

The "Third Camp"

Hal Draper debates Ignazio Silone

The debate that follows occurred in the weekly paper of the Independent Socialist League of the USA, Labor Action, in January and April 1956.

Ignazio Silone (1900-1978) is best known today as a novelist, author of Bread And Wine, Fontamara, and other books. He was a founder member of the Italian Communist Party (in 1921); he broke with Stalin in 1931, speaking out for independent working-class politics, and moved to the right in the 1940s and 50s, contributing to the famous anthology The God That Failed (1949). Recent historians have found evidence that he was secretly a police informer from the early 1920s, but at the time of the debate it was assumed that his history was honourable.

The first contribution by Ignazio Silone was a response to an article [not reproduced here] in Labor Action on Silone's political activities, written by Lucio Libertini, an Italian independent socialist. In the middle of the debate, Silone threatened to take Libertini before an Italian court on charges of libel. He charged him and then withdrew. He talked too of suing Labor Action. Nothing came of that. Leaving aside that drama, the discussion remains an important episode in the history of "Third Camp", independent, working-class socialism.

As a prelude we publish an interview with Silone from 1939 to which the debate refers.

An interview with Ignazio Silone (1939)

In the event of a war between Italy and France, which country would you favour?

Tunisia.

What do you mean?

The world is now divided into two great fronts: one composed of the conservatives, that is, of the democracies or other partisans of collective security; the other composed of the revisionists or fascists. Neither of these two fronts is capable of assuring peace or of solving the economic and political problems now confronting the world.

Real peace depends today on the rapidity with which a third front is created, on the rapidity with which revolutionary workers all over the world retain their political autonomy and resume the struggle to overthrow capitalism. This third front did once actually exist in the form of a revolutionary Russia and of militant workers' parties elsewhere, but at present it exists only in potentiality.

Do you, as an anti-fascist, look forward to, and favour, a war as the quickest means of overthrowing the present regime in Italy?

Personally, I do not share the opinions of many of my fellow political émigrés. A "liberty" brought to Italy and Germany by foreign armies would be nothing less than disastrous. However, I do not deny that it would be easier to create revolutionary situations in Italy and Germany during a war, but these situations would have to be exploited by Italian and German revolutionaries themselves, and by no one else.

What in the light of their relations to political parties, do you think should be the role of revolutionary writers in the present situation?

Although until 1930 I was a member of the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party, at present I do not belong to any political organisation. I do, however, consider myself an anti-fascist partisan in the civil war that is now

being waged more or less throughout the world.

As an anti-fascist partisan, I believe, that the true function of the revolutionary writer today is to herald and, so to speak, to represent in its ideal state that third front to which I just referred. This means that the revolutionary writer must risk isolation.

For example, there are many writers who have only a superficial understanding of the questions involved in the "collective security" policy, precisely because they believe the Stalinist parties to represent truly the interests of the masses and precisely because they fear the isolation that would result from a break with Stalinism. But today it is necessary to have the courage to stand alone, to risk hearing oneself called fascist agent, Hitler spy, and so forth, and to persist nevertheless in one's course. The third front, existing as yet only in an ideal state, must be kept pure as an ideal. And for that too, courage is required.

The reactionary trend of our epoch is shown precisely by the alliance of such a "third front." They try to force on us the dilemma: status quo or regression? Most of the progressive forces have already accepted this Hobson's choice. They are content to struggle to preserve the existing order, lest they fall under the fascist yoke.

One thing I must make clear at the outset: I think it would be a serious mistake to put bourgeois democracy and fascism on the same level, in view of the great differences between these two forms of political organisation. The Stalinists, who until 1934 denied the existence of any such differences and who fought against social-democracy and liberal democracy as the equivalent of fascism, these gentlemen in actuality made possible Hitler's victory.

But it would also be a mistake, through fear of fascism, to turn conservative. Fascism's power, its mass appeal, its contagious influence, all are due to the fact that fascism means false solutions, easy solutions, ersatz solutions but, all the same, solutions of the real problems of our time. We can conquer fascism only by proposing and carrying out other solutions — just, humane, progressive solutions of these same problems.

But conservative democracy denies the existence of these problems. She does not see them, does not wish to see them, is unable to see them. That is why, in spite of her military strength, her material wealth and her monopoly of raw materials, when conservative democracy is brought face to face with fascism, she is forced back onto the defensive. That is why she has until now been beaten by fascism. That is why she is weak.

The democrats are right when they call the Nazi "abolition of unemploy-

ment" fictitious, unstable and a stop gap measure, but their criticism will be more convincing when they themselves find and carry out a healthy and permanent solution of that same problem.

It is true that fascist nationalism conflicts with the peaceful collaboration of all peoples which is a historical necessity, now that the economic integration of the globe has laid the foundation for a progressive world unity. But the Versailles system is also based on nationalism, it too is opposed to historical development, and so it cannot be set up as an effective barrier against fascism.

When the socialists, with the best possible anti-fascist intentions, renounce their own program, put their own theories in moth balls, and accept the negative positions of conservative democracy, they think they are doing their bit in the struggle to crush fascism. Actually, they leave to fascism the distinction of alone daring to bring forward in public certain problems, thus driving into the fascists' arms thousands of workers who will not accept the status quo.

In short, I see the struggle against fascism as primarily not a military but a political and social question. We anti-fascists have been beaten by the fascists in the political and social spheres; it is cheap to seek revenge in the military sphere. War will not make an end of fascism. It is even probable that the first result of war will be the fascisation of the democratic countries.

But don't you think the military defeat of Hitler and Mussolini will inevitably mean the end of their regime.

I think that the establishment of a truly free regime in Italy and Germany depends entirely on the Italian and German people. If they cannot free themselves no one else can free them. Freedom cannot come as a gift from a foreign army: to pay for liberty, a people must dig down deep into its own pocket.

Obviously, a war can produce certain favourable conditions for revolution. The same conditions can also be produced by cholera, earthquake, famine. But the advocates of liberty have never been the advocates of cholera, nor of earthquakes or of famine, and they cannot any more be the advocates of war, even though they stand to profit by favourable conditions which it may produce. The worst misfortune which could happen to German socialism which achieved power in 1918 under such unfortunate circumstances would be for it to regain power after the next military defeat of Germany and as a natural result of the defeat. Nothing worse could happen to socialism than to become synonymous with national defeat.

When you speak of liberty, do you mean socialist liberty?

Yes, I think of socialism as an element from now on indispensable to a regime of real freedom — that is to say, of liberties that are concrete and actual, not formal and “constitutional”. Big business and political liberty have become incompatible.

But I do not see liberty as the necessary, natural and predestined consequence of socialism: I do not consider economics, politics and culture to be as mechanically interrelated as many Marxists seem to. Just as we have very different political regimes growing from the common soil of capitalist production, so too Russia warns us that, on the base of state socialist production, there can arise a culture of cannibals, a culture much inferior to the culture which bourgeois democracy had created.

Socialism rids us of one enemy of human liberty, but it can also introduce new ones, unknown to past history. And there is no formula which can protect us from these new enemies, no automatic mechanism, no constitutional guarantees. There is nothing, that is, which can force men to be free. Fortunately! Perhaps after I have finished writing the novel I am working on now I will try to write a “School of Liberty” as a sequel to the School of Dictators you already know.

What is your opinion of contemporary left-wing literature?

Left-wing literature? You must admit that the expression is ambiguous. One should reserve the adjectives “left”, “right”, “centre” and their nuances for political parties and their propaganda.

However. I understand what you are referring to. There are a few great left-wing writers and there is a left-wing literary industry, nourished by, a left-wing literary-philistinism which has become especially abundant and vulgar since the Kremlin discovered literature as “*instrumentum regni*.”

Stalinism is really the horn-of-plenty of this literature. Writers find themselves flattered in all their vague aspirations and, into the bargain, they risk nothing. In a society where they were accustomed to being considered merely a luxury, they are now given the illusion of playing a leading role. They are called together in congresses, they sign appeals, they are “popularised”. All that is asked of them is that they approve everything the Party does — or at least that they do not disapprove in public. Nothing more!

There are also a good many writers, essentially bourgeois and reactionary in the quality of their writing, who conform to the etiquette of anti-fascism. Their hostility to fascism has this particular quality; they address themselves always to far distant regimes and have not a word to say about fascism and reaction in their own country. Truly, a platonic and tactful anti-fascism.

Their socialist convictions are also strictly export commodities: these writers are partisans of socialism in Russia but not in their own country. They are most eloquent about the victorious revolutions of the past — 1789, 1848, etc. — but are silent on the revolutionary tasks of our own epoch. Already this whole left-wing literary industry is going to pieces as a result of the collapse of "popular front" politics.

The true left-wing writers are distinguished by characteristics the very opposite of those I have just described. They are first of all and above all, opposed to fascism and reaction in their own country. They feel themselves bound in sympathy, first and foremost, with the working class and peasantry of their own country, and, through them, with the workers of every country in the world. They submit to no discipline beyond what every honest conscience and sincere thought provides of itself. And so, they will tell the truth to everyone, at all times, to enemies and to friends, even when the friends do not want to hear disagreeable truths.

Round One

Ignazio Silone: "My political faith"

I DO NOT ADHERE to any system of philosophy, to any ideology, or to any orthodoxy. I think that all the ideological systems inherited from the last centuries, like the society that produced them, are in crisis at present — which does not mean that they do not contain some partial truth. I think that this has been the lot also of Marxism, in all of its variants. All metaphysics has lost its self-evidency.

In 1931 I left the Italian Communist Party, having firmly decided to keep far away from political parties for the rest of my life, and to continue the struggle alone, as a writer and an independent socialist. I remained faithful to that aim until 1941, when I yielded to the vigorous insistence of some friends, so that at least for the duration of the war I might help the underground organisation of

Italian socialism that was about to be absorbed by the Stalinists, with Nenni as accomplice.

The recollection of this period gives me the opportunity to set down the significance I attributed to the formula of the "Third Front" which I had already pointed to in an interview with Clement Greenberg that appeared in the *Partisan Review* (Autumn 1939) and in another with Jean-Germain Tricot that appeared in *Nouvelles Littéraires* (Paris, 26 August, 1939). Having adhered to socialism in the midst of the First World War, at the age of 17, attracted to it by the Zimmerwald Manifesto, my problem was this: could one assume the same attitude toward the Second World War? I tried to formulate the answer in 13 points which I called "Theses on the Third Front". The first three points give a general idea of it, and they are simply:

"1. The Italian socialists affirm that the present war, besides being like the war of 1914-18 an imperialist and capitalist war to corner raw materials and markets, bears very grave consequences for the internal regime of every country, and on its outcome will depend to a considerable degree the future situation of humanity and in particular of the working classes.

"2. The attitude of the Italian socialists towards the present war is therefore dominated by their anti-fascist position, and by their firm conviction that democratic liberties constitute very useful premises for all future progress by humanity.

"3. The decisive front on which fascism can be halted and destroyed is the home front of each country. Only on this third front can the social and political problems from which fascism has sprung be resolved. The only adversary capable of defeating fascism on the third front is socialism. The military defeat of the fascist powers must be considered only as a prelude to the decisive struggles which will take place on the third front. The democratic character of the powers presently at war against the fascist states is neither homogenous nor unalterable. The state of war, especially if prolonged, can also modify in a totalitarian direction the internal structure of the democratic states. The Italian socialists are therefore determined to safeguard liberty of criticism and autonomy at all times even against the democratic governments. The politics of the Italian socialists takes its inspiration solely from the interests and ideals of the Italian and international working class..."

Of the points that followed, the most important were those on anti-colonialism and on the condemnation in advance of any division of the world into spheres of influence. These theses were accepted by the foreign centre of Italian socialism, and served as a guide for our action during the war. The quotation above should clarify: first in what sense we had departed from the position of Zimmerwald; second, in what way our support of the war was condi-

tioned. This distinction recurs later under the new conditions created in European socialism by the formation of military blocs and by power politics.

When the war was over, with the defeat of fascism, my withdrawal from practical politics was delayed by the necessity of preventing the Communist Party from capturing Italian socialism. The objective was partly realised by us, but under quite confused and contradictory positions.

As compared with the past, our political life is now radically transformed. The general insecurity pushes individuals towards mass organisations. Small groups can still have some importance inside mass organisations: isolated their function can be of a cultural nature at most.

On 13 October 1950 the leadership of the PSU approved a long statement on the policy "For Peace and Democracy."

"... each difficult conjuncture, in the face of any threat of conflict, we socialists will therefore always be for recourse to negotiations, mediation, arbitration and any other democratic procedure that may preserve peace and permit the solution of international problems in accordance with justice. But in order to be able to fulfil our peace-making function without misunderstandings, we feel the duty to make very clear to all that we do not intend in any way to compromise on the defence of democratic institutions or on resistance to all armed aggressions."

The Communist Party is at present going through a serious political and organisation crisis, specially among the workers and intellectuals; to a lesser degree among the peasants but even there are clear symptoms of disaffection. The little groups of ex-Communist deviations of various tendencies in Italy we have at least five) have lived until now in expectation of the Stalinist thaw that would bring the still-absent worker masses into their ranks. But the crisis of the Communist Party has already assumed grave forms and this mass influx to the groups of ex-Communists is not taking place.

Why? The explanation lies in the social and ideological composition of the Communist Party and in particular the dynamism of each stratum that forms a part of it. I want only to recall that the Communist Party is an amalgam in which, around the Bolshevik nucleus, are grouped the most diverse and heterogeneous elements: revolutionary peasants, free-thinking intellectuals, nationalist ex-partisans, vaguely socialist workers, etc. The tearing away of all these very diverse elements cannot, however, take place in a single direction.

In my opinion an intensification of the crisis in the CP will be of use to all parties except the small groups of ex-Communists, who will continue to tear themselves apart in their impotence and blame fantastic scapegoats for their

own sterility. They are daily ridiculed, slandered and threatened by the Stalinist bureaucracy and they think to take revenge by using the same methods themselves. Having read a collection of truculent and acid phrases directed against opponents in the pamphlets of Lenin and Trotsky, they have ended up believing that this is the essence of revolutionary thought. Thus one sees excellent men grow old corroded by anger, their precious energies wasted.

[On] the orientation of the Italian Committee for Cultural Freedom, of which I am one of the supporters, I have to clarify this last point too.

Writers and artists of all liberal Italian tendencies make up the organisation. Four-fifths of the activities of this organisation is devoted to the defence of cultural freedom in Italy, which is endangered by the remnants of fascism, by the clerical right, and by a part of the state apparatus. We are in fact convinced that the duty of democrats is, above all, concern themselves with liberty in their own country. But within the limits of our possibilities we try, above all in our publications, to make Italian intellectuals aware of the dangers that menace us on the international plane.

On this point also, however, I want to make things clear: we reject the sophism of equidistance [he refers to equidistance from the two world blocs]. In the first national assembly of our organisation on 18 January 1953 a declaration was adopted in which one could read as follows.

"It would be an error to judge our open and irreconcilable opposition to totalitarian regimes of any kind and our critical vigilance over the imperfections and contingent tendencies that exist in the democratic regimes as a position of equidistance. In reality, in totalitarian regimes we condemn that political structure which does not permit the least expression for the individuals and classes that suffer under it, while in democratic countries we consider ourselves responsible citizens."

Without taking back the approval I gave this formulation at that time, I would now be more cautious in affirming that in totalitarian countries the oppressed are not able to protest: the facts of 17 June in East German and the Vorkuta strikes have demonstrated the contrary. For the liberation of oppressed countries, I put my hopes in revolution and not in war.

Hal Draper: "An open letter to Ignazio Silone"

DEAR COMRADE SILONE: We were glad to publish your political statement in *Labor Action*, for we know that what you have to say will be of justifiably great interest to all who admire your novels as well as all who respect your past contributions to the struggle for socialism and human rights.

If we seek to continue the dialogue now, it is because of our feeling that your statement does not do justice to the need which prompted it. That need is the need which every politically responsible person faces of confronting his views of today with his views of yesterday and accounting for the transformation.

We have no thought of questioning the propriety of changing one's mind, even of changing one's mind from being a principled opponent of imperialist war to being a critical supporter of one of the imperialist war blocs. But do you feel that you have adequately faced, and presented, the grounds on which you have gone through this political transubstantiation?

We can go only on your present statement for we know of no other place where you have discussed this quintessential point, this heart of contemporary socialist politics, this touchstone for the revitalisation of an independent socialist movement.

And therefore we have some questions to pose on whether this statement of yours has truly presented a rationale for support of the "Atlantic" camp of imperialism, or whether it has avoided answering the insistent questions which demand replies from your politics.

Before doing so, we had better make clear what we are not questioning at this point, to avoid misunderstanding.

We are, it goes without saying, happy at your insistence, even today, on liberation of the oppressed peoples not by external warmakers but by their own revolution: and at your continued adherence to the socialist aim. Nor are we questioning, in this space, your views on Marxism, or, Proudhonism, on orthodoxies, on philosophy, on the difficulties of the Italian socialist movement or the clashes within it, on the composition of the Italian CP or the dynamics of its crisis, etc. — interesting and important as all these matters are.

We are here raising only the question: Why have you abandoned the ideas of Third Camp internationalism, as you explained them in your brilliant 1939 interview reprinted elsewhere in these pages? and why have you become a critical supporter of one of the war blocs?

We are interested in your reasons, not those of the multitude of backsliders and renegades from socialism whose name is legion in the United States. From

them we have heard many political motivations, with many variants, and so we have a modest acquaintanceship with the possibilities that exist. But why have you gone in this direction? That is what we do not find to be elaborated in your statement — not to us, if to you.

We do not find such an explanation in the section which you head "The Third Front." There we find a peculiar re-definition of the term which makes it mean merely "the home front," the terrain on which the decisive fight should take place. It apparently no longer means the anti-war political position which you explained in 1939. In any case, in no way does it attempt to deal with, explain, or even reject this anti-war political position. You quote your theses, but you do not quote anything which either supports or opposes the war; you quote some general considerations, some of which are partly true in themselves, but which largely can be made to face either way.

As far as we can see, the nearest you come to formulating your reasons for abandoning the Third Camp position, and supporting the Atlantic Pact, is in the section you quote from the 1950 PSU statement, which, we take it, you present also as your own opinion. Here the sole motivation is that "the continuing Soviet pressure has brought about the conclusion of an Atlantic Pact which has forced European socialism, without renouncing its (European) federalist aims, to continue the struggle for peace on positions withdrawn further back, like those constituted by the Atlantic pact."

But why does the conclusion of a military alliance by the imperialists "force" socialists to retreat from their anti-war position and adopt ("withdraw to") a critical pre-war bloc position?

Why exactly did you decide that the function of socialists in this war crisis is not to fight both imperialist blocs but rather to make sure that the "democratic" imperialists remain "purely defensive", unmilitaristic, free from reactionary tendencies, and otherwise unsullied — to produce a perfectly antiseptic imperialism, in other words, while international misunderstandings are to be taken care of by "negotiations, mediation, arbitration," etc?

In 1939 you explained why the "conservative" (i.e. pro status-quo) democracies could not effectively fight a totalitarian system which put forward "false solutions, easy solutions, ersatz solutions — but, all the same, solutions of the real problems of our time." Why have you decided to turn a blind eye to this thought, when with regard to Stalinism and its dynamic appeal to the masses it is clearly twice as true now?

In 1939 you stressed that there could be no real peace or real liberty, except under socialism. Has the era of H-bomb capitalism and totalitarian Stalinism caused you to revise this estimate?

In 1939 you said that the alternatives of "status quo or regression" were false ones. Have you decided now that it is right for a socialist to devote his energies to defending the "conservative" (i.e. capitalist) status quo in order to escape the greater evil of Stalinism?

In 1939 you saw with utter clarity the suicidal nature of such social-patriotic "realism" from the point of view of fighting the totalitarian enemy itself as well as from the point of view of emancipating the working class from the present evil of that social order which has oppressed them much longer than the new exploiting system of Stalinism. You were able to say:

"When the socialists, with the best possible anti-fascist intentions, renounce their own program, put their own theories in moth balls, and accept the negative positions of conservative democracy, they think they are doing their bit in the struggle to crush fascism. Actually, they leave to fascism the distinction of alone daring to bring forward in public certain problems, thus driving into the fascists' arms thousands of workers who will not accept the status quo."

Is this not a hundred times truer today? Isn't this the reason why despite party crises and all the crimes and betrayals committed by Stalinism the CP still retains massive working-class support in countries like Italy and France and why this workers' support has not been weaned away by socialist groups which have put their own programme "in mothballs"?

No doubt many things have changed since 1939 and it would be superfluous to call attention to this well known fact politically; but have you formulated to yourself just why the reactionary changes that have taken place in the world should push you to put your own theories in "mothballs" in the belief that (this time anyway!) this is the clever way of combating the Stalinist menace?

Surely it cannot be the fact that today you see the "sophism of equidistance", unlike the unreconstructed anti-war fighters of yesterday. For you already exposed this "sophism" in 1939 more clearly than you do today.

We refer to the section in your 1939 interview in which, in the very course of explaining your principled Third Camp view, you took pains to "make clear at the outset" that "it would be a serious mistake to put bourgeois democracy and fascism on the same level, in view of the great differences between these two forms of political organisation." You implemented this distinction by a reference to the famous Stalinist "social-fascist" policy and analysis. You put this necessary distinction in its proper perspective by showing that to oppose both camps of imperialism, it is not necessary to identify or equate both camps of imperialism.

You did not, then, put forward any theory of "equidistance". It was not a geometrical but a political selection that you put forward in explaining why the totalitarian menace could not be beaten back by supporting the "conservative" status quo.

Whose, then, is this "sophism of equidistance" against which you now polemicise? And after this "sophism" has been ignominiously refuted, what dent has been made in the unsophisticated position of the anti-war socialism which you used to hold and have now abandoned?

Is it not more relevant, however, to look at what you simultaneously counterpose to this "sophism" in your final section, the section in which you sum up your views on "anti-communist"? You chose to do this through a quotation from the programme of the Committee for Cultural Freedom.

It is only with the greatest hesitation that we would accept assurance that you really allow this organisation to sum up your politics. In this quotation we find that the trouble with capitalism (which appears there only under the pseudonym of the "democratic regimes") is its "imperfections"; and we find that your role vis-à-vis your own state is summed up as that of "responsible citizens" ...

Does this really speak for you? In that case, what have we to do here with quibbles about "equidistance," when it is a question of more basic positions on capitalism? Were you not a "responsible citizen" of Italy when you were fighting the fascist regime?

No, it is hard to believe that this speaks for you, and one would prefer to believe that you were slandering yourself in using this bourgeois sophism as the very climax of your political statement of faith. But then we have to remember that you are indeed a leader and officer of this very organisation you quote.

You say that this Italian section of the Congress of Cultural Freedom devotes four-fifths of its activities to "the defence of cultural freedom in Italy," and you apparently deny the charge that it is primarily and overwhelmingly concerned with being the propaganda mouthpiece among intellectuals of the Atlantic war bloc. We ourselves, of course, cannot pass comment on this since we are not sufficiently well acquainted with the organisation in Italy. All we can say is that it would be indeed remarkable if you are right, for we do know what this organisation is in our own country, the US, from which it gets its inspiration. We have produced and documented the fact that the Cultural Freedom Committee which was founded here under the leadership of the "liberal" witch hunter Sidney Hook, was not even willing to come out against

the infamous McCarran anti-alien law which was denounced as "racist" by less "responsible" liberals than the valiant defenders of cultural freedom. We have proved that this organisation devotes four-fifths of its work to pure and simple cold war propaganda, not too far distant from the State Department's own brand, and that its one-fifth of attention to threats against internal liberty is devoted mainly to straightening out cases where staunch supporters of capitalism have been mistakenly witch hunted themselves.

But leaving aside characterisation of the Cultural Freedom Committee there are some questions to be raised that are germane to the subject of this letter.

For example we note with some appreciation that you inveigh against substituting the struggle of small groups for real work inside mass organisations: very well, though we do not know what mass organisations you would suggest. In any case, even assuming the justice of your complaints against the anonymous "imbeciles" in your country, which we do not understand any too well: how does this justify your personal decision to put your socialist programme in moth balls and transfer your political activities to a group which is neither a small socialist organisation nor a mass socialist organisation, more even a mass organisation of any kind, but largely (in the US at least) an Association for the Moth-Ball Storage of Ex-Radicals' Theories?

For, by the way, it is a mistake to believe that you have left "active political life." The Cultural Freedom Committee is primarily a political organisation, though of course not a "party". It is so by the terms of its orientation, activity and reason for existence. What you have left is active *socialist* political activity.

Do you think that in this way you "are doing your bit to crush Stalinism"? But if "all the ideological systems inherited from the last centuries" are in crisis, including all "variants" of Marxism, then surely you do not exempt the democratic ideology from this sweep? If all proposed alternatives to the out-lived "conservative" status quo are in such mortal crisis, can it be that the most stable rock to be found is — that outlived conservative status quo itself!

If you have now "withdrawn your positions" from the advanced tranches of revolutionary socialism and its democracy to the more prudent rear-lines of bourgeois democracy, what experience of recent life or history has persuaded you that this is where the bastions of human values are to be best defended?

Perhaps it is the capacity of the "democratic regimes" for guaranteeing human liberties, as we have been finding out here in the US before, during and since the reign of McCarthy? It is perhaps the "democratic" capacity to de-Nazify the German reaction under our pet Adenauer, or demilitarise the Japanese warlords.

Is it perhaps the "democratic" capacity to break away even from Hitlerite allies like Franco? Is it perhaps the "democratic" capacity to break with butchers like Chiang Kai-shek or Syngman Rhee or the semi-fascist lords of Thailand who are America's only "bastions of democracy" in the Asian world?...

It is not our purpose to deny or gloss over the crisis of socialism in today's world, nor to present our claim to possess any easy formulas for overcoming it. This is not in question here. Indeed, none of the proofs that such a crisis exists is, inter alia, the matter we are discussing. But precisely because socialism faces its crisis, is it not the duty of every socialist who has not been overcome by despair to resist when "they try to force on us the dilemma: status quo or regression" and to devote himself to the unflagging task in whatever manner of seeking, finding and pursuing the revolutionary and democratic socialist way out of the shambles that has been made of this world by rival exploiters.

Round Two

Ignazio Silone: "My Political Faith, Second Round"

IN REPLY TO my article which it published January 31 entitled "My Political Faith" (and reprinted in Italy by *Giustizia* among others, under the title "A Socialist Writer,") *Labor Action* has renewed the discussion with an Open Letter on February 6, in which it posed to me a score of questions, of an ideological, political and ethical nature all more or less pertaining to the actions of socialists during the last world war and their current attitude toward the military blocs.

The tone of the Open Letter is inevitably the one that is characteristic of disident communists, those little exasperated epigones of Trotsky and Lenin: that is to say, it varies between insolence, and pseudo-doctrine, and what is more — since we are dealing with American extremists — with a distinctive inquisitorial accent that horribly re-echoes the interrogations of their now famous Committee on Un-American Activities. There is something strange about this, since the urge to imitate, in discussions with their friends, the

odious manners of their own persecutors, has always been one of the satisfactions of the persecuted. To which one must add the fact that these American extremists, in contrast with their European comrades, have never participated in a broad workers' movement, and as a result of the environment in which they have developed, they are scarcely endowed with a conception of liberty and, intellectual fairness, and even from Marxism they have assimilated only the crudest and by now outmoded aspects.

Despite this and the limited time available to me, I wish to reply to their Open Letter since we are dealing here with a non-conformist journal which has — or so it would seem — a hard life. Christian and socialist education creates these obligations also: one must be kind to one's persecutors even if they talk nonsense. I must add that it will never be polemics, no matter how bitter, that will drive me further away from these extremists than I already am, since I have learned to establish my line of conduct on the basis of reasoning and not bad humor. It goes without saying that I consider myself excused from the need to reply to purely rhetorical or pseudo-witty questions such as: if Silone considers the various ideologies handed down to us from the last centuries to be in crisis, why not also bourgeois democracy?

Two arguments

I will reply instead to a serious question to which I have already replied on previous occasions, but *repetita juvant*. Thinking, to embarrass me gravely, *Labor Action* asks: "In 1939, before the outbreak of the great war in an interview with an American writer in *Partisan Review*, to the question: In case of conflict between France and Italy for control of Tunisia, which side would you support? —you replied: The side of Tunisia; but on the contrary a year later you came out in support, albeit critical, of the democratic powers in the war against the Axis. How do you explain this betrayal of the international proletariat?"

I reply with two arguments — one with regard to the different character of the Second World War as compared with the hypothetical conflict between Fascist Italy and France over the possession of Tunisia; the other concerning the change in my personal responsibility from an independent writer, which I already was in 1939, to the socialist leader which I became as a result of the requests of Italian socialist émigrés in France, who were placed in the position of not being able to act any longer because of the German occupation.

It seems to me that my first argument is irrefutable and well-founded. Even today, if I should be asked: "If a war should break out between two states over the possession of Morocco, which side would you support?" I would reply

without hesitation: "The side of the Moroccans." But Hitler's war was another matter. The victory of Hitler would have meant the destruction for a long time of the premise for any political activity whatever and hence also for the struggle for socialism. Anti-war sabotage actions on the part of Western workers' organisations would have led to this. It would have been a collective suicide. On this there was agreement also among the few old internationalists of the Zimmerwald period who were still alive in 1940: Modigliani, Balabanoff, Rosmer, Monatte, and the head of the international religious socialists Leonhard Ragaz. For me the problem was a different one: one must not identify the cause of socialism and liberty with the belligerent states, one must safeguard socialist independence. In my opinion, during those years this was the most radical position within European socialism since, starting from the necessity of defeating Nazism, the majority of socialists were collaborating with the military apparatus of the democratic states and in no way differentiated themselves in their propaganda. I know only of a single case of absolute intransigence: that of the Neapolitan, Amadeo Bordiga, who was of the opinion that the two belligerent blocs were "objectively" identical, and that, rather, Hitler's victory, destroying Anglo-Saxon imperialism, would have smoothed the road to proletarian revolution... This was madness.

A tension

To suppose that my point of view was inspired by expediency is a gratuitous insult. I remained in Switzerland, for the anti-fascist struggle, despite repeated offers of an American visa, even when a Nazi occupation appeared imminent. But I was also aware that my platform of a "Third Front" was a compromise between the spirit of Zimmerwald and the new reality of Nazism. Precisely in those years (1940-41) I wrote *The Seed Beneath the Snow*. This novel was a poet's revenge against contingent reality; for me, almost a biological need. That book appeared during the war and everywhere aroused the impression (typical, for example, was the criticism in *Partisan Review*) that I had definitely withdrawn from politics. Instead, as I say, I had begun to write that book precisely at the time when I had just recently accepted a political post, albeit a clandestine one. The distance in ideas during those years between my pamphlets, my articles, my practical political work, and that serene and stoical atmosphere of *The Seed Beneath the Snow* reveals precisely the extreme tension in which I found myself. Certainly, revolutionary consciousness, when it includes both the duty of political struggle and the transcendence of the present in one's thinking, embraces a dimension which is almost inhuman and ultimately even unbearable.

Principles

With this, I feel I have implicitly replied even to the other objections on military pacts. On this point the difference with *Labor Action* is substantial. But it is not a personal difference of mine, because both the aversion to the Atlantic Pact as well as the critical and conditional acceptance after it had become a law of the state, I shared with the unanimous leadership of the PSU [United Socialist Party] of which I was a part. But I do not at all intend to give the impression that I want to escape from my past responsibilities, while I must still make clear that for me today every discussion of political tactics has only a retrospective value. When one is a socialist but does not actively participate in an organized movement, the only interesting problems are problems of principle and not tactics. My principled position is pacifist and libertarian. So long as I was a militant of the PSU, I saw the political problem in these terms (forgive me the horrible Stalinist jargon): how to link tactics with strategy. Tactics demand that one not lose contact with existing reality, without being absorbed by it. For the great danger in defending the liberties which we may lose is that of becoming conservative. The defense must be carried out therefore with the maximum of independence, for with the maximum of independence the most desperate situation the demands that go beyond the existing order.

The duty of the writer is a good deal simpler. It may even be that my instinctive inability to endure active political life is simply the inability to endure the necessary tactical compromises. The writer, and even the socialist writer, has the duty of keeping clear of the claims of the apparatus, and of refusing to become a propagandist.

The socialist writer betrays his mission if he does not depict human suffering and does not embody in his writings the sense of the true and the just that springs to birth in the humble and the oppressed. I certainly do not consider myself free of weaknesses and contradictions, and I confess moreover that I am not made of steel or aluminum; but whoever wishes to criticize me should take my books. Only in them do I wholly recognize myself. The others are only partial images, already superseded by myself.

I hold to nothing as tenaciously as to my independence as a socialist writer. To believe that I can give up my liberty in this or that association of intellectuals — what foolishness. But I must add that I reject once again the slanderous appraisal that *Labor Action* wants to give to the International Congress for Cultural Freedom and particularly to Sidney Hook.

From all accounts, it is a united front of intellectuals in which each has his own individuality, and it is not a herd of sheep.

But, perhaps to talk about freedom to *Labor Action* is like talking about colour to the blind. As a socialist and as a writer, I consider freedom the supreme good. The day on which I cannot freely write what I think, you can be sure that I will turn to writing illegally and, in the absence of newspapers, I will write on the walls.

Hal Draper: "Silone's politics — then and now"

DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIES, let us try again to keep the spotlight on the political problem to which our Open Letter was devoted — the question of socialist policy on the war camps into which the world is divided.

Our Open Letter tried to put aside all other matters which Silone had raised in his article, "My Political Faith," in order to concentrate on this only. We would still like to do that.

But for raising such questions in our Open Letter, we now find ourselves scolded by Silone with a series of epithets which he apparently finds necessary for a rounded exposition of his thinking: it was "insolence" ... "little exasperated epigones" ... we are "inquisitorial" like McCarthyites and, being "American extremists," we are imitating our "persecutors" ... no "conception of liberty and intellectual fairness" ... "slanderous" ... "gratuitous insult" ... and there are more such amiable expressions designed to underline Silone's contrasting intellectual tolerance and dispassionate objectivity, so different from our own insolence in raising gravely embarrassing questions.

It is a good thing, as he says, that he was not moved by "bad humor" when he wrote all this.

But as we did in our Open Letter in the case of Silone's previous invective against "imbeciles" and "little would-be politicians" and "communist deviationists" and other hopeless objects of scorn, let us put it all to one side in order to keep political questions on the floor.

Let us put aside also a more valuable aspect of Silone's second round: those passages, in the latter part of his article, where he speaks in a personal vein of the tension between his life as a creative artist and as a political leader. We put it aside not because it is uninteresting — on the contrary! — nor because it is irrelevant, for surely Silone's peculiar political course is illuminated somewhat

at least, from the subjective side, by his personal explanations.

There is another thing in this connection; I take full responsibility only for my literary work, says Silone in effect; "whoever wishes to criticise me, should take my books." in the long run, this may well be true, for in the long run whoever wishes to criticise Silone will take his books and not the polemical and programmatic writings left along his political path.

But more immediately a man who is also an artist must still expect to be taken at his word when he chooses to write in the different capacity of political leader and ideologist. Artists who, wisely or unwisely, also choose to be politicians should reply to political criticism as political persons.

So it was exclusively with the political questions that our Open Letter dealt and that we deal now.

Our Open Letter asked Silone: "Why have you abandoned the ideas of Third Camp internationalism" which you held when the war broke out? And then we tried to examine this conception of Third Camp anti-war socialism in terms of the very document to which Silone himself had referred us: his excellent statement of his anti-war position in a *Partisan Review* interview of 1939, which we reprinted separately.

In the looming war between the bourgeois democracies and the fascist states Silone indicated in his interview as we read it — he was in favour of supporting neither war camp. "Real peace depends today on the rapidity with which a third front is created ... This third front did once actually exist in the form of revolutionary Russia and of militant workers' parties elsewhere ... "

The thought seems quite clear: the "Third Front" (or "Third Camp") means building a revolutionary socialist opposition to both war blocs, both the bourgeois-democratic bloc and the fascist bloc.

But at this time, just as a little later, the concepts of "collective security" to "stop fascism" were already long ascendant among social-democrats and liberals, together with the stock arguments which they used against that Third Camp approach. These arguments did not spring up only after the start of "Hitler's war."

The "partisans of collective security" to whom Silone himself referred in this 1939 document had, for years already, been arguing that the Third Camp policy was "foolishness": first defeat Hitler — to preserve democracy — then go ahead and fight for socialism if you insist; but first settle with the fascists. Bourgeois democracy has its imperfections, to be sure, but it is far better than fascism; let us first defeat the common menace and then think about going

forward from there...

Anti-war line

It was precisely against this dominant conception that Silone polemicised in his 1939 interview, even though he realized, he said, that "the revolutionary writer must risk isolation" in advancing such a Third Front.

"The dilemma: status quo or regression" is a false presentation of alternatives, he argued. "The reactionary trend of our epoch" is shown by the fact that "Most of the progressive forces... are content to struggle to preserve the existing order, lest they fall under the fascist yoke," and so the Third Front is not built.

But support of capitalism will not stop fascism, he went on to argue. (All along here we asked our readers to apply Silone's train of thought to the present case of the Stalinist totalitarian menace.) "Fascism's power, its mass appeal, its contagious influence, all are due to the fact that fascism means false solutions, easy solutions, ersatz solutions but, all the same, solutions of the real problems of our time." But capitalism ("conservative democracy") has no solution of these problems.

Socialism has. "When the socialists, with the best possible anti-fascist [read: anti-Stalinist] intentions, renounce their own programme, put their own theories in mothballs and accept the negative positions of conservative democracy, they think they are doing their bit in the struggle to crush fascism [Stalinism]. Actually, they leave to fascism [Stalinism] the distinction of alone daring to bring forward in public certain problems, thus driving into the fascists' [Stalinists'] arms thousands of workers who not accept the status quo."

Our Open Letter inquired: "is this not a hundred times truer today?" Isn't this what accounts for Stalinism's "power, its mass appeal, its contagious influence" from Rome to Bandung?

Very carefully Silone-1939 made clear that he did not equate bourgeois democracy with fascism, nor was he derogatory of the value of bourgeois freedoms. He was obviously aware of the existence of gentlemen who like to reduce all politics to that incontrovertible distinction. It was a question of how to fight fascism — by supporting one imperialist war bloc against another, or by fighting for a socialist transformation of society against both?— just as it is now a question of how to fight totalitarian Stalinism, which is able to win victories today only insofar as it can convince its victims that the only realistic alternative to its own rule is the continued rule of the old discredited system

of capitalism.

He has learned...

Now, when we direct Silone's attention to his brilliant argument, and ask "Why did you change?" he replies merely by summarising in three sentences precisely the political position which he had torn apart and stomped on in his 1939 document: "The victory of Hitler would have meant the destruction for a long time of the premise for any political activity whatever..." and so on. He introduces this by hailing it in advance as "irrefutable," as if he had never even heard of it before his conversion to its ineluctable logic.

Maybe so, but in that case one of the many Mothball Socialists who he had scorned in 1939 has a right to ask: "Dear Comrade Silone, but this is exactly, word for word, what we were telling you in the 1930s when you were bemused by the sectarian madness and extremist nonsense that you called the Third Front. It is late but it is nice to see that you have learned."

This would be quite in order, though men have a right to change their mind.

We do not begrudge Silone the exercise of this right. We insist only that political accounts not be juggled. Silone insists that he has not changed his viewpoint.

It is objective conditions that have changed, you see. He was right then, and he is right now. And in between he was right all through the various intermediate shadings he went through as he switched over from a critical partisan of the Third Camp to a critical partisan of the Atlantic war bloc....

Concocted quote

To make this account balance is, under the circumstances, a feat that takes some doing, of course, and not all of his methods would be approved by all of the characters in *Bread and Wine*. He launches his exposition, for example, with what purports to be a quotation from our Open Letter, or at least so the innocent reader would assume. "*Labor Action asks*" writes Silone in his fourth paragraph and he follows these words with a colon and a passage enclosed in quotation marks.

This quoted passage was concocted by Silone alone and appears nowhere

in our Open Letter or anywhere else. This accounts also for its language about "betrayal of the international proletariat."

That might not be so bad. But it is not even a paraphrase of anything in our Open Letter.

This "embarrassing question" which Silone has invented (in order to show how easily he can escape from the odious traps set for him by American inquisitors) is adapted by him from the beginning of his own interview, which began as follows:

"Q: In the event of a war between Italy and France, which country would you favour?"

"A: Tunisia.

"Q: What do you mean?"

Whereupon Silone proceeded to expound what we have already summarised, without any further reference to the little witticism about Tunisia but as a political position on the war blocs.

Now see how Silone has tailored his fabricated "quotation" from *Labor Action* undeterred by the fact that our Open Letter had not bothered to mention this initial by-play about Tunisia, let alone pose questions to Silone about it.

Evasion

It enables him to maintain that his views have not changed. "Even today," he insists, in a war "between two states over the possession of Morocco," I would still answer similarly....

The fabrication is convenient. For one thing, having "quoted" *Labor Action's* non-existent embarrassing question, he is relieved of the embarrassment of taking up what we did pose questions about.

But even so, the dodge is not quite satisfactory.

The Second World War did not break out over possession of Tunisia — not Tunisia alone. No one expected it would, in spite of the little whimsy. The colonial and imperialist stakes were much more extensive, extending even into European territory itself. It broke out over many Tunisiyas. What exactly does

this change for a principled policy on the war?

The third world war is not likely to break out as a result of a conflict of two states over Morocco, so that Silone can show us his good faith by supporting "Morocco". This threatened war is, as everybody knows, likely to break out as a conflict of two blocs for control of — all the peoples of the world. Should we not then support the latter against both contending war blocs, Mr Silone, if you have indeed been right all along, before, after and during all your changes?

But this is only playing with phrases, that is, Silone's phrases. There is not political content to them. Silone, unfortunately, is only interested autobiographically in squaring this past with the present, not with facing the meaning of his political switch.

Amnesia

Inevitably political amnesia sets in, an occupational disease of political figures who try to prove that they have always been right, even when they were an opposite sides of a question:

(1) As the alternative to his switchover, he denounces "anti-war-sabotage actions" (our italics). Has he really and truly forgotten that anti-war socialist fighters have always rejected "sabotage" as a course of action, as Lenin did specifically during the First World War?

Yes, we suppose he has forgotten this along with much else.

(2) As the alternative to his own switchover, he poses the "absolute intransigence" of ... a notorious ultra-super-sectarian named Bordiga! But not only that.

According to Silone (I do not know, myself) this Bordiga, the genuine dyed-in-the-wool guaranteed "intransigent" article in anti-war goods, thought that Hitler's victory would smooth the road to proletarian revolution! The unwary reader might get the impression, which of course Silone cannot possibly want to convey, that he is saying: If you're against this imperialist war, you must be "pro-German?" at least "objectively". To people with a better memory than Silone's, this again has a familiar ring.

Writer or leader?

So much for the first of the "two arguments" which Silone says he will

adduce. The second we do not quite understand insofar as it bears on the switchover. This second argument, says Silone, is the fact that in 1939 he was a "socialist writer" but later he became a "socialist leader."

Clearly this can not mean that it is correct to be for the Third Camp when you are merely a socialist writer, but that when you reach the exalted station of Socialist Leader more "practical" policies are called for. Therefore we do not understand it.

One other thing we do not claim to understand exactly. In a parenthetical clause, Silone says that he does not like the Atlantic Pact, as we already know, but refers to his "critical and conditional acceptance [of the Pact] after it had become a law of the state."

What if any is this relation between "accepting" the Pact, i.e., becoming a "critical and conditional" supporter of the Pact, and the "law of the state"? We do not understand it.

The principled man

Silone sums up his "principled position" today as: "pacifist and libertarian". That is very nice. But there is a certain irony about it.

Once Ignazio Silone was a revolutionary socialist, and he was an anti-war fighter then. Now he is in "principle" for pacifism and he becomes a supporter of the Atlantic war bloc.

Once Ignazio Silone put the fight for socialist democracy as the task of the day. Now he has graduated to the principled rank of "libertarian" — and so he defends Sidney Hook against our "slander" as well as the Cultural Freedom outfit — particularly Sidney Hook, he says.

Does that mean that he defends the "libertarian" Hook position on witch-hunting- Stalinists — ousting Stalinist teachers from their jobs, for example, for which the man is noted in this country? Is he a defender of the Sidney Hook position on cracking down on Stalinists as members of a "conspiracy"?

If so, does he advocate this position in Italy? Or are "objective conditions" — those handy things — such that Sidney Hook is right for the United States but wrong for Italy?

Would Silone keep Sidney Hook's discreet silence about police-actions to put the whole leadership of the Italian Communist Party in jail on the charge simply

that they are leaders of a Communist Party as has been true in this country?

Would Silone keep his mouth shut — like Sidney Hook, the leader of his "Cultural Freedom" libertarians — while teachers who are known to have broken with the CP but who refuse to turn stool-pigeon and informer in order to point the finger at other ex-CPers are fired from their jobs after refusing to testify on constitutional (Fifth Amendment) grounds?

Would Silone go along with the refusal by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom to condemn the infamous and racist American anti-alien and immigration act?

The worm within

Silone retorts "Slander!" — it seems to be becoming a habit of his — perhaps because he thinks we are referring to some private information of our own about these American friends of his "pacifist and libertarian" principles. No, we have none. We are referring to their public and well known positions.

In Italy, socialists and democrats have a duty to bring before public opinion — and in the first place, before socialist opinion — the nature of these American political friends of Italian socialist figures who pose as libertarians or who want to be libertarians. Silone should be forced to take a public statement as to whether he agrees or disagrees with Hookism on civil liberties, now that he has gone out of his way to solidarise himself with "particularly Sidney Hook."

Pacifist and libertarian! "In no century have words been perverted from their natural purpose of putting man in touch with man as they are today," says Dori Paolo in *Bread and Wine*. "To speak and to deceive (often to deceive oneself) have become almost synonymous."

And an old man says later: "Each one of us has within himself his own thief, or his own worm, or his own hail: ... One must frankly admit that in the post war years the circumstances were ideal for the thieves, worms, and hail that each one of us carries about within him. But that does not absolve any of us of responsibility."