

Trotsky was no Zinovievite

By Mark Osborn

WE should not let Ernie Haberkern's (unjustified and unbacked-up) comment against Trotsky — tucked away in a footnote in "The Left and Max Shachtman", (WL 25) — pass without comment. Haberkern says: "Since Trotsky had never understood what Lenin was trying to do organisationally, he could only throw up his hands, admit Lenin had been right on this point while he had been mistaken, and pass on to his own followers Zinoviev's proto-Stalinist ideas on party organisation."

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Since the footnote refers to a paragraph in the main article which refers to the "Third Camp's rejection of the ersatz 'Leninism' of the Third International", it is appropriate to use Shachtman to defend Trotsky.

Max Shachtman's article "25 years of American Trotskyism" (*New International*, Jan-Feb 1954) contrasts Cannon with Trotsky. "What Cannon learned about Lenin's conceptions of the role of the party, of the party cadre, of the party leadership, of party democracy, he learned not from Lenin but, like virtually all the Communist Party leaders of the time, from Zinoviev, that is, from the ridiculous caricature of Lenin's ideas and traditions that flowered in the disastrous days of Zinoviev's 'Bolshevisation' campaign."

And: "In the course of the very first factional struggle which Cannon precipitated in the Trotskyist organisation here, Trotsky found himself impelled to write to us that he could not fail to see in it the methods and traditions of Zinovievism. It was a gentle and restrained rebuke to Cannon but its meaning was unequivocal. Trotsky, aware of the Comintern school that had produced Cannon, tried as diplomatically and pedagogically as possible to induce Cannon to follow a democratic and rea-

sonable course in a factional situation or in the organisation of the internal life of the party."

Are the Serbs of Bosnia and Croatia just "ethnic groups"?

By Ernie Haberkern

I WAS disappointed to see three articles in no. 24 of *Workers' Liberty* on the Bosnian crisis each of which repeated the standard arguments in favour of military support to the Bosnian government and none of which addressed the question that should be obvious to a Marxist. Do the Bosnian Serbs have the right to self-determination? The immediate cause of this war, after all, was the decision of the Croats and Muslims, mistakenly or not, to demand their right to self-determination while denying the same right to their substantial Serbian majority.

WL has been one of the very few publications on the left to make this fundamental question of Marxism the basis of its analysis of the very similar conflicts in Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine. There, too, outside powers, both the superpowers and local players like Syria and Iraq, have cynically manipulated the grievances of the two peoples for their own imperialist purposes. But the root problem is the refusal of two peoples, each with legitimate claims to the land, to recognise the rights of the other. The only difference here is that there are three people involved.

To write, as Chris Reynolds does, that "the main engine of war in ex-Yugoslavia is Serb proto-imperialism" at a time when the American Air Force is intervening in this civil war with the same overwhelming firepower that it used in the Gulf War, at a time when the CIA-armed and CIA-trained Muslim-Croat alliance has seized the military initiative in obvious collaboration with this air assault, and at a time when Slobodan Milosevic is clearly allied with American imperialism and Croatian dictator Franjo Tudjman against the Serbs of Bosnia and Krajina, is to continue spreading a propaganda myth that even the more hawkish bourgeois commentators have dropped.

What is more important, this analysis dodges the main issue. If "the Bosnian government's bourgeois [read imperialist — EH] alliances do not cancel out the Bosnian Muslims' national rights", as Chris

Reynolds rightly argues, then, why should the Bosnian Serbs' national rights be cancelled out by their erstwhile, and clearly foolish, alliance with Milosevic? If the SWP is pandering to the arrogant chauvinism of large nations when it denies to the Bosnian Muslims their rightful dignity as a nation, what is Chris Reynolds doing when he denies to the Bosnian Serbs their rightful dignity? I think the SWP position on the right of nations to self-determination is a mess. As far as I can tell, they have not abandoned the Marxist position; they apparently have never heard of it. But at least they are consistent. Chris Reynolds's article is based on a methodology that is in flat contradiction to the one WL writers have used in their discussions of Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine.

In the U.S. today, former leaders of the movement against the war in Vietnam call on their government, and some of the most reactionary Arab governments which are its allies, to "arm the Bosnian Muslims." While they have been making these public demands and denouncing the Clinton administration for its "cowardice" the CIA has quietly turned the Croat-Muslim alliance (dominated by Croatia) into the dominant military force in the area.

Clearly, the German-American alliance has used this opportunity to advance its aggressive, interventionist designs in what used to be the Russian sphere of influence. In fact, it is clear that the German foreign office, with the support of the more hawkish wing of the American foreign policy establishment, deliberately provoked this crisis. Against the opposition of the more sober representatives of the EU, they recognised the Croat republic even though the Croatian government refused to make any concessions to its substantial Serb majority. (At that time, by the way, the representatives of the Krajina Serbs did not seek full independence.) The German government knew its action would lead to civil war and that is what it wanted. The German government and its American friends wanted a pretext for NATO military intervention.

The overwhelming majority of the left have acted as cheerleaders for this aggressive policy with the same enthusiasm they once showed for Stalinist imperialist adventures. Tony Benn and even (it has to be said) the SWP have behaved very well in standing up to this pressure however confused their general politics may be. To attack them in the manner Chris Reynolds does is a symptom of the sectarian spirit which is in general absent from WL literature.

I am for defending the national rights of the Croats, Serbs and Balkan Muslims (not all of whom live in Bosnia). WL has shown, in its treatment of the cases of Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine, how you can do this without apologising for the chauvinism and gangsterism of the nationalist leaders of these peoples. WL has also demonstrated, in these cases,

why a nationalist leadership that suppresses its internal minority must turn the country into an armed camp allied with imperialist powers. And how, in doing so, such a leadership ends up betraying the aspiration of its own people. Israeli Jews, Palestinian Arabs and the Protestants of Northern Ireland may be learning this important lesson. Croatian and Muslim would-be progressives and democrats need to learn that lesson as well, just as much as the Bosnian Serbs do.

Room for debate

By Ted Crawford

I HAVE been reluctant to write to you about a rather silly letter by Sam Levy on the subject of *Revolutionary History* as I hoped someone else would do so. I am fond of Sammy and owe him a lot in terms of my political education — more perhaps than he would be willing to acknowledge. But his letter is silly for he seems to think that the magazine is some kind of anti-Trotsky conspiracy. Let me deal with some of his points in turn.

Robin Blick has written letters to us which we published and he has done us a review or two. We have also carried the most erudite and damning review by David Bruce of Robin's anti-Lenin booklet *Seeds of Evil*, more effective I believe than any review that has appeared elsewhere. Blick has never been a member of our EB. We have carried letters and reviews by Walter Kendall too who is on our EB. Walter is not a Trotskyist but he is a Marxist and his book *Revolutionary Movements in Britain* is a most useful source for militants. Sam would surely agree that Walter has made a real intellectual contribution to the movement. Should we not be glad at his participation in our publishing endeavour? The same is true of Mike Jones. True he is by no means a Trotskyist but has he not made a contribution to the left by translating the work of Thalheimer and Levi? Has not this enriched discussion? I think that the material he has translated and made available for us and for *New Interventions* has been of great value to everyone who wants to study the left in Germany after WW1 — perhaps the key period in the twentieth century. What is extraordinary is that it was never available before. Mike has a deep knowledge of the German events from which no-one should be ashamed to learn. Whether his judgments are always correct are matters on which people will have to make up their own minds.

I think that Sam's problem is that he seems to think that *RH* is in some sense the property of a particular group or political line. I repeat for the nth time that it is not. In a broad sense we try to throw light on the non-Stalinist Marxist and the revolutionary movements which have been marginalised by academics of both Stalinist and Social Democratic persuasion. Unfortunately the opposition to Stalinism and Social Democracy, under the enormous pressure exerted by these movements and by bourgeois society, has often over reacted by becoming narrow and shrill and

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by seeking the answers in the Holy Books rather than trying to think for themselves. Sammy Levy is an example of this here though by God it was not always so in the past. But the groups, sectarian and deformed though they all inevitably are, have carried the revolutionary torch and trained, however inadequately, a new layer that is all we have as we face the challenges of the 21st century. That is ample justification for their existence. We wish them luck and hope to help them by providing material for education and discussion.

Early Third Camp

By Laurens Otter

HABERKERN'S "Platform" (WL25) article is excellent (I have not read Drucker, so I do not know if it's fair as a review) but two objections, one a minor quibble. In listing the factions of the Workers' Party that analysed the Soviet Union as a class society before or alongside Shachtman, there is no mention of the IKD (and the other "retrogressionists"), none of the Johnson-Forrest Group, none of Dwight Macdonald. More important, in treating Third Camp it takes the ISL out of context as a purely International Socialist League

phenomenon.

The Third Camp was a world-wide attempt (not always fully formalised) to bring together dissident Marxists, GDH Cole-type socialists in the Labour Party, anarchists and Muste-type radical pacifists. The international committee was based in Britain and Holland (here the ILP and Common Wealth were the most fully committed groups) with John Banks (of CW) as international secretary. No doubt the ISL was the largest grouping still describing itself as Trotskyist within Third Camp, but Third Camp international meetings were attended by Mme. Trotsky, by Rosmer, by Vereeken and by Reg Groves and Stuart Purkis, representing the Socialist Christian League. Some of us (possibly most) had previously passed through Trotskyism.

I can only remember Shachtman attending one international meeting: there were generally two or three delegates from the ISL (and at British meetings, Ray Challinor, Mike Kidron and Ken Tarbuck were at different times delegates/observers from the Socialist Review Group). By and large we were unaware of divisions within the ISL, so that when it came out that Shachtman (in his defence before HUAC) had said that he had written pamphlets for use by the American forces for dropping on Korea, this was assumed to have been done on behalf of the ISL, and the American Third Camp committee started to go through the motions of disassociating itself from the ISL.

Editors note: it is Workers' Liberty policy to print letters without political censorship. What is said here about Max Shachtman and the Korean War seems to us to be very improbable. We expect that comrades who know more about these things will respond.

Roots

Cockney in voice, English by birth
And domicile, he hears, one apart,
The teacher's cool, cold dissertation,
Recounting Erin's old Starvation.
Matters of fact, no cause to fret,
The telly shows you things like that!
"Hunger in England in 'forty-five,"
A young lad says, "They had to grieve,
'Cos we came first"; "Got some relief,"
Teacher replies, "meal, not beef
(The export trade ate that)." "But were
They grateful? No, I'll bet! Eh, sir?"

Alone, suddenly, under threat,
The anger rising in his throat,
He hears, knowing the Famine tale,
With stomach tight, breath quick, face
pale:
His grey, hurt eyes are raw nerve ends
Extending back and down, wound
Root-tight to starved and murdered folk
Beyond sea, years, past shallow talk:
Tied by folk memory to those who died,
"That's me you're talking off!" he cried.

Sean Matgamna