian bourgeois republic; was active in suppressing the revolutionary actions of the Austrian working class.

**Bentham, Jeremy** (1748-1832) — English philosopher and theorist of utilitarianism.

- Berdayev, Nikolai** (1874-1948) — Originally “legal” Marxist; became reactionary idealist philosopher and mystic.
- Bernstein, Eduard** (1850-1932) — A leader of the extreme opportunist wing of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the Second International; after Engels’ death in 1895 came forward as chief advocate of revising Marxism to accommodate the liberal bourgeois social-reformist practice of the right-wing of the SPD.
- Bismarck, Otto** (1815-98) — Prime minister of Prussia (1862-71) and then prime minister of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890; introduced anti-socialist law in 1878.
- Blum, Léon** (1872-1950) — Joined the French Socialist Party in 1902; backed the chauvinist right-wing in 1914; main leader of the party in the 1930s; premier of the Popular Front government 1936-37.
- Bolsheviks** — Majority faction of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party formed at 1903 Second Congress; led by Lenin; became separate party in 1912; led the 1917 October revolution that established first workers’ state; later changed name to Communist Party.
- Bonapartism** — After Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). Term used by Marxists to describe a dictatorial regime that governs in a period of acute crisis, due to an objective equilibrium between the opposing class forces. Such a regime bases itself upon the bureaucracy of a capitalist state (or, in the case of Stalinism, of a workers’ state), elevating one of its members to the position of a supreme, unchallengeable arbiter who seems to stand “above parties” and “above classes”.
- Brandler, Heinrich** (1881-1967) — Leader of German Communist Party in early 1920s; scapegoated for party’s failure in 1923 revolutionary situation and removed from leadership in 1924. Later formed faction allied with Bukharinite Right Opposition in Soviet CP; expelled from party in 1929.
- Brockway, Fenner** (1888-?) — Pacifist in World War I; a leader of Independent Labour Party in 1920s and 1930s; secretary of *London Bureau* and opponent of Fourth International; rejoined Labour Party after World War II and became MP; member House of Lords from 1964.
- Bulgakov, Sergei** (1871-1944) — “Legal Marxist” in 1890s, then idealist philosopher and bourgeois economist.
- Centrism** — Marxist term denoting those tendencies in radical movement that vacillate between reformism and revolution.
- Chamberlain, Neville** (1869-1940) — British Conservative Party politician; prime minister 1937-40; advocated “appeasement” of Hitler; signed 1938 Munich pact agreeing to Hitler’s occupation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.
- Cheka** — Extraordinary Commission for Struggle Against Sabotage and

Counterrevolution; special agency set up after October revolution in Russia; later transformed into chief Stalinist repressive agency; known later as the GPU and the NKVD, etc.

**Comintern** — The Third or Communist International; founded in 1919 as the revolutionary alternative to the class-collaborationist Second International. Guided by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in its early years; under Stalin became converted into tool of Soviet diplomacy; dissolved by Stalin in 1943 as a sign to his wartime imperialist allies of his non-revolutionary intentions.

**Daladier, Edouard** (1884-1970) — French politician; a leader of Radical Party in later 1920s and 1930s. Premier in 1933, 1934 and 1938-40; with Britain's Neville Chamberlain, signed 1938 Munich agreement with Hitler.

**Darwin, Charles** (1809-82) — English naturalist; in his *Origin of Species* (1859) put forward theory of evolution to account for plant and animal diversity.

**Dauge, Walter** — A leader of the Belgian Trotskyists in the 1930s.

**de Man, Hendrik** (1885-1953) — Leader of right wing of Belgian Labor Party (POB); in 1933 put forward "labor plan" to end the depression, advocating that government buy out the capitalists.

**Dewey, John** (1859-1952) — Prominent US philosopher and educationalist; presided over the 1937 commission of inquiry into the charges made against Trotsky in the Moscow purge trials.

**Duranty, Walter** (1884-1957) — *New York Times* journalist in Moscow in 1930s, supported Stalin against Trotskyists.

**Eastman, Max** (1883-1969) — US radical and early sympathiser of Trotsky and Left Opposition; translated number of Trotsky's books; broke with Marxism in 1930s and went to right, eventually becoming an editor of *Reader's Digest*.

**Engels, Frederick** (1820-95) — Co-founder with Karl Marx of the modern socialist workers' movement, co-author of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), a leader of the revolutionary-democratic movement in Germany in 1848-49, outstanding theorist and populariser of scientific socialism.

**First International** — The International Working Men's Association was founded in London in 1864. Marx wrote its inaugural address and rules and was its acknowledged leader. In the period of reaction that followed the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, the International's centre was transferred to the United States and the organisation ceased to exist in 1876.

**Fischer, Louis** (1896-1970) — *Nation* correspondent in Europe, mainly in Soviet Union; Trotsky regarded him as an apologist for the Moscow trials.

**Fourth International** — Formed by exiled Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky and his

cothinkers in 1938 as an alternative to the Stalinised Comintern. He hoped that out of the crisis of the coming war the small organisation would grow to become a powerful force. However, the outcome of the Second World War was a strengthening of Stalinism and the continued isolation of the Trotskyist forces.

**Franco, Francisco** (1892-1975) — Spanish general; led victorious counterrevolutionary forces during 1936-39 civil war; set up fascist dictatorship.

**Franco-Soviet Pact** (1935) — By signing the Treaty of Mutual Aid, Stalin endorsed rearmament of French capitalism; led French CP to switch from ultraleftism to open class collaboration.

**Frank, Waldo** (1889-1967) — US writer; 1935-37 headed CP-dominated League of American Writers; left CP over Moscow trials.

**Freemasonry** — A fraternal order with liberal traditions, anticlerical but procapitalist, which in France formed a link between the socialist movement and the bourgeois left. The 1922 Fourth World Congress of the Comintern banned French communists from membership in the Freemasons.

**Gandhi, Mohandas** (1869-1948) — Indian nationalist leader; advocated non-violence as only means. Assassinated by Hindu fanatic following independence.

**Garcia Oliver, José** (1901-?) — Right-wing Spanish anarchist; minister of justice in republican government from 1936 until end of civil war; helped Stalinists crush revolutionary forces.

**Goethe, Johann Wolfgang** (1749-1832) — Widely regarded as the greatest German writer.

**GPU** — The name of the Soviet political police, also known as the NKVD, MVD, and, from 1956, the KGB.

**Green, William** (1873-1952) — Right-wing US labor leader; after death of Samuel Gompers in 1924, president of American Federation of Labor until his death.

**Hegel, Georg** (1770-1831) — The culminating figure of the German idealist school of philosophy that began with Immanuel Kant. Hegel sought to resolve the traditional philosophical distinction between mind and matter by postulating a unified, monistic reality in which matter is the “alienated” expression of its inner organising force — reason or the Absolute Spirit. While Hegel’s theory of being was idealist, he viewed reality as undergoing a process of dialectical development.

**Hitler, Adolf** (1889-1945) — Leader of the fascist National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazis); dictator of Germany 1933-1945.

**Independent Labour Party** — A British reformist party founded in 1893 and an affiliate of the Second International and of the British Labour Party; it adopted a bourgeois-pacifist position during World War I. Expelled from Labour Party in 1931; affiliated



to centrist London Bureau in mid-thirties; rejoined Labour Party 1939.

**Jacobinism** — Radical political group in French revolution; in power 1791 until Thermidor (July 16) 1794 when Robespierre was overthrown and the conservative Directory established.

**Jesuits** — Catholic religious order founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534; originally played key role in struggle against protestant heresy; carried out world-wide missionary activity (especially in the Americas).

**Kant, Immanuel** (1724-1804) — Founder of German classical philosophy; an idealist; advocated theory of ethics based on a universal moral law, the categorical imperative.

**Kerensky, Aleksandr** (1881-1970) — A leading right-wing figure in the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party; during World War I he was a rabid social-chauvinist; after the February Revolution of 1917 he was successively, minister of justice, of the army and navy, and then prime minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government (holding this office at the time of the October 1917 Bolshevik insurrection); emigrated from Russia in 1918.

**Kirov, Sergei** (1886-1934) — Old Bolshevik and Stalinist; head of Leningrad CP in early thirties; elected to politburo at 17th party congress in 1934; assassinated in December by Nikolayev; death used as pretext by Stalin for unleashing wave of terror against all possible opponents.

**Krivitsky, Walter** (1899-1941) — Head of Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe in mid-thirties; defected at end of 1937 and gave information to US government; death in Washington probably an assassination.

**Kronstadt** — Naval base in Gulf of Finland outside St. Petersburg; in March 1921 site of uprising of sailors against Soviet regime; revolt crushed by Red Army.

**Largo Caballero, Francisco** (1869-1946) — Leader of the left wing of the Socialist Party; prime minister of the Spanish republic 1936-37 during the civil war struggle with the Francoists; replaced by Negrín.

**Lassalle, Ferdinand** (1825-64) — German writer and lawyer. Participated in the 1848-49 revolution. In 1863 he founded the General Association of German Workers but his energetic work was compromised by his dealings with the Prussian chancellor Bismarck. He called on the state to provide aid to establish workers cooperatives.

**League for the Rights of Man** — bourgeois liberal French human rights group; whitewashed the Moscow trials.

**Left Opposition** — Faction in CPSU formed by Trotsky in 1923 to fight for revolutionary line and workers democracy; became international grouping from 1930; led to founding of Fourth International in 1938.

- Lenin, V.I.** (1870-1924) — Founder and leader of the Bolshevik Party; principal leader of the October 1917 Russian revolution; founder of the Communist International; outstanding Marxist theorist of 20th century.
- Lewis, John L.** (1880-1969) — President of the United Mineworkers from 1920 to 1969. He was the main leader of the CIO from its inception in 1935 to his resignation in 1940.
- Liebknecht, Karl** (1871-1919) — A leading figure in the German and international working-class movement, fought opportunism and militarism; during World War I adopted a revolutionary internationalist stand, and was one of the organisers and leaders of the revolutionary Spartacus League; after November 1918 revolution in Germany, together with Rosa Luxemburg, headed the newly formed Communist Party of Germany; a leader of the Berlin workers' uprising in January 1919, he was killed by counterrevolutionary officers of the social-democratic government.
- Lincoln, Abraham** — See *American Civil War*
- London Bureau** — Established in 1932 at the initiative of the Norwegian Labor Party and the British Independent Labour Party; a loose association of centrist parties not affiliated to either the Second or Third Internationals, but opposed to the formation of a Fourth International. Among its members in 1938 were the ILP and the Spanish POUM.
- Lovestone, Jay** (1898-1990) — A founder of US Communist Party; central leader in 1920s; general secretary 1927-29; expelled 1929. Led Right Opposition group until disbanded in 1940. Became anti-communist and chief foreign policy adviser to AFL-CIO president George Meany, cold-war supporter and CIA collaborator.
- Ludendorff, Erich von** (1865-1937) — World War I German military leader; gave support to Hitler.
- Ludwig, Emil** (1881-1948) — German writer who specialised in biographies of historical figures and contemporary political leaders.
- Luther, Martin** (1483-1546) — A leader of the German Reformation; founder of Protestantism (Lutheranism) in Germany; ideologist of the German burghers; in 1525 Peasant War sided with princes against insurgent peasants and urban poor.
- Luxemburg, Rosa** (1871-1919) — An outstanding figure in the international working-class movement, one of the leaders of the revolutionary left-wing in the Second International; helped initiate Polish Social-Democratic movement; from 1897 onwards actively participated in the German Social-Democratic movement came to lead its revolutionary left wing; one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany; in January 1919 was arrested and murdered by counterrevolutionaries.
- Lyons, Eugene** (1898-?) — Radical US writer in 1920s and thirties; became disillusioned

with Stalinism and broke with Marxism.

**MacMahaon, Marie Edme Patrice Maurice de** (1808-1903) — French monarchist; 1871 led bloody suppression of Paris Commune; 1873-79 president of France.

**Mach, Ernst** (1838-1916) — Austrian positivist philosopher; argued that world consists of nothing but sensations.

**Machiavelli, Niccolò** (1469-1527) — Italian politician, diplomat, historian and writer; founder of political science; author of the *History of Florence*. A progressive and original thinker in his time; advocated the unification of Italy and favoured a republic. In *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, he shows that all means are used and justified to maintain the ruling class in power. Ironically, the methods he investigated — demagoguery, deceit and ruthlessness — and which are the stock in trade of capitalist politicians, are now termed “machievellian”.

**Makhno, Nestor** (1884-1934) — Led peasant guerilla bands against Whites and German occupation forces in Ukraine; in ensuing civil war his anarchist-kulak bands variously fought both Whites and Reds; was finally defeated by Red Army in 1921; went into exile.

**Marx, Karl** (1818-83) — Co-founder with Frederick Engels of the proletarian-socialist movement; leader of the Communist League 1847-52; co-author of the *Communist Manifesto*; central leader of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) 1864-76; author of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*.

**Mill, John Stuart** (1806-73) — English economist and positivist philosopher; follower of Jeremy Bentham.

**Molinier, Raymond** (1904-?) — A founder of French Trotskyist movement; his group was expelled 1935 for publishing its own newspaper, *La Commune*.

**Moscow trials** — Three show trials in which the outstanding leaders of the October Revolution were framed and executed as “counterrevolutionaries”, “spies” and “wreckers” in the paid service of the Nazis. The first trial opened in August 1936, the second in January 1937 and the third in March 1938. The defendants were all found guilty and executed. The trials were the most spectacular public incidents in the Stalinist terror that enveloped the Soviet Union from 1935 on and claimed millions of victims.

**Munich pact** — 1938 agreement between Britain, France, Germany and Italy giving Hitler green light for occupation of Czechoslovakia.

**Mussolini, Benito** (1883-1945) — Founder of fascism in Italy; began his political career as a member of the Socialist Party but during World War I adopted a chauvinist position. With the blessing and assistance of the Italian bankers and big industrialists he rose to power on October 30, 1922, when a fascist government was appointed

by the Italian king. He was killed by Italian resistance fighters while attempting to flee Italy.

**Negrín López, Juan** (1889-1956) — The last premier of the Spanish republican government (1937-39) during the civil war.

**Nikolayev** — Assassin in 1934 of Stalinist bureaucrat, Sergei Kirov; tried in secret and executed.

**Norwegian Labor Party** — One of the initiators of the London Bureau in 1932. In 1935 formed government in Norway and gave asylum to Trotsky; yielded to Soviet pressure following first Moscow trial and in August 1936 interned him for four months before deporting him to Mexico in December.

**Oak, Liston** — US journalist who broke with Stalinism in 1937 over Spain; collaborated briefly with Trotskyists before shifting to social democracy.

**October Revolution** — The 1917 insurrection overthrew the capitalist Provisional Government and brought to power the Soviet regime led by the Bolsheviks.

**Paris Commune** — The first example of a workers' government. It emerged out of the defeat of the imperial regime of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The radicalised workers held power in the city from March 18-May 28, 1871. The Commune was brutally crushed: tens of thousands of workers were massacred and many more suffered harsh repression at the hands of the victorious bourgeois reaction.

**Paz, Magdeleine** (1889-1973) — One-time supporter of French Left Opposition; active in civil liberties issues in 1930s.

**People's Front** (Popular Front) — The Anti-Fascist People's Front was proclaimed by the Stalinist leadership of the Communist International in 1935. The objective of this policy was to defeat the rise of fascism in Europe by forming coalition governments of Communists and liberal capitalist parties that would enter into diplomatic-military alliances with the Soviet Union. The Popular Front governments in both France and Spain in the thirties served to brake the revolutionary movement of the masses and preserve the capitalist order in a period of severe crisis.

**Pivert, Marceau** (1895-1958) — Leader of left current in French Socialist Party; aide to Léon Blum in first Popular Front government; left SP 1938 to form Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (PSOP) which affiliated to the London Bureau; later rejoined SP.

**POUM** — Workers Party of Marxist Unification. Centrist party prominent in Spanish Civil War; formed in 1935; led by Andrés Nin and Juan Andrade; supported bourgeois Popular Front government but outlawed in June 1937. Strongly criticised by Trotsky.

**Pritt, Denis Nowell** (1887-1973) — Lawyer and longtime Stalinist fellow traveller; defended Moscow trials; expelled from Labour Party in 1940 for supporting Soviet

invasion of Finland; member of parliament 1935-50

**Rappoport, Charles** (1865-1939) — Russian revolutionary; emigrated to France toward end of 1890s; active in labor movement as a writer; became a leader of Communist Party; left CP in late 1930s and broke with Marxism.

**Rolland, Romain** (1866-1944) — French writer; pacifist in World War I; Stalinist fellow-traveller in 1930s.

**Rosenmark, Raymond** — French lawyer; wrote 1936 report for League for the Rights of Man whitewashing first Moscow trial

**Second International** — Established in 1889; united socialist parties in a number of countries. In the period before the World War I, a great organisational and educational work was accomplished under its banner, particularly by the German Social Democracy, its largest and most influential section. However, it embraced both revolutionary and pro-capitalist elements and failed the decisive test of the war, with most party leaderships supporting their respective governments. Revived after World War I; today exists as Socialist International.

**Sedov, Leon** (1906-38) — Trotsky's older son; a leader of Left Opposition and close political collaborator of Trotsky; author of *The Red Book on the Moscow Trial* (1936); died in French hospital in suspicious circumstances, in all likelihood a victim of Stalinist assassination.

**Serge, Victor** (1890-1947) — Anarchist in his youth; after October revolution, moved to Soviet Union and worked for Comintern; joined Left Opposition; arrested in 1928 and again in 1933 but freed in 1936 following campaign by French intellectuals; developed differences with Trotsky; wrote *Year One of the Russian Revolution* and other historical-political works as well as many novels dealing with political themes.

**Shaftesbury, Anthony** (1671-1713) — English philosopher and moralist; student of John Locke; postulated a "moral sense" to reconcile individual happiness with general welfare.

**Sixty Families** — *America's Sixty Families*, by Ferdinand Lundberg (1937), documented the existence of an economic oligarchy in the US, headed by 60 immensely wealthy families. The author brought the work up to date in 1968 under the title, *The Rich and the Super-Rich*.

**Sneevliet, Henricus** (1883-1942) — Joined Dutch Social Democratic Party 1902; emigrated to Java; founded Indonesian CP. Comintern representative in China 1921-23. Broke with Dutch CP 1927; formed Revolutionary Socialist Party in Holland 1929; RSP joined Trotskyist movement in 1933 but broke with it in 1938. Executed by Nazis.

**Socialist Party** — French section of the Second International; part of Popular Front

of 1930s.

**Social Revolutionaries** — Socialist-Revolutionary Party, main peasant party in Russia, founded in 1900; in 1917 the right-wing of the SRs led by Aleksandr Kerensky, who became head of the landlord-capitalist Provisional Government. Toward the end of 1917 the SRs split into pro- and anti-Bolshevik wings; Left SRs supported the October Revolution and participated in the Soviet government until July 1918. During the civil war both wings of the party aligned themselves with the Whites against the Soviets.

**Souvarine, Boris** (1893-?) — A founder of French CP; early supporter of Trotsky but broke with him in 1929; later breaking with Leninism; for Trotsky he was synonymous with Stalinophobic pessimism and defeatism.

**Spaak, Paul Henri** (1899-1972) — Belgian bourgeois politician; briefly in left wing of Labor Party but moved right to become premier in 1938-39 and again in 1946 and 1947-49; NATO secretary-general 1957-61.

**Spanish revolution** — Under the impact of severe economic crisis and widespread popular unrest, the Spanish monarchy fell in 1931 and a republic was proclaimed. The Spanish working class defended the republic in numerous clashes with monarchists and other rightist elements. The succession of republican governments however continued their anti-labour measures, such as the crushing of the general strike in Seville in 1931, and the use of the army to subdue the uprising of Asturian miners in 1934. In 1936, after the army generals, led by Francisco Franco and backed by the bourgeoisie, launched a military-fascist uprising, the Spanish workers responded by launching a revolutionary movement, seizing factories, setting up workers' militias, etc. However, all of the organisations of the Spanish left participated in the Popular Front government which set out to contain the revolutionary workers' movement and to rebuild a bourgeois state machine, a course of action which led to its defeat by the fascists in the 1936-39 civil war. Among the largest of these organisations were the (social-democratic) Socialist Party, the anarchists, the (Stalinist) Communist Party and the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification, a centrist organisation led by ex-Trotskyists).

**Spencer, Herbert** (1820-1903) — Prominent English philosopher; advocate of extreme individualism.

**Stalin, Joseph** (1879-1953) — Joined the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1896 and sided with the Bolsheviks in the 1903 split. He became general secretary of the Russian Communist Party in 1922. He was the central leader and spokesperson for the privileged party-state bureaucracy that came to power in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

- Struve, Pyotr** (1870-1944) — Russian bourgeois economist and liberal publicist. In the 1890s he was a leading representative of the reformist “legal Marxism”, the Russian variety of Bernsteinian reformism; leading member of the liberal-monarchist Constitutional Democratic Party (Cadets) from its inception in 1905; after Bolshevik revolution, a member of the Wrangel counterrevolutionary government.
- Tell, William** — Swiss legendary figure; supposed to have inspired 1291 revolt against Austrian rule.
- Themis** — In Greek mythology, the daughter of Uranus, goddess of justice and law.
- Thermidor** — The month in the new calendar proclaimed by the French bourgeois revolution in which the radical Jacobins led by Robespierre were overthrown by a reactionary wing within the republican camp, which while preserving bourgeois property relations established by the revolution reversed the democratic and egalitarian measures of the petty-bourgeois Jacobin regime. The event most closely identified with this change is the execution of Robespierre on July 27, 1794. Trotsky used the term as a historical analogy to designate the seizure of political power by the reactionary petty-bourgeois Stalinist bureaucracy within the framework of the socialist property forms created by the proletarian revolution.
- Thomas, Norman** (1884-1968) — Presbyterian minister and Christian socialist; Socialist Party member from 1918; reformist leader of the SP from 1933; six-time SP presidential candidate 1928-48.
- Thorez, Maurice** (1900-64) — General secretary French CP from 1930 until his death; unwavering Stalinist; deputy-prime minister 1946-47; ordered disbanding of Resistance partisan forces; endorsed sending troops to Indochina.
- Tolstoy, Leo** (1828-1910) — Russian writer; author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*; advocated extreme ascetic and pacifist ideas in later life.
- Tranmael, Martin** (1879-1967) — Norwegian Labor Party leader in 1930s.
- Trotsky, Leon** (1879-1940) — A leading member of the RSDLP. Aligned with Mensheviks in 1903-04; then occupied independent position. Opposition to World War I enabled him to see validity of Lenin’s positions. In July 1917 joined Bolsheviks and became a central leader. Chief organiser of October insurrection; first commissar of foreign affairs after revolution; leader of Red Army (1918-25). After Lenin’s death, led communist opposition to Stalinism; exiled in 1929; founded Fourth International in 1938; assassinated in Mexico by Stalinist agent August 21, 1940.
- Tukachevsky, Mikhail** (1893-1937) — Former tsarist officer; civil war military leader; from 1926 chief of staff of the Red Army and advocate of modernisation and mechanisation; executed by Stalin after frame-up trial.
- Utilitarianism** — Idea that greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the

overriding guide to morality; advocated by Jeremy Bentham, John Mill and James Stuart Mill.

**Vandervelde, Émile** (1866-1938) — A leader of the Belgian Workers' Party and chairperson of the International Bureau of the Second International. During World War I adopted a pro-war position and became a minister in the Belgian government.

**Vereecken, Georges** (1896-1978) — A leader of the Belgian Trotskyists; led several sectarian splits in 1930s. In 1970s he supported Gerry Healy's "security" campaign against Joseph Hansen and the US Socialist Workers Party and wrote *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement* (New Park: London, 1976).

**Versaillese** — The supporters of the bourgeois-republican government set up in Versailles after the popular overthrow of bourgeois rule in Paris in March 1870 and the establishment of the revolutionary Paris Commune (March 18-May 28, 1871). Its leader was the historian and monarchist politician, Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877). Following its military victory over the Commune, the Versaillese massacred between 20,000 and 30,000 Communards and subjected thousands more to prison and deportation.

**Vorlander, Karl** (1860-1919) — German philosopher; attempted to combine socialism and neo-Kantianism.

**Vyshinsky, Andrei** (1883-1954) — Menshevik from 1902 to 1920 when he joined the Communist Party; prosecutor in 1930s Moscow frame-up trials; Soviet foreign minister 1949-53.

**Jacob Walcher** (1887-?) — A founder of German Communist Party; expelled with Right Opposition in 1929; leader of centrist Socialist Workers Party (SAP) in 1930s; opposed idea of Fourth International; rejoined CP after World War II.

**Wells, H.G** (1866-1946) — English novelist, sociological writer and historian.

**Wrangel, Pyotr** (1878-1928) — Tsarist general; White military leader in Ukraine and south Russia during civil war; fled abroad after final defeat by Red Army in Crimea.

**Yagoda, Genrikh** (1891-1938) — Headed NKVD 1934-36; organiser of first wave of Stalinist terror and first Moscow trial; executed after featuring in third Moscow trial.

**Yakir, Iona** (1896-1937) — Joined Bolsheviks April 1917; military commander; executed in purge of Red Army leadership.

**Yezhov, Nikolai** (1894-1939) — In 1936 succeeded Yagoda as head of the NKVD; organised mass terror (the *Yezhovshchina*). Replaced by Beria in 1938; purged 1939.

**Zenzinov, Vladimir** (1880-1953) — Joined Social Revolutionary Party in 1900; elected to Constituent Assembly in 1917; left Russia after October revolution.



Marxists are often attacked for being “amoral”, if not immoral, by defenders of the established social order. This collection of writings, centred on two essays written in the late 1930s by exiled Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky, gives the lie to such claims.

Trotsky explains that Marxist socialists reject the idea of eternal moral truths, arguing instead that morality arises from the interests of particular social classes. Capitalist morality defends the interests of the wealthy and privileged.

Socialists have a different moral code. They do not pretend that it comes from outside of human society; rather it is derived from the needs of the struggle of the working class and the oppressed to put an end to capitalism and create a new society — one which will be democratic, egalitarian, collectivist and solidaristic.

A criticism of Trotsky’s views from noted US educationalist and philosopher John Dewey is answered by Marxist scholar George Novack. Two appendices by Frederick Engels and V.I. Lenin round out this illuminating selection.

*Resistance books*