

## The "Tanaka Memorial"

By LEON TROTSKY

The famous "Tanaka Memorial" was a document submitted to the Japanese emperor in 1927 by Baron Tanaka, the premier of Japan. This document outlined in detailed steps a program of Japanese imperialist expansion, beginning with establishment of Japanese control in Manchuria and leading eventually to domination of all China, Indonesia, the South Sea Islands, the Maritime Provinces of USSR and, eventually, India and the whole Pacific basin. Baron Tanaka even visualized ultimate Japanese control of Europe.

When the document came to light, its authenticity was denied in Japan. But beginning in 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria, Japan proceeded along precisely the lines laid down in the "Tanaka Memorial."

Yet the chancelleries of all the great imperialist powers, and the Kremlin too, al-

though certain of the authenticity of the "Tanaka Memorial," have remained silent while Japan has continued to deny its authenticity. Washington and London, engaged in "appeasing" Japan — i.e., preparing for the most propitious moment for war in the Pacific — have discouraged publication of material on the "Tanaka Memorial." The Soviet press likewise remains silent.

In the following article Leon Trotsky has told for the first time the story of how the "Tanaka Memorial" was secured by the Soviet intelligence service from the archives of the Japanese government. Comrade Trotsky had not quite finished this article when he was assassinated by Stalin's GPU.

The article was written for publication for the general public. Comrade Trotsky was still attempting to establish more spe-

cific dates for certain of the events. Although his memory was excellent, he was never satisfied, in anything he wrote, until he secured documentary verification. The editors have not been able to supplement Trotsky's own tentative dates with further verification.

In an article published in *Liberty*, January 27, 1940, Comrade Trotsky predicted that a forthcoming Kremlin-Japan pact "would constitute a symmetric supplement to the pact between Moscow and Berlin." Such a pact was actually signed on April 13, 1941. The Kremlin would scarcely vouch for the authenticity of the "Tanaka Memorial" today, for then it would be hard put to justify to the world working class the signing of the pact with Japan in the midst of China's struggle against Japanese imperialism.—THE EDITORS.

The American press has up to now considered the "Tanaka Memorial" a dubious document.

On April 23, 1940, Rear Admiral Taussig referred to the "Tanaka Memorial" in his extremely interesting report to the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs. Rear Admiral Taussig was disavowed by his own department. It is not my intention to enter into this controversy. I believe that Rear Admiral Taussig had his own reasons for speaking, and the Navy Department had its own reasons for disavowing his views. Quite possibly the disavowal did not come as a surprise to the Rear Admiral. But, I repeat, this does not concern me. So far as I am able to judge, Rear Admiral Taussig is a qualified expert on the morals, tasks and politics of the Far East. He does not doubt the authenticity of the "Tanaka Memorial." The New York Times, however, in reporting this session of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, found it necessary to remind its readers once again that the "Japanese have always insisted that the so-called 'Tanaka Memorial' was a Chinese forgery." Thus even today, some sixteen years after the publication of the "Memorial," it still remains a suspect and controversial document.

The "Tanaka Memorial" is not a forgery. A careful analysis of its contents and text in and of itself testifies adequately to this. Moreover, the author of these lines is in possession of facts which verify completely and incontrovertibly the authenticity of the "Tanaka Memorial."

### Its Internal Validity

A genius in the fabrication of forgeries would have been required to execute so complex a forgery with such penetration into the objective situation and the political psychology of Japan's ruling circles. However, geniuses do not as a rule

occupy themselves with forgeries but devote their energies to other pursuits. To be sure, there was no scarcity of forgeries during the last war and the ensuing post-war years. Suffice it to recall the notorious Sisson documents on the Soviet Republic. As a general rule—and I know of no exceptions—documents of this type are extremely crude. They tend to reveal the psychology of the forgers themselves or of the circles for whom they are intended rather than the psychology of those individuals or groups in whose name the forgeries are committed. If such documents meet with credibility, it is only because of lack of familiarity with the milieu from which they reportedly emanate. The Soviet Government consisted of individuals completely unknown to world public opinion. Small wonder that it was possible to ascribe to them any goal or aim whatsoever, and depict these things in any kind of language.

It is otherwise with the Imperial Government of Japan. It constitutes an ancient and traditional milieu. Whoever has carefully followed the evolution of Japanese politics cannot fail to acknowledge that the document, with its cynical realism and icy fanaticism of the ruling caste, originates in this milieu. The document is credible. The text is valid. The contents gain credence because they speak for themselves.

Japan is today the weakest link in the imperialist chain. Her financial and military superstructure rests on a foundation of semi-feudal agrarian barbarism. Periodical explosions within the Japanese army are only a reflection of the intolerable tension of social contradictions in the country. The regime as a whole maintains itself only through the dynamics of military seizures. The programmatic basis for these seizures is supplied by the "Tanaka Memorial."

As I recall it, the "Memorial" is based on the testament

of Emperor Meiji. This testament itself is of course a myth. But Japanese aggression is interlaced with traditionalism. While creating a gigantic fleet of the most modern type, the Japanese imperialists prefer to base their activities on ancient national traditions. Just as priests put their pronouncements and desires into the mouths of deities, so the Japanese imperialists palm off their very modern plans and combinations as the will of the august progenitors of the reigning Emperor. Similarly Tanaka covered up the imperialist aspirations of the ruling cliques by reference to a non-existing testament of an Emperor.

The document did not leap full-blown from Baron Tanaka's brow. It constitutes a generalization of the plans formulated by the Army and Navy leaders and, in a certain sense, a reconciliation and a theoretical summation of these plans. It is to be assumed that many variants preceded the final draft; and that many discussions were held in intimate, "non-official" and hence all the more influential circles. The task was to affix the seal of imperial will upon these aspirations of the Army and Navy circles. The old Emperor's physical and mental condition was such that his signature could not prove authoritative for the initiated. That is why the imperialist conspirators waited for the enthronement of Emperor Hirohito before presenting for his signature the document, which from all indications had received its final formulation under General Tanaka's direction.

### Why I Can Verify Its Authenticity

However, apart from these general considerations, the writer of these lines is able to vouch for the following facts. The "Tanaka Memorial" was first photographed in Tokio in the Ministry of Naval Affairs and brought to Moscow as an undeveloped film. I was perhaps the very first person to become acquainted with the document in English and Russian translations of the Japanese text.

\* \* \*

At that time relations with Japan were extremely alarming for Soviet foreign policy. The Far East was defended poorly. The defenses of the Chinese Eastern Railway were even worse. There was no talk in those days of selling the railway to the Japanese. Not so much because Moscow was not ready to sell, but primarily because Tokio had no inclination to buy: they were preparing to get it free of charge.

Throughout that period Moscow made persistent offers to conclude a mutual non-aggression pact with Tokio. These proposals were diplomatically evaded by Tokio on the pretext that the time was not yet ripe for such a treaty. In those days treaties were still approached with a semblance of seriousness. In a few years it was already to become the rule that a mutual non-aggression pact was the best prelude to military invasion. In those years, however, Japan at all events preferred to evade.

Moscow never removed its eyes from the East. On the one hand there was the constant threat of Japanese plans. On the other hand, the Chinese Revolution of 1925-1927 was germinating. Great hopes were bound up with the Chinese Revolution, including the security of the Soviet Far Eastern possessions and the Chinese Eastern Railway. The writer was not among those on the government staff who believed that the Chinese Eastern Railway must be handed over to the Japanese as soon as the latter succeeded in gaining control of Manchuria.

But neither the duration of the Chinese Revolution nor its success was guaranteed in advance. Japanese militarism was an existing fact, very palpable, very aggressive. The

Chinese Revolution was a question of the future. It is hardly astonishing that the Soviet Intelligence Service in both its branches—that which fulfilled military assignments and that of the GPU—were under orders to watch carefully every Japanese move in diplomatic as well as military fields.

The Military Intelligence Service was under a two-fold jurisdiction: subject on the one hand to the War Department and on the other to the GPU. The Foreign Department of the GPU was headed by an old Bolshevik, Trilisser, who was later removed and apparently liquidated along with many others. The Military Intelligence was headed by Berzin, an old Lettish Bolshevik. I was not closely acquainted with the organization of our agency in Japan, being little interested in the technical aspects of the matter. I handed this over to my aides, first Sklyansky, later Unschrift and, to a certain extent, Rosenholtz. Permit me to recall that Sklyansky, one of the outstanding and most meritorious organizers of the Red Army, was drowned in 1924 or 1925 in America while taking a boat ride on a lake. Unschrift disappeared, and was evidently liquidated. Rosenholtz was shot by verdict of the court.

Questions relating to the Intelligence Service were thus brought to my attention only in exceptional cases involving issues of great military or political importance. This is precisely what happened on the occasion to which I have referred.

### Early Soviet Advantages in Intelligence Work

The successes of which the Soviet Foreign Intelligence could already boast at that time were by no means accidental. The party had at its disposal not a few people who had passed through a serious conspiratorial school and who were well acquainted with all the methods and subterfuges of the police and counter-espionage. They brought into their work an international experience, many of them having been emigres in various lands and possessing a broad political outlook. They had personal friends in many countries. Nor was there any lack of self-sacrificing support on the part of the revolutionary elements in different countries. In many government institutions of capitalist countries the lower functionaries were sympathetic to a considerable degree to the October revolution. Provided one knew how, their sympathy could be utilized in the interests of the Soviet power. It was so utilized.

The network of foreign agencies was still very little developed, far from complete but, by way of compensation, lucky individual connections sometimes produced unexpected and extraordinary results.

Dzerzhinsky, the then head of the GPU, used to refer with satisfaction on more than one occasion to the extraordinary sources of information at his disposal in Japan.

Despite the shut-in character of the Japanese, and their ability to keep secrets—which arises from the specific, special conditions of their national milieu and the inaccessibility of the Japanese language to the overwhelming majority of foreigners—it must be said that this ability is nevertheless not absolute. The decomposition of the old system finds its expression not only in the fact that young officers and officials from time to time shoot Ministers whom they find inconvenient but also in this, that other less patriotic officers and officials, wearied of Spartan customs, seek for sources of revenue on the side. I know of cases of important Japanese functionaries, assigned to work in Japanese Consulates in European countries, who gave up important secrets for relatively modest sums of money.

Dzerzhinsky was brought into the Political Bureau after Lenin's death. This step was taken by Stalin, Zinoviev and

Kamenev in order to attract to their side the honest but vain-glorious Dzerzhinsky. They succeeded completely.

Dzerzhinsky was very talkative, very hot-tempered and explosive. This man of iron will who had served terms of hard penal labor possessed traits which were absolutely childlike. Once during a session of the Political Bureau he boasted of his hopes shortly to lure Boris Savinkov to Soviet soil and arrest him. My reaction to this was highly skeptical. But Dzerzhinsky proved right. Savinkov was lured by agents of the GPU to Soviet territory and arrested there. Shortly thereafter Dzerzhinsky expressed his hopes of apprehending Wrangel in the same way. But this hope did not materialize because Wrangel proved more cautious.

Very often, without giving any technical details, into which no one even inquired, he would boast of the successes of our foreign espionage, especially in Japan.

One day in 1925, in the summer or early autumn, Dzerzhinsky talked excitedly about his expectations of obtaining an extremely important document from Japan. He stated ecstatically that this document in and of itself could provoke international upheavals, events of vast importance, war between Japan and the United States, etc. I remained, as always in such cases, even more skeptical.

"Wars are not provoked by documents," I objected to Dzerzhinsky. But he insisted: "You have no conception of the importance of this document; it is the program of the ruling circles, approved by the Mikado himself; it embraces the seizure of China, the destruction of the United States, world domination."

"Mightn't your agent be duped?" I asked. "No one writes such documents as a rule. Why should such plans be put down on paper?"

Dzerzhinsky was himself not very sure on this point. He replied, as if to dispel the doubts in his own mind: "In their country they do everything in the name of the Emperor. In order to justify risky measures, risky politics and vast army and naval expenditures the military men and the diplomats have been seeking to tempt the Mikado with a colossal perspective which is equally indispensable to themselves for the political adventures in which they are engaging. That is why Tanaka has written down the plans of the military circles in a special report to the Emperor, and this report has met with the Emperor's approval. We will receive a photographic copy of the document directly from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

## How the Document Was Secured

I remember that Dzerzhinsky mentioned a sum to be paid for the photographic copy. It was relatively modest, about three thousand American dollars.

From Dzerzhinsky I learned that the GPU enjoyed the services of a very trusted functionary who had direct access to the secret archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a period of more than a year he had already provided some very valuable information and was marked by great precision and conscientiousness in fulfilling his obligations as a foreign spy. He was quite familiar with the archives and with the relative importance of the various documents. This functionary had proposed to copy the document but the GPU representative, upon instructions from Moscow, demanded photographic copies. This was much more difficult. It was necessary to introduce a GPU technician into the premises of the Ministry or to teach the functionary the art of photography. These technical difficulties caused a delay in obtaining the document. Several copies of each page were taken, and

the film was then forwarded by two or three different routes. All the copies arrived safely in Moscow.

I must admit that I am unable now to recall—perhaps I was not interested in this at the time—whether the Japanese agent was one among the volunteers sincerely devoted to the new Soviet regime, or one of a number of hired agents or, finally, a type representing a combination of the two. This last type was probably the most prevalent. The number of sympathizers in Japan was very small.

"The document has arrived!" Dzerzhinsky announced joyously. Where was it? It had arrived as a film which was being developed. The developing was coming out successfully and the document was being translated by our Japanese experts as it was developed. They were all staggered by the contents of the very first few pages. I would get my report from Trilisser. (It might have been Unschlicht.)

As the head of the War Department, I was naturally interested in Far Eastern questions, but there was still another connection. During the first period of the Soviet regime, in the initial months up to February, 1918, I was in charge of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. Upon arriving from England, Chicherin, whom we had exchanged for several arrested Englishmen, became my deputy. When I shifted to the War Department, Chicherin, who had been coping successfully with his assignment, was appointed as the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs on my motion in the Council of People's Commissars and in the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets. As a member of the Political Bureau I frequently used to draft together with Chicherin the more important diplomatic documents. On the other hand, in all cases where I required the aid of diplomacy during the civil war, I would get in touch directly with Chicherin.

In 1923 the "Troika" (Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin) made an attempt to remove me from all supervision of foreign policy. This function was formally assigned to Zinoviev. Nevertheless the old relationships and, so to speak, the old unofficial hierarchy continued to remain in force. Even in 1925, after I had already left the War Department and was placed in charge of the modest Concessions Committee, I was, as a member of the Political Bureau, appointed head of the Committee on Far Eastern Affairs, Japan and China. Among the members of this Committee were Chicherin, Voroshilov, Krassin, Rudzutak and others.

Stalin was at that time still wary of venturing on the slippery ice of international politics. For the most part, he would listen and look on, formulate his opinion, or merely vote after others had expressed themselves.

Zinoviev, who was formally in charge of diplomatic affairs, was inclined, as everybody knew, to fall into a panic whenever a difficult situation arose. All this explains amply why the document received from Tokio was transmitted directly to me.

## We Study the Document

I must acknowledge that the vast scope of the plan, the cold and ruthless messianism of the Mikado's bureaucratic clique, astounded me. But the text of the document did not arouse in my mind the slightest doubt, not only because I was acquainted with the document's history but also because of its internal validity.

If we grant that the Chinese did manage to find an ideal forger who fabricated this document, then the question still remains just how did this Chinese forgery turn up in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a special, secret document? Did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself arrange

to transmit the falsified Chinese document and pass it off as a genuine Japanese document? This supposition is utterly fantastic. The Japanese could not have been in the least interested in circulating such a document and arousing belief in it. They demonstrated this most graphically by branding it as a forgery the moment it was published.

The film was developed and the translation made at once in the offices of the Intelligence Service, and both were rushed immediately to the Kremlin. The photostats were still wet and the translation was in the shape of the first rough draft. Many corrections were later required.

Did the other members of the Political Bureau become acquainted with the document at the same time as I did, or was it shortly after? I have no definite recollection on this point. In any case, when the Political Bureau met, all the members were acquainted with the document. Although personal relations were already very strained at that time, all the members of the Political Bureau seemed temporarily to draw closer together because of the document. In the preliminary discussion the main topic was naturally the voracity of the Japanese. The megalomania in which mysticism and cynicism remarkably supplemented each other was spoken of with astonishment tinged with grudging admiration.

"Isn't this perhaps a poem, a forgery?" asked Bukharin who with all his childlike gullibility loved, whenever a propitious occasion offered itself, to play the part of a cautious statesman. Dzerzhinsky exploded, as usual.

"I have already explained to you," he said, speaking with a Polish accent which always became thicker as he grew excited, "that this document is supplied by our agent who has proved his complete trustworthiness; and that this document was kept in the most secret section of the archives of the Naval Ministry. Our agent introduced our photographer into the premises. He himself didn't know how to operate a camera. Is it perhaps your opinion that the Japanese Admirals themselves placed a forged document in their secret archives? The Naval Ministry originally had no copy of this document. It was at first kept only in the Emperor's personal archives, with a copy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then the Army and Navy Ministries asked for their own copies. Our agent learned the exact time when a copy would arrive from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Extreme precautions were taken with its delivery. Our agent was able to gain access to it only thanks to the fact that a copy finally got into the archives of the Naval Ministry. Are you perhaps of the opinion that all this was done specially for purposes of fraud?"

As for myself, I had, I repeat, no doubts about its authenticity, if only on the basis of its internal validity. "If we granted for a moment," I said, "that this document is a forgery then we must also grant that the forgery is the work of the Japanese themselves. What for? To sell it to us for two or three thousand dollars? Enrich the treasury of the Naval Ministry by three thousand dollars? Or do they desire in this way to provoke us, frighten us? But we are already aware of their appetites, although, to be sure, not on such a scale. They know that despite a whole series of provocations we are doing everything in our power to avoid a conflict. A programmatic document could not in any way cause a change in our policy."

Discussion on this point ended quickly. All the circumstances and all the technical details, which have not of course been retained in my memory, left no room for doubts about the authenticity of the document.

## What to Do With the "Memorial"?

The question next arose: What to do? We had in our

possession a charge of great explosive power. There was naturally danger that we might blow ourselves up. From every standpoint it was not expedient to publish it in the Soviet press. In the first place, this would reveal to the Japanese authorities that an agent of extraordinary value was at the disposal of our espionage. Dzerzhinsky would not agree to this in any case. Far more important were considerations of a political nature. Japan's plans were calculated for a number of decades. The Kremlin was concerned with gaining a few years, even a few months. We were sparing the Japanese in every way. We made very great concessions. Our wisest, most careful and mildest diplomat, Joffe, was functioning in Japan. The publication of this document in Moscow would be tantamount to saying openly to the Japanese that we were seeking a conflict. The scales would immediately tip in favor of the most bellicose circles in the Japanese army and navy. It was absolutely irrational to provoke Japan by publishing this document which, moreover, might not gain credence abroad.

Zinoviev at first made the proposal that the document be published in the periodical, *Communist International*. This method of publication would still leave the government itself on the side-lines. But no one would hear of it, nor did Zinoviev insist on his hasty proposal.

I offered a plan which I had elaborated before coming to the session of the Political Bureau. It was necessary to publish the document abroad, and avoid any link whatever between the document and Moscow, without lessening its effect, without arousing mistrust, without compromising the GPU agents in Japan. But where? The place of publication literally offered itself, namely, the United States. I proposed that, after the document was translated into English, it should be transmitted to the press by a trustworthy and authoritative friend of the Soviet Republic in the United States. At that time the calling of a friend of the Soviet Union had not yet become a profession. The number of friends was not large; important and influential personalities were all too scarce. In any case the task turned out much more difficult than I had presumed.

We were under the impression that the document would literally be torn from our hands. Dzerzhinsky had hopes of easily recouping the expenses of our Japanese agency. But things did not turn out that way at all. It was not easy to provide a credible version of how the document was obtained from Tokio. Any reference to the real source, i.e., the GPU, would arouse additional mistrust. In America the suspicion would naturally arise that the GPU itself had simply manufactured the document in order to poison relations between Japan and the United States.

The English translation was painstakingly made in Moscow. The photostats together with the English text were forwarded to New York, and in this way any trace of a connection between this document and Moscow was eliminated.

It should not be forgotten that this took place during the administration of President Coolidge and Secretary Hughes, that is, an administration very hostile to the Soviet Union. There was every justification to fear that hostile experts would simply pronounce the document a Moscow fabrication. It is a fact that fraudulent documents are sometimes acknowledged to be genuine while authentic documents are not infrequently labelled as forgeries.

To my knowledge the American press made no references to Moscow as the key point from which the document was forwarded from Tokio to New York. However, there was no "malice" on the part of Moscow in this affair, unless of course it is considered as malicious to obtain a document from the secret archives of a hostile power. We were simply unable

to devise any other way of bringing the document to the attention of world public opinion except by publishing it in the American press, without indicating the source, or rather by camouflaging the actual source as much as possible.

In those years the Soviet republic did not as yet have its own diplomatic representative in the United States. At the head of the Amtorg was the engineer, Bogdanov. He and his colleagues, who are today better known and more influential, fulfilled all sorts of diplomatic missions. I cannot now recall just who among them was entrusted with the task of finding a competent person among the Americans and putting the document in circulation through him. In any case it should not be difficult to verify this, since the document was offered to the most influential publications in the order of their importance.

\* \* \*

According to certain indications the "Tanaka Memorial" was signed by the Mikado in July 1927. In that case it is quite obvious that the document was forwarded to Moscow prior to its being actually signed by the Mikado. The document, as has already been stated, had been under discussion among the close summits of the Japanese Army, the Navy and the diplomatic corps. It was precisely during this period that copies had to be made available to the Ministries concerned. Tanaka became premier in April, 1927. He might have well obtained the post of Premier precisely because of undertaking to win the Emperor's sanction for this program of the extreme wing of the militarists and imperialists.

Why do the Japanese authorities pronounce the "Tanaka Memorial" a *Chinese* forgery? They were obviously unaware of Moscow's role in the publication of this document. The appearance of the "Memorial" in the American and not the Soviet press naturally inspired the idea that the "Memorial" had in some way fallen into Chinese hands who hastened to forward it to the United States.

## Why Is the Kremlin Silent?

It is hard to understand why Moscow, which is best informed on this matter, persists in maintaining silence about the "Tanaka Memorial." The original photographic copy was received in Moscow under circumstances precluding any doubts whatever about its authenticity. This remarkable document was sent abroad, i.e., to the United States from Moscow, from the Kremlin. The authenticity of the document is strangely enough suspect even today. Moscow keeps quiet.

To be sure Moscow had ample reasons in its day to hide its participation in publishing and exposing the "Tanaka Memorial." The prime consideration was not to provoke Tokio. This explains why the Kremlin took the round-about way in making it public. But the situation has drastically changed in the decade and a half that have since elapsed. Moscow is very well aware that the technical conditions, the conspiratorial considerations which originally impelled the hiding of the source of information have long since disappeared: The individuals involved have been replaced (mostly shot), the methods have changed. The flight to Japan of General Luchkov, an important GPU functionary, marks a dividing line between two periods of espionage direction. Even if Luchkov did not surrender his former agents into the hands of the Japanese—and his conduct leads me to believe that he revealed everything he knew—Moscow must have hastily eliminated all agents and changed connections long ago, in view of the danger from Luchkov. From every aspect, the silence of the Kremlin is well-nigh incomprehensible.

One has to assume that operating here is the excessive caution which often drives Stalin to ignore major considerations for the sake of secondary and petty ones.

It is more than likely that this time too Moscow does not wish to cause any annoyances to Tokio in view of the negotiations now under way in the hope of reaching a more stable and lasting agreement. All these considerations, however, recede to the background as the world war spreads its concentric circles ever wider and as Japan awaits only an opportune moment in the Far East before taking the next step toward the realization of the "Tanaka Memorial."

\* \* \*

I ask myself: Why didn't I relate this episode before, an episode which throws light on one of the most important political documents of modern history? It was simply because no occasion arose for it. In the interval between the meeting of the Political Bureau in 1925 when the question of the Tanaka document first came up, and the period when I found myself in exile abroad and had the opportunity of following international affairs more accurately—in this interval there intervened the years of the cruel internal struggle, arrest, exile to Central Asia, and then Turkey. The Tanaka document remained dormant in the recesses of my memory.

The course of events in the Far East in recent years has corroborated the Tanaka program to such a degree as to preclude any doubts about the authenticity of this document.

# Jan Valtin: Out of the Fight

By JOHN G. WRIGHT

Jan Valtin's autobiographical narrative, "Out of the Night," belongs to the writings of a lost generation of European revolutionists. The leading characters that pass through the pages of his book are semi-fictionalized, semi-factual thumb-nail sketches of men and women who—in the interval between World War I and World War II—began as revolutionists. Confronted by history with the task of leading society toward new beginnings and a new life, they tried to assume the responsibilities of participating in and guiding the revolutionary struggle of the working class against capitalism. When that struggle was led by the parties of the Second and

Third Internationals to catastrophic defeats, Valtin and his friends failed to carry on. Originally, they had gravitated toward communism (Bolshevism) but instead of Bolsheviks they became demoralized agents and dupes of the GPU (Stalinism). Neither Valtin nor any of the chief characters in this book proved capable of rising to the level of the historic tasks.

Each defeat left in its wake a quota of deserters. Some deserted to Fascism; others, Valtin among them, to the camp of bourgeois democracy. As against the relatively few who died physical deaths, a great many found themselves plunged into a darkness worse than death, drained of all capacity to